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THEORIZING PRAYER IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND: BEDE AND ÆLFRIC

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

I argue that Anglo-Saxon prayer was inflected by Germanic assumptions about gift-giving and lordship and that prayer, in turn, shaped the Anglo-Saxons' perception of the self and its relation with the community. Modern studies of early prayer tend to focus on forms of devotion that replicate modern ideals of the self. In *Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James defined prayer as "no mere repetition of certain sacred formulae, but the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence." James' understanding of prayer reflects a post-Romantic preference for selfhood rooted in individualism, genuine emotional experience, and sincerity. Yet for the monks Bede (d. 735) and Ælfric (d. 1010) – the Anglo-Saxon authors who address prayer most explicitly and extensively – prayer was fundamentally the "repetition of sacred formulae" in the set prayers found in the liturgy. It was precisely this repetition that articulated a selfhood formed in relation to God and the larger Christian community. Both Bede and Ælfric, I demonstrate, theorize prayer as a special form of gift-giving relationship between God and humans that is both personal and profoundly social. For Bede, those praying conform themselves to the words of the prayers by interiorizing them in their thoughts and exteriorizing them in their actions, presenting the purified self as a return-gift to God. For Ælfric, prayer functions like a vow: it is a performative statement of allegiance that both expresses the intention of those praying to serve God and also brings them under God's protection. Because prayer was both an individual and communal regimen practiced in some form by all levels of Anglo-Saxon society, it is a tremendously productive site of study for understanding Anglo-Saxon subjectivity. This project thus counters a trend in recent scholarship that represents Anglo-Saxon prayer as if it were an overlooked forerunner of the highly individualized, affective form of prayer that develops in the twelfth-century with the much-heralded "discovery of the individual."

To my Dad

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ABBREVIATIONS

ASE = *Anglo-Saxon England*.

ASPR = Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, 6 vols., ed. G.P. Krapp and E.V.K. Dobbie (New York, 1931-53).

CCSL = Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina (Turnhout, 1953-).

CH = *Catholic Homilies*, 3 vols., ed. Peter Clemoes and Malcolm Godden (Oxford: 1979-2000).

CSEL = Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (Vienna, 1866-).

DOE = *Dictionary of Old English: A to G* online, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey, et al. (Toronto, 2007).

EETS = Early English Text Society.

ELN = *English Language Notes*.

HE = *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

NPNF = *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, ed. Philip Schaff (Peabody, 1994).

Rprnt. Christian Literature Publishing Company, 1886.

OED = *Oxford English Dictionary* online.

PL = *Patrologia Latina*, 221 vols., ed. J.-P. Migne (Paris, 1857-66).

SASLC = *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, ed. Frederick M. Biggs, et al. (Binghamton, NY, 1990-)

SP = *Studia Patristica*.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Midway through *Catholic Homily* I.18, a Rogationtide homily explicating the parable on prayer in Luke 11:5-13, Ælfric says: “Ælc þæra þe geornlice bitt. 7 þære bene ne geswicð. þam getiðað god þæs ecan lifes.”¹ (To everyone who zealously prays, and does not cease from prayer, to them God will grant everlasting life).² This straightforward statement on prayer essentially literalizes Jesus’ metaphors of asking, seeking, and knocking as assurance that those who pray will be saved.

The simplicity of the statement and its similarity to the biblical text, however, obscure key questions regarding an understanding of Anglo-Saxon prayer. In Ælfric’s understanding why (and perhaps, how) does God grant everlasting life in response to prayer? Is it integral to the efficacy of prayer that it be offered “geornlice” (zealously) and that one “ne geswicð” (not cease)? If so, why? Is zealousness measured by numbers of prayers said, by bodily performance, or by some sort of interior disposition, and, in the latter case, how is this disposition enacted? Is Ælfric’s focus here on the specific request or efficacious formulae? Regarding the language, Old English has two nearly synonymous words for the noun “prayer,” *ben* and *gebed*. What does it mean that *ben* is used here? How does the semantic range of *biddan* – which is different from, for instance, the modern word “to pray,” or even “to bid”³ – affect (or reflect) an Anglo-Saxon understanding of prayer? And in what ways might it matter for reconstructing Anglo-Saxon theories of prayer that Ælfric’s audience is likely to have understood the “eternal life” that God gives differently from, say, the way Augustine understood the same concept?

Prayer is ubiquitous in the Anglo-Saxon record. It is represented in every kind of document, from sermons to saints’ lives to charters to recipes, and all of these contextualizing genres have something to teach us about the theory and practice of prayer in Anglo-Saxon

¹ Peter Clemoes, ed., *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, the First Series* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 320, ll. 94-6. All Ælfric quotations come from Clemoes and Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary, and Glossary*, Early English Text Society n.s. 18 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); crossed þ will be silently expanded and *puncti elevati* replaced with colons.

² Translations are mine unless otherwise noted.

³ *Bitt* corresponds to *petite* in Luke 11:9. *Biddan* + *ben* thus renders *petare* pretty accurately.

England. Anglo-Saxon England also proves comparatively rich in early prayer books,⁴ and these manuscripts and the prayers they (and others) contain also illuminate an understanding of the sources, practice, and orientation of Anglo-Saxon prayer. A further complication of studying Anglo-Saxon prayer is that its concerns overlap many different fields of study: the liturgy; devotional practice (monastic, lay); spirituality (whatever exactly that is); magic; penance (both as a penitential act, and as it gets caught up in commuted penances and substitution atonement);⁵ gender and selfhood; monastic endowments; theology; historical traditions of prayer; and, in the context of teaching on prayer, sermon studies. These are all vast fields of scholarly endeavor, and so, of course, I have had to set some limits.

First of all, I am limiting my study of Anglo-Saxon prayer to the sermons of Bede and Ælfric. Even though Bede and Ælfric presented themselves for this study by virtue of the fact that they were the only Anglo-Saxon authors who address prayer directly and extensively,⁶ they neatly complement each other. Both are among the most prolific and influential of Anglo-Saxon authors. Bede writes early in the Anglo-Saxon period, in Latin, and for monks, while Ælfric writes late, in Old English, for a mixed audience. Additionally, while studies of the spirituality of Bede are becoming more common (although not so common that each new one can forego a lament for the lack of such studies), no one, to my knowledge, has systematically addressed the

⁴ The four main prayer anthologies are Royal Library Prayer Book (London, BL Royal 2 A.xx), the Book of Nunnaminster (London, BL Harley 2965), the Harley Prayer Book (London, BL Harley 7653), and the Book of Cerne (Cambridge, University Library L1.1.10). For a brief description of these and other prayer collections, see Thomas H. Bestul, "Liturgy," in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: A Trial Version*, ed. Frederick M. Biggs, Thomas D. Hill, and Paul E. Szarmach (Binghamton, NY: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1990), 135-144.

⁵ Cyrille Vogel's term, in Arnold Angenendt, "*Donationes pro anima*: Gift and Countergift in the Early Medieval Liturgy," in *The Long Morning of Medieval Europe: New Directions in Early Medieval Studies*, ed. Jennifer R. Davis and Michael McCormick (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 136.

⁶ Alcuin is the other major Anglo-Saxon author who has left a record of prayer; however, in his case it is in the form of prayerbooks such as the *Libelli Precum*. Benedicta Ward, *High King of Heaven: Aspects of Early English Spirituality*, Cistercian Studies Series 181 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1999), briefly discusses *De Psalmorum usu liber* as Alcuin's (found in *Patrologia Latina* 101, cols. 465-508). However, according to Palémon Glorieux, this attribution to Alcuin is incorrect (Bullough, referenced below, does not list this work in his index of Alcuin's writings, whether attested, doubtful, or pseudo). Glorieux, *Pour revaloriser Migne: Tables rectificatives* (Lille: Facultés catholiques, 1952), 54. Ward also walks through an "Anglo-Saxon" explication of the Lord's Prayer arrived at by blending together explications by Bede and Alcuin taken from various parts of their works (without documenting her sources fully) with an interest to showing their "interior understanding of the Lord's Prayer" (84). For further information on Alcuin's place in the Anglo-Saxon tradition of prayer, see Donald Bullough, *Alcuin: Achievement and Reputation* (Leiden: Brill, 2004); and Radu Constantinescu, "Alcuin et les 'Libelli Precum' de l'époque carolingienne," *Revue d'histoire de la spiritualité* 50 (1974): 17-56.

topic of prayer in the works of Ælfric. What I am specifically interested in for each author is how he theorizes prayer: how does it form or enact a relationship between the precator⁷ and God and within the Christian community, and how is it efficacious (whether subjectively or objectively)?

When one reads through the sermon collections of both Bede and Ælfric, one is immediately struck by the way each author takes care to establish at the beginning of his series a clear picture of the relationship between humans and God. Bede's Advent homilies present the figure of Mary as exemplary for all Christians in the way she bears Christ in her body and brings him forth into the world, but what Bede especially emphasizes is the way that Mary's relationship with God is predicated on the exchange of gifts: God's many gifts to Mary, and Mary's counter-gifts to God. Ælfric's first collection of homilies begins with a sort of prologue-homily disconnected from the liturgical year, *Catholic Homily I.1, De initio creaturae*, which recounts the creation of the world and the fall of angels and man. This homily, too, takes care to show that humans have all they have by virtue of God's gracious gift and that they owe obedience to him in return. Thus, in different ways, both Bede and Ælfric open up their homiletic series by emphasizing that humans are (or should be) in a relationship with God characterized by reciprocal gift-giving.

My own starting place will likewise be to frame Anglo-Saxon prayer in the context of petitionary practices and expectations. To many, petition may seem a limited view of prayer, which is commonly and more expansively defined as "talking with God."⁸ But what is the

⁷ The relative poverty of modern English words for prayer can lead to confusion and awkward circumlocutions. I am adopting Hugh A.G. Houghton's use of "precator" (borrowed in turn from ante-classical Latin) to designate the one praying. See "The Discourse of Prayer in the Major Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles," *Apocrypha* 15 (2004), 172, n. 2.

⁸ Variants of this definition are found from Clement of Alexandria: Prayer is "converse with God" (*Stromateis* vii.7, qtd. in Eric Jay, *Origen's Treatise on Prayer* (London: S.P.C.K., 1954), 27); to John Chrysostom (Homily 30.5, in *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, trans. Robert C. Hill, Fathers of the Catholic Church 82 (Catholic University of America Press, 1990)); to Augustine (5th century): "Oratio tua locutio est ad Deum" (Your prayer is speech to God). *Enarratio* 1.7, l. 50 on Ps. lxxxv.5, *CCSL* 39 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1956). Augustine, of course, has a famous example of prayer as a conversation with God in his *Confessions*. More recent examples include Father van Acken, prayer is "cultivating personal communion with God" (qtd. in Mary Elizabeth Mason, *Active and Contemplative Life: A Study of the Concepts from Plato to the Present* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1961), 3); Josef Jungmann: "Likely enough we can regard this daily programme of conversing with God as the core and kernel of Christian prayer" (*Christian Prayer through the Centuries*, 2nd ed., trans. John Coyne (London: Paulist Press, 2007). Orig. publ. *Christliches Beten* (Munich: Verlag Ars Sacra Joseph Mueller, 1969), 13); Marcel Mauss: "Prayer is speech" (*On Prayer*, trans. Susan Leslie (New York: Durkheim Press/Berghahn Books, 2003). Orig. publ. *La*

content and form of this speech? What effect is it supposed to have? What type of being is God pictured to be, and what kinds of attributes is he imagined to have? How does he respond to or interact with humans? How do humans get God to respond to or interact with them? The answers to these questions vary according to time and place, and this variation can reveal cultural expectations for communication between human and divine, the way that this relationship is imagined to reflect or resist human cultural paradigms, and the way it reveals and forms particular cultural understandings of what we might call human psychology. For Anglo-Saxons, I will argue, the content and form of this “talking” is petition, and within this petition, God is imagined variously as a father, a king, and a lord, all relationships framed within the receiving and giving of gifts.

Once prayer is situated within the context of petition, it becomes obvious that key elements of successful petitions are the gifts the petitioners bring to encourage a hearing and a response, the gifts they receive, and the return-gifts they gratefully give – the reciprocal nature of the gift-giving relationship within which prayer exists. Thus, modern gift-theory proves a valuable frame on which to view forms of subjectivity, hierarchical power relations, and economic structures that are somewhat alien to our modern, individualistic ways of thinking. But contextualizing prayer within gift-giving does not, unfortunately, cause a clear pattern of the workings of prayer to emerge within the Anglo-Saxon social context. Rather, it brings out complications and tensions within understandings of prayer, praxis, and theology that we can see threading throughout the discourse even if they rarely resolve into a dominant pattern.

While prayer as petition in some ways reflects human/human models of petitioning, in which gifts can operate to create freedom as well as obligation, spaces of independence as well as dependence, in other ways it resists those models. Things that are acceptable within a human/human relationship are not necessarily acceptable within a human/divine relationship, and the lines between human and divine can be drawn differently in different situations and times.⁹ These varying petitionary models present four overlapping complications within a

Prière: Les Origines (France: privately printed, 1909), 22). Ann and Barry Ulanov: “Prayer above all else is conversation with God” (“Prayer and Personality: Prayer as Primary Speech,” in *The Study of Spirituality*, ed. Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 24).

⁹ For instance, Roman and (less philosophically influenced) Greek prayer *did* conceptualize the relationship between humans and the gods in much the same way hierarchical human relationships were considered. See Simon Pulleyn,

discourse of prayer informed by gift-theory that I will briefly state here and then revisit in more detail below. First, one of the major distinctive aspects about prayer as petition is that this prayer can function both as the petition itself, and also as a gift or sacrifice.¹⁰ This is because prayer can either be thought of as simple communication (words corresponding to thoughts), or it can be reified into a symbolic object that can then function as an element of exchange just as does any other good work.

The second complication gift-theory presents for the study of prayer is that prayer can be concerned predominantly either with purity, in which case the relationship with God is conceptualized more abstractly and gift-giving plays a lesser part, or with reward and merit,¹¹ in which case God is more fully personified and reciprocity attains greater importance. What exactly “purity” means is its own question. In the structure set forth in Levitical law, according to Mary Douglas, impurity is a violation of order.¹² Within the eastern tradition represented by such early authors as Evagrius, Origen, and Cassian, ideas of purity are related to the Greek concept of *apatheia* (detachment), which is reached as material desires and distractions are stripped away. As Chapter 3 will show in more detail, Augustine’s commentary on the Lord’s Prayer reflects this eastern idea of purity, an idea we might conceptualize as sanctity, with its connotations of removal from the world, its desires and pollutions. Thus, for Augustine, almsgiving functions within the more abstract system of purification-as-detachment. In contrast, Ælfric’s teaching on prayer has little to say about purity;¹³ rather, his focus is more on communal

Prayer in Greek Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); and John Scheid, “Sacrifices for Gods and Ancestors,” in *A Companion to Roman Religion*, ed. Jörg Rüpke (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 263-71.

¹⁰ Patristic writers such as Tertullian state explicitly that prayer replaces the sacrifices offered in earlier religious systems: “Haec est enim hostia spiritalis, quae pristina sacrificia deleuit. ... Nos sumus ueri adoratores et ueri sacerdotes, qui spiritu orantes spiritu sacrificamus orationem hostiam Dei” (*De Oratione* XXVIII, 1 and 3, ll. 1-3 and 8-10, *CCSL* 1) [For this is the spiritual oblation which has wiped out the ancient sacrifices. ... We are the true worshippers and the true priests, who, praying in the Spirit, in the Spirit offer a sacrifice of prayer as an oblation] (*De Oratione Liber. Tertullian’s Tract on the Prayer*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans [London: S.P.C.K., 1953], ch. 28). This idea is not unique to Tertullian. Ælfric also says: “Ure gastlican lac sint ure gebedu. 7 lofsang. 7 huselhalgung 7 gehwilce oðre lac þe we gode offriað” (CHI.3, ll. 164-5) [Our spiritual offerings are our prayers and hymns and husel-hallowings and all other offerings that we offer to God]. In this passage he is apparently remembering Augustine. See Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies*, 27.

¹¹ “Merit” presents further complications, since this term is used within the penitential system, which operates according to a judicial model, yet one that also uses the language of purity, as will be seen below.

¹² Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1966).

¹³ As an interesting aside: a DOE Corpus search turns up only a handful of hits in Ælfric where either *ben* or *gebed* are in proximity to *clæne/clænysse*. Most of them are in female saints’ lives.

wholeness represented in the way he re-casts the relationship between prayer and almsgiving.¹⁴ On the other hand, Bede manages to meld elements of both traditions. As we will see, he strongly contextualizes prayer within a reciprocal gift-giving relationship while at the same time showing concern for a sort of transformational efficacy in prayer that could be termed purity.

The final complications are doctrinal. The third lies within soteriological doctrine, which influences the way the relationship with God is imagined, and, insofar as prayer is an expression of that relationship, it informs the way prayer is understood as well. Fourth is the doctrine of grace, which as formulated by Augustine strongly resists being assimilated into human gift-giving structures of obligation while, because of the language in which the discourse is couched (especially in Old English, in which *gifu* means both “gift” and “grace”) it simultaneously invokes them.

In spite of these complications, I argue that prayer needs to be understood not merely within the more usual context of contemplation, rumination, and meditation, but within the context of gift-exchange, sacrifice, and offering. If one situates Anglo-Saxon prayer only within the first context it becomes impossible to understand the more symbolic uses of Anglo-Saxon prayer (which, as far as we can tell, were much more common in practice) as anything more than superstition. Furthermore, the first context necessarily privileges the individual, private, interior, and (at least assumed) spontaneous and unique experience of prayer over the communal, ritual, active, and symbolic. This reproduces modern preferences and fixations regarding human psychology, sincerity, and autonomy within the early medieval world, obscuring the way that prayer can enact a different model of the psyche, one that privileges symbol, action, gesture, and community.

SCHOLARSHIP ON PRAYER

From the perspective of most medievalists who study spirituality or devotion, Anglo-Saxon prayer falls at a particularly unfortunate moment in the practice of Christian prayer. First of all, it has more in common with the “practical” Latin orientation of prayer than with the

¹⁴ Douglas mentions the semantic differences in varying words pertaining to purity/holiness/sanctity. Both Latin *sacer* (like sanctity) and Hebrew k-d-sh have to do with separation, set-apartness, things removed from the common, profane, mundane (*Purity and Danger*, 8). “Holy,” however, comes from a nexus of OE words having to do with wholeness, healing, salvation (*hælu*, *hælig*, etc.).

“mystical” eastern tradition (to which, indeed, the Anglo-Saxons would have had limited access). Additionally, according to many scholarly paradigms, Anglo-Saxon England exists before the “invention” of the individual,¹⁵ and the individual’s invention of interestingly personal, emotive, and even mystical prayer that emphasizes personal experience and the individual’s sense of personal connection with God.¹⁶ If we imagine these two types of orientation on an XY axis (X: pre-12th century/post-12th century; Y: Eastern prayer at the top, of course/Latin prayer) it becomes apparent that Anglo-Saxon prayer falls in the dark lower-left corner of religious experience, a corner traditionally ceded to the mustier disciplines of philology¹⁷ and liturgical study. As can be seen, there is a strongly judgmental strain in prayer studies.

The early 20th century saw the publication of two foundational books on the study and psychology of prayer. The first was by the psychologist William James on the nature of religious experience. In it, he defines prayer as “no vain exercise of words, no mere repetition of certain sacred formulae, but the very movement itself of the soul, putting itself in a personal relation of contact with the mysterious power of which it feels the presence.”¹⁸ The second was by Friedrich Heiler on the history and psychology of prayer; he defines “genuine prayer” as “the free, spontaneous expression of one’s own experience, or at least the fruit of what one has

¹⁵ See n. 33 below.

¹⁶ Which means a generally wider variety of experience, including gendered experience, the subject of much scholarly interest. For an example of a confluence of just these concerns, see John C. Hirsch, *The Boundaries of Faith: The Development and Transmission of Medieval Spirituality* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 7.

¹⁷ Philological studies of prayer have, of course, added much of value to our knowledge of the origins and influences of prayers in Anglo-Saxon England. Phillip Pulsiano’s chapter, “Prayers, Glosses and Glossaries,” in *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano and Elaine Treharne (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 209-30, provides a very basic, thorough introduction to prayer texts, including an appendix of vernacular prayers and a bibliography of scholarship. Thomas H. Bestul gives a very brief introduction to the subject in “Liturgy”; many of his other works are in this vein, notably “Continental Sources of Anglo-Saxon Devotional Writing,” in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1986), 103-26. Like Bestul, others have traced the various paths prayers and prayer-formulae took to arrive in Anglo-Saxon England: Latin, Carolingian, Iberian, and Irish. Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (London: Batsford, 1991) discusses the liturgy the Romans brought to England and the practice of private prayer in the context of the extant prayerbooks. Further examples discussing the sources of Anglo-Saxon prayer can be found Patrick Sims-Williams, “Thought, Word, and Deed: An Irish Triad,” *Eriu* 29 (1978): 78-111; *Religion and Literature in Western England: 600-800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990). Thomas D. Hill, “Invocation of the Trinity and the Tradition of the *Lorica* in Old English,” *Speculum* 56 (1981): 259-67. Kathleen Hughes, “Some Aspects of Irish Influence on Early English Private Prayer,” *Studia Celtica* 5 (1970): 48-61. Donald Byzdl, “The Sources of Ælfric’s Prayers in Cambridge University Library MS. Gg.3.28,” *Notes and Queries* n.s. 24 (1977): 98-102.

¹⁸ James, *Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: Modern Library, 1902; New York: Mentor, 1958), 352. Citations refer to the Mentor edition.

experienced and gained in struggle.”¹⁹ Both definitions privilege spontaneity (or at least resist the formulaic) in prayer, emphasize the individual and personal, and, in the case of James, assume a sort of direct although “mysterious” experience of the divine frequently attached to mystical experience.

Both of these men’s definitions of prayer (and their projects as a whole) implicitly resist a modernist materialist mindset that was dismissive of the spiritual world and spiritual experience. As a tool of their resistance, they followed in the prayer tradition coming out of the Reformation, which tended toward suspicion of set prayer, preferring individual, spontaneous prayer as “true” prayer, and conceptualizing prayer as something a person does within himself, as an interior activity or discipline.²⁰ Feeding into this discourse of spirituality was the type of selfhood preferred from the Romantic period on, rooted in interiority, individualism, genuine emotional experience, and spontaneity-marked sincerity.

Additionally, both James and Heiler subscribe to an evolutionary development of prayer, which starts with more “primitive” ritualistic prayer and progresses through time to the more valued spontaneous prayer. Marcel Mauss, in his study on prayer, nicely sums up this progression (although he does not explicitly value one type of prayer over another): “At first completely mechanical and effective only through the production of certain sounds, prayer finished by being completely mental and interior.”²¹ In subsequent studies of prayer this evolutionary teleology feeds into the Protestant ideal of spontaneity in prayer, devaluing the ritual form seen as “primitive,” and privileging an individually creative mental and interior prayer as more developed and more complex – a better, truer kind of prayer because it is a better and truer expression of the self in prayer.

That this unexamined preference for modern ideals in prayer is distorting the scholarship on medieval prayer is beginning to be recognized. For instance, a recent anthology, *A History of Prayer* (2008) begins to try to address the “Simply Complicated Scholarly Problem” that prayer presents (as the introduction states it). In that introduction, Roy Hammerling points out:

¹⁹ Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*, trans. Samuel McComb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), xxiii. Orig. publ. *Das Gebet: eine religionsgeschichtliche und religionspsychologische Untersuchung* (Munich: E. Reinhardt, 1923).

²⁰ See Lori Branch, “The Rejection of Liturgy, the Rise of Free Prayer, and Modern Religious Subjectivity,” *Restoration* 29.1 (2005): 1-28.

²¹ Mauss, *On Prayer*, 24.

[A] definition or even a broad consensus concerning the nature of prayer has been difficult to come by in part because many scholars assume a definition of prayer without attempting to define it. Likewise, many have tended to pursue the study of spirituality by looking at a variety of valuable primary sources without attempting to look closely at prayer itself.²²

Because of this lack of careful consideration, implicitly or explicitly, most studies of prayer theory tend to focus on the interior, individual, and contemplative practice of prayer marked as “sincere” by spontaneity or individual creativity in prayer-forms. This focus presents a distorted picture of prayer. So, for instance, liturgical scholar Josef Jungmann states: “... the most authentic prayer takes place outside all forms, in the secret encounter between God and man and woman.”²³ More profusely, Ann and Barry Ulanov claim:

Prayer above all else is conversation with God. It is the primary speech of the true self to the true God. It reaches far below words into the affects and images and instincts living in us unconsciously – into what depth psychologists call primary-process thinking. Prayer makes use of all we know verbally and emotionally – our conscious secondary-process thinking – forming words and wishes sent in urgent pleas or in quiet meditations to our Lord. We speak in prayer from our most hidden heart to the hiddenness of God, in whose astonishing image we were fashioned and find our true faces.²⁴

This passage in particular reads like it comes from a devotional text; however, the volume it comes from, *The Study of Spirituality*, and its companion-volume, *The Study of Liturgy*, both aim to lay out the central issues to scholarly study of these topics. In both these cases it is fairly obvious that the authors speak in their own voices (rather than reflecting historical perspectives), privileging in their study the type of prayer they themselves value.

It is striking, then, that when one turns to studies of Christian late-antique and early medieval prayer (and Jungmann’s book quoted above is on early Christian prayer) we see much

²² Roy Hammerling, “Introduction: Prayer – A Simply Complicated Scholarly Problem,” in *A History of Prayer: The First to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Roy Hammerling (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 2.

²³ Jungmann, *Christian Prayer through the Centuries*, xiii.

²⁴ Ulanov and Ulanov, “Prayer and Personality,” 24.

the same preoccupations with individuality, interiority, and formlessness in prayer.²⁵ Thus, Columba Stewart defines prayer for John Cassian as follows:

For [Cassian], as for many monastic writers, “prayer” (*oratio*) was both a generic and a particular term. It was used inclusively for all forms of human communication with God In the monastic milieu, “prayer” also had a more specific meaning. Cassian follows earlier monastic tradition by locating *oratio* particularly in the reflective pause following each psalm of the canonical office. . . . *oratio* in this narrower sense happened when the flow of recited or sung text paused and *the heart spoke from its own appropriation of the texts*. Offered by each monk in silence and then communally in a prayer by the leader, such prayer arises from, and responds to, the biblical words that have been vocalized.²⁶

Stewart emphasizes the interior, individual, silent nature of prayer in its more specific meaning, even though this type of prayer was rare in Cassian’s work and even rarer outside of it.²⁷

Scholarly work on early medieval prayer in England also reproduces the focus on this kind of prayer, turning to contemplative practices, often those of Cassian, to do it. Cassian uniquely provides the most detailed account of the interior discipline of praying of any early author, making it tempting to apply Cassianic teaching on prayer to more laconic later

²⁵ Behind some of the emphasis individual spirituality is a sort of defensiveness on the part of Catholic scholars, who are keen to show that medieval spirituality is just as sincere and genuine as modern. A strikingly exaggerated example of this is Benedicta Ward, *High King of Heaven*, which emphasizes again and again the genuinely spiritual nature of Anglo-Saxon Christianity. Examples of this are the way she generalizes from a quotation from Bede to all Anglo-Saxons: “Such an approach [to the eucharist] shows that the celebration of the eucharist for the Anglo-Saxons was by no means a clerical formality” (41), and her emphasis on the “interior” nature of Anglo-Saxon teaching on prayer mentioned in n. 6 above.

²⁶ Columba Stewart. *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 100 (emphasis added) .

²⁷ Cassian’s *Conference* 10 gives instruction in the discipline of prayer necessary to arrive at the point where one can appropriate biblical text as one’s own (as Stewart puts it). It is notable that this is considered a very high level of spiritual advancement directed toward hermits rather than something any praying Christian (or even any praying monk) could attain (see Boniface Ramsey’s introduction to his translation in *John Cassian: The Conferences*, Ancient Christian Writers no. 57 [New York: Paulist Press, 1997], 27). Additionally, the words the monks speak in prayer are from the Psalms rather than either their own words or their own catena-like meditational embroidery of the Psalms. See below under “Early Christian Praxis and Teaching on Prayer” for my reading of Cassian. Other than Cassian, the early Christian works on prayer do not typically present the discipline of prayer as leading to this end. As Scott DeGregorio shows, even when Bede adopts Cassian’s language of “purity” he means something different by it: “. . . pure prayer in Cassian’s sense is akin to contemplation, indeed indistinguishable from it. Yet these are not the associations carried by Bede’s use of the phrase *orationis puritas* in his homily. Bede is undoubtedly referring to vocal prayer here, as such phrases as *ore precamur* and *clamor labiorum* . . . indicate. By the phrase “pure prayer,” Bede thus appears to have had something quite different in mind from Cassian” (“The Venerable Bede on Prayer and Contemplation,” *Traditio* 54 [1999]: 1-39, 24).

accounts.²⁸ Benedicta Ward's account of Bede's use of the Psalter does exactly this, invoking Cassian's much fuller account of prayer to explain Bede's practice.²⁹ Rachel Fulton follows this trajectory to muster a formidable argument against the limited understanding of people such as James and Heiler, in favor of understanding text-based prayer as "real" prayer (i.e., individually oriented, sincere prayer).³⁰ In her argument she applies Cassian's conception of prayer to Anselm's prayers, arriving at a place in which prayer is a strikingly individual, creative, mental act performed by an imagined nun praying alone from a group of Anselmian prayers.³¹ I am not arguing that Fulton is essentially wrong in her basic argument. Medieval spirituality obviously had a place for contemplation. Rather, my point is that when scholars turn to study early medieval prayer they tend to reproduce the modern preference for prayer as an interior, mental, individual exercise by choosing to study a contemplative, monastic prayer that very few medieval people would have had access to, and by presenting Cassian's ideal of prayer as more individually creative than it is.

But Anglo-Saxon spirituality is largely left out "of the grand narratives of devotion and mysticism in the Middle Ages," as Allen Frantzen points out.³² Partly this is because the type of prayer that has proven of interest to modern scholars is difficult to find in Anglo-Saxon England. Additionally, studies of early prayer (or more specifically, devotion) also explicitly or implicitly speak to the debates about the "invention" of the individual, which is usually located after the Anglo-Saxon era.³³ Thus, some scholarship on Anglo-Saxon prayer implicitly or explicitly

²⁸ Cassian was, of course, influential in the establishment of monasticism, although it seems unlikely his works were very influential in England. See Stephen Lake, "Knowledge of the Writings of John Cassian in Early Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 32 (2003): 27-42.

²⁹ Ward, *Bede and the Psalter*, Jarrow Lecture, 1991, 6-9.

³⁰ "There was no question of prayer being 'free' or 'spontaneous,' which was not to say, as I have already noted, that it should lack sincerity." Fulton, "Praying with Anselm at Admont," *Speculum* 81 (2006): 700-33, 708.

³¹ For her imagined scenario, see Fulton, "Praying with Anselm," 724.

³² Frantzen, "Spirituality and Devotion in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 117-128, 117.

³³ Conventionally, the Italians discovered the individual in the 15th-century. Naturally, as with so many other 15th-century discoveries, scholars have rushed in to point out that others were there before. Influential in this project is Colin Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual: 1050-1200* (London, 1972; Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1987), the most prominent articulator of a 12th-century discovery of the individual. For two concise summaries of the state of the question see Aaron Gurevich, *The Origins of European Individualism*, trans. Katharine Judelson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), chapter 1; and Andrew Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy: Gifts, Violence, Performance, and the Sacred* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), "Introduction." Gurevich focuses on the development of the individual in medieval scholarship. Cowell situates his account within anthropological and gift-giving theories of the individual. Cowell summarizes: "the recent trend has been to focus more on the social limits

resists this categorization, attempting to make space in prayer for a private, individual interiority that is often claimed to be the development of later eras. This is Frantzen's explicit project. He lauds the work of scholars like Thomas Bestul on early medieval devotion³⁴ and Scott DeGregorio on various aspects of Anglo-Saxon spirituality,³⁵ both of whom seek to situate the Anglo-Saxon spiritual tradition at the early edge of affective piety and a devotion oriented around individual experience.³⁶ Frantzen focuses on forms of spirituality that are oriented toward individual, interior experience. Since Frantzen's goal is to make room for Anglo-Saxon England at the early edge of affective individuality, he of course reproduces this kind of individual within Anglo-Saxon piety.

Conversely, scholars who *do* study ritualized prayer³⁷ often focus on prayer's relationship to power. The literature on charms and magic has historically focused on prayer as a means for the church to control access to God.³⁸ Earlier scholars assumed that the "syncretism" evidenced by the charms' mixture of supposedly pagan and Christian elements was evidence of the church's desire to control all means of access to the divine, such as, for example, healing.³⁹ Such studies are often skeptical of organized religion and power hierarchies in a way that is perhaps

and constraints on individualism in the Middle Ages – especially the period prior to 1200 – while at the same time recognizing the existence of forms of individual autonomy which were expressed in culturally specific ways which may not match – and even less lead to – classic modern forms of the autonomous individual" (1).

³⁴ Bestul, "St. Anselm and the Continuity of Anglo-Saxon Devotional Traditions," *Annuaire Mediaevale* 18 (1977): 20-41. "The Book of Cerne and the English Devotional Tradition," *Manuscripta* 23 (1979): 3-4. "St Anselm, the Monastic Community at Canterbury, and Devotional Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England," *Anselm Studies* 1 (1983): 185-98.

³⁵ DeGregorio, "The Venerable Bede on Prayer and Contemplation"; "Affective Spirituality: Theory and Practice in Bede and Alfred the Great," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 129-39; "Texts, Topoi and the Self: A Reading of Alfredian Spirituality," *EME* 13 (2005): 79-96.

³⁶ I am not convinced this is quite what DeGregorio does. His article on Alfred, "Texts, *Topoi*, and the Self," focuses on a textually mediated self constructed through reading: "spiritual selfhood for Alfred was evidently in part a process of reading and internalizing texts" (84).

³⁷ Obviously, I am not talking about liturgical scholarship here, which tends to focus on praxis, or philological works like those cited above, n. 17, that trace the pedigree of various written prayers. Neither of these types of scholarship really interacts with the theoretical question of what prayer is.

³⁸ The central book to this project is Valerie Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991). Her approach influences two quasi-scholarly books: Bill Griffiths, *Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2003) and Stephen Pollington, *Leechcraft: Early English Charms, Plantlore, and Healing* (Norfolk: Anglo-Saxon Books, 2008). These are two of the most recent editions/translations of Anglo-Saxon charms.

³⁹ J.H.G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*. Publications of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum (London: Oxford University Press, 1952); Godfrid Storms, ed. and trans., *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (Halle: Nijhoff, 1948); Felix Grendon, ed. and trans., "The Anglo-Saxon Charms," *The Journal of American Folklore* 22 (1909): 105-237.

more appropriate to modern than medieval subjectivities. They posit individuals who might be impatient with the limitations imposed by church power, or, conversely, who might be trying in every way possible to consolidate personal power by means of the church. More recent scholarship on charms, notably work by Karen Louise Jolly,⁴⁰ has challenged this easy binary between pagan and Christian, not by considering what prayer is or the way it functioned in Anglo-Saxon England, but by pointing out that Anglo-Saxons did not have the same understanding of the relationship between the natural and spiritual world that we do,⁴¹ and by noting that many “superstitions” taken as evidence of lingering Germanic paganism were beliefs shared with the Christian Mediterranean world.⁴²

I run through the issues embedded in the scholarship of prayer at this length because these unexamined assumptions imported into the study of prayer point toward the need to begin with Anglo-Saxon evidence in attempting to reconstruct Anglo-Saxon theories of prayer, rather than assuming a theory of prayer that may be anachronistic. I also wish to highlight what is at stake in labeling Anglo-Saxon prayer as *essentially* petition: according to modern preconceptions, reducing prayer to petition debases it, stripping it of what is most personal and genuine, of what is least self-interested and most pure, leaving nothing but self-interest as prayer becomes a site for the struggle over various forms of power that then tend to get reduced to the economic. Prayer-as-petition also explains why theoretical aspects of Anglo-Saxon prayer have been largely ignored (except insofar as the influences of Cassian can be traced): both because prayer-as-petition does not fit modern ideas of the individual expression of a unique self, and because, if one is looking for highly developed contemplative prayer, the literature of Anglo-Saxon England is not a very rewarding place to look. But situating prayer in the context of petition and the cultural practices petition invokes actually allows us, without positing a potentially anachronistic notion of individuality, to see how the reciprocal relationships involved in petition make room for a highly personal relationship between God and petitioner within

⁴⁰ Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

⁴¹ See M.L. Cameron’s work, but especially *Anglo-Saxon Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

⁴² For instance, a belief in spirits, and a shared sense of the way the spiritual and material worlds were interlinked. See Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 2.

ritualized, communal prayer. That is, we need to consider what petition meant for the Anglo-Saxons, and how these ideas work out in the Anglo-Saxon discourse of prayer.

THE VOCABULARY OF PRAYER

That modern studies of prayer largely dismiss its petitionary aspect (and what this might mean for the way the relationship with God is imagined and the way personhood is constructed) is rather odd insofar as the vocabulary of prayer is largely petitionary. The broad ModE understanding of prayer as “talking with God” does not work within the Old English vocabulary for prayer. But ModE “pray” (from Latin *precari* via Old French) means at heart petition, as the OED entry shows.⁴³ Every definition for “pray, verb” refers to petition, although all definitions except the archaic are in a religious context or become generalized from the religious meaning. Strangely, the OED overlooks the way that the word is commonly used in devotional, hence scholarly literature. One example of the limitation of the OED entry is that the Creed – which makes no petitions – is in common modern usage called a prayer.⁴⁴ In scholarly usage, then, prayer can refer to petition or it can refer to a devotional prayer aligned with contemplation, as the kind of prayer Stewart defines in Cassian’s work (quoted above); however, the roots of prayer are in petition.

In Latin the vocabulary for prayer is much more narrowly related to petition. The most common words (out of a rather large vocabulary) are *oro*, *rogo*, *precor*, *obsecro*, *supplicor*, and *deprecor*. All of these represent various shades of petitioning. *Oro* is in some ways the most interesting, in that its semantic range includes both religious petition and legal/political arguments.⁴⁵ What it emphasizes is the formal, public nature of the speech. Thus *oratio*, the noun, has a more general meaning before ecclesiastical Latin picks it up as the common word for

⁴³ “pray, v.,” OED Online, November 2010, Oxford University Press,

<http://www.oed.com.proxy2.library.illinois.edu/view/Entry/149429?rskey=3GTRnZ&result=3&isAdvanced=false>.

⁴⁴ The Creed is *not* called a prayer in Anglo-Saxon texts. Ælfric makes a clear distinction between them in CHI.20, ll. 1-3: “Ælc christen man sceal æfter rihte cunnan ægþer ge his pater noster ge his credan; Mid þam pater nostre he sceal hine gebiddan. mid þam credan he sceal his geleafan getrymman.” [Every Christian person should rightly know both his Pater Noster and his Creed. With the Pater Noster he should pray; with the Creed he should confirm his faith].

⁴⁵ Q.v. Charlton T. Lewis and Charles Short, *A Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1879), *oro*, sense II.A: “to argue, to treat, to plead.” A. Walde and J.B. Hofmann in *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1982) give the earliest written use of *oro* in the *Duodecim Tabulae*.

prayer: speech, language, utterance,⁴⁶ and from there to “formal language, artificial discourse, set speech.”⁴⁷ The emphasis here is on the formality of the language and the speaking situation.

The most common OE verb for prayer is *biddan*, a word used in both secular and religious contexts, the basic meaning of which (in either case) is petition. That is, the semantic field of *biddan* is not the same as ModE “prayer,” being both narrower in that it means petition alone (rather than catching any wider idea of discourse with God), and broader in that it covers both secular and religious petitions. *Biddan* also picks up an interesting ambiguity, partly because some of its forms are indistinguishable from *beodan* (to command), so that *biddan* sometimes means “command,” and it can call on sometimes subtle contextual cues to clarify which sense is meant.⁴⁸ For the purposes of this study, it is enough to note that Ælfric consistently uses *biddan* to mean petition, and *hatan* for commands. Furthermore, *halsian*, which is sometimes used for prayer (in collocation with *biddan*), is never used by Ælfric for speech directed toward God. *Halsian* has a stronger binding force (e.g., “Ic halsige ðe þurh ðone lifiendan God” [I adjure you through the living God]⁴⁹), associated with exorcism and conjuration. OE has further verbs used for address to God; *clipian* (to cry out) is the most common of these, but since people cry out to God for help or for favor, it still operates within the petitionary context.

The most common nouns for prayer are *gebed* and *ben* (also both defined as “prayer” in the Dictionary of Old English⁵⁰). While the two words are broadly interchangeable and often used in collocation, within Ælfric’s corpus they have subtly different semantic ranges. The central meaning of both is “request, petition,” but *gebed* (which is far more common) is almost always used when the rhetorical form of prayer is meant (thus a church is a *gebedhus*, the place where regular prayers are offered, never *benhus*), and *ben*⁵¹ usually means more specifically the content of a petition, used when someone is making a particular request, whether to God or men.

⁴⁶ Lewis and Short, sense I.

⁴⁷ As opposed to *sermo*, which is ordinary speech. See sense II.

⁴⁸ Q.v. DOE *biddan*, sense 5.

⁴⁹ An example BT gives of the way it is used in conjuring/exorcism situations (trans. of Mt. 26.63). That is, *halsian* appeals to some power outside of the speaker for its binding force.

⁵⁰ *Dictionary of Old English: A to G online*, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey, et al. (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project 2007).

⁵¹ *Ben* corresponds to ON *bón*, not Latin *ben-* (as in *benedictus*), according to the OED.

A very clear example of this differentiation is found in CHI.25, on the nativity of John the Baptist:

Hit gelamp æt sumum sæle þæt zacharias eode into godes temple: þa mid þam ðe he on his gebedum stod him æteowde godes heahengel gabrihel. 7 him to cwæð; Ne beo þu afyrht zacharia: se ælmihtiga wealdend þe hæst cyþan þæt he gehyrde þine bene. 7 þin wif sceal acennan sunu.⁵²

[It befell at a particular time that Zacharias went into God's temple. Then when he stood in his prayers God's archangel Gabriel appeared to him and said to him: "Do not be afraid, Zacharias: the Almighty Ruler commanded that it be made known to you that he has heard your request, and your wife will bring forth a son."]

Zacharias stands in the temple praying *gebed*. This is not his own, particular request (which is about to be heard), but rather the formal prayers appropriate to the particular season. Gabriel reveals to him, however, that God has heard his particular request, his *ben*, for a son. The way the content of this request is specified makes this a very clear example; *gebed* is almost never used when a specific request is given. An apparent exception to this is in CHI.19, where the various petitions of the prayer are referred to as *gebed*;⁵³ however, in this case *gebed* refers to the set petitions of a formal prayer rather than specific petitions a person might ask and in this way comes closest to Latin *oratio* in that it encompasses the formal elements of prayer, its set form.⁵⁴ Likewise, *ben* sometimes refers to petitions that do not have specific content but do have a specific effect. For instance, in CHI.24, in a catalogue of various Christian manifestations of virtue, Ælfric says: "Sind eac sume gecorene menn þe aflightaþ þa awyriedan gastas fram ofsettum mannum þurh mihta heora bona."⁵⁵ (There are also certain of the elect who put to flight accursed spirits from afflicted people through the power of their prayers.) Here, *bona* does not refer to

⁵² CHI.25, ll. 8-12.

⁵³ "Seofon gebedu sind on þam pater nostre. on þam twam formum wordum ne sind nane gebedu. ac sind herunga þæt is ure fæder þe eart on heofonum. þæt forme gebed is sanctificetur nomen tuum" (CHI.19, ll. 71-3) [There are seven petitions in the Paternoster. No petitions are in the first two phrases but praises, that is, 'our Father who art in heaven.' The first petition is 'sanctificetur nomen tuum'].

⁵⁴ As when, for instance, Stephen asks for Saul's salvation: "Stephanus soðlice gebigedum cneowum drihten bæd. þæt he Saulum alysd; Wearð þa stephanes ben fram gode gehyred: 7 saulus wearð alysed" (CHI.3, ll. 109-111) [Stephen truly prayed the Lord with bended knees that he might redeem Saul. Stephen's request was heard by God and Saul became redeemed].

⁵⁵ CHI.24, 117-19.

specific requests; rather, the emphasis is on the power of the people praying (and so, presumably, the power of their language). While this seems to shade very close to the rhetorical meaning of *gebed*, apart from specifying a particular request, Ælfric uses *ben* in this sort of situation only when the efficacy of powerful prayers is being emphasized.

There are, of course, many ambiguous examples of usage of the two words. The following two make an interesting comparison because of the similarity of the ideas. In CHI.10, concerning the blind man on the road to Jerusalem, Ælfric says: “Gif we þonne þurhwuniað on urum gebedum. þonne mage we gedon mid urum hream e þæt se hælend stent. se ðe ær eode 7 wyle gehyran ure clypunge 7 ure heortan onlihtan. mid godum 7 mid clænum geþohtum.”⁵⁶ (If we then persevere in our prayers then can we bring about with our cry that the Savior stands, he who previously went by, and will hear our crying and enlighten our hearts with good and pure thoughts.) There seems to be no essential difference between *gebed* and *ben* here; *ben* would even seem to follow the semantic range I have just mapped out a little better, since the cries of the one praying cause Jesus to stop – a specific petition. However, in the larger context of the homily, which will be examined in more detail in Chapter 3, Ælfric is apparently concerned with the reiterated discipline of prayer and its subjectively efficacious power – that is, with *gebed*, rather than specific requests.⁵⁷ In CHI.18, which began this introduction and is also discussed further in Chapter 3, Ælfric makes a similar statement: “Ælc þæra þe geornlice bitt. 7 þære bene ne geswicð. þam getiðað god þæs ecan lifes.”⁵⁸ (To everyone who diligently prays, and does not cease from prayer, to them God will grant everlasting life.) Unlike CHI.10, in *this* case the content of the request is emphasized, not just in the eternal life that God will grant in response to zealous prayer, but in the “three loaves” of faith, hope, and charity that the petitioner requests in the contextualizing passage. Keeping the distinction between *ben* and *gebed* in mind helps explain how petition – prayer – could be conceptualized as a gift, insofar as it is a formal speech-act designed to praise or express dependence on God. And, in fact, we find that *gebed* is the

⁵⁶ CHI.10, ll. 80-3.

⁵⁷ Although, as will be seen in Chapter 3, the idea of subjective efficacy in this homily is not quite as straightforward as I have worded it here.

⁵⁸ CHI.18, ll. 94-6.

word preferred when Ælfric refers to prayer as *lac*, or as something offered.⁵⁹ There are also many OE words for praise (*aræran*, *arwurþian*, *began* [a word with a much broader range of meanings], *bletsian*, and *blissian*, to list some of the most common), although, as subsequent chapters will make clear, this concept is subsumed into the petitioning relationship as a response to God's gifts, a return gift.

The OE vocabulary for prayer places it squarely within practices and expectations of petition, and, as both Bede and Ælfric's work shows, the prayer-relationship between humans and God is within a discourse and practice of reciprocal gift-giving. For Bede, the relationship with God is couched in terms of God's gifts, which humans use and thereby return in humility. For Ælfric, obedience to God is a key concept, but he most emphasizes God's protection of those who pray to him. For Bede, this gift-giving relationship is transformative and is almost subjectively efficacious,⁶⁰ as the discipline of prayer remakes the one praying and causes Christ to intervene in the lives of those prayed for. For Ælfric, prayer is situated much more within the cosmic battle between God and the devil and serves as a marker of whose side the petitioner aligns himself with. The practices of prayer serve to shape a community and as an expression of allegiance to the one to whom a person prays. For Ælfric, prayer is therefore more objective: God responds to it with direct intervention in the world.

Beyond gifts, the discourse of early Christian prayer is often conceptually connected to sacrifice, almsgiving, and more general good works, all of which are related through and illuminated by theories of gift-giving. It is therefore helpful to consider ways that modern gift-theory can contribute to an understanding of Anglo-Saxon practice while at the same time reflecting on its limitations. Modern gift-theory (and some of the challenges it presents) helps to rethink presentist assumptions about selfhood and economic structures that influence the way we conceptualize prayer. It also helps to set a useful frame through which to consider Anglo-Saxon

⁵⁹ For instance, "Mid store bið geswutelod halig gebed. be þam sang se sealmscop: drihten sy min gebed asend swa swa byrnende stor on þinre gesihðe" (CHI.7, l. 230-1) [With frankincense holy prayer is revealed, concerning which sang the Psalmist: "Lord, may my prayer ascend as burning frankincense in your sight"].

⁶⁰ Because it matters whom the Christian prays to, true Christian prayer can never be fully subjectively efficacious – that is, working to change a person through the mere discipline of praying, regardless of God's power or help. Subjective efficacy is a modern idea akin to meditational practices. However, if we think about prayer on a spectrum from subjectively to objectively efficacious, the type of prayer Bede presents effects changes upon the one praying through the discipline of prayer (Cassian is the most extreme early example of subjective efficacy), while objectively efficacious prayer brings changes in the world through the direct intervention of God.

theories of prayer, insofar as it emphasizes the basic structure of the gift-giving relationship within societies where gift-giving was much more of a “total system” – that is, a practice drawing together economy, religion, and morality to produce a cohesive society.⁶¹

PRAYER AND GIFT-THEORY

Modern gift-theory essentially begins with Marcel Mauss’s 1924 essay, *The Gift*.⁶² Mauss’s work focuses on agonistic giving between human beings in “archaic” societies. Mauss’s fundamental insight was that all gifts, while seemingly “free,” are actually both “interested” and “constrained.”⁶³ Gifts create obligation on the part of the recipient both to receive gifts and to reciprocate. Often, gifts create obligation on the part of the giver as well (although this idea is not fully developed in Mauss⁶⁴). They create obligations – and this is often missed when people focus on the economic function of gift-exchange – not through the mechanism of a mean accountant’s heart, self-interestedly keeping careful calculations of debits and credits,⁶⁵ but through creating personal ties of gratitude, recognition, and mutual loyalty. The basic question Mauss sought to answer was what was it about these sorts of gifts that obligated a return-gift.⁶⁶ To answer this question, he posited a “total system” in which the

⁶¹ Mauss most explicitly describes a total system at the end of *The Gift*, 78-9. For a concise explanation of “total system,” see Mary Douglas, “Foreward: No Free Gifts,” in Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W.D. Halls (London: Routledge, 1990), viii-ix. Orig. publ. *Essai sur le don, forme archaïque de l’échange*, (France: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950).

⁶² Mauss, *The Gift*. This was not the very first modern study in gift-giving (Bronisław Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* [London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1922]; and Vilhelm Grønbech, *The Culture of the Teutons*, 3 vols., trans. W. Worster [London: Oxford University Press, 1932] were earlier), but it is the most formative within the field.

⁶³ “[W]e seek here to study only one characteristic [of gift exchange] ... the so to speak voluntary character of these total services, apparently free and disinterested but nevertheless constrained and self-interested.” Mauss, *The Gift*, 3.

⁶⁴ The idea is not developed, but it is implied in his account of the potlatch, since what the tribal leaders are competing for is the rulership of the community. As its leaders, they have some obligation toward the people involved. See further n. 110.

⁶⁵ This perspective reduces gift-exchange to a kind of commodity exchange (a point sometimes missed in the literature on gift-giving). To the extent it is present in a gift-giving system it reveals a failure to meet the ideals of gift-giving and a breakdown of social relations.

⁶⁶ “What rule of legality and self-interest, in societies of a backward or archaic type, compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back? This is the problem on which we shall fasten more particularly.” Mauss, *The Gift*, 3.

obligation to give, to receive, and to reciprocate was supported by moral duties, religious practice,⁶⁷ and economic structures.

The scope and reception of Mauss's essay are slightly complicated by the fact that part of his interest was in the way gift-giving was a means of exchange in pre-market economies and an early form of contract.⁶⁸ This interest introduces a teleology to gift-giving in which it is always already defined by and against the later development of the market economy and especially market capitalism. As a result, his argument is left open to certain sorts of misunderstandings, namely, that the logic of the gift-economy mirrors the logic of a market economy in certain basic ways: that individuals act fundamentally in their own interests in gift-giving just as in a market-economy,⁶⁹ and that accumulation of *things* and getting a fair economic exchange is a major focus of the gift-giving. Mauss's desire to find a different economic model also limits the types of gift-giving he focuses on; notably, he focuses on agonistic gift-giving, even though, as Maurice Godelier points out, non-agonistic gift-giving is really more common.⁷⁰ Thus, although

⁶⁷ Some scholars, such as Lévi-Strauss, have faulted Mauss for allowing the "mystical" notion of the *hau* (the "spirit" or *mana* of a gift obliging its circulation) explanatory power, correcting him by secularizing his explanation. But it is, in fact, a Western imposition to refuse religious explanations in a society that has them. Jos Bazelmans, among others, notes that this focus on the merely human overlooks a key element of the construction of personhood and the motivation of the exchange cycle in gift economies: "In most societies it is not only relationships between humans that are relevant but also those between these persons and other supernatural entities. The person takes shape in this culture-specific totality of relationships. ... [T]hese constituents ... in the end do not have social but a supernatural origin." "Beyond Power. Ceremonial Exchanges in *Beowulf*," in *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Frans Theuws and Janet L. Nelson (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 311-375, 319.

⁶⁸ "We shall describe the phenomenon of exchange and contract in those societies that are not, as has been claimed, devoid of economic markets In these societies we shall see the market as it existed before the institution of traders We shall see how it functioned ... before the discovered of forms of contract and sale." Mauss, *The Gift*, 4.

⁶⁹ Jonathan Parry corrects the common misperception that Mauss's essay has much to say about individual behavior: "It is not individuals but groups or *moral persons* who carry on exchanges. The *individuals* of modern society are endowed with interests as against the world. The persons who enter into exchanges which centrally concern Mauss do so as incumbents of status positions and do not act on their own behalf." "The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the 'Indian Gift,'" *Man* n.s. 21.3 (1986): 453-73, 456 (ital. orig.).

⁷⁰ Godelier points out that Mauss uses "non-agonistic gift-giving as the starting point for understanding" forms of agonistic gift-giving. One of the key markers of non-agonistic gift-giving is, according to Godelier, "The giving of gifts and counter-gifts creates a state of mutual indebtedness and dependence which presents advantages for all parties." *The Enigma of the Gift* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 48. Orig. publ. *L'Énigme du don* (Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1996). One example he gives of this type of exchange is of women as wives. As Godelier explains elsewhere, these types of gift-exchanges never create balance in which the debt between the two parties is cancelled. Rather, "They create new debts that counterbalance the earlier ones. According to this logic, the gifts constantly feed obligations." "Some Things You Give, Some Things You Sell, but Some Things You Must Keep for Yourselves: What Mauss Did Not Say about Sacred Objects," in *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice*, ed. Edith Wyschogrod, Jean-Joseph Goux, and Eric Boynton (New York: Fordham University Press, 2002), 26).

Mauss's central interest is gift-giving between humans, when he briefly discusses gifts to the gods (which he calls sacrifice), he considers them a type of contract or exchange between humans and gods referred to as *do ut des* ("I give so that you might give"), not really different in kind from exchanges between humans.⁷¹ In fact, in some ways, these exchanges are the original of exchanges between humans: humans give to the gods so that the gods might, in return, give to humans, who replicate this pattern among themselves.

The way Mauss makes gift and sacrifice into similar economic transactions oversimplifies the theoretical problem the two concepts represent insofar as it focuses only on the contract aspect of sacrifice without considering further expiatory, purificatory, and atoning functions of sacrifice. While Mauss's treatment of sacrifice is necessarily brief in *The Gift*, his earlier essay on sacrifice accounts for the purificatory nature of sacrifice by subsuming the idea of purity into the essentially exchange nature of sacrifice; the rituals surrounding sacrifice create a sacred space free of defilement in which to ask for divine favor.⁷² Most gift theorists follow more or less in Mauss's footsteps. Like Hubert and Mauss, Aafke E. Komter points to the destruction of the sacrifice as the main difference between sacrifice and gift; its destruction transfers the sacrifice to the divine realm, making it accessible to the gods and activating its potential for mediation between humans and gods.⁷³ Dennis King Keenan attempts to capture the paradoxical nature of sacrifice, in that sacrifice is at once economic – "sacrifice pays. One gets a return on one's investment" – while at the same time "sacrifice must necessarily be a sacrifice *for nothing*, a sacrifice for no reason, no goal. It must necessarily be a nonsensical aneconomical

⁷¹ Mauss, *The Gift*, 16.

⁷² The person or group of people on whose behalf the sacrifice is being offered up, as distinguished from the sacrificer, the priest whose job is to do the actual killing (Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, trans. W.D. Halls [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964], 10, 22. Orig. publ. as *Essai sur la Nature et la Fonction du Sacrifice*, in *L'Année sociologique*, 1898).

⁷³ Hubert and Mauss: "[T]he thing consecrated serves as an intermediary between the sacrificer, or the object which is to receive the practical benefits of the sacrifice, and the divinity to whom the sacrifice is usually addressed." *Sacrifice*, 11. Komter: "In anthropological theories gift and sacrifice are conceived as two manifestations of one underlying dimension. In the first case what is given is kept intact; in the second it is "sacrificed" (destroyed, burned, slaughtered, killed, and the like). In the theoretical model that is presented, the gift manifestation of the supposed solidarity dimension relies on mutual recognition, dependency, and reciprocity, whereas the sacrifice manifestation more often involves denial of personal autonomy and 'otherness.'" *Social Solidarity and the Gift* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 11. In a way, what he is doing is assigning characteristics of the "free" gift to sacrifice, preserving reciprocal gifts from being implicated in the loss of autonomy that many find such a problematic aspect of the gift. This issue is picked up in the discussion of the free gift below.

sacrifice. ... The sacrifice must be performed without calculation.”⁷⁴ But, for Keenan, the aneconomic nature of the sacrifice is what allows it to become “sublated by a transcendent economy” in which sacrifice is rewarded.⁷⁵ Others, such as Maurice Godelier, argue that in a gift-system, the first gift (life and sustenance) comes from the gods; hence human/human gift-giving is a re-enactment of that first gift, while sacrifice recognizes human dependence on the gods for continued divine gifts.⁷⁶ Thus, all of these variations on a theme of sacrifice still place sacrifice within what we might call a *gratia* economy: in which grace (*gratia*) is received with gratitude (*gratia*), which then brings further favor (*gratia*). Sacrifice and gift operate according to much the same logic; no clear distinction need be made between gifts and sacrifices made in the divine realm.

The complex relationship between gift and sacrifice, then, is not so much within gift-theory but rather at the nexus of sacrifice and ritual purity. The more serious challenge to a cohesively economic idea of sacrifice comes from work on Levitical law, such as that of Mary Douglas, who explores the way that sacrifice is situated within “rituals of purity and impurity [that] create unity in experience.”⁷⁷ Within this context, sacrifice is a way of dealing with disruption, defilement, sin, guilt – things that affect the human realm and the (divine-mandated) human order.⁷⁸ That is, for Douglas, Levitical law and ritual is a way of ordering the world intended to draw sharp distinctions between kinds: human/divine, human/animal, male/female, etc. In this case, sacrifice, in some sense, mends violations of this order and analogically constructs “a pattern of the cosmos under cover of God’s protection.”⁷⁹

The potential distinctions between gift and sacrifice are a thorny conceptual problem within the scholarly literature. In a project like this, it is important to be aware of a potentially different logic behind sacrifice (petitionary prayer-as-sacrifice) than gift (petitionary prayer-as-gift) since both terms are used to refer to prayer. It does potentially matter on some level

⁷⁴ Keenan, “The Sacrifice of Sacrifice: Waiting without Hope,” in *The Question of Sacrifice* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 1.

⁷⁵ Keenan, “Sacrifice of Sacrifice,” 2.

⁷⁶ Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*.

⁷⁷ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 2.

⁷⁸ *Purity and Danger* focuses more on ritual order and ideas of purity than on sacrifice. In *Leviticus as Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), Douglas devotes a chapter to a reading of sacrifice in Leviticus. There she emphasizes the way that Levitical sacrifice analogically constructs a particular cosmology and theology.

⁷⁹ Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*, 74.

whether prayer is conceptualized as gift or economic sacrifice, or whether it is conceptualized as the type of sacrifice embedded in an ordering sort of purity system. The works of both Bede and Ælfric raise this problem in places where prayer and sacrifice seem to be conflated. For Bede, this happens in a complicated exegetical moment when the spices the women bear to Jesus' tomb become prayer-as-incense (a reference to Revelation 8:4, which refers back to the Old Testament altar of incense burning before the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle). This will be examined in more detail in Chapter 2. For Ælfric prayer and sacrifice are treated as much the same thing in CHI.31, the *passio* of St. Bartholomew, when the pagan Indians offer *lac* (most safely translated as “offering”) to idols as part of (and indistinguishable from) a process of petition. But, as we will see in more detail in the coming chapters, neither Bede nor Ælfric seems to draw a sharp distinction between gift or sacrifice, treating these offerings as gifts (i.e., relational) rather than as a means of purification through restoring ritual systems of order.⁸⁰

Mauss's gift-theory has further complications as it is developed by subsequent theorists. Mauss's focus on the necessary reciprocity in agonistic gift-giving has caused scholars who work on reciprocal gift-giving to notice the way that *all* gifts, agonistic or not, even the most ostensibly “free” are, in fact, interested and constrained.⁸¹ In fact, the *discourse* of gift-giving, which uses the language of generosity and the expectation of no return, cuts against the *practice* of gift-giving, in which gifts actually create obligation and indebtedness.⁸² What this means is that gifts are symbolic (of relationships, of feelings, of desired relationships). Put positively, then, reciprocal gift-giving creates social bonds of allegiance and commonality.⁸³ Negatively, gifts threaten autonomy. Furthermore, like all symbols, gifts can be manipulated, all the more seeming-sinisterly so because of the way that the discourse is at odds with practice in even the friendliest gift-exchange: ostensibly friendly, gifts can mask a manipulative, coercive, or hostile edge, and (because of this potential) gifts can be unwelcome, even while they are presented as

⁸⁰ In a sense offerings to God do restore order, but only insofar as people pray to the right power, the true creator God rather than devils.

⁸¹ See Godelier in n. 70, above, for positive ways this can be construed.

⁸² That is, the Maussian gift violates modern notions of sincerity.

⁸³ “A gift that does nothing to enhance solidarity is a contradiction.” Douglas, “Foreward,” in *The Gift*, vii.

generously given. This fact forms a strong thread of interest within scholarship on gift-giving that focuses on the relationship between gift-giving and struggles for power and autonomy.⁸⁴

For people whose ideal is the modern, Western independent individual, the idea that gifts create obligations – create *debts*, as the terminology usually is – is profoundly challenging to ideals of personal autonomy. Thus, another path gift-theory has taken is to point out that the Maussian gift is set in implicit opposition to the “free” or “pure” gift – the gift without strings, disinterested, unconstraining⁸⁵ – which is often implicitly preferred. This scholarship also questions whether the “free” gift can actually exist at all, and, if so, under what sorts of conditions it can exist, and what sorts of functions it might serve.⁸⁶ A most idiosyncratic (and influential) example of this is Jacques Derrida’s meditation on the gift, in which he concludes that the gift (by which he means the free gift) is impossible (is *the impossible*⁸⁷), that its existence is negated in the very language used to describe it, because, most essentially, a true gift must be *outside* cycles of reciprocity and exchange:

For there to be gift, there must be no reciprocity, return, exchange, countergift, or debt. If the other *gives me back* or *owes me* or has to give me back what I give him or her, there will not have been a gift, whether this restitution is immediate or whether it is programmed by a complex calculation of a long-term deferral or difference.⁸⁸

For Derrida, even the recognition of a gift, with the possible satisfaction it brings the donor in giving, and the possible feelings of gratitude it inspires in the recipient, creates a circle, binding donor to recipient and reducing the gift to calculation and economic interest. Derrida’s interest in the gift is fairly obviously not in actual gift-giving practice, but rather in the way the discordance between the “gift and economy” open up a “gap between, on the one hand, thought,

⁸⁴ This interest stems from Mauss’s description of potlatch and the relationship of potlatch to hierarchy, but (as we will see below) it also tends to reproduce modern ways of valuing autonomy. A good example of a work that focuses on the way gift-giving (and resisting gift-giving) could be used to hostile or insulting effect within a 12-13th century medieval context is Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*.

⁸⁵ See Mark Osteen, “Introduction: Questions of the Gift,” in *The Question of the Gift: Essays across Disciplines*, ed. Mark Osteen (London: Routledge, 2002), 1-41.

⁸⁶ Alain Caillé, “The Double Inconceivability of the Pure Gift,” *Angelaki* 6.2 (2001): 23-39; James Laidlaw, “A Free Gift Makes No Friends,” *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6.4 (2000): 617-34. Repr. in *The Question of the Gift*, ed. Osteen, 45-66; Jacques Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992). Orig. publ. *Donner le temps* (Paris: Editions Galilée, 1991); Parry, “*The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the ‘Indian Gift.*”

⁸⁷ Derrida, *Given Time*, 7.

⁸⁸ Derrida, *Given Time*, 12 (ital. orig.).

language, and desire, and, on the other hand, knowledge, philosophy, science, and the order of presence.”⁸⁹ But in its substructure, Derrida’s argument manifests a profound discomfort with the bond and obligation that the gift places upon people.⁹⁰ Alain Caillé points out the limitations of this discomfort: Derrida’s argument, he says,

fails because it does not take into consideration the idea that the gift must be constituted by something – that it cannot simply be an auto-referential affirmation of the self – so that the question whether it comes from interest, pleasure, or spontaneity is not at all indifferent to it, but, on the contrary, co-substantial. But it also fails for another subtler and stronger reason. In the end, is it so certain that those who receive must be profoundly humiliated by accepting the gift, and are indebted to the point of being incapable of enjoying the gift, unless they do not perceive it as such? Similarly, is it so certain that those who give, ought, for the sake of symmetry, to feel guilty until the end of time for having committed the aberration of allowing themselves a moment of human, all too human, generosity? In the final analysis, I am tempted to say, it behoves [sic] the donors and the recipients to resolve their problems with gratitude.⁹¹

Caillé’s criticism points out the extent to which the “self” (and a modern, individualistic self, at that) is at the center of Derrida’s argument, but also the extent to which Derrida overlooks or devalues the actual details of gift-giving as it occurs within real relationships, the very facets of gratitude and generosity that give gift-exchange its power to bind people together.

Lurking behind Caillé’s question about whether it is “so certain that those who receive must be profoundly humiliated by accepting the gift” is the fact that almost all instances of “free” gifts within the scholarship on gift-giving are charity and almsgiving, in which the inequality of the donor and recipient is, in fact, a given: the donor gives because the recipient needs; the recipient cannot repay the donor, nor is he expected to.⁹² Furthermore, these types of free gifts

⁸⁹ Derrida, *Given Time*, 19.

⁹⁰ “Mauss reminds us that there is no gift without bond, without bind, without obligation or ligature.” Derrida, *Given Time*, 27.

⁹¹ Caillé, “Double Inconceivability,” 37.

⁹² Although it should be noted that alms within the penitential system begin to come to monks, who then use them for their own maintenance, or are then responsible for dispersing them to the poor as well as praying. See Angenendt, “*Donationes pro anima*.” This changes the hierarchy of gift-giving (the gift then moves from lower to higher, the one seeking the favor to the one giving a favor, and alms also become reciprocal in a way they had not

are almost always conceptualized as between strangers, and are not necessarily expected to create a social bond between the two parties.⁹³ To the extent a “free” gift is possible between relatives or perhaps good friends, it is insulting *because* it insists on treating family like strangers. Rather, a gift given in response to need (say, clothes and furniture given when a family member’s house burns down) is almost always understood within the context of that relationship, as an expression of the relationship (“families look out for each other”; “blood is thicker than water”), with the implied acknowledgement that the one receiving the gift would do the same for the giver had the situation been reversed (and might do so in the future). That is, it is seen as an *obligation* attendant on that kind of relationship. But, a gift in response to need presented as truly free (that is, charity) between friends or family is, in fact, insulting insofar as it implies the recipient has and will have nothing to offer himself, and as it represents a refusal on the part of the donor to acknowledge that the recipient *in fact* has some claim on her attentions and to her goods by virtue of the prior relationship. Charity reduces family or friends to strangers, just as loans between family members reduce the relationship to a business transaction, highly fraught because of the tensions between performing under the constraints of family (in which generosity is presumed) and performing under the constraints of contract (where the giver expects her money to be returned).⁹⁴ Caillé’s non-humiliating gifts, then, are presumably not charity, even as Derrida seeks to imagine a gift that is as much like charity as possible but without the implied hierarchy or pre-existing relationship that makes charity potentially offensive. Derrida’s gift is an inhuman gift, in the end, one that denies human connection in the name of freedom, that pries open the circularity of gift exchange but leaves nothing but the emptiness of the atomized individual behind it.

been before. That is, in the most common way of thinking, Christian alms were reciprocated by God himself (as we will see in Chapter 3, this is not the model Augustine sets forth).

⁹³ See Laidlaw, “A Free Gift Makes No Friends” for an anthropological example of the extreme formalism necessary to make an alms gift truly “free” within Jain society. Parry, among others, notes the common feeling that “The unreciprocated gift debases the recipient.” “*The Gift, the Indian Gift, and the ‘Indian Gift,’*” 458. See also Douglas, “Foreward,” in *The Gift*, vii.

⁹⁴ In modern-day American society, many family members *do*, in fact, lend money to other family members, sometimes with interest; this is perhaps an example of how thoroughly individualistic capitalism has colonized our relationships. A fascinating essay that considers these types of issues within the patriarchal narratives of Genesis (such as Esau selling his birthright to Jacob for a pot of stew) is Charles H. Hinnant, “The Patriarchal Narratives of Genesis and the Ethos of Gift Exchange,” in *The Question of the Gift*, ed. Osteen, 105-117.

And yet, is this inhuman gift inhuman because it is actually divine? Within early Christian discourse, it is the act of charity that comes closest to representing the gifts God gives humans, since God's gifts are given within an absolute hierarchy to those who can never hope to repay him. Does Derrida's argument point toward a radical difference between human/human interactions and human/divine interactions (a difference that goes against much of the anthropological work on the subject)? Unlike the limited nature of human charity, the overwhelmingly fundamental nature of God's gifts then creates a relationship in which humans are utterly and inescapably dependent upon him, God's beggars (*þearfan* in Ælfric).⁹⁵ At the same time, God's fundamental gifts are given to all indiscriminately, regardless of whether they ask for or acknowledge the source of these gifts. It is those who do not recognize their dependence on God who come closest to the Derridean ideal.⁹⁶ Those who recognize their dependence on God beg for God's favor out of the depths of their need, recognizing that God gives without being in any way constrained to give, not because he *must* give, but simply out of his *gratia*. But in this case, far from the Derridean gift, God's *gratia* may be unconstrained, but those who accept it realize that God's gifts constrain a response in which humans owe God everything. Stated this way, *gratia* emphasizes human constraint and obligation. Humans are enmeshed in a relationship predicated upon gifts they did not ask for (such as life), constrained within unending debt to a being who, in the end, because humans have nothing they can give, owes them nothing and can cut them loose without warning. As we will see, this is essentially how Lucifer conceptualizes his relationship with God in Ælfric's CHI.1.

⁹⁵ Also, in Cassian: "Et re uera quae maior aut sanctor potest esse paupertas quam illius, qui nihil se praesidii, nihil uirium habere cognoscens de aliena largitate cotidianum poscit auxilium, et uitam suam atque substantiam singulis quibusque momentis diuina ope intellegens sustentari uerum se mendicum domini non inmerito profitetur, suppliciter ad eum cotidie clamans; 'ego autem mendicus et pauper sum: dues adiuuat me' [Ps. 39:18 LXX]" (*Iohannis Cassiani Opera*, Pars II, ed. Michael Petschenig, CSEL, vol. xiii [Vienna: C. Geroldi Filium Bibliopolam Academiae, 1886], *Conl.* X.xi.2, ll. 10-17) [And in fact what poverty can be greater or holier than that of one who realizes that he has no protection and no strength and who seeks daily help from another's bounty, who understands that his life and property are sustained at each and every moment by divine assistance, and who rightly professes that he is the Lord's true beggar, daily crying out humbly to him: 'I am needy and poor; God helps me?'] (trans. Boniface Ramsey in *John Cassian: The Conferences*, Ancient Christian Writers 57 [New York: Paulist Press, 1997], Conf. 10.11.2). This is specifically in the context of the mind "restricting itself to the poverty of this one verse" in prayer (10.11.1).

⁹⁶ For an application of this sort of idea to the concept of forgiveness in the Gospels, see John D. Caputo, "The Time of Giving, the Time of Forgiving," in *The Enigma of Gift and Sacrifice*, eds. Wyschogrod, Goux, and Boynton, 117-47.

But this discourse, with its cold, distant God scattering rain on just and unjust alike, and its abjectly dependent humans, is not the discourse used, for the most part, in Bede or Ælfric. The distance implied in the relationship between almsgiver and beggar is rejected for a closer model of reciprocity. That is, while the almsgiving model most closely fits the nature of God's gift to humans, in fact, as we will see, this model is one that Anglo-Saxon teaching acknowledges but resists at almost every turn in favor of the mutual model of reciprocal gift-giving in which Christians have a closer relationship to God than those who merely receive his charity. As Caillé recommends, Bede and Ælfric's solution to God's astounding generosity is gratitude and joy resulting from the gift unlooked-for and unearned, and God's response to that gratitude is a self-constraining promise of future gifts.

The attitude toward power and constraint inherent in the gift is another way that modern gift-theory tends to diverge from the model found within the Anglo-Saxon discourse on prayer. Within a gift economy the power and constraint in gift-giving are inextricably linked with generosity, gratitude, and joy. That is, gratitude and joy are seen to be the appropriate responses to gifts, which are experienced as unconstrained and unconstraining, even though, in practice, gifts place a person in a position of having to return the gift, and thus in a position of dependence and debt. Ever sensitive to power relationships, modern sociological theory has called attention to these entwined discourses of power and gratitude, tending to see the free and unconstrained nature of the gift relationship as a disguise for the "true" nature of gifts: interest and constraint. That is, the discourse of the gift (free, unconstraining) and the praxis of the gift (interested, constraining) cannot, it seems, both be true.

Rather than leaving this perceived knot hopelessly snarled, the modern theoretical gaze teases the two strands apart. The difference between the subjective and objective natures of the gift (what I have been calling discourse and praxis, respectively) is the problem Pierre Bourdieu addresses by positing "individual and collective misrecognition of the social rules that govern the act of reciprocation."⁹⁷ That is, in the end, the subjective experience of the gift is a "misrecognition" of the objective way that the gift works to weave webs of power relations and cement hierarchy. While Bourdieu himself seems to have felt that this solution gives equal

⁹⁷ Alan D. Schrift, "Introduction: Why Gift?," in *The Logic of the Gift: Toward an Ethic of Generosity*, ed. Alan D. Schrift (New York: Routledge, 1997), 13.

weight to the subjective experience and the objective view, or at least leaves room for the subjective,⁹⁸ the language in which he states his argument consistently gives primacy to the objective experience as the true one. The subjective view “misrecognizes” the “truth of the objective ‘mechanism’ of the exchange.”⁹⁹ This misrecognition is a “collectively maintained and approved self-deception.”¹⁰⁰ That is, clear-eyed, undeceived recognition of the truth of exchange mechanisms lies with the objective perspective because that is the one that reveals the way that power works. Power is truth, truth power. Or rather, truth is power misrecognized as a gift that obligates hapless recipients to respond in gratitude to what, in fact, enslaves them.

In some respects, there is no arguing with this model from within its own structures. Mark Osteen makes the same observation regarding market rhetoric: “‘market rhetoric’ renders invisible anything outside of the market.”¹⁰¹ In the same way, a focus on power, like a focus on economy, reduces everything to its own terms. While, for Bourdieu, the space between subjective experience and objective observation is productive, in the end, however much he might try to imagine a sociological theory that salvages both subjective experience and objective observation, he is caught up both in “market rhetoric”¹⁰² and in a focus on power that subtly privileges the ideal of the autonomous individual through its emphasis on and then suspicion of all power hierarchies, however capitially disguised they might be. Thus, Bourdieu’s “misrecognition” of the gift has a curious blindness of its own.

To escape this blindness, we might take gratitude on its own terms. Caillé posits gratitude as the solution to the “debt” of the gift, appealing to the common sense of experience – we are, in the normal course of things, often grateful for gifts, and we experience the obligation

⁹⁸ For instance, he cautions: “The abstract model that has to be constructed (for example, to account for the practices of honor) is completely valid only if it is presented for what it is, a theoretical artifact totally alien to practice ...” (196). He further says, “[E]ven if reciprocity is the ‘objective’ truth of the discrete acts that ordinary experience knows in discrete form and associates with the idea of a gift, it is perhaps not the whole truth of a practice that could not exist if its subjective truth coincided perfectly with its ‘objective’ truth.” Pierre Bourdieu, “Selections from *The Logic of Practice*,” in *The Logic of the Gift*, ed. Schrift, 190-230, 198.

⁹⁹ Bourdieu, “Selections from *The Logic of Practice*,” 198.

¹⁰⁰ Bourdieu, “Selections from *The Logic of Practice*,” 198.

¹⁰¹ Mark Osteen, “Gift or Commodity?,” in *The Question of the Gift*, ed. Osteen, 231. Osteen is here borrowing an observation from Margaret Radin.

¹⁰² As Caillé observes, his whole terminology of the various types of capital and markets is borrowed from capitalism and thus never succeeds in escaping reducing every sort of capital to the economic. Bourdieu apparently took exception to Caillé’s criticisms; however, I think Caillé’s critique is fundamentally sound. Caillé, “Double Inconceivability,” 25-28.

to reciprocate the gift as a delight rather than a burden. The problem is, in emphasizing the burden of reciprocity rather than the joy, theorists place an implicitly higher value on the autonomy that the “bond and bind” of the gift threatens. But one person’s autonomy is another person’s alienation. Who, after all, is more free than the Wanderer? Yet the Wanderer experiences his wide freedom in the world as loneliness: that he

sohte sele dreorig sinces bryttan,
hwær ic feor oþþe neah findan meahhte
þone þe in meoduhealle min mine wisse,
oþþe mec freondleasne frefran wolde,
weman mid wynnum.¹⁰³

[sadly sought a hall of a giver of treasures,
where, far or near, I might find
one who would in the mead-hall acknowledge my affection,
or comfort me in my friendless condition,
persuade me with joys.]

What the Wanderer values in the gift is exactly the social bonds it creates, a space where he is welcomed and loved, where he has particular rights within a particular group of people.

Gifts create bonds between people and a space of belonging. Because gift-bonds are a matter of social cohesion, gratitude is not merely an issue of politeness, of manners, but is a moral obligation. As Georg Simmel put it, “Gratitude ... is the moral memory of mankind”;¹⁰⁴ it reminds people of their obligations to each other. Because of the discomfort with the *debt* of gifts and the discrepancy between discourse and praxis in gift-giving,¹⁰⁵ this moral element is too

¹⁰³George Philip Krapp and Elliott Van Kirk Dobbie, *The Exeter Book*, ASPR III (New York: Columbia University Press, 1936), ll. 25-29.

¹⁰⁴Simmel, “Faithfulness and Gratitude,” in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1950), 388. Also printed in *The Gift: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, ed. Aafke E. Komter (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996), 39-48.

¹⁰⁵As mentioned above, it is this discrepancy that allows Derrida to posit the impossibility of the gift, but might it not also be revalued: the gap between discourse and praxis is precisely what makes room for relationships to flourish? The “imbalance” in the gift-cycle (that, as Boundas, points out, it can never reach a “zero sum” balance. Something is always owed. Constantine V. Boundas, “Exchange, Gift, and Theft,” in *Angelaki* 6.2 (2001), 101-12, 101) is a fruitful imbalance opening possibilities rather than foreclosing on them, as the economic exchange relationship is supposed to do, where exchanges come to perfect balance and thus cancel any ties between the two parties, see C.A. Gregory, *Gifts and Commodities* (London: Academic Press, 1982), 100-1.

commonly overlooked or dismissed as misrecognized power. As Mauss saw, the moral element of gift-giving seeks to construct a society whose obligations to each other are based, not on utility or naked power, but on generosity, gratitude, reciprocity, and the joy of the gift.¹⁰⁶ That gifts can be unwelcome insofar as bonds between people are unwelcome, is, of course, the flip side of this sort of system. In response to this emphasis on power, I do not want to posit a romanticized early medieval past where everyone knew his place and was happy for whatever was given him within it. Medieval people were as adept at recognizing the potential trap of the gift as anyone else might be.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, work like Bourdieu's (and Mauss's) ably counters more naïve views of the gift as always free, as essentially benignant. But if one mistrusts the way gifts create bonds between people or cement a hierarchy, this has much to do with what one thinks of being bonded to others (and which others) or being cemented in hierarchy (and which hierarchy). We *might* posit a world in which some people are happy to receive gifts from a lord they admire and are proud to serve him in return, and who, when they are wrenched out of this relationship, mourn its loss like we would mourn the loss of family. Within the context of reciprocal gift exchange and the moral system it creates, it is not the reciprocal gift that threatens social order, it is the "free" gift, if any, in fact, exists; the gift that creates nor seeks to create bonds between people.

But more essentially, we need to recognize, as Osteen, Caillé, and Komter urge us to, that the logic of the gift brings with it its own system of reciprocal morality, one in which gratitude is a moral virtue, and failures of gratitude (and the concomitant failure of return-gifts or service) are seen as moral failures that threaten to unravel the fabric of society. As is so amply shown in the literature on early Germanic gift-giving,¹⁰⁸ a society that organizes its relationships according to gifts is trying to reproduce the same bonds of familial affection and obligation, within the wider society.¹⁰⁹ In this case, gifts are inescapably "about" power, but they are also inescapably

¹⁰⁶ Mauss, *The Gift*, 79.

¹⁰⁷ See Marcell Mauss, "Gift, gift," in *The Logic of the Gift*, ed. Schrift, 28-32; and Cowell, *The Medieval Warrior Aristocracy*. In addition, suspicion of the gift is attested in primary texts such as the *Hávamál*.

¹⁰⁸ Grønbech, *The Culture of the Teutons*. Hinted at in David Greene, *The Carolingian Lord: Semantic Studies in Four Old High German Words: Balder, Fro, Truhtin, Herro* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 115-117. Aaron Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, ed. Jana Howlett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁰⁹ And, just as with families, any particular expression of this system can be dysfunctional.

“about” affection. To give power’s threat to autonomy primacy within this discourse is to reproduce our own anxieties within the early Middle Ages instead of listening to theirs.

In addition, it is easy to overlook the fact that, in a gift-giving hierarchy, superiors have obligations to their inferiors as well as the other way around,¹¹⁰ and that, if a superior should fail to fulfill his obligations this threatens his position and loosens his inferiors’ obligations to him. Within Anglo-Saxon teaching, the idea that God could (or would) fail to fulfill his obligations is never entertained;¹¹¹ the reciprocal relationship between God and humans is a fully functioning, idealized model of human reciprocity insofar as God is the perfect lord. But Anglo-Saxon teaching presents a paradox: humans cannot initially constrain God to give them anything, yet they can oblige him to reward their good works; God has obligations, too. It is these reciprocal obligations that move the relationship between God and humans beyond the abject distance implied in charity and enable humans to have a close relationship with God. Thus within this gift-giving system both Bede and Ælfric repeatedly emphasize exactly what you would expect them to: that God’s gifts are great, and that he is a good lord, obliged to reward those who obey him.

¹¹⁰ A fact Mauss’s system accommodates: “The obligation to give is no less important [than the obligation to receive]; To refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality. Also, one gives because one is compelled to do so, because the recipient possesses some kind of right of property over anything that belongs to the donor.” Mauss, *The Gift*, 13. This point has been easily overlooked because Mauss spends less time on the obligation to give. His sense of the circularity of the gift-cycle that people are always already part of by virtue of being born de-emphasizes this point yet further, in spite of the fact that for gifts to be able to forge new ties with new communities, there must be a first gift, given before the web of reciprocity constrains every subsequent gift. Theorists after Mauss muse on the superiority of the first gift as the best, most valuable gift, impossible to fully reciprocate because it is unconstrained, most fully given *gratis* (Simmel, “Faithfulness and Gratitude,” in *The Gift*, ed. Komter, 47), while others, following Godelier, point out that the only first gift is the hypothesized gift of the gods, and thus, they are the only ones truly outside of the gift-cycle (*Enigma of the Gift*, 30). At the same time, typical exchange theories of sacrifice do not agree with this, since the gods are involved in reciprocal relationships with humans through sacrifice. In contrast to Mauss, Bourdieu’s ideas of the gift show how complex the issue can be within particular cultural expressions. In Bourdieu’s case, his observations on the gift are focused through the lens of personal honor because of the particular society he is studying, the Kabyle of North Africa. Because of this, Bourdieu’s study does not address the obligations of superiors to inferiors.

¹¹¹ It is, in some ways, carefully not entertained, as at the end of CHI.31 where Ælfric explains why God does not necessarily answer prayers for healing.

GIFT-GIVING IN ANGLO-SAXON STUDIES

Scholars since Mauss have found gift-giving a fruitful field of inquiry because of the way it “can be located at the center of current discussions of deconstruction, gender, ethics, philosophy, anthropology, and economics.”¹¹² Within Anglo-Saxon studies, gift-theory is most heavily represented in the scholarship on *Beowulf*.¹¹³ Much of this scholarship reflects the preoccupation with reconstructing a secular Germanic Anglo-Saxon culture that occupied a great deal of scholarly attention from the 19th-century on.¹¹⁴ Thus, the focus of gift-exchange within Anglo-Saxon studies tends to be on heroic literature and the kind of social performance usually limited to aristocratic men.¹¹⁵ A few studies bring gift-exchange into the religious context, but they also focus on the insight that Old English poetry often presents God along the model of the

¹¹² Schrift, “Introduction: Why Gift?,” in *The Logic of the Gift*, 3.

¹¹³ Leslie Lockett, “The Role of Grendel’s Arm in Feud, Law, and the Narrative Strategy of *Beowulf*,” in *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge*, 2 vol., ed. Katherine O’Brien O’Keefe and Andy Orchard (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2005), vol. 1, 368-88. Jos Bazelmans, “Beyond Power,” in *Rituals of Power*, based on his dissertation, printed as *By Weapons Made Worthy: Lords, Retainers and Their Relationship in Beowulf* (Amsterdam University Press, 1999). Heinrich Härke, “The Circulation of Weapons in Anglo-Saxon Society,” *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, Ed. Frans Theuws and Janet L. Nelson (Leiden: Brill, 2000): 377-399 (an archeological/cultural study using exempla from *Beowulf*). Jos Bazelmans, “One for All, All for One: The Old English *Beowulf* and the Ritual and Cosmological Character of the Relationship between Lord and Warrior-follower in Germanic Societies,” *Method and Theory in Historical Archaeology: Papers of the “Medieval Europe Brugge 1997” Conference* 10 (1997): 51-3. Adelheid L.J. Thieme, “The Gift in *Beowulf*: Forging the Continuity of Past and Present,” *Michigan Germanic Studies* 22 (1996): 126-43. John M. Hill, *The Cultural World in Beowulf* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995). Robert E. Bjork, “Speech as Gift in *Beowulf*,” *Speculum* 69 (1994): 993-1022. John M. Hill, “*Beowulf* and the Danish Succession: Gift Giving as an Occasion for Complex Gesture,” *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 11 (1982): 177-97. Charles Donahue, “Potlatch and Charity: Notes on the Heroic in *Beowulf*,” in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry: Essays in Appreciation for John C. McGalliard*, ed. Lewis Nicholson and Dolores Warwick Frese (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1975). Many other works mention gift-giving in *Beowulf* without explicitly using gift-theory (e.g., Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 62-8 discusses gift-giving as part of hall life in *Beowulf*).

¹¹⁴ In this vein, there is a strong tradition of German-language scholarship on Germanic gift-exchange as well, although it is not necessarily influenced by Mauss. See Grønbech, etc. in n. 108, above.

¹¹⁵ But for a take on the queen’s role within the *comitatus* see Michael J. Enright, “Lady with a Mead-Cup: Ritual, Group Cohesion and Hierarchy in the Germanic Warband,” *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 22 (1988): 170-220. Additionally, focusing on *Judith*: Erin Mullally, “The Cross-Gendered Gift: Weaponry in the Old English *Judith*,” *Exemplaria* 17 (2005): 255-84 (presumably from her dissertation, “Giving Gifts: Women and Exchange in Old English Literature,” Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Oregon, 2002). In addition, the following works focus on the economics of exchange in Anglo-Saxon England: Emilia Jamrozak, “Making and Breaking the Bonds: Yorkshire Cistercians and Their Neighbours,” in *Perspectives for an Architecture of Solitude: Essays on Cistercians, Art and Architecture in Honour of Peter Fergusson*, ed. Terry N. Kinder (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004): 63-70. Nida-Louise Surber-Meyer, *Gift and Exchange in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Corpus: A Contribution towards the Representation of Wealth* (Geneva: Slatkine, 1994). Roy Workman, “Ælfwine’s Gifts,” *Suffolk Review* 4 (1979 for 1978): 280-82.

Anglo-Saxon lord,¹¹⁶ and that this involves exchange of gifts and services.¹¹⁷ Both gift-theory and Anglo-Saxon literature have more to offer than this. Anglo-Saxon teaching on prayer is aimed at a more “normal” (i.e., less heroic) cross-section of society which would include all levels of wealth and power, varying statuses of religious and lay, and both men and women. It thus presents ways beyond the heroic in which the gift-giving relationship performed in prayer constructs community between humans and God and among humans.

DOCTRINAL COMPLICATIONS

Gift-theory developed in the field of anthropology, so it is not surprising that its primary focus is on human relationships rather than human/divine relationships, which it tends to conceptualize as mirroring human relationships.¹¹⁸ We have already run across some of the ways that this assumed parallel necessarily raises complications when one applies gift-theory to the imagined relationship between humans and God (or the gods) as a negotiated relationship, in which human and divine differ in *rank* rather than essentially in *kind*. Since the Christian God is usually imagined as differing in kind (theologically speaking, his ineffability, omniscience, etc. are often emphasized, thus the necessity for Christ to take on flesh, to operate as a mediator between two very different kinds of beings), it seems obvious that the normal rules regarding reciprocal gift-giving would be heavily modified or suspended, but, as the discussion of almsgiving has shown, this is not necessarily the case. In fact, in early Christianity, strains of Christianity most influenced by Neo-Platonism or Gnosticism tend to imagine God more abstractly, less humanly, and in these cases the exchange element of the relationship is indeed muted (the focus tends to be on purity instead). At the same time, outside of the rarified circles

¹¹⁶ Alvin A. Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 11, discusses God as lord and gift-giver in Old English poetry. Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community*, considers the hall as an ideal community.

¹¹⁷ Examples of this are Adelheid L.J. Thieme, “Gift Giving as a Vital Element of Salvation in *The Dream of the Rood*,” *South Atlantic Review* 63.2 (1998): 108-23 (this article is presumably based on her 1995 dissertation, “Gift Exchange and the Heroic Ethos in Old English Poetry,” Ph.D. diss., Arizona State University); and Ruth Louise Coy, “The Gift in Old English Literature,” Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1977, on *Genesis A*, *Christ II*, and *Beowulf*.

¹¹⁸ Mauss’s original point was that gift-giving was a “total” system, folding in economic, social, and religious activity, but, of course, his main focus was on how gift giving operated within human relationships. Godelier, *Enigma of the Gift*, recently critiques more recent scholars for overlooking the religious element to gift-giving, especially the influence of Christianity on Western ideas of the gift.

of high theology, God is more usually imagined as a person, as some sort of super-human at the very top of a hierarchy. This conceptualization does tend to picture humans and God as locked in a reciprocal relationship. But there are some theological complications to this.

There are, first of all, two differing soteriological models used to explain exactly how Christ's sacrifice worked to save mankind. The first, the ransom theory of salvation, pictures God and Satan as rival lords and thus fits very neatly into Anglo-Saxon cultural models of gift-giving within a lordship relationship.¹¹⁹ This will be revisited in further detail in Chapter 3, where I show how Ælfric's soteriology influences the way he conceptualizes prayer as a means of stating allegiance to one lord or the other. While ransom theory fits almost seamlessly into gift-giving paradigms, both penance and the Eucharist add disruptive complications insofar as the Eucharistic sacrifice is imagined both as a gift from God to humans and from humans to God, and insofar as penance introduces legal theories of atonement and purity to an already existing vocabulary of atonement and purity within Judaism, and the further ideas of purity in Neo-platonic philosophy that privilege the spiritual realm. In either case, the vocabulary of penance, especially insofar as purity is concerned, overlaps with Neo-platonic vocabulary of purity. Because Neo-platonic-influenced Christian thought conceptualizes God more abstractly – we will see this most strongly in Augustine – gift-giving does not have much place within a discourse of purity.¹²⁰ But purity can also be effected by prayer as a gift for God, and purity is also a goal of penance. The main difference is that the penitential system does not conceptualize good works as a gift given by humans in gratitude for God's gifts, but as a debt owed on account of sin. Confusingly, this also is often called impurity and is also talked about in terms of healing. These issues are too complex to deal with in the abstract; I bring them up here because we will

¹¹⁹ See Gustav Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A.G. Herbert (New York: Macmillan, 1967); and William C. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1995).

¹²⁰ There is an element of reciprocity embedded in the Greek word for prayer, *euche*, which also means "to vow." According to Cassian, "Orationes sunt quibus aliquid offerimus seu uouemus deo, quod Graece dicitur *εὐχή*, id est uotum (*Conl.* CSEL 13, VIII.XII.1, ll. 7-8) [Prayers are those acts by which we offer or vow something to God, which is called *εὐχή* in Greek – that is, a vow] (*Conf.* IX.xii.1). But, for Cassian, these vows are centered on reformation of the self: "Oramus, cum renuntiantes huic mundo spondemus nos mortificatos cunctis actibus et conuersationi mundanae tota cordis intentione domino seruituros" (*Conl.* CSEL 13, VIII.XII.2, ll. 16-9) [We pray when we renounce this world and pledge that, dead to every earthly deed and to an earthly way of life, we will serve the Lord with utter earnestness of heart] (*Conf.* IX.xii.2). It is this self-reformation that becomes the focus of Cassian's further discussion of prayer in *Conl.* X.

be continually seeing the way that these different theoretical strands twine themselves through the discourse of gift-giving that surrounds prayer. As Bede and Ælfric's CHI.29 both make clear, although in different ways, prayer is seen as a total system, central to salvation, *sine qua non*, involving the individual's gift (or giving up) of himself to God. In Ælfric's life of Laurence, this gift explicitly parallels Christ's Eucharistic gift conceptualized as a gift from men to God, while Bede's theories of prayer interact more with modified Neo-platonic ideas of purity.

To summarize: as subsequent chapters will show, prayer is petition and operates within a reciprocal system. But prayer also catches up these other theological issues (and other exchange models). The purity resulting from prayer and its associated good works can be thought of as a gift to God, or as the payment of a debt, or more abstractly, outside of the gift-system altogether. The Neo-platonist theologians recognize more openly that God is beyond human concretizations, that we can only speak of him in metaphor and symbol, and that these human symbols are inherently unstable when applied to the divine.

Finally, the last doctrinal complication is the doctrine of grace. Augustine strove mightily to wrench the Latin *gratia* away from any sort of system in which God might have a reason to show favor on humans or in which God might be subsequently obliged to continue in gift-giving (that is, he continues in gift-giving out of the bounty of his nature rather than obligation). Augustine argued for a system in which all *gratia* ("free" gift – although not fully free, since it obligates a response) was on God's part, and all obligation on humans. But for most early medieval Christians, Augustine's formulation of *gratia* simply did not take. As Aaron Kleist shows, while the medieval church thought of itself as Augustinian, in practice it made much more room for human cooperation with grace.¹²¹ Aside from the doctrinal struggle, room for human volition was reinforced by practices such as penance. For instance, Tertullian, the earliest articulator of penitential doctrine, said that penance "Bonum factum deum habet debitorem" (A good deed has God as its debtor).¹²² And it was also reinforced by the cultural baggage of exchange terms such as the Greek *charis*, *gratia*, and *gifu* carried with them. These

¹²¹ Kleist, *Striving with Grace: Views on Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). See especially the conclusion, pp. 213-19.

¹²² Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus, *De Paenitentia*, CCL II.11.44-5. Trans. S. Thelwall, *On Repentance* II.11, Christian Classics Electronic Library, http://www.tertullian.org/anf/anf03/anf03-47.htm#P11261_3190842.

issues will become crucial to understanding Bede's articulation of the gift-giving relationship between God and humans in Chapter 2.

EARLY CHRISTIAN PRAXIS AND TEACHING ON PRAYER

Early Christian praxis and teaching on prayer helps to contextualize the Anglo-Saxon teachings on prayer that adopt and adapt this same tradition. However, these earlier works often assume a different praxis of prayer than that of Bede and Ælfric, and reflect, therefore, potentially different theories of prayer. Thus, it is necessary to briefly situate the early Christian tradition of teaching within its social and institutional context; teaching on prayer differs according to whether private, communal, monastic, or whole-church prayer is assumed. This inescapably brushes up against studies of the early liturgy, which was multi-faceted, complex, and poorly documented,¹²³ as well as studies of "spirituality" more generally. Since this project is not intended as a liturgical study, what follows is a necessarily brief summary, focusing only on those considerations that bear immediately on this study.

The general trend through the late antique and early medieval period was that prayer at set hours became increasingly professionalized. In the early church all Christians were expected to pray the Lord's Prayer (LP) three to seven times a day (depending on time and place).¹²⁴ Tertullian, the earliest Latin writer on prayer, indicates all Christians were expected to pray six times daily. By private prayer is meant prayer within the home, whether with the whole household or individually.¹²⁵ This private prayer was apparently based fundamentally on the LP with potential room for additional personal intercessions.¹²⁶ With the growth of cathedral and

¹²³ For an overview of the state of the study of early Christian worship, see Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

¹²⁴ See Eric Jay's introduction to *Origen's Treatise on Prayer* (London: SPCK, 1954) for a helpful introduction to early Christian prayer. All of the sources he examines are Greek, with the exception of Tertullian. An Appendix (pp. 36-44) summarizes information about the practice of prayer from the Didache through Origen. Bradshaw comes to the conclusion that private prayer three times a day was the oldest practice. *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 175.

¹²⁵ Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 172.

¹²⁶ In the earliest Latin treatise on prayer, Tertullian says: "et sunt quae petantur pro circumstantia cuiusque, praemissa legitima et ordinaria oratione quasi fundamento accedentium desideriorum, ius est superstruendi extrinsecus petitiones, cum memoria tamen praeceptorum, ne quam a praeceptis, tantum ab auribus Dei longe simus" (*De oratione* X, ll. 3-8, CCSL 1) [and as there are things to be asked for according to the circumstances of each, having advanced the prescribed and regular prayers as a foundation for the desires of those who draw near, it

monastic prayer in the 4th century, it becomes increasingly difficult to see what practice of prayer lay Christians were expected to keep, since the written record focuses more on clerical and monastic than lay prayer. Thus, there are three basic contexts for the practice of prayer to be considered: private prayer in the home; monastic prayer sourced especially in the practice of the Egyptian ascetics, and later based on the Benedictine and other rules; and cathedral prayer performed by priests (at which lay people might be present). As Bradshaw points out, “The differences between the [cathedral or monastic] types of worship, however, relate not merely to the people who participated in them but to their external forms and ultimately to their spirit and purpose.”¹²⁷ These different contexts and expectations are reflected in the early teachings on prayer. As Bradshaw puts it, the fundamentally different conceptions of the nature of prayer in both contexts are as follows:

The cathedral office had a strong ecclesial dimension: here was the Church gathered for prayer, exercising its royal priesthood by offering a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving on behalf of all creation and interceding for the salvation of the world. The monastic office, on the other hand, was centred around silent meditation on the word of God and supplication for spiritual growth and personal salvation. Its ultimate aim was spiritual formation.¹²⁸

In the main, it is the cathedral type of prayer, oriented eventually around the Eucharist and its model of reciprocal gift-giving between humans and God,¹²⁹ that is especially infused with the structure of gift-giving, whereas monastic prayer, reflecting a more abstract conception of God, emphasized knowledge, an idea of purity related to the Greek concept of *apatheia*, and contemplative practice. But just as it becomes increasingly difficult to say much about lay private prayer, the cathedral and monastic offices begin to influence each other as monks begin to be ordained and become involved in administering the cathedral sacraments, especially the

is right to build upon it outside petitions, yet with mindfulness of the precepts, lest we be far from the ears of God as we are from the precepts].

¹²⁷ *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 173.

¹²⁸ *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 174.

¹²⁹ See Angenendt, “*Donationes pro anima*,” 131-54.

mass.¹³⁰ As a result, the two orientations of gift-giving and purity begin to influence each other. In addition, the development of penitential practices (and the complicated way that they become increasingly bound within a human/human discourse of gift-giving with the practice of commutation of penance) adds another way of thinking about and enacting the individual's relationship with God and the spiritual community. We will see some ways that Bede weaves together these two discourses of prayer, especially in Homily 1.22.

Within the Western tradition, explicit teaching on prayer is rather limited.¹³¹ While prayers, exhortations to pray, and (especially) exhortations to pray within a penitential context are common and everywhere present, there are just four general patristic treatments of prayer: Tertullian's tract on the Lord's Prayer, at c. 200 the earliest Christian work on prayer, addressed to lay people and perhaps catechumens; Cyprian's slightly later work on the same subject (c. 250);¹³² Cassian's *Conlationes* 9 and 10, addressed to monks and reflecting Egyptian practice (early 5th century);¹³³ and Augustine's Letter CXXX to questions asked by the laywoman Proba (5th century).¹³⁴ At the center of all of these works is line-by-line explication of the LP.¹³⁵ Augustine, naturally, had much more to say about prayer than he said in this one letter, but it is scattered throughout his voluminous corpus.¹³⁶ However, some of his most direct teaching is in the form of four catechetical sermons on the LP, plus his commentary on the LP (and the

¹³⁰ Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 173-4. In the late Anglo-Saxon Benedictine reform the cathedrals were monasticized, blending monastic and cathedral prayer yet further. Monks also began taking on the duty of saying masses for the dead. See Angendendt, "*Donationes pro anima*."

¹³¹ Although Karlfried Froehlich mentions that "it is hard to find any author who does not remark upon, or at least allude to, these few biblical verses [of the LP]" most of this commentary is not systematic, and very little of includes details about actually praying, either from a practical or theoretical standpoint. See Froelich, "The Lord's Prayer in Patristic Literature," in *The History of Prayer*, ed. Roy Hammerling (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 59. The more fruitful place to look for early literature that theorizes prayer is in the Greek tradition. The Greek texts on prayer – from people like Clement, Evagrius, and Origen – were not tremendously influential in the west, except through Cassian.

¹³² Found in CCSL vol. 3A, *Opera* vol. II., pp. 90-113.

¹³³ Cassian, *Iohannis Cassiani Opera*.

¹³⁴ CCSL 31B, pp. 212-37.

¹³⁵ For a list of additional (and briefer) explications of the LP see Froehlich, "The Lord's Prayer in Patristic Literature," 59-77. In the same volume, see also Roy Hammerling, "The Lord's Prayer: A Cornerstone of Early Baptismal Education," and "The Lord's Prayer in Early Christian Polemics in the Eighth Century," in *The History of Prayer*, ed. Hammerling, 167-182 and 223-241.

¹³⁶ In the 1960s, Thomas A. Hand took it upon himself to remedy Augustine's failure in never writing a full treatise on prayer: "Strange as it may seem, [Augustine] never wrote what could be called a Treatise on Prayer During the past few years I have culled more than five hundred texts relevant to Prayer from the writings of Augustine and have endeavoured [sic] to fit them into his own doctrinal background I have made him speak for himself and, consequently, feel justified in calling the work 'Saint Augustine on Prayer'" (*St. Augustine on Prayer* [Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1963], x). Hand's book is essentially a mash-up of everything Augustine ever said on prayer.

surrounding passage) in his *Commentary on the Sermon on the Mount*. Additional commentary on the LP is found in the works of Jerome¹³⁷ and Bede;¹³⁸ in sermons, usually, like Augustine's, addressed to catechumens by Caesarius of Arles and Rabanus Maurus;¹³⁹ and in a commentary on the sacraments by Ambrose. In addition, one can find (usually brief) comments on key New Testament passages on prayer in commentaries or sermons.¹⁴⁰ The biblical passages lead to certain theoretical issues regarding prayer that many of the early teachers comment on at one point or another. These are:

1. What are Christians to pray for? While all teaching on prayer prefers asking for spiritual above material benefits, they differ in the relative asceticism of their answer. Cassian, for instance, never once considers that the 4th petition in the LP (for daily bread) could refer to literal bread,¹⁴¹ while Tertullian allows people to add on their own specific, additional requests at the end of the LP.¹⁴²

2. When Jesus said, “Si quid petieritis me in nomine meo hoc faciam”¹⁴³ (If you ask anything in my name I will do it), what are the practical limits on this? The many, many promises in the NT of God's generous response to prayer seem to open up the dangerously naïve possibility that prayer might work like a magic genie, an idea that would not be born out in real-life experience and thus could both lead to presumption and damage faith. Gregory sets the standard response: “Sed quia nomen Filii Iesus est, Iesus autem Saluator uel etiam salutaris

¹³⁷ *Commentariorum in Matheum*, book IV, sect. I, ll. 753-89, *CCSL* 77.

¹³⁸ Bede explicates the LP very briefly in his commentary on Luke; the commentary on Matthew that goes by his name (and includes a longer explication) is pseudonymous. See George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Cambridge: Boydell Press, 2009) for a list and discussion of Bede's works.

¹³⁹ A very close adaptation of Augustine's sermons.

¹⁴⁰ There are repeated assurances, both explicit and through parables, that those who ask will be heard and will receive (Matthew 7, 21:22; Mark 11:24-5; Luke 11.9; John 11:22; 14:13-4; 15:7; 15:16; 16:23-4; Philippians 4:6; James 1:5-6, specifically in asking for wisdom; 4:2-3; I John 3:22; 5:14-5). Some of these passages (e.g., Mark 11: 24-5) emphasize belief as a condition of being heard, the passages in John add the additional detail of asking in Jesus' name. And some tie answered prayer to obedience (Jn. 3:22) or forgiving enemies (Mark 11:24-5). There are additional parables or examples given to model desirable behaviors in prayer (such as the exemplary figures of the Pharisee and the publican in Luke 18:10ff). Furthermore, Christians are to “pray without ceasing” (I Thes. 5:17), pray everywhere (ITim. 2:8), pray for their enemies (Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:28), and, when they do not know how to pray, the Holy Spirit will intercede for them (Romans 8:26). Finally, the list of “supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks” that are to be “made for all men” (I Tim. 2:1) are often used to classify different types of prayers (e.g., Cassian, *Conlatio* IX, viii-xv).

¹⁴¹ Cassian, *Iohannis Cassiani Opera, Conlatio* IX, xxi.

¹⁴² See n. 126, above.

¹⁴³ John 14:14. All biblical quotations come from the Vulgate; translations are Douay-Rheims.

dicitur, ille ergo in nomine Saluatoris petit, qui illud petit quod ad ueram salutem pertinet”¹⁴⁴
(But because the name of the Son is Jesus, and Jesus means savior or saving, he asks in the name of the Savior who asks for that which pertains to salvation).¹⁴⁵ Both Bede and Ælfric have passages following Gregory’s teaching.¹⁴⁶

3. How does one pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17)? This question inspires the greatest diversity in answers. For instance, among the Egyptian ascetics Cassian studied, the command was understood to mean pray *continuously*, and the expectation was that the ascetics were literally praying, usually by reciting the psalms, every waking moment, while reducing the hours of sleep to the bare minimum.¹⁴⁷ Another response was to understand it as praying *continually*; the development of the Divine Office responded to this understanding, as did the earlier lay practice of praying the LP at set times during the day. Augustine’s solution was that ceaseless desire for the heavenly kingdom constituted ceaseless prayer.¹⁴⁸ But he also gestures in the direction that Bede takes: “Et cuius lingua durat meditari tota die laudem Dei? ... Quidquid egeris, bene age, et laudasti Deum” (But whose tongue could bear to intend to praise God all day long? ... Whatever you do, do it well and you have praised God.)¹⁴⁹ Bede’s solution is that all the actions of a just man constitute ceaseless prayer.¹⁵⁰ As we will see in the next

¹⁴⁴ *Homilia XXVII*, CCSL 141, sect. 6, ll. 140-42.

¹⁴⁵ My translation.

¹⁴⁶ Bede, *Homily 2.12*; Ælfric, *CHIL.35*.

¹⁴⁷ “Omnis monachi finis cordisque perfectio ad iugen atque indisruptam orationis perseuerantiam tendit” (*Conl.* CCEL 13, VIII.II.1, ll. 19-20) [The whole purpose of the monk and perfection of his heart tends toward continual and uninterrupted perseverance in prayer] (*Conf.* 9.2.1). Note that perseverance in prayer is not the same thing as prayer, however. The goal is toward “perfection”: “ut eo usque extenuata mens ab omni situ carnali ad spiritualia cotidie sublimetur, donec omnis eius conuersatio, omnis uolutatio cordis una et iugis efficiatur oratio” (*Conl.* CCEL 13, X.VII.3, line 28-line 2) [so that every day the mind, purged from all carnal desires, may be lifted towards spiritual things, until its whole life and the heart’s every thought are made one continuous prayer] (*Conf.* 10.7.3).

¹⁴⁸ “Numquid sine intermissione genu flectimus, corpus prosternimus, aut manus leuamus, ut dicat: *Sine intermissione orate?* Aut si sic dicimus nos orare, hoc puto sine intermissione non possumus facere. Est alia interior sine intermissione oratio, quae est desiderium. Quidquid aliud agas, si desideras illud sabbatum, non intermittis orare. Si non uis intermittere orare, noli intermittere desiderare” (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*, In Psalmum xxxvii.14, ll. 8-14, CCSL 38) [But can we be on our knees all the time, or prostrate ourselves continuously, or be holding up our hands uninterruptedly, that he bids us, Pray without ceasing? If we say that these things constitute prayer, I do not think we can pray without ceasing. But there is another kind of prayer that never ceases, an interior prayer that is desire. Whatever else you may be engaged upon, if you are all the while desiring that Sabbath, you never cease to pray] (my translation).

¹⁴⁹ *Enarrationes in Psalmos*, In Psalmum xxxiv, sermo II, 16, ll. 5-6 and 9.

¹⁵⁰ “... omnia quae iustus secundum Deum gerit et dicit ad orationem esse reputanda” (*In Luc.* 5, CCSL 120, p. 322, ll. 1056-8) [everything that the just man does and says according to the will of God ought to be counted as prayer].

chapter as we consider this aspect of Bede's teaching, the various answers given can reflect different ideas of what prayer is and how prayer works.

5. Why does God command people to persevere in prayer?¹⁵¹ A related question: if God knows what we need before we ask it and is well-disposed toward us, why pray? The latter question tends to come up within the works of more philosophically oriented teachers. Thus, Origen first addresses the question as a response to the more esoteric philosophical Greek ideas concerning prayer. Augustine also addresses the question both in his sermon lxxx.2¹⁵² and in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount; in the commentary, the reason given is that “ipsa orationis intentio cor nostrum serenat et purgat capaciusque efficit ad excipienda diuina munera Fit ergo in oratione conuersio cordis ad eum.”¹⁵³ (the very effort involved in prayer calms and purifies our heart, and makes it more capacious for receiving the divine gifts Hence there is brought about in prayer a turning of the heart to Him.)¹⁵⁴

As we will see in Bede and Ælfric's teaching, the answers given to these questions present a system of prayer oriented toward salvation and eternal rather than material concerns that have implications for the way prayer works as a total system, encompassing thoughts, words, and deeds, and having the power to transform the one praying.

But what is often just as striking as the teaching on prayer is the absence of teaching on prayer. For instance, while the *Regula S. Benedicti* establishes the hours of prayer, and which psalms, prayers, and scripture readings should fill those hours, it pays only minimal attention to the theoretical issues of prayer – what prayer was supposed to accomplish or how it was supposed to accomplish it.¹⁵⁵ In Gregory's series of forty sermons not one is either wholly or

¹⁵¹ In passages such as Luke 11:8-9, “Dico vobis et si non dabit illi surgens eo quod amicus eius sit propter improbitatem tamen eius surget et dabit illi quotquot habet necessarios et ego vobis dico petite et dabitur vobis quaerite et inuenietis pulsate et aperietur vobis” [Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend; yet, because of his importunity, he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth. And I say to you, Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and you shall find: knock, and it shall be opened to you].

¹⁵² PL 38, col. 0494.

¹⁵³ *De sermone domini in monte secundum Mattheum*, liber secundus CCSL 35, II.iii.14, ll. 283-5, 290.

¹⁵⁴ Trans. Philip Schaff, *St. Augustin: Sermon on the Mount; Harmony of the Gospels; Homilies on the Gospels*. Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, vol. vi (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company), <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf106.v.html>, II.iii.14.

¹⁵⁵ In ch. 20 Benedict speaks to reverence in prayer, likening prayer to God to prayer to a powerful man, and admonishing that it be done humbly, respectfully, with purity of heart (“puritate cordis”): “Et ideo brebis [sic] debet esse et pura oratio, nisi forte ex affectu inspirationis diuinae gratiae protendatur” (Benedicti Regula, CSEL 75,

largely on prayer; the only teaching on prayer is a short passage on praying in Jesus' name, cited above. In Augustine's hundreds of sermons, only four primarily address prayer;¹⁵⁶ all of these are on the LP, and all of these focus on a line-by-line explication of the literal meaning rather than presenting a fuller theology of prayer. One of his very favorite Bible verses to weave into sermons is the 5th petition of the LP (forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors), but his point is invariably to preach against revenge rather than about prayer.¹⁵⁷ Like Gregory, most of his sermons do not address questions of prayer at all, except in passing. Often, it is difficult or even impossible to tell whether the teachers assume private prayer on the part of their congregations or communal prayer, or whether there is any expectation of unstructured or spontaneous prayer either in the communal liturgy,¹⁵⁸ or in private devotion. But the tendency in modern scholarship on prayer is to assume a central place both for private piety and for individual spontaneous¹⁵⁹ prayer, locating "true" prayer in the silences between the canonical hours or within the liturgical service rather than in the actual set prayers themselves.

An example of the orientation toward individual spontaneous prayer is the way scholars discuss Cassian's presentation of prayer in *Conferences* 9 and 10. Bradshaw states the common position succinctly: "It should be noted that the psalms here [recited alternating with silent prayer] were not understood as being prayer themselves – the sources often speak of prayer *and* psalmody – but as readings, as the fount of inspiration for the fount of prayer which followed

XX.4) [Prayer should therefore be short and pure, unless perhaps it is prolonged under the inspiration of divine grace]. (*RB1980: The Rule of St. Benedict*, ed. and trans. Timothy Fry et al. [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1981]).

¹⁵⁶ Sermons 56-59; some of his other sermons, such as the several on the Psalms already quoted, have significant things to say about prayer.

¹⁵⁷ Although this is a bit too simplistic, because Augustine does enfold this within the reciprocal structure of "forgive as you wish to be forgiven."

¹⁵⁸ Our teachers are not usually clear about this, but several scholars note the way that Christian prayer became more set during the first several centuries. John E. Skoglund points out that "Free prayer has had a place in Christian worship from the beginning ..." (151). But he notes, "Following the Fourth Century in both the East and West prayers became increasingly fixed." "Free Prayer," *Studia Liturgica* 10 (1974), 153. Klauser also supports this, documenting the "decline of the 'Prayer of the Faithful,' as he puts it, within the liturgy. Originally a part of the mass allowing for silent intercessory prayer prayed by the congregation, this prayer fell victim to attempts to reign in the length of the service, first by substituting in a litany (keeping the element of intercession, but losing the period of silent prayer), and eventually, under Gregory the Great, drastically curtailing this as well. See Theodore Klauser, *A Short History of the Western Liturgy: An Account and Some Reflections*, trans. John Halliburton (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 47-54. Orig. publ. *Kleine abendländische Liturgiegeschichte: Bericht und Besinnung*. Bonn: Hanstein, 1965.

¹⁵⁹ I use this term advisedly, because every reference to spontaneous prayer that I have run across seems to rely heavily on verbal formula that can be modified as the precator wishes.

each psalm.”¹⁶⁰ But the issue is more complicated than Bradshaw makes it seem. For Cassian, the apex of prayer was what he called “preces ignates” (fiery prayers), prayer “quae ore hominum nec comprehendi nec exprimi potest” (which can be neither seized nor expressed by the mouth of man)¹⁶¹ and which comes when a mind rooted in a

uerum puritatis proficit adfectum ... ad deum preces purissimi uigoris effundere, quas ipse spiritus interpellans gemitibus inenarrabilibus ignorantibus nobis emittit ad deum, tanta scilicet in illius horae momento concopiens et ineffabiliter in supplicatione profundens, quanta non dicam ore percurrere, sed ne ipsa quidem mente ualeat alio tempore recordari.¹⁶²

[true disposition of purity ... pours out to God wordless prayers of the purest vigor. These the Spirit itself makes to God as it intervenes with unutterable groans, unbeknownst to us, conceiving at that moment and pouring forth in wordless prayer such great things that they not only – I would say – cannot pass through the mouth but are unable even to be remembered by the mind later on.]¹⁶³

As has been mentioned, this type of prayer fits with reassuring neatness into modern ideals of formless prayer, leaving room for individual creativity and expression, or at least a personal sort of individual experience of God. Yet this is not the only kind of prayer for Cassian; rather, it is a rare and occasional¹⁶⁴ result of the discipline of prayer, which comes after step-by-step advancement in the different kinds of prayer: supplication, prayer, intercession, and thanksgiving.¹⁶⁵

In some ways Rachel Fulton’s study of Anselm’s prayers illustrates Bradshaw’s claim; for her as well “real” prayer is to be found beyond written prayers, which serve as tools to teach

¹⁶⁰ *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 174 (ital. orig.).

¹⁶¹ *Conlatio VIII.xv.1*, ll. 28, 15. Trans. Ramsey, XV.1.

¹⁶² *Conlatio VIII.xv.2*, ll. 17-26,

¹⁶³ Trans. Ramsey, Conference XI.xv.2.

¹⁶⁴ The Lord’s Prayer “prouehit tamen domesticos suos ad illum praecelsiorem quem superius commemorauimus statum eosque ad illam igneam ac perpaucis cognitam uel expertam, immo ut proprius dixerim ineffabilem orationem” (*Conl.* CSEL 13, VIII.XXV.1, ll. 18-20) [nonetheless raises his familiars to that condition which we characterized previously as more sublime. It leads them by a higher state to that fiery and, indeed, more properly speaking, wordless prayer which is known and experienced by very few].

¹⁶⁵ *Conlatio* 9.9.2. This classification system comes ultimately from I Tim. 2:1. Origen also classifies prayer this way, and gives the same meaning for the particular type of prayer called “prayer.” See n. 120, above.

the craft of praying.¹⁶⁶ She considers the question of how repetition of set prayers can be “considered ‘real prayer,’ when it would seem at least by some modern definitions rather closer to a political or social performance.”¹⁶⁷ She musters Cassian’s description of the use of texts within a mental discipline of prayer leading to formless prayer in her defense of Anselm’s prayers as tools toward “real prayer.” Anselm, like Cassian, was concerned with the experience of God,¹⁶⁸ and he used the same text-based techniques to get there. Or what she takes to be these same techniques. The prayer Fulton describes uses written prayers as a starting point for catena-like meditational practices.¹⁶⁹ She describes a reconstructed pattern:

from text (Anselm’s second prayer) to commentary (Honorius’ *Sigillum*) to liturgical chant (Song of Songs 3.6) to image (Admont MS 18, fol. 163r) to psalm (Psalm 109) to text (Anselm’s third prayer) to image (Admont MS 289, fol. 21v) to liturgical chant (the hymn and other neumed texts of the banderoles) and back There is a restlessness to the experience¹⁷⁰

This meditation is supposed to result, eventually, in “real” prayer: “here, at last, . . . our nun . . . will find herself in the presence of the Lady for whose attention she has longed and so will be able to turn to her and her Son,”¹⁷¹ thus arriving at a sense of the presence of and communion with the divine.¹⁷² As Fulton shows, these meditational practices leave ample room for individual creativity in the practice of, or surrounding, prayer. And while I am willing to be convinced by her reading of Anselm, this type of catena-like prayer is actually not what Cassian teaches. Although he also finds creativity in the process he describes,¹⁷³ it is not of making

¹⁶⁶ Fulton, “Praying with Anselm,” 707.

¹⁶⁷ Fulton, “Praying with Anselm,” 701.

¹⁶⁸ She quotes Anselm: “The purpose of the prayers and meditations that follow is to stir up the mind of the reader to love or fear of God . . .” (Fulton, “Praying with Anselm,” 709).

¹⁶⁹ As Fulton notes, p. 731 n. 125, this type of process is described in Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature 34 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 69-77.

¹⁷⁰ Fulton, “Praying with Anselm,” 730.

¹⁷¹ Fulton, “Praying with Anselm,” 730.

¹⁷² Mary is mediator; Christ is divine.

¹⁷³ For Germanus, prayer is, in fact, a creative act: failure in prayer leads the soul to become “palpator tantummodo spiritualium sensuum ac degustator, non generator nec possessor effectus” (*Conlatio* X.13.1, ll. 1-3) [a mere toucher and taster of spiritual meanings and not a begetter and possessor of them] (trans. Ramsey, *Conf.* 10.13.1)). But the idea of creativity put forth is quite different from something sourced in the individual.

something unique and original, but rather of conforming oneself to and internalizing an outside standard.

In *Conference 9* Cassian and his travel companion and fellow-monk, Germanus, learn about prayer from Abba Isaac, an Egyptian monk: he discusses types of prayer, explicates the Lord's Prayer, and describes fiery prayer. Later, they return to Isaac, and Germanus confesses that the previous teachings were too advanced for him. He has no idea how to pray like Isaac taught. Furthermore, his problem is just exactly a catena-like wandering of the mind, restlessness of experience, as the mind flits from passage to passage instead of staying rooted in the text being prayed at the present moment:¹⁷⁴

Cum enim capitulum cuiuslibet psalmi mens nostra conceperit, insensibiliter eo subtracto ad alterius scripturae textum nesciens stupensque deuoluitur. Cumque illud in semet ipsa coeperit uolutare, necdum illo ad integrum uentilatio oborta alterius testimonii memoria meditationem materiae prioris excludit. De hac quoque ad alteram subintrante alia meditatione transfertur, et ita animus semper de psalmo rotatus ad psalmum, de euangelii textu ad apostoli transiliens lectionem, de hac quoque ad prophetica deuolutus eloquia et exinde ad quasdam spiritales delatus historias per omne scripturarum corpus instabilis uagusque iactatur.¹⁷⁵

[For when our mind has understood a passage from any psalm, imperceptibly it slips away, and thoughtlessly and stupidly it wanders off to another text of Scripture. And when it has begun to reflect on this passage within itself, the recollection of another text shuts out reflection on the previous material, although it had not yet been completely aired. From here, with the introduction of another reflection, it moves elsewhere, and thus the mind is constantly whirling from psalm to psalm, leaping from a gospel text to a reading from the Apostle, wandering from this to the prophesies and thence being carried

¹⁷⁴ This is a different process from the conflation of *lectio*, *meditatio*, and *oratio* outlined by Jean Leclercq in *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catharine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 73, esp. Orig. publ. *L'Amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu: Initiation aux auteurs monastiques du moyen âge*. Paris: Les Editions du Cerf, 1957. Leclercq illustrates the extent to which every activity became subsumed into prayer. At the same time, one of the big differences between Cassian and Benedict, is that Cassian's *Conferences 9* and *10* address prayer within a more loosely structured eremitic tradition wherein many of its practitioners could not read rather than the cenobitic focus found in Benedict's *Regula* (and other similar rules).

¹⁷⁵ *Conlatio* X.xiii.1, ll. 16-26.

away to certain spiritual histories, tossed about fickle and aimless through the whole body of Scripture.]¹⁷⁶

In response to this issue Isaac takes them back to the rudimentary beginnings of the discipline of prayer. He instructs that the novice should choose a short phrase from the Psalms as a “formula,” something like Ps. 69:2: “Deus ut liberares me Domine ut auxiliaberis mihi festina” (O God, come to my assistance; O Lord, make haste to help me),¹⁷⁷ which he says he recommends because it is appropriate for all situations (to prove this he gives an exhaustive list of situations. Sure enough ...). The novice is then to pray this phrase without ceasing, that is, as the Egyptians understood it, continuously, in and around the daily regimen of private and communal prayers largely derived from the Psalms: “hunc in opera quolibet seu ministerio uel itinere constitutus decantare non desinas”¹⁷⁸ (“You should not stop repeating it when you are doing any kind of work or performing some service or are on a journey”)¹⁷⁹ until “incessabili eius exercitatione formatus etiam per soporem eum decantare consuescas”¹⁸⁰ (“you are formed by having used it ceaselessly and are in the habit of repeating it even while asleep”).¹⁸¹ Isaac continues:

Istam, istam mens indesinenter formulam teneat, donec usu eius incessabili et iugi meditatione firmata cunctarum cogitationum diuitias amplasque substantias abiciat ac refutet, atque ita uersiculi huius paupertate constricta ad illam euangelicam beatitudinem, quae inter ceteras beatitudines primatum tenet [“beati pauperes spiritu”].¹⁸²

[Let the mind hold ceaselessly to this formula above all until it has been strengthened by constantly using and continually meditating upon it, and until it renounces and rejects the whole wealth and abundance of thoughts. Thus straightened by the poverty of this verse, it will very easily attain to that gospel beatitude which holds the first place among the other beatitudes (“blessed are the poor in spirit”).]¹⁸³

¹⁷⁶ Ramsey, Conf. X.xiii.1.

¹⁷⁷ The Latin is from the Vulgate; the translation is Douay-Rheims.

¹⁷⁸ *Conl.* X.x.xiv, ll. 7-8.

¹⁷⁹ Conf. 10.10.14.

¹⁸⁰ *Conl.* X.x.xv, ll. 15-7.

¹⁸¹ Conf. 10.10.15.

¹⁸² *Conl.* X.xi.1, ll. 1-6.

¹⁸³ Conf. 10.11.1.

The end result of this discipline is that the one praying would begin to experience the words of the Psalms as his own words and to adopt the Psalms as his own:

ita incipiet decantare, ut eos non tamquam a propheta compositos, sed uelut a se editos quasi orationem propriam profunda cordis conpunctione depromat uel certe ad suam personam aestimet eos fuisse directos, eorumque sententias non tunc tantummodo per prophetam aut in propheta fuisse completas, sed in se cotidie geri inplerique cognoscat. Tunc enim scripturae diuinae nobis clarius perpatescunt et quodammodo earum uenae medullaeque panduntur, quando experientia nostra earum non tantum percipit, sed etiam praeuenit notionem, sensusque uerborum non per expositionem nobis, sed per documenta reserantur. Eundem namque recipientes cordis affectum, quo quisque decantatus uel conscriptus est psalmus, uelut auctores euis facti praecedemus magis intellectum ipsius quam sequemur.¹⁸⁴

[he will begin to repeat them and to treat them in his profound compunction of heart not as if they were composed by the prophet but as if they were his own utterances and his own prayer. Certainly he will consider that they are directed to his own person, and he will recognize that their words were not only achieved by and in the prophet in times past but that they are daily borne out and fulfilled in him. For divine Scripture is clearer and its inmost organs, so to speak, are revealed to us when our experience not only perceives but even anticipates its thought, and the meanings of the words are disclosed to us not by exegesis but by proof. When we have the same disposition in our heart with which each psalm was sung or written down, then we shall become like its authors, grasping its significance beforehand rather than afterward.]¹⁸⁵

This is not quite the exact opposite of what Fulton describes, but it is very different. The main difference here is that there is, in fact, no personal creativity (in the sense of creating prayers) at work, and that the individual praying never prays his own words – nor is that ever presented as desirable. The continued repetition of the prayer formula would blot out “the rich and full resources of all thoughts,” erase that distracting interior monologue, lead to a radical unmaking

¹⁸⁴ *Conlatio* X.xi.4-5, ll. 17-7.

¹⁸⁵ *Conf.* 10.11.4-5.

of the psyche, and remold it according to the form of the Psalms.¹⁸⁶ In fact, if the novice were to pray his own words, or even his own personal Psalm mash-up, that would destroy the very thing this discipline of prayer is reaching for: the loss of self and individual experience, subsumed beneath the experience of the Psalmist, and, hence, a very personal (but not individual, and not creative as we tend to think of it) identification with Christ.¹⁸⁷ And this idea *is*, in fact, the exact opposite of the modern ideals of genuineness and sincerity in prayer put forward by James and Heiler. Ideally, the Egyptian ascetic does not pray from his own experience, and does not pray his own words, but begins to adopt the words and experience of someone else, the Psalmist.¹⁸⁸ Spontaneous prayer, in its endless iteration and re-representation of the self to the self (or, if you will, the self to God) would be powerless to effect the kind of transformation the ascetics were seeking.

Hence, the emphasis we find in authors like Stewart and Bradshaw¹⁸⁹ on the silences between the Psalms as being the location of “real” prayer is not something Cassian exactly supports. Yes, the goal of the discipline of prayer is a type of formless, fiery experience of the presence of God, but this (as he says repeatedly) is a rare experience. That fiery prayer is prayer does not make not-prayer the word-dependent discipline that leads up to the personal appropriation of the Psalms. Otherwise, how would people be able to pray without ceasing?

But in the context of Western prayer, Cassian is strange. His ideas of prayer, and sometimes his phrasing, bear the unmistakable stamp of Eastern practice and patterns of thought that never really caught on in the Latin church in the period under consideration, even though

¹⁸⁶ As Isaac says, the monk should be formed by using his prayer formula ceaselessly (“donec incessabili eius exercitatione formatus” (*Conl.* CSEL 13, X.X.15, ll. 15-6) [until [he is] formed by having used it ceaselessly] (*Conf.* X.X.15).

¹⁸⁷ See Bradshaw p. 174, n. 15 on the Christological interpretation of the Psalter, “apparently derived by the desert tradition from the exegetical method adopted by Origen from classical literature.” He cites Marie-Josèphe Rondeau, *Les Commentaires patristiques du Psautier (IIIe-Ve siècles)* II (OCA 220, 1985), pp. 39ff; Paul F. Bradshaw, “From Word to Action: The Changing Role of Psalmody in Early Christianity,” in Martin Dudley, ed., *Like a Two-Edged Sword: The Word of God in Liturgy and History* (Norwich: Canterbury Press, 1995), pp. 21-37; Graham W. Woolfenden, “The Use of the Psalter by Early Monastic Communities,” *SP* 26 (1993), pp. 88-94.

¹⁸⁸ Fulton, in considering prayers as tools, says, “we must first trust both their makers (typically other human beings, but also, if we are the makers, ourselves) ...” (“Praying with Anselm,” 731). But, for Cassian, what can be trusted more than the words of inspired Scripture?

¹⁸⁹ Bradshaw says: “It should be noted that the psalms here [recited alternating with silent prayer] were not understood as being prayer themselves – the sources often speak of prayer *and* psalmody – but as readings, as the fount of inspiration for the fount of prayer which followed each psalm” (*Search for the Origins of Christian Worship*, 174).

Cassian's work was known and, in many ways, influential.¹⁹⁰ Even so, Cassian's example – the most complete presentation of the interior practice of the discipline of prayer we have – should give scholars pause when they come to silent points in the liturgy or in private prayer. We should not rush to fill these in with spontaneous prayer or even catena-like meditation.

Obviously, the type of prayer Cassian presents is something that would only be possible within a highly committed, disciplined, eremitic structure. It would even be difficult to carry out in a post-Benedict monastic community, and would have been totally out of reach of lay people or clerics. Expectations and the experience of prayer were quite different for lay vs. religious. Naturally, it is much easier to reconstruct monastic prayer and devotion than that of lay people. As far as our authors go, Bede does not overtly address lay people in his sermons, which thus reflect a more monastic piety.¹⁹¹ Ælfric's sermons, even though they are intended for a mixed audience, including lay people, do not give much indication as to expectations for private prayer beyond the statement that “Ælc cristen man sceal æfter rihte cunnan ægþer ge his pater noster ge his credan”¹⁹² (Every Christian should correctly know both his Paternoster and his creed). Whether every Christian is expected to pray the LP at set times daily is obscure. In fact, it is also difficult to say whether he expected lay people to pray the LP in Latin or OE. Ælfric translates the LP at the beginning of his sermon on the subject (CHI.19) and in the process of explicating it, and he also gives a stand-alone translation of both the LP and the Creed.¹⁹³ However, there does not seem to be a standard OE translation of the LP, which would presumably be needed for group recitation.¹⁹⁴ Neither Ælfric's sermon version nor the stand-alone quite match up.

¹⁹⁰ Although, beyond Bede and perhaps Aldhelm, Cassian was not widely known in Anglo-Saxon England. See Stephen Lake, “Knowledge of the Writings of John Cassian.”

¹⁹¹ Bede's sermons are in Latin, indicating a primary audience of religiously trained, Latin-learned people. However, monks in Bede's day did take on the pastoral care of the community around them, and it is not unlikely that lay people could have been present at church preaching, especially at particular times of the year, or that monks could have adapted Bede's sermons for vernacular preaching. 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: Leicester University Press, 1992), 137-70.

¹⁹² CHI.20, ll. 1-2.

¹⁹³ Printed at the end of Benjamin Thorpe, ed. and trans., *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, vol. 2 (London: Ælfric Society, 1846; rpt. Kessinger Publishing Legacy Reprint Series), 596.

¹⁹⁴ Translations of the LP into OE can be found in the NT texts of Matthew and Luke, two times in Ælfric, once in Wulfstan, and in four Psalter glosses (according to the data in the DOE corpus). Matthew and Luke give different variants of the prayer, of course; it is Matthew's version that is preferred liturgically. Ælfric's two (similar) translations of the LP are fairly close to the OE Matthew, and the glossed texts have fairly similar structure since the word order is largely constrained by the Latin (the Latin is the same in all cases except for minor spelling variants).

Additionally, the other sermon translation we have, by Wulfstan, is a looser, heavily alliterative translation in no way like Ælfric's,¹⁹⁵ but preceded by the words, "geleorniað hit on Englisc þus ..."¹⁹⁶ ("learn it in English thus"). It is hard to imagine that he really meant for his congregation to pray the form of the prayer he then recites. Without any particular evidence of a standard translation, it is also hard to imagine that lay people would have joined in the LP during the mass in OE, or even that there would be a switch from the Latin of the rest of the mass to OE just for that prayer. Also, the evidence of the charms points in the direction that the Latin version of the prayer was more standard for recitative efficacy than any OE versions.

OVERVIEW OF CHAPTERS

This project examines the way prayer was taught in the Anglo-Saxon homilies of Bede and Ælfric, and this introduction attempts to give some context to the study. Chapter 2 focuses on Bede's 50-homily series covering the liturgical year. What is most interesting about Bede's teaching on prayer is the way he focuses on a relationship with God oriented around gift-giving, and melds this discourse with the more abstract idea of prayer's subjective efficacy. I examine the way the opening Advent homilies establish an ideal relationship between the Christian and God through the figure of Mary, and argue that this relationship is oriented towards the giving and return of gifts that includes Bede's subtle rewriting of Augustine's idea of *gratia*. With this frame in place, I consider the passages and homilies where Bede teaches most explicitly on prayer: I.22, II.10, II.12, II.14. In spite of the fact that Bede shares language in common with Cassian and Augustine, Bede's idea of prayer is much more actively oriented. He defines prayer as "omnia quae iustus secundum Deum gerit et dicit"¹⁹⁷ (everything that the just man does and says according to the will of God). Although this phrase was used in early Eastern teaching on prayer, by this they meant an idea of *apatheia*, whereas Bede's emphasis is on action. For Bede, prayer is a "total" request, governing every aspect of the precator's life

In this grouping, Wulfstan's is a bizarre outlier, although it isn't as full-blown poetic of a treatment as found in ASPR VI (LP I). Additionally, there are two poetic explications of the LP, also printed in ASPR VI. The very strangest Old English work on the LP is in the Solomon and Saturn dialogues, *The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*, ed. and trans. Daniel Anlezark, Anglo-Saxon Texts 7 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2009).

¹⁹⁵ Which we might expect if there were a standard translation since they come from the same basic milieu.

¹⁹⁶ Homily VIIa, l. 7 in *The Homilies of Wulfstan*, ed. Dorothy Bethurum (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 166.

¹⁹⁷ *In Luc.* 5, *CCSL* 120, p. 322, l. 1056-7.

through the way that it requires the alignment of thought, word, and deed. Prayer is thus a kind of action (the petition and the gift) enmeshed in a discourse of gift-giving oriented around the sole and most important petition a person can make: the request for salvation. In prayer, Bede's concern in the alignment of thought, word, and deed does not reflect a concern for sincerity on the part of the preceptor, but rather with something we might call purity; through this, he draws together both the discourse of gift-giving and the subjective efficacy of prayer.

Chapter 3 begins by looking at the way that Ælfric establishes the relationship between God, man, and the devil in *Catholic Homily I.1, De initio creaturae*. While Ælfric downplays the language of lordship used to describe Lucifer's rebellion as found in poetic works such as *Genesis A* and *B* and *Christ and Satan*, he grapples with some of the key concepts within a gift-giving relationship brought up by implications of an Augustinian idea of grace and free will. Lucifer is able to find a position for his rebellion by claiming as his own attributes that are really God's gift to him. Lucifer's flaw is a failure of gratitude, which is really a failure of love. He reduces God's gifts to a power play instead of understanding them through personal affection. The relationship between God and humans is not quite parallel to the relationship between God and Lucifer. The expectation of obedience is made much clearer through the command not to eat of the forbidden tree; this simple act of obedience, and the way it represents Adam and Eve's *own* choice (*agen cyre*) to obey God, gives them a possibility of returning God's gifts through freely chosen service, hence compelling God to the obligations of reciprocity. When they fail in this, God is no longer obliged to protect them from their new lord, the devil, and yet God graciously meditates mercy.

The relationship that CHI.1 sets up becomes important for both Chapter 3, which examines Ælfric's explicit teachings on prayer in *Catholic Homilies I.10, I.18, and I.19*, and Chapter 4, which looks at the three of Ælfric's narratives in which prayer is most central. Ælfric's explicit teachings on prayer adapt sermons by Augustine and Gregory, consistently downplaying the more abstract orientation toward purity found in their teaching, while introducing (or emphasizing) the figure of the devil as a counter-lord to God, a structure he takes from the ransom theory of atonement. For Ælfric, the act of praying itself, almost secondary to the content, becomes a statement of allegiance to God and thus a claim to his protection.

The homilies considered in Chapter 4 all adapt radically different base-texts: an apocryphal life of Bartholomew (written in the Carolingian era but pretending to be older), the Latin passion of Laurence from Rome, and an abridgement of a Latin translation of the Greek Life of St. Basil. Each of these narratives gives prayer a slightly different perspective and context. In Bartholomew the Fall of humankind is re-enacted through the pagan Indians' prayers to their idols which entrap their souls through a diabolical exchange. In Laurence, the connection between human self-sacrifice in martyrdom and the Eucharistic offering is explicitly invoked; additionally, Laurence's life gives a narrative context for six "actual" prayers. Finally, while exchange is a central issue in several key episodes of Basil's life, the concerns manifest in St. Basil's life show a sophisticated, philosophically influenced anxiety surrounding issues of orthodoxy and belief that the prayer of Basil mediates as the figure of the saint becomes a guarantor of the true faith. Because Basil is a very different figure for Ælfric than for the Eastern church, and because Greek philosophy did not apparently present issues of pressing intellectual importance to Ælfric, this narrative largely explores a slightly different concern. Ælfric subtly moves the discourse away from the Greek philosophical concerns of belief, toward an idea of belief as allegiance, thus situating it within the allegiance and gift-giving paradigm. Furthermore, because, for Ælfric, prayer is objectively efficacious, and tends toward becoming a reified symbol of the precator's allegiance, this opens up room for anxiety of potential distance between the symbol (prayer) and the thing symbolized (belief) that Ælfric's life of Basil still explores. Thus, though each of these narratives presents a different angle on prayer and gift-giving, each tends to present a coherent theory of prayer as a statement of allegiance, objectively efficacious in securing God's protection, and placing the precator within a relationship in which God owes future rewards for present gifts.

Prayer was one of the central facts of medieval life. This study of how Bede and Ælfric theorized prayer contributes to an understanding of Anglo-Saxon literary culture and to the scholarship on devotion more broadly in several ways. First, in its focus on sermons addressed to monks and to lay people, it allows us to place gift-exchange in a non-heroic context, revealing an idealization of lordship accessible to people beyond the aristocracy. Second, it complements and corrects current studies of devotion and spirituality by providing a way to conceptualize prayer that is personal and intimate without reproducing the modern individual. Third, it shows

important ways that Anglo-Saxons adapted Latin Christian doctrine and practice to their own cultural structures. Fourth, this study demonstrates how central prayer is to an understanding of Anglo-Saxon society and its members because of the way prayer mediates between interior and exterior, thought and action, the individual and the community. The iterative nature of prayer reflects, reinforces, and reforms social structures, cultural assumptions, and ideals, as well as the people who pray.

CHAPTER 2

GRATIAM PRO GRATIA: BEDE ON PRAYER

*Teque deprecor, bone Iesu, ut cui propitius donasti uerba tuae scientiae dulciter haurire, dones etiam benignus aliquando ad te fontem omnis sapientiae peruenire, et parere semper ante faciem tuam.*¹

[And I beg you, good Jesus, that, as you favorably gave him sweetly to drink the words of your wisdom, you would also kindly grant hereafter to arrive at you, the fount of all wisdom, and to appear ever before your face.]

With this prayer Bede ends his most famous work, the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*. The prayer functions as a sort of colophon to the work,² and it also nicely exemplifies the reciprocal and intimate way Bede views prayer. Bede's main request is an eternal one – for salvation, essentially – that Jesus might give him “parere semper ante faciem tuam.” He bases this request on the fact of previous favors given (“cui propitius donasti uerba tuae scientiae dulciter haurire”). The favor he asks is, not that he might *see* Jesus' face (a contemplative ideal), but that Jesus might see him. Bede's humility is such he does not use the personal pronoun in most of the prayer, but he asks to appear before Jesus in a relationship defined by favors already received. Modestly elided is the fact that the favor Bede has received is the book just finished, the *Historia*, a major undertaking situating the English people in their place within the community of God's own people. It is on this basis, of a gift received and used in the service of God, that Bede asks to be allowed into Jesus' presence in eternity. And it is also notable that Bede addresses Jesus intimately by his personal name rather than as *Dominus*. With bold humility Bede asks to be considered an intimate of Jesus.

While the Venerable Bede (c. 673-735) is still most famously known for his *Historia*, the central task of his life was biblical commentary and creating the educational tools necessary for

¹ Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, ed. Charles Plummer (Oxford: Clarendon, 1896), 360.

² Colophons often contain prayers. A great many are reproduced in Richard Gameson, *The Scribe Speaks? Colophons in Early English Manuscripts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 2002).

understanding Christian doctrine and practice.³ Recent scholarship has addressed itself to rectifying the neglect of Bede's exegetical works, and to reassessing Bede's authority and innovation as a Christian Latin writer in the process.⁴ The essays in the collection *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* argue against the older view of Bede as a derivative compiler and for a much more central and active role of Bede as "a creator of Christian Latin culture,"⁵ an *auctor*,⁶ and a "patristic figure."⁷ As Joyce Hill shows, the influence of Bede's exegesis down through the Carolingian era and beyond was immense.⁸ Bede's corpus is, as one might expect, filled with prayer, prayers, and people praying. Tackling the subject of prayer in the full corpus would be a daunting task. This study will therefore focus on the explicit teachings on prayer in Bede's homilies. .

Alongside renewed study of Bede's exegesis, there has been a one-man renaissance of interest in what might be called Bede's "spirituality" in the work of Scott DeGregorio.⁹ Within his important essay on prayer and contemplation in Bede's work, he argues that Bede's teaching on prayer reflects the least contemplative of the Latin writers, Gregory, and that even with Gregory's work Bede largely ignored the "subtle interior dynamics of the spiritual life" that

³ The most recent introductory overview to Bede's literary output is George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 12 (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2009). This is a heavily rewritten version of his earlier *Bede the Venerable* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1987). For an historical introduction, Peter Hunter Blair's classic *The World of Bede*, reprinted in 1990 with a new foreword by Michael Lapidge (*The World of Bede* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990]).

⁴ See *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2006).

⁵ Roger Ray, "Who Did Bede Think He Was?" in *Innovation and Tradition*, 11-35, 11.

⁶ Scott DeGregorio, "Footsteps of His Own: Bede's Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah," in *Innovation and Tradition*, 143-68, 167.

⁷ Joyce Hill, "Carolingian Perspectives on the Authority of Bede," in *Innovation and Tradition*, 227-49, 235.

⁸ See Hill, "Carolingian Perspectives." Bede becomes a central figure for the transmission of Latin Christianity, both in the way he becomes a mediator of the older Latin tradition and through his own innovations (249). The earliest line of transmission out of Anglo-Saxon England was through St. Boniface's missionary activities in Germania (230).

⁹ DeGregorio, "The Venerable Bede on Prayer and Contemplation"; "Affective Spirituality," in which DeGregorio (following Frantzen's program) examines Bede for signs of the "currents of thought and practice commonly said to mark later medieval devotional literature" (129), focusing mainly on his commentary on the Song of Songs and on devotion to the Passion. Earlier works on Bede's spirituality include Gerald Bonner, "Christian Life in the Thought of the Venerable Bede," *Durham University Journal* 63.1 n.s. 32.1 (1970): 39-55; M.T.A. Carroll, *The Venerable Bede: His Spiritual Teachings*, The Catholic University of America Studies in Medieval History, n.s. vol. ix (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1946); and Benedicta Ward, *High King of Heaven*, includes discussion of Bede throughout. Ward also wrote an introduction to Bede's output that is focused through what one might call a spiritual lens, *The Venerable Bede* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990 rpt. 1998).

interested Gregory,¹⁰ showing “little interest in exploring the interior workings and slippery paradoxes of the spiritual life that so captured Gregory.”¹¹ DeGregorio explains the active orientation of Bede’s prayer through the pastoral concerns manifested in Bede’s work, especially his desire to see reform in the Anglo-Saxon church, and through the active role monks had in providing pastoral care to lay people in his day.¹² DeGregorio’s essay, however, is set against an assumed background of contemplative prayer, and he at times seems to consider the active type of prayer he argues Bede presents as being for a less sophisticated audience:

sources had to be selected, adapted, digested, and reworked in order to make them accessible to his newly Christianized Anglo-Saxon audience. Such an audience, Bede may well have thought, would benefit less from thinking of unceasing prayer in terms of desire than in terms of the performance of just deeds.¹³

Perhaps. But DeGregorio at this moment overlooks the similarity that Bede’s definition of prayer had with that of Origen, who writes fully within the eastern, “mystical” tradition, and whose account of prayer no one would accuse of being unsophisticated.¹⁴ While Bede’s teaching on prayer is not heavily indebted to Origen, it, in fact, presents a consistent “psychology” of the self and of the way that prayer forms and reforms both individual and community.

As this chapter will argue, a central reason for the active nature of Bede’s conception of prayer is his understanding of the doctrine of grace within a relationship between God and humans formed by the exchange of gifts. As DeGregorio points out, Bede defined prayer broadly, saying, “Certe omnia quae iustus secundum Deum gerit et dicit ad orationem esse reputanda”¹⁵ (certainly, everything that the just man does and says according to the will of God ought to be counted as prayer.) Within the total relationship of *gratia* within which people petition God, the works of a just man are significant both as counter-gifts returned to God accompanying the petition for salvation, and also an enactment of the *gratia* for which one prays. While the *gratia*-relationship is conceptualized as individual and personal, the emphasis is on the

¹⁰ DeGregorio, “Prayer and Contemplation,” 13.

¹¹ DeGregorio, “Prayer and Contemplation,” 14.

¹² DeGregorio, “Prayer and Contemplation,” 5-7.

¹³ DeGregorio, “Prayer and Contemplation,” 21.

¹⁴ See *Origen’s Treatise on Prayer*, trans. Eric Jay: “For only in this way can we take the saying ‘Pray without ceasing’ as being possible, if we can say that the whole life of the saint is one mighty integrated prayer,” 12.2.

¹⁵ *In Lucam* 5 (CCSL 120, p. 322, ll. 1056-8).

individual situated within the community. Communal, ritual, and set prayers rather than spontaneous (or contemplative), individual prayer primarily mediate the relationship with God. This way of imagining the relationship between God and humanity is very far indeed from the later medieval religious experience often expressed by borrowing the language and affect of sexual ecstasy. It is a formal and often prescribed ideal of appropriate behavior, approaching God as lord rather than as lover.

It is important to clarify what we can know about the practice of prayer that Bede might have in mind when he teaches about prayer. Bede's formative training would have been within a monastic rule, whether Benedictine, or, more likely, mixed.¹⁶ First of all, he rarely specifies whether he is talking about formal, communal prayer or individual, private prayer, and he never specifies whether people are praying set prayers or praying spontaneously.¹⁷ As was discussed in Chapter 1, for most theorists of prayer the two types of prayer express two different types of piety, two different ways of understanding the self, and two different stages of religious development. But for Bede, both kinds of prayers perform essentially the same function:¹⁸ they confess sin, present petitions to God, express gratitude for gifts received, and are oriented toward salvation.

By its nature the written record privileges formal, set prayers above the spontaneous outpourings of the soul. There is much about prayer that we just cannot know because we no longer have the oral context in which it was taught and practiced. One could presume that Bede's original audience knew the type of prayer he was talking about in specific instances because they knew the appropriate behavior for the situation. However, in the teaching and discourse surrounding prayer, there is no emphasis on spontaneous prayer; it seems to have had little inherent value. It seems that Bede usually assumes the prayers his audience are praying are formal, set prayers, whether communally in the liturgy or else alone in response to a particular

¹⁶ See Henry Mayr-Harting, "The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St. Benedict, and Social Class," Jarrow Lecture, 1976. He argues for the centrality of the *Regula Benedicti*, but not its exclusive use (8).

¹⁷ For one good example, see Homily I.18 on the Feast of the Purification and Bede's explication of the pigeon and dove offered in sacrifice where he does mention both private and public prayers, but sees no difference between them in form or even function.

¹⁸ See Homily I.4 on the Magnificat for an example. The public recitation of the Magnificat at vespers prepares one for private prayer. Prayer performs an entirely different function in Bede's account of the death of John the Evangelist in Homily I.9 where prayers are merely a marker of a holy life and well-ordered death.

situation. There are several reasons for this. Bede's audience was monastic¹⁹ so they would have been praying the hours daily. That is, their overwhelming and formational experience with prayer would have been the set prayers chanted communally at the hours. In addition, from what we know about personal piety of the era, most injunctions to pray concern praying the Pater Noster and the psalms.²⁰ Bede himself, according to Benedicta Ward,²¹ developed the breviary psalter in order to facilitate private prayers. For Bede, the breviary psalter served as a tool for meditation and also as words for private prayer.²² Bede also repeatedly emphasizes the necessity of congruence between thoughts and words in a way that implies those praying are praying words familiar from long habit, words that they could easily say without attention. There might be a tendency to think that as long as one's body is in a particular place, and as long as one is saying the right words, one is praying. Bede takes care to emphasize this is not so. Finally, the context in which Bede talks of prayer often implies set prayers. This will be seen in the

¹⁹ Alan Thacker, "Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care," argues that, while Bede's direct audience was largely monastic, there is some evidence that several times a year his sermons were directed toward an "augmented" audience (Holy Saturday, for instance, pp. 140-1), and that Bede's sermons would have served for monks to adapt for their own preaching. To this it must be added that most instances of address in Bede's homilies do presume a monastic audience (see Lawrence T. Martin's "Introduction," in *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, 2 vols., trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991], bk. I, xi). Furthermore, since the homilies are in Latin, it would be difficult for most lay people hearing them to understand them if they were read in Latin.

²⁰ And, in fact, explications of the Pater Noster emphasize that it completely covers all a person would need to pray for. For lay people most encouragements to pray concern praying the Pater Noster. For monks, it is the Pater Noster, the psalms, and other biblical prayers.

²¹ Ward, *Bede and the Psalter*, Jarrow Lecture, 1991. In the way that she sees it, these psalms are used more as hooks for personal meditation and prayer than as prayer itself, but she invokes Cassian at this point in a questionable way, as my introduction makes clear.

²² As mentioned in Chapter 1, the scholarly tendency is to fill in the silences around the Psalms with personal (spontaneous?) prayer. Since our authors are generally silent about what goes in the silence, it is significant that what few mentions there are do not fully support this. Cassian has been dealt with in Chapter 1. When Tertullian grants that additional petitions may be tacked on to the end of the Pater Noster, he still speaks in terms of formal prayers added: "et sunt quae petantur pro circumstantia cuiusque, praemissa legitima et ordinaria oratione quasi fundamento accedentium desideriorum, ius est superstruendi extrinsecus petitiones, cum memoria tamen praeceptorum, ne quam a praeceptis, tantum ab auribus Dei longe simus" (*De oratione* X, ll. 3-8, CCSL 1) [and as there are things to be asked for according to the circumstances of each, having advanced the prescribed and regular prayers as a foundation for the desires of those who draw near, it is right to build upon it outside petitions, yet with mindfulness of the precepts, lest we be far from the ears of God as we are from the precepts]. Finally, Augustine does speak of something like formless prayer in his *Epistola CXXX ad Probam* when he addresses the question of why people need to pray to an omniscient God at all: "Nam plerumque hoc negotium plus gemitibus quam sermonibus agitur, plus fletu quam affatu" (CCSL 31b, 20.371-3) [[I]n most cases prayer consists more in groaning than in speaking, in tears rather than in words] (trans. from NPNF, vol. 1), although this precedes his explication of the LP, before which he says, "Nobis ... uerba necessaria sunt" (21.376) [To us ... words are necessary] (trans. NPNF, vol. 1).

discussion of Homily II.10, where Bede uses the episode of the women bringing spices to Jesus' tomb to talk about prayer. My point, however, is not that people never prayed spontaneously or composed their own prayers (this chapter begins with a composed prayer by Bede²³), but rather that what is called "free" prayer was not particularly valued as an end in itself,²⁴ nor could prayer function in the way Bede imagines in his homilies on prayer if it were spontaneous.

For Bede prayer operates within gift-paradigms in three ways. First, access to God in prayer is a gift from God; people use this access to request further favor from God. Bede's prayer at the end of the *Historia* clearly models this petitionary conception: on the basis of past favors from God, gratefully received by Bede, he request future favors. The same scheme is modeled in the way Bede uses the concept of twofold grace found in Homily I.2, explored in more detail below. Second, the prayers people bring with them into God's presence function as gifts, so prayer works as both petition and as the gift accompanying the petition. The petition offered is the request for salvation; the desire expressed in this prayer is offered to and accepted as a gift by God. We will see the somewhat complicated way this operates in Homily II.10. Third, the discipline of prayer is also a gift from God. Through using this gift, people internalize the prayer in thought and externalize it in deeds, so that prayer is in some sense subjectively efficacious; it transforms the one praying. It is important to recognize that what people are praying for in all these cases is salvation (or, in Homily I.2, the *gratia* of salvation). When the words correspond to their thoughts and deeds, people enact their request. But, as I will show in the discussion of grace in Homilies I.2-4, Bede also thinks of these good deeds as a counter-gift

²³ Narrative reports saints praying "spontaneously" as well. Hugh A.G. Houghton, "The Discourse of Prayer," argues that narrative accounts of prayer in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles reflect the features of "the improvised liturgical prayers of the early Church" (175). As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the tendency over time was for prayer to become more set and less spontaneous. Donald Byzdl, "Prayer in Old English Narratives," examines the formulaic ways narrative prayers reflect the structure of private prayers found in prayerbooks and considers how narrative prayers contribute to the construction of distinct saintly characters rather than as particular examples of "spontaneous" prayer, which practice (as opposed to the attitudes, and maybe even the prayers themselves) hearers might be expected to adopt. This topic will be further explored in Chapter 4.

²⁴ "Free" prayer is spontaneous, verbal prayer. Within the Eastern tradition, some sort of formless, wordless ecstatic prayer was held to be an ideal. This is Cassian's "fiery prayer," which he presents as a rare state in *Conl.* IX; this type of prayer also appears in other teachings of the Desert Fathers (for an example see Ward, *Bede and the Psalter*, 7). Within the Eastern tradition, ecstatic prayer is reached through the discipline of set prayers. Within the early Western tradition, Augustine's statements about prayer as groaning (above, n. 22) and desire as prayer (below, n. 155) are as close as one gets to formless prayer. But this formless prayer is also wordless. So, while ecstasy is highly valued by some (usually Eastern) authors, and while Augustine presents an emotion-laden type of prayer, there is no particular value for spontaneous prayer either as a normal way of praying or as a way to reach ecstasis.

to God; people ask for *gratia* and receive good deeds. The performance of these good deeds is a gift gratefully returned to God, which God then rewards with *gratia* (eternal salvation). In some ways, it is tempting to think of this congruence between word, thought, and deed as “sincerity,” but modern sincerity is understood as an accurate enactment of the inner self coming from within the individual;²⁵ this is not the model Bede presents. For Bede, the words are primary²⁶ and are both internalized and externalized through prayer. Bede’s integrated prayer does not speak to concerns of sincerity, but of purity and wholeness: both of the individual and of the individual within the praying community. Through this conception of purity, Bede blends a discourse of gift-giving (with its more concrete conceptualization of God) with ideas of purity found in the more abstract Neo-platonic-influenced work of authors like Cassian and Augustine. We will see how this works at the discussion of Homily I.22 at the end of the chapter.

The scope of Bede’s homiletic cycle is most closely akin to Gregory’s cycle of forty gospel homilies,²⁷ and Lawrence T. Martin argues that Bede’s homilies were designed to supplement Gregory’s collection.²⁸ Both cycles use pericopes from the Neapolitan liturgy,²⁹ but there is only one overlapping pericope between them, on Easter, for which Bede could have seen

²⁵ As Adam B. Seligman puts it, sincerity emphasizes intention, “something within the social actor or actors” (4). “Rather than becoming what we do in action through ritual, we do according to what we have become through self-examination. This form of thought emphasizes tropes of ‘authenticity’” (Adam B. Seligman et al. *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁶ This is congruent with much patristic teaching on prayer (see the discussion of Cassian in Chapter 1), but it is also similar to the project DeGregorio describes in “Texts, Topoi, and the Self” (79-96), of king “Alfred’s spirituality as a functional process of living texts, or of ‘textualizing’ the self (79), although the process DeGregorio describes seems closer to *ruminatio*, while the process of praying is repetition.

²⁷ Gregory’s homilies were probably split into two books. The second begins with Christ’s resurrection. The first is randomly ordered in the PL. Although none of the extant manuscript copies has homilies 1-20 in a stable order, Hurst, in his translation, rearranges them in accordance with the liturgical year, beginning just before Advent with the feast day of St. Felicity (November 23). Even if this was not the order in which they were written, it is the order in which they would be preached.

²⁸ Martin, “Introduction,” in *Homilies on the Gospels*, bk. 1, xvi. Aaron Kleist delivers the important warning that Bede’s homiletic collection is not quite as coherent as the neat 50-homily CCSL edition by Hurst and Martin and Hurst’s two-volume translation make it look. See Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 59-60, for an outline of the problems, and the table detangling the various editions (and authorship questions) on 249-66. The chief issue is not the homilies that Hurst includes (all of which are thought to be genuine, although he divides up the homilies differently than the PL does), but the homilies printed by Migne as uncertain. According to Kleist many of these are actually Bede’s. As is the case with Gregory’s homilies, a congregation hearing Bede’s homilies read would have heard them in the order of the liturgical year, starting at Advent. However, many of Bede’s homilies became most widely circulated in the collection of Paul the Deacon where they would have been mixed in with others’ homilies rather than read as a set.

²⁹ David Hurst, ed. *Bedaе Venerabilis opera III: Opera homiletica*. CCSL 122 (Turnhout:Brepols, 1955), vii-xxii.

the need to amplify Gregory's rather short sermon.³⁰ Because of the relationship between the two cycles, it is possible to view the development of Bede's ideas in relationship to those of Gregory. Gregory approaches Advent, for example, through a different set of pericopes that focus on the figure of John the Baptist as exemplary in humility.³¹ Gregory's focus is to prepare the hearts of his hearers for Christ to come into them as he came into the world at Christmas. John functions as a forerunner of this double advent; as John prepared the way for the coming of Christ, with an emphasis on good works, preaching the gospel, and repentance of sins, so too does he become both a preacher whose words Gregory's own audience must hear³² and a model to emulate in his humility and as a forerunner and preacher of Christ.³³ Insofar as Gregory conceives of either of these comings in the context of exchange, he imagines a sort of violent "seizing" of the kingdom through contrition. Although "[v]ult a nobis omnipotens Deus talem uiolentiam perpeti,"³⁴ (Almighty God desires to suffer this kind of violence from us),³⁵ Gregory

³⁰ Martin, trans., *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, book 1 (Kalamazoo, 1991), xvi.

³¹ The order that Gregory's homilies are supposed to go in is a vexing question. As David Hurst points out, the PL prints the first twenty in random order (*Gregory the Great: Forty Gospel Homilies* [Kalamazoo: Cistercian Publications, 1990], 3). Hurst's translation prints them in the likely order they were preached. CCSL 141 follows the order given in the PL, but devotes a section of the introduction to detangling the proposed dates for which the sermons were written, pp. lvix-lxx). Because of this, I will refer to the homilies by the numbers given in the translation with the pericopes, cross-referenced to the numbers in the CCSL with the rubrications given in the PL.

³² In Homily 6 (Homily XX CCSL 141, p. 153-69. Rubricated *Sabbato Quatuor temporum ante Natalem Christi*, on Lk. 3.1-11, on John's preaching in the wilderness) Gregory puts his hearers in the same position as John's hearers: "Sed quia iam peccauimus, quia usu malae consuetudinis inuoluti sumus, dicat quid nobis faciendum sit, ut fugere a uentura ira ualeamus" (p. 159, 8.144-6) [But since we have sinned, since we have become accustomed to an evil way of life, let John tell us what we must do to escape the wrath to come] (Hurst, 40). John's sermon ends with exhortations to righteous living that Gregory applies to his audience as well.

³³ Gregory uses John's example to describe a humility which his hearers can emulate in Homily 4 (Homily VII, CCSL p. 45-52. Rubricated *Dominica quarta in Adventu Domini*, on Jn. 1.19-27): "Restat ergo ut in omne quod scit sese mens deprimat, ne quod uirtus scientiae congregat, uentus elationis tollat. Cum bona, fratres, agitis, semper ad memoriam male acta reuocate" (p. 51, 4.131-4) [It remains, then, that the mind should abase itself in regard to everything it knows, lest the wind of exaltation blow away what the virtue of knowledge is vigorously gathering in. When you do something good, my friends, always call to mind the evils you have done] (Hurst, 25). And he concludes: "In cunctis ergo quae agitis, fratres mei, radicem boni operis humilitatem tenete, nec quibus iam superiores, sed quibus adhuc inferiores estis aspice" (p. 52, 4.164-6) [My friends, in everything you do hold on to humility as the root of good works. Do not look at the things which make you better now, but at those which make you still bad] (Hurst, 27). Homily 5 (Homily VI, CCSL 141, pp. 38-44. Rubricated *Dominica tertia Adventus Domini*) continues using John as an example. Gregory's application is that all Christians should be messengers of God, able to give counsel and encourage others (pp. 42-3; Hurst, 32), and avoid idle talk (p. 44; Hurst, 33). "ut in quantum uires suppetunt, si annuntiare eum non negligitis, uocari ab eo angeli cum Joanne ualeatis" (p. 44, 6.152-3) [Then as far as your strength allows it, if you do not neglect to make him known, you may be worthy to have him call you an angel along with John] (Hurst, 33).

³⁴ Homily XX, CCSL 141, p. 169, 15.383-4.

³⁵ Hurst, Homily 6, 48.

focuses firmly on stressing his audience's need to repent³⁶ and human agency and responsibility within repentance,³⁷ rather than building a picture of a particular kind of relationship between God and humanity. Bede's concerns are filtered through a different sensibility: Bede emphasizes the relationship between humans and God as expressed through the gift of Advent.

Like Gregory, Bede's purpose is also to prepare his hearers for the personal advent of Christ analogous to the first Advent. But in contrast to Gregory, Bede's Advent homilies have an unusual emphasis on gift exchange. In Bede's sermons, the first four homilies develop Advent themes;³⁸ through focusing on John the Baptist but more especially on Mary, they establish a relationship with God defined by his munificence and the proper human response to his gifts. The Advent homilies create a story-line that Bede's hearers can re-create in their own lives as they also meditate on the significance of God's gift of his Son to and in them. The pericopes Bede uses make both John the Baptist³⁹ and Mary central characters. Bede uses John

³⁶ For instance, he ends Homily 3 (Homily I, CCSL 141, pp. 5-11. Rubricated *Dominica secunda Adventus Domini*, on Lk. 21.25-33) on the signs of Christ's second coming with a call to repentance in light of the second coming: "Illum ergo diem, fratres carissimi, tota intentione cogitate, uitam corrigite, mores mutate, mala tentantia resistendo uincite, perpetrata autem fletibus punite. Aduentum namque aeterni iudicis tanto securiores quandoque uidebitis, quanto nunc distractionem illius timendo praeuenitis" (p. 11, 6.151-5) [Give hard thought to that day, dearly beloved; amend your lives, change your habits, resist and overcome your evil temptations, requite your evil deeds by your tears. The more you now anticipate his severity by fear, the more securely will you behold the coming of your eternal Judge] (Hurst, 20).

³⁷ Again, Homily 6 (Homily XX, CCSL 141) portrays repentance as an active seizing of the kingdom of heaven: "Recogitemus ergo, fratres carissimi, mala quae fecimus et nosmetipsos assiduis lamentis atteramus. Hereditatem iustorum, quam non tenuimus per uitam, rapiamus per paenitentiam. Vult a nobis omnipotens Deus talem uiolentiam perpeti. Nam regnum caelorum rapi uult nostris fletibus, quod nostris meritis non debetur" (p. 169, 15.381-6) [Dearly beloved, let us think over the evils we have committed; let us give ourselves to continual sorrow. Let us seize by our repentance the inheritance of the righteous which we have not kept by our way of life. Almighty God desires to suffer this kind of violence from us. He desires us to seize by our tears the kingdom of heaven which is not owed us on our merits] (Hurst, 48). Humanity's greater responsibility in salvation is consistent with Gregory's position on the doctrine of grace, according to Kleist: "Prevenient grace does not make humans irresistibly choose good, Gregory suggests, but enables them either to cooperate with or reject God" (*Striving with Grace*, 43).

³⁸ Although none of the extant MS collections preserve Bede's homilies in any particular order, Hurst arranges them according to the Neopolitan pericopes (vii). The numbering followed in this chapter is Hurst's (Migne uses a different order. The two numbering systems are helpfully collated by Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, Appendix II, 249-66. While Bede might not have begun his series with Advent, they would have been used in the order of the liturgical year, making the development of the themes outlined above loosely cohere.

³⁹ Bede's first Advent homily (Mark 1:4-8, on the baptism John gave) begins with the figure of John the Baptist, the precursor to Christ's coming. He begins by focusing on John's baptism as an anticipation of the baptism Christ brings, as the necessary confession and correction of sins that could then be fulfilled in Christ's baptism of forgiveness. It is then Christ's baptism that gives "dationem carismatum spiritus" (CCSL 122, p. 6, l. 160) [the charismatic gifts of the Spirit] (Martin, 7). Bede moves on from there to a typological explication of the figure of John in which John becomes an exemplary saint by separating himself from the allurements of the world. He thus designates the lives of the saints, who "tota semper intentione animi praesentis saeculi desideria spernunt" (CCSL

to emphasize baptism, the first act that brings a person from death to life, introducing him to God's family. Yet he focuses more on Mary, presenting her as a loyal servant, receiving God's gift of his Son in her own body, and then giving thanks for the great gift she has been given. In her obedience, she serves as a model for Christians, who must also receive Christ within themselves, and in whom Christ must grow to fullness in order to come forth into the world. Like Mary, Christians should show grateful awareness for this greatest of gifts which they have received. As they do this, their humility and gratitude move them into an intimate and dependent relationship with God. Bede builds this theme through the first four homilies.

While Bede explicates a two-fold scheme of grace in Homily I.2, which he then illustrates through Mary, many of Bede's homilies show a pattern of gift-giving in which various gifts are associated with various members of the Godhead: the foundational gifts come from God's creative act,⁴⁰ Christ's incarnation and sacrifice bring further gifts, and he also gives the "charismatic" gifts through the Holy Spirit;⁴¹ and the final gifts are associated with God the Father, and are the eternal rewards given in the heavenly kingdom. Continual gift-giving, with its attendant concepts of grace and humility, establishes a relationship between humans and God that is continually invoked in the subsequent homilies. Bede's first homily on prayer, I.22, falls in Lent, a typical time in any sermon series for teachings on prayer in its collocation with fasting, almsgiving, and vigils. As he approaches Easter, the theme of Christ's sacrifice begins to dominate over gift-giving. After Easter, in short order, are three more homilies on prayer, II.10, 12, and 14. As the liturgical year moves toward Pentecost, Bede begins to ruminate on the

122, p. 2, ll. 40-1) [always reject the desires of the present world with the whole intention of their minds] (Martin, 2). Bede begins laying the foundation for his understanding of humility, which he comes back to in Homily I.4. He says here that what the elect have that others do not is a heightened sense of their sins: "[Q]uia minus perfectos se esse deprehendunt sordes suae fragilitatis undis paenitentiae diluunt" (CCSL 122, p. 3, ll. 87-8) [because they apprehend themselves to be less perfect, they wash away the stains of their weakness with the waves of repentance] (Martin, 4). Bede ends the sermon with an exhortation to prepare for the celebration of Christ's nativity by examining consciences, wiping away negligences, and acquiring virtues (CCSL 122, p. 6, ll. 177-9; Martin, 7-8). So far, this is much like Gregory. (This is not surprising. Bede borrows slightly from Gregory's homilies at this point, and, like Gregory, he is discussing John the Baptist.) Bede begins to develop his own context for understanding the relationship between God and man in his next homily on grace.

⁴⁰ [D]e plenitudine conditoris nostri ... omnes quicquid boni habemus accepimus" (CCSL 122, p. 8, 152-3) [all of us have received whatever good we have from the fullness of our Maker] (Martin, 11).

⁴¹ For example, "Baptizat quippe spiritu sancto qui munere spiritus sancti peccata dimittit et accepta remissione peccatorum etiam spiritus eiusdem gratiam tribuit" (CCSL 122, p. 6, ll. 157-60) [He indeed baptized with the Holy Spirit who pardoned sins by the favor of the Holy Spirit; and when they had received forgiveness of sins he also bestow the grace of the same Spirit] (Martin, 7).

meaning and effect of the second gift, that of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables Christians to perform good works, and there are several sermons on apostles that exemplify this theme; this naturally leads Bede back to considering gift-giving as he emphasizes that everything Christians have, including their good works, are gifts from God which must be used appropriately. The cycle concludes with two homilies outside of the liturgical calendar on the dedications of a church. In these homilies, Bede considers the heavenly and eternal congregation that the earthly church pictures, which ties back to gift-giving: a place in the eternal kingdom is the final gift that humans receive for using the gifts they have been given on earth.

HOMILY I.2: GRACE, THE GIFT-GIVING RELATIONSHIP IN ABSTRACT

Bede's second homily is a tour-de-force case-study of what shifting an exchange-paradigm can do. Because the doctrinal definition of grace, "God's unmerited love and favor" which "transforms the human will so that it is capable of doing good,"⁴² emphasizes its one-way nature (from God to humans) and dominates a modern understanding of *gratia*, and because debates about *gratia* situate it within the theological context of human nature, free will, and predestination,⁴³ it is worth resituating *gratia* within the field of petition and giving, to consider the ways it could still carry some of the more concrete semantic charge of reciprocity and obligation.

Insofar as Bede follows Augustine, he has to resist the normal, reciprocal function of the gift,⁴⁴ just as Augustine did when adapting the social term *gratia* to suit his own doctrinal ends.

⁴² Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, a History of the Development of Doctrine, vol. 1. The Emergence of the Catholic Tradition (100-600)* (Chicago, 1971), 294.

⁴³ See Pelikan, *The Christian Tradition, vol. 1.*, 278-331 and vol. 3, *The Growth of Medieval Theology (600-1300)* (Chicago, 1978), 80-95 for a summary of the debate. Whether one can choose to do such good as would obligate God to show his favor is of course at the heart of the discussion, but this tends to be overshadowed by debates of God's predestination of humans and in what human free will consists. That is, the debates tend toward abstractions about the nature of God and the nature of humans.

⁴⁴ This is the model under which gifts and prayer to the Greek gods worked. See Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*. It is also the "pagan" model set forth in Ælfric's CHI.31, and which the pagan Danes attempt (without success) in *Beowulf* 175-88 (Bruce Mitchell and Fred C. Robinson, eds., *Beowulf: An Edition* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1998]). Within this model of reciprocity, it is possible for inferiors to obligate superiors to respond to their requests through petitions made in such a way that the superior would lose face if he did not respond in some kind. While the relationship between gods and men is almost always one in which men give gods the proper respect and in which men can never actually challenge the gods' position, it is still possible to view prayer as a way of angling to get one's own desires fulfilled. This latent idea within gift-giving schemes is not one that Bede overtly acknowledges; in fact, his teaching totally forecloses it by emphasizing the magnitude of God's gifts, and the response of humility.

That is, socially speaking, *gratia* is not a free gift (unconstrained and unconstraining) because it creates a relationship. Rather, *gratia* carries with it the value of the *first* gift, which is more valuable than any subsequent gifts because it is unconstrained.⁴⁵ It is a gift experienced as being outside the limits of anything the recipient might have deserved or expected. In this way, it affirms hierarchy, since the one giving *gratia* will always come out ahead in the tally of gifts (if one were to tally them – a practice at odds with the discourse of *gratia*). Ostensibly, no return is expected to such a gift – except gratitude (*gratia*).⁴⁶ Gratitude is not merely something felt but shown through praise, service, objects given in return. The goal of this return-*gratia* is not to discharge the debt incurred by the first gift (which would sever the relationship) but to acknowledge and continue it in gratitude, because the dependent, so long as he *is* dependent, is grateful, has an expectation of further *gratia* on the basis of an already-established relationship.

On the surface, Bede’s homily is a hard-hitting, Augustinian explication of grace in which Bede disrupts an exchange paradigm by emphasizing repeatedly that humans do not in any way earn God’s grace; all that they receive is *gratis*.⁴⁷ But there are two key differences. First, Augustine positions grace in opposition to a purchase/wage economy, which Bede does not do. Second, what Bede actually does is to subsume Augustinian grace into a reciprocal gift-paradigm in which humans play a more active role than in the *gratia* relationship Augustine lays out in his explication of the same passage.⁴⁸ At the heart of the matter is John 1:16 (from the pericope): “et de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus gratiam pro gratia.”⁴⁹ (And of his fulness we all have received grace for grace.)⁵⁰ The verse presents a translation problem: is “*gratiam pro gratia*” to be understood as excess (“grace upon grace”) or as exchange (“grace in exchange for grace”)?

The Greek clarifies the superlative nature of God’s grace (*charin anti charitos*, “grace upon

⁴⁵ See Georg Simmel, “Faithfulness and Gratitude.” “I am caused to return a gift, for instance, by the mere fact that I received it. Only when we give first are we free, and this is the reason why, in the first gift, which is not occasioned by any gratitude, there lies a beauty, a spontaneous devotion to the other ... which cannot be matched by any subsequent gift, no matter how superior its content” (47).

⁴⁶ Bede’s teaching reflects this when he says, “[N]e si ingratus largitori remanserit, perdat bonum quod accepit” (CCSL 122, p. 8, ll. 55-6) [By remaining ungrateful toward his benefactor, he may lose the good which he has received] (Martin, 11).

⁴⁷ Aaron Kleist’s general characterization of Bede on grace should correct a too facile Augustinian reading of Bede. Kleist argues that Bede reveals a Gregorian rather than an Augustinian perspective. See *Striving with Grace*, 61. Kleist does not, of course, consider the subject in the light of gift-theory.

⁴⁸ *In Ioannis evangelium tractatus*, *Tractatus* III on John 1:15-18 in CCSL 36.

⁴⁹ CCSL 122, p. 8, ll. 34-5. This is the version Bede uses. The Vulgate reads: “... accepimus et gratiam pro gratia.”

⁵⁰ Biblical translations taken from the Douay-Rheims. This one is slightly modified to reflect Bede’s Latin.

grace”), but the Latin (like the English) hovers ambiguously between the meanings of excess or exchange: Is this grace *in exchange* for grace? Grace *in proportion to* grace? Grace *by virtue of* grace? And whose *gratia* are we talking about when the word can mean either favor or gratitude?⁵¹ The version of the verse Bede uses is as quoted above. In Augustine’s explication of the passage, however, he makes a point of using a version that matches the Vulgate in order to argue for a reading that prefers the excess of grace:

*Et de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus. Quid accepistis? Et gratiam pro gratia. Sic enim habent uerba euangelica, collata cum exemplaribus graecis. Non ait: Et de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus, gratiam pro gratia; sed sic ait: Et de plenitudine eius nos omnes accepimus, et gratiam pro gratia, id est, accepimus: ut nescio quid nos uoluerit intellegere de plenitudine eius accepisse, et insuper gratiam pro gratia. Accepimus enim de plenitudine eius, primo gratiam; et rursum accepimus gratiam, gratiam pro gratia.*⁵²

[“And of His fullness have all we received.” What have you received? “And grace for grace.” For so run the words of the Gospel, as we find by a comparison of the Greek copies. He does not say, And of His fullness have all we received grace for grace; but thus He says: “And of His fullness have all we received, and grace for grace—that is, have we received; so that He would wish us to understand that we have received from His fullness something unexpressed, and something besides, grace for grace.”]⁵³

The *et* allows Augustine to emphasize the superlative, inexpressible nature of God’s grace toward abject humanity and expressly to negate a conception of God’s favor being earned by anything humans can do.

Initially, Bede’s focus seems, like Augustine’s, to be on the excessiveness of God’s grace; he celebrates the superlative nature of God’s gifts by momentarily breaking out of an economy of exchange entirely to one where all God does is give and all humans do is receive:

⁵¹ Interestingly, in Augustine’s commentary on the verse (discussed below) he uses a version reflecting the Vulgate; Augustine makes a point of the *et*, which enables him to interpret “et gratiam pro gratia” first and foremost as indicating the superlative nature of God’s grace (CCSL 36, *In Joannis evangelium tractatus*, Tract. III.8).

⁵² CCSL 36, Tract. III.8.1-10.

⁵³ NPNF 7, Tract. 3.8. Augustinian translations not otherwise attributed are mine, although loosely based on NPNF 7.

“omnes quicquid boni habemus accepimus curandum summopere,”⁵⁴ (all of us have received whatever good we have from the fullness of our maker)⁵⁵ he says. “[I]llius auxilio debemus semper inniti qui ait: *Quia sine me nihil potestis facere.*”⁵⁶ ([W]e ought always to rely for support on the help of the one who says, “For without me you can do nothing.”)⁵⁷ As part of this project, he borrows from Augustine’s explication of the passage. Bede says: “nos gratiam accepisse testatur [euangelista] unam uidelicet in praesenti alteram in futuro; in praesenti quidem *fidem quae per dilectionem operatur* in futuro autem uitam aeternam.”⁵⁸ ((The evangelist) is testifying that we have received a twofold grace, namely one grace in the present and another for the future – in the present, *faith which works through love*, and for the future, life eternal.)⁵⁹ Elided in this focus on the plenitude of what God gives is the counter-gift. It seems humans are given “good works” and then eventually given eternal life as two separate, not-necessarily-related bestowals. What is ignored at this moment (although only for the moment) is that the good works God gives are *actually carried out* by humans. The first *gratia* and the second *gratia* are not unconnected. Through this momentary elision, Bede apparently resists the possibility of exchange within *gratiam pro gratia* to focus on the one-sided nature of God’s gifts. That is, Bede seems to follow an Augustinian doctrine of grace.

Let us examine more closely how Augustine frames his concept of grace in his explication of John 1:16. In arguing for grace, the primary paradigm Augustine argues against is characterized by purchasing or wage-earning. His intent is to correct the error of thinking that humans in any way deserve or can buy God’s favor with good works, and he emphasizes this repeatedly: “*gratia tibi data est, non merces reddita. ... Non enim praecedentibus meritis emisti quod accepisti.*”⁶⁰ (grace is given to you, not recompense repaid. ... Indeed, you did not by previous merits purchase that which you received.) He hammers on this point: “*Quid est gratis data? Donata, non reddita. Si debebatur, merces reddita est, non gratia donata.*”⁶¹ (What is

⁵⁴ CCSL 122, p. 8, ll. 53-4.

⁵⁵ All translations of Bede’s sermons come from Martin and Hurst, trans, *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, 2 vols.

⁵⁶ CCSL 122, p. 8, ll. 84-5.

⁵⁷ Martin, *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, 12.

⁵⁸ CCSL 122, p. 9, ll. 71-7.

⁵⁹ Martin, *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels*, vol. 1, 11-2.

⁶⁰ CCSL 36, III.8.19-21.

⁶¹ CCSL 36, III.9.4-6.

grace? That which is freely given. What is freely given? Given, not paid. If it was owed, recompense was repaid, not grace given.) Augustine’s teaching on grace attempts to disrupt a commodity mentality through which humans “buy” or earn grace through merit.⁶² To do this he emphasizes the completeness of human helplessness, and the gratuity of God’s *gratia*: “Non se quisque compalpet, redeat in conscientiam suam ... inueniet non se dignum fuisse nisi supplicio. Si ergo supplicio dignus fuisti, et uenit ille qui non peccata puniret, sed peccata donaret; gratia tibi data est, non merces reddita.”⁶³ (Let not each one flatter himself, but let him return into his own conscience ... he will find that he was not worthy of anything save punishment. If, then, you were worthy of punishment, and He came not to punish sins, but to forgive sins, grace was given to you, and not reward rendered.)⁶⁴ Within a purchase economy, humans have nothing that they can offer to “buy” God’s grace; their abjection is so complete they deserve nothing but punishment from him.

In contrast to salvation-as-commodity, Augustine outlines an economy of grace that looks, initially, cyclical:

[C]ogita quid per legem tibi imminere debebat, et quid per gratiam consecutus sis. Consecutus autem istam gratiam fidei, eris iustus ex fide. *Iustus enim ex fide uiuit*; et promereberis Deum uiuendo ex fide: cum promerueris Deum uiuendo ex fide, accipies praemium immortalitatem, et uitam aeternam. Et illa gratia est.⁶⁵

⁶² “emo,” CCSL 36, III.8.21. This seems a fairly consistent substitution of economic structures. Gregory does the same thing in his Homily 2 (Hom. V, CCSL 141, pp. 33-7, for the Feast of St. Andrew). The imagery he uses to explain that the disciples left everything to gain the eternal kingdom is that of trade: “Nemo igitur etiam cum quosdam conspicit multa reliquisse apud semetipsum dicat: Imitari mundi huius contemptores uolo, sed quod relinquam non habeo. Multa, fratres, relinquitis, si desiderii renuntiat. Exteriora enim nostra Domino quamlibet parua sufficiunt. Cor namque et non substantiam pensat, nec perpendit quantum in eius sacrificio, sed ex quanto proferatur. Nam si exteriorem substantiam perpendamus, ecce sancti negotiatores nostri perpetuam angelorum uitam datis retibus et nauis mercati sunt” (p. 34, 2.25-33) [No one should say to himself, even when he regards others who have left a great deal behind, ‘I want to imitate those who despise this world, but I have nothing to leave behind.’ You leave a great deal behind, my friends, if you renounce your desires. Our external possessions, no matter how small, are enough for the Lord: he weighs the heart and not the substance, and does not measure the amount we sacrifice to him but the effort with which we bring it. If we think only about the outward substance, we see that our holy traders purchased the everlasting life of angels when they gave up their nets and boats!] (Hurst, 11). He repeats this idea several times, and concludes: “relictis temporalibus mercemur aeterna” (p. 37, 4.85) [let us leave behind what is temporal and purchase what is eternal] (13). Gregory and Augustine think in metaphors of economic exchange – purchasing – while Bede thinks in terms of reciprocal gift-giving.

⁶³ CCSL 36, III.8.13-4, 16-19.

⁶⁴ NPNF 7, Tract. III.9.

⁶⁵ CCSL 36, III.9.9-14.

[(C)onsider what did by right hang over you by the law, and what you have obtained by grace. But having obtained that grace of faith, you shall be just by faith (for the just lives by faith); and you shall obtain favor of God by living by faith. And having obtained favor from God by living by faith, you shall receive immortality as a reward, and life eternal. And that is grace.]⁶⁶

Augustine asserts a cycle of grace: the *gratia* of faith given, which the recipient lives by, thereby obtaining God's favor, and finally obtaining immortality as a further favor. The "cycle" of *gratia*, for Augustine, fundamentally negates two different exchange paradigms that both assert the independence⁶⁷ of the participants in the exchange: buying goods and paying wages.⁶⁸ At the same time, he frees humans from the position of merely being God's wage-slaves; a *gratia* relationship is closer, more privileged, than being either a customer or a hired hand.

But Augustine's emphasis on the one-sided nature of the human/divine relationship has the effect of making humans passive recipients of *gratia* who have no real role of their own in maintaining or continuing the relationship between themselves and God.⁶⁹ Because all favor comes from God – *gratia* is superlative, not reciprocal – God does not have any particular obligation toward his dependents even after the first gift is given. The result of this is that in some sense all God's gifts are always first gifts: given freely, without obligation to those who never have any claim on him or any reason to expect further gifts from him. As such, they have the advantage of the surprise and joy that goes with a gift unlooked-for. However, this is tremendously disruptive for a relationship oriented around a gift-exchange paradigm. Therefore, it is instructive that what Augustine contrasts with *gratia* is not reciprocal gift-giving but purchase: neither model Augustine presents, commodity or *gratia*, creates mutual bonds. This is

⁶⁶ NPNF 7, Tract. III.9.

⁶⁷ Within gift-theory this idea is often referred to as "moral independence," the idea being that there is no moral tie binding the two parties created through the exchange of gifts. See Louis Dumont, *Essays on Individualism: Modern Ideology in Anthropological Perspective*, Chicago: Chicago UP, 1986, 25.

⁶⁸ According to C.A. Gregory, "[C]ommodity exchanges involve *alienable* objects exchanged between reciprocally independent transactors that thereby establish quantitative relationships between the objects transacted" (summarized in Mark Osteen, "Gift or Commodity?" in *The Question of the Gift*, 233).

⁶⁹ One implication, never followed through in the Middle Ages as far as I know, is that, since humans can do nothing to merit God's favor, they can do nothing and need do nothing, opening up a sense of distance between *gratia*-endowed humans and God. The idea that humans can do nothing to merit salvation is stated in a hardened form in the Calvinism of the Reformation, and one can see the anxiety it causes in various literary works as authors such as John Donne and James Hogg in *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, struggle with the implications.

so even when Augustine briefly imagines a reciprocal model for salvation: he momentarily concedes that, because of God's grace (*gratiam pro gratia*), one could think about the eternal rewards he gives (the second *gratia*) as a type of payment in exchange for faith (the first *gratia*): "Si enim fides gratia est, et uita aeterna quasi merces est fidei, uidetur quidem Deus uitam aeternam tamquam debitam reddere."⁷⁰ (If indeed faith is grace, then life eternal is like the payment for faith: it seems indeed as if God gives eternal life as though repaying a debt.) As an example of this, he cites St. Paul, who desires his reward, a "crown of righteousness," as though it were a debt due him.⁷¹ But Augustine quickly clarifies: "[I]pse dedit fidem primo Quod ergo praemium immortalitatis postea tribuit, dona sua coronat, non merita tua."⁷² (It was God who first gave faith Therefore, in afterwards paying the rewards of immortality, he crowns his own gifts, not your merits.) Augustine uses the metaphor of commodity exchange to imagine the transactions of grace, faith, and eternal reward. Saints "purchase" an eternal payment from God through the coinage of faith, although this is a coin God gratuitously gave them in the first place. Both of these models posit independence. The "free" gift (which is not fully free for Augustine in that God is free, but not humans⁷³) and a purchase resist the creation of relationships by means of the exchange.⁷⁴ Against a model that allows humans independence, he asserts a model that preserves God's independence. While using the language of gift-exchange, Augustine resists actual reciprocity.

⁷⁰ CCSL 36, III.9.15-7.

⁷¹ II Tim. 4:6-8.

⁷² CCSL 36, III.10.15, 17-8.

⁷³ And it occurs to me that "free" becomes a vexed term here. Gift-theory takes it to mean "no strings attached," but "free" could also denote generosity. A no-strings-attached gift is usually taken to be a generous gift, but this is perhaps only within a society that values autonomy over relationship. Our idea is that a "free" gift has no strings attached; but *gratia* is generous.

⁷⁴ That both purchase and something very close to the "free gift" are linked together in Augustine's explication of grace is interesting in light of the way modern gift-theory links the two in ideological opposition to one another. Jonathan Parry argues that the ideology of the "pure gift" (as he calls the "free gift") develops in opposition to market exchanges, in which the market exchange and the gift "become ever more polarized in terms of their symbolism and ideology" (466); within religious thought the pure gift, because it is unreturned, becomes "a liberation from bondage to the world" (477) ("*The Gift*, the Indian Gift, and the 'Indian Gift,'" 466-9). James Laidlaw develops this idea further: "The free gift is an idea which has developed and been more clearly articulated as the commodity economy has developed" ("A Free Gift Makes No Friends," 627. Rprt. In *The Question of the Gift*, ed. Osteen, 45-66). The commodity is seen as impersonal and unconstraining, while the gift is personal and reciprocal. In opposition to this, what is emphasized about the free gift is its non-reciprocal nature; the way it does not try to create bonds between people, and yet is also not exchanged for anything else. It resists the acquisitiveness of the commodity exchange and of the reciprocal gift.

Bede, on the other hand, does not turn to commodity exchange for his analogies. He creates a sense of the superlative nature of grace while situating grace within an exchange paradigm of the gift. Before he gets to the matter of *gratiam pro gratia*, Bede emphasizes that humans have no good of their own “quia ergo de plenitudine conditoris nostri non quidam sed omnes quicquid boni habemus accepimus.”⁷⁵ (because not only some of us, but all of us have received whatever good we have from the fullness of our Maker.)⁷⁶ In the immediate context, the “good” Bede refers to is that good given through the fullness of Christ, manifest to all “saints”⁷⁷ through the gifts of the Spirit – utterances of wisdom and knowledge, faith, healings, miracles, prophecy, and so forth. But in pointing out that “all of us” receive whatever good we have from our Maker, Bede expands the reference of the “good” as these more spectacular spiritual gifts to embrace all the good qualities that come from being made in a particular way. All people have received good from God. The fact of this indebtedness entails obligation upon the recipient: “ne si ingrates largitori remanserit, perdat bonum quod accepit.”⁷⁸ ([b]y remaining ungrateful toward his benefactor, he may lose the good which he has received.)⁷⁹ By refusing to enter fully into the relationship of *gratia* by not recognizing the obligation which God’s gifts place upon a person, by refusing to give *gratia* in response to *gratia*, the recipient will lose that which he was given in the first place and risks bringing the relationship to an end. As mentioned previously, this gratitude is not merely a feeling of gratitude, but gratitude enacted through the continued use of God’s gifts. For Bede, gratitude for God’s grace incurs in humans an obligation but also a desire to use the gifts given them or else lose them. Bede quotes the words of Paul to affirm gratitude enacted, “Et gratia eius . . . in me uacua non fuit, sed plus illis omnibus laboraui.”⁸⁰ (His grace has not been fruitless in me, but I have labored more than any of them.)⁸¹ Humans do not receive God’s favor toward them in exchange for serving him but they owe God gratitude because of his grace.

⁷⁵ CCSL 122, p. 8, ll. 52-3.

⁷⁶ Martin, 11.

⁷⁷ “Sancti,” CCSL vol. 122, p. 8, l. 45.

⁷⁸ CCSL 122, p. 8, ll. 55-6.

⁷⁹ Martin, 11.

⁸⁰ CCSL 122, p. 9, l. 63.

⁸¹ Martin, 11.

In Augustine’s discussion, faith is the first “grace” of God given to humans. He defines faith passively, as something done to the sinner: “Hanc ergo accepit gratiam primam peccator, ut eius peccata dimitterentur.”⁸² (This first grace therefore the sinner receives, that his sins should have been forgiven.)⁸³ A little later he asks a question Bede picks up: “Quid est ergo: *gratiam pro gratia*? Fide promeremur Deum ...”⁸⁴ (What is *grace for grace*? By faith we render God favorable to us.)⁸⁵ But Augustine does not define faith any further at this point. Although Bede adopts this explanation, he greatly restructures Augustine’s discussion of faith. Bede goes on to define faith as the *works* of faith: believing, loving, and more general good works.⁸⁶ As Bede explains it, God gives the elect faith; the elect in gratitude return this faith to him in the form of good works; God rewards them with eternal life.⁸⁷ The saints are those who respond to his gifts, in gratitude returning the grace given them for more grace, *gratiam pro gratia*.

By putting grace in the context of gift-giving, Bede is able to portray the relationship between God and man as exceptionally intimate; the superlative nature of God’s grace comes from the intimacy of the reciprocal relationship, one in which man and God work together through their mutual exchange of gifts to bring about man’s salvation and God’s glory: “In misericordia quippe et miseracione nos coronat quando propter bona opera quae nobis ipse misericorditer exercenda donavit supernae exercenda donavit supernae beatitudinis praemia retribuit”⁸⁸ (He crowns us indeed in mercy and compassion when he repays us with the reward of heavenly blessedness for the good works which he himself has mercifully granted us to carry out)⁸⁹ is one way that Bede sums up this relationship. Because of this intimacy the fitting final

⁸² CCSL 36, III.8.21-2.

⁸³ My translation.

⁸⁴ CCSL 36, III.9.1-2.

⁸⁵ My translation.

⁸⁶ “Fides quippe quae per dilectionem operatur gratia Dei est; quia ut credamus ut diligamus ut operemur bona quae nouimus ...” (CCSL 122, p. 9, l. 74-6) [Faith which works through love is indeed a grace of God, because our believing, our loving, our doing works which we know to be good ...] (Martin, 12). In contrast, Augustine’s discussion remains with the more abstract concept of faith.

⁸⁷ “In misericordia quippe et miseracione nos coronat quando propter bona opera quae nobis ipse misericorditer exercenda donavit supernae beatitudinis praemia retribuit” (CCSL 122, p. 9, ll. 92-4) [He crowns us indeed in mercy and compassion when he repays us with the reward of heavenly blessedness for the good works which he himself has mercifully granted us to carry out] (Martin, 12).

⁸⁸ CCSL 122, p. 9, ll. 92-4.

⁸⁹ Martin, trans., *Homilies*, 12. Compare this with Augustine’s formulation, quoted above: “[I]pse dedit fidem primo Quod ergo praemium immortalitatis postea tribuit, dona sua coronat, non merita tua,” (CCSL 36, III.10.15, 17-

reward – the second grace in the two-fold scheme of grace Bede borrows from Augustine – is that the saints should see God face to face in order to contemplate the mysteries of the Trinity directly. Bede defines immortality by using John 17:3, “Haec est autem uita aeterna ut cognoscant te.” (Now this is eternal life: That they may know thee.) This final, greatest gift “quoniam in huius saeculi uita fieri non potest.”⁹⁰ (cannot happen in the life of this world.)⁹¹ By situating contemplation within the gift-giving relationship Bede removes the concept from its possible Neo-platonic resonances. For Bede, the reward for a life lived in service of God is that one may finally see him whom one has served face to face.

Finally, Bede ends the homily by showing how the gift-giving economy of grace binds humanity together. While some Christians gain the joy of paradise immediately upon death, others, “bona quidem opera ad electorum sortem praeordinati”⁹² (preordained to the lot of the elect on account of their good works) but polluted by evils, go to the “flammis ignis purgatorii”⁹³ (flames of the purging fire)⁹⁴ to be cleansed of their vices. Their time in purgatory can be lessened if those still on earth pray, give alms, fast, and weep in “hostiae salutaris oblationibus”⁹⁵ (saving sacrificial offering)⁹⁶ for their friends. Bede ends the homily by reflecting on the time when all of Christ’s elect will gain the gift of contemplation of God. He modulates back to the theme of two-fold grace by folding his explication of the place of Moses’ law, introduced by the pericope, within this scheme: “cum tempore resurrectionis benedictionem dederit qui legem dedit ut ambulantes de uirtutem contemplationis uideant Deum deorum in Sion.”⁹⁷ (at the time of resurrection he who gave the law will give blessing, so that, journeying from the virtue of faith

8) [It was God who first gave faith Therefore, in afterwards paying the rewards of immortality, he crowns his own gifts, not your merits.]

⁹⁰ CCSL 122, p. 11, ll. 143-4.

⁹¹ Martin, 14.

⁹² CCSL 122, p. 13, ll. 213-6.

⁹³ CCSL 122, p. 13, ll. 215-6.

⁹⁴ My translation. Martin says, “the flames of the fire of purgatory” (17). Bede is one of the earliest Christian authors credited with bringing together three important elements of purgatorial doctrine (although this doctrine was not codified until the 12th century). According to Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), the passage above is the earliest to locate the purgatorial fires between death and judgment (104), and he also mentions the idea of the intercession of the living for the dead. He was further instrumental in developing an otherworld geography in which Purgatory has a place through his visions of Fursey and Drihthelm (97, 110).

⁹⁵ CCSL 122, p. 13, ll. 218-9.

⁹⁶ Martin, 17.

⁹⁷ CCSL 122, p. 13, ll. 221-4.

and hope to the virtue of contemplation, they may see the God of gods in Zion.)⁹⁸ At this point, by “the law” Bede means that grace which is for the present manifested in the ability to do good works, signified by “faith.”⁹⁹ This faith leads to the gift of contemplation. Thus Bede clarifies that God does give grace in exchange for grace in superlative generosity: the future grace manifested in the favor of seeing God in exchange for the present grace which allows Christ to fulfill the law in his saints.

HOMILIES I.3 AND I.4: GRACE ENACTED BY MARY

Homily I.2 sets up the central reciprocity of the relationship between God and humans which Bede refers to or takes for granted throughout the rest of his homilies. Both Homily I.3¹⁰⁰ on the Annunciation and I.4¹⁰¹ explicating the Magnificat present Mary as an example of one who enacts the reciprocity of twofold grace (although Bede does not use this specific term outside of Homily I.2). In I.3 God favors Mary by recognizing her service to him through virtue and purity, and giving her in return the gift of his son. In I.4 Mary responds to God primarily as a generous gift-giver. Throughout, Bede emphasizes both Mary’s humble estimation of her own worth and her merit that brings further rewards. That is, Mary’s gratitude is expressed in her response as she praises God for recognizing someone as lowly as she; part of God’s *gratia* is in recognizing and rewarding her worth. Thus, both God and Mary give lavishly to each other, *gratiam pro gratia*.

Bede’s account of the Annunciation negotiates the delicate doctrinal balance between grace and good works, making Mary a valued participant in the relationship with God through her humble use of the gifts given her, which then function as her return-gift to God. After the angel’s greeting, Bede affirms:

Vere etenim gratia erat plena cui diuino munere conlatum est ut prima inter feminas gloriosissimum Deo uirginitatis munus offerret. Vnde iure angelico aspectu simul et affatu meruit perfrui quae angelicam studebat uitam imitari. Vere gratia era plena cui ipsum per quem gratia et ueritas facta est Iesum Christum generare donatum est. Et ideo

⁹⁸ Martin, 17.

⁹⁹ See his discussion of the Mosaic law following l. 107.

¹⁰⁰ On Luke 1:26-38.

¹⁰¹ On Luke 1:39-55.

uere dominus cum illa erat quam et prius nouo castitatis amore a terrenis ad caelestia desideranda sustulit.¹⁰²

[And indeed, truly full of grace was she, upon whom it was conferred by divine favor that, first among women, she should offer God the most glorious gift of her virginity. Hence she who strove to imitate the life of an angel was rightfully worthy to enjoy the experience of seeing and speaking with an angel. Truly full of grace was she to whom it was granted to give birth to Jesus Christ, the very one through whom grace and truth came. And so the Lord was truly with her whom he first raised up from earthly to heavenly desires, in an unheard of love of chastity.]¹⁰³

The cycle is this: God favors Mary in allowing her to offer back to him the “gift of her virginity.” Because of this virginity, she is worthy of speaking with an angel. Offering her virginity, she is further “granted to give birth to Jesus Christ.” At the end of the passage Bede comes back full circle: Mary’s love of chastity was also one of God’s gifts. She has responded to this gift by enacting it, giving her a “gift of virginity” to offer back to God, which draws her into a *gratia*-cycle so intimate she becomes the mother of God’s own son.

The Magnificat is Mary’s response to God’s gifts. After Elizabeth enumerates the blessings Mary has received, Mary “non amplius tacere potuit dona quae perceperat ...”¹⁰⁴ (could no longer remain silent about the gifts which she had attained.)¹⁰⁵ Then, “[q]uibus primo dona sibi specialiter concessa confitetur deinde generalia Dei beneficia quibus generi humano in aeternum consulere non desistit enumerare.”¹⁰⁶ (With (the Magnificat) she first confesses those gifts which had been specially conceded to her, and then she enumerates too those ordinary kindnesses of God with which he does not stop consoling the human race forever.)¹⁰⁷ The gratitude of Mary’s response is expressed not only in the words of the Magnificat; her thoughts

¹⁰² CCSL 122, p. 16, ll. 60-8.

¹⁰³ Martin, 21.

¹⁰⁴ CCSL, 122, p. 25, ll. 148-9.

¹⁰⁵ Martin, 35.

¹⁰⁶ CCSL 122, p. 25, ll. 161-3. In addition: She “reverently awaited what was hidden until the distributor of gifts himself might reveal, at whatever time he so willed, what sort of special gift he had bestowed upon her and what sort of secret he had revealed” (36). “But now that she discerned that those same charismatic gifts with which she had been endowed had been disclosed to others by the revealing Spirit, she herself then also disclosed the heavenly treasure which she was keeping in her heart [through the Magnificat]” (36).

¹⁰⁷ Martin, 36.

and deeds also align with the words: she “omnes interioris hominis sui affectus diuinis laudibus ac seruitiis mancipat qui obseruantia praeceptorum Dei semper eius potentiam maiestatis se cogitare demonstrat.”¹⁰⁸ (commits all the affection of her interior self to divine praises and subjection, and by her observance of God’s commands she demonstrates that she thinks always of the might of his majesty.)¹⁰⁹ That is, Mary’s grateful response is not merely words of praise, nor merely affection, nor merely service: it draws all aspects of the person together in a response focused on the worth of God. The obligation God’s gifts lay upon her results as much from her internal emotional response to the situation as it is as it is the necessary response to one’s master. This response of grateful humility is what fits her for further divine gifts: “nequaquam se donis caelestibus quasi a se haec essent extulit sed ut magis magisque donis esset apta diuinis in custodiam humilitatis gressum mentis fixit ... *Ecce ancilla domini* ...”¹¹⁰ (in order that she might be fit for more and more divine gifts, she placed her steps firmly in the custody of humility of mind ... “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord.”)¹¹¹ Mary positions herself as God’s dependent, humbly expecting further gifts from her gracious master.

Central to the *gratia* relationship is Mary’s humility, which is an expression of the extent of her gratitude. Her response to the angel, “*Ecce ancilla domini*,”¹¹² shows, according to Bede, her

[m]agnam quippe humilitatis constantiam tenet quae se ancillam sui conditoris dum mater eligitur appellat. ... nec se tamen de singularitate meriti excelsioris singulariter extollit sed potius suae conditionis ac diuinae dignationis in omnibus memor famularum se Christi consortio humiliter adiungit famulatum Christo deuota quod iubetur inpendit. *Fiat, inquit, mihi secundum uerbum tuum; fiat ut spiritus sanctus adueniens me caelestibus dignam mysteriis reddat.*¹¹³

[great constancy of humility, since she named herself the handmaid of her Maker at the time when she was chosen to be his mother. ... Nevertheless she did not extol herself in a singular way on account of the singularity of her higher merit, but being mindful instead

¹⁰⁸ CCSL 122, p. 25, ll. 164-7.

¹⁰⁹ Martin, 36.

¹¹⁰ CCSL 122, p. 21-2, ll. 19-23.

¹¹¹ Martin, 31.

¹¹² CCSL 122, p. 20, l. 218.

¹¹³ CCSL 122, p. 20, ll. 219-20, 222-8.

of her own condition and of God's dignity, she humbly joined herself to the company of Christ's servants and committed herself devotedly to Christ in what was ordered. "Let it be done to me," she said, "In accordance with your word" – "Let it be done that the Holy Spirit's coming to me may render me worthy of heavenly mysteries."]¹¹⁴

The gratitude of Mary's response and her humility, an expression of the extent of her gratitude, are part of Mary's return-gift of service to God. She acknowledges the generosity of God's gift by placing herself among God's servants rather than asserting any prerogatives as his mother. But, while Mary acknowledges her lowliness, this is not the way God names her; he calls her mother of his Son and gives her the honor due that position, responding to her gratitude with further *gratia*. Both behave with perfect generosity toward each other. God proves himself to be one who rewards his servants, those who use and return his gifts. Thus, God honors Mary through his messenger: the angel greets her with a greeting "humanae consuetudini inaudita ... beatae Mariae dignitati congrua."¹¹⁵ (unheard of ... in human custom ... fitting to the dignity of blessed Mary.)¹¹⁶ Furthermore, he privileges her in a special way: "Nec praetereundum quod beata Dei genetrix meritis praecipius etiam nomine testimonium reddit. Interpretatur enim *stella maris*. Et ipsa quasi sidus eximium inter fluctus saeculi labentis gratia priuilegii specialis refulsit."¹¹⁷ (Nor should we overlook the fact that the blessed mother of God rendered testimony of her preeminent merits even by her name, for it has the meaning 'star of the sea,' and like an extraordinary heavenly body among the storms of this tottering world she shone brightly with the grace of her special privilege.)¹¹⁸

The passage just quoted exemplifies the dual way that Bede treats the issue of merit within the *gratia* relationship. In Homily I.2 he carefully shows that all gifts humans have come from God and that everything humans do to merit the grace of God they do through his gifting in the first place, but his later treatment of the subject assumes both this and also that saints merit the favor of God. Thus Mary gains the grace of special privilege through her preeminent merits, signified by her the name, "star of the sea." Mary's humility is part of the extent of her gratitude.

¹¹⁴ Martin, 27.

¹¹⁵ CCSL 122, p. 16, ll. 59-60.

¹¹⁶ Martin, 21.

¹¹⁷ CCSL 122, p. 15, ll. 53-6.

¹¹⁸ Martin, 21.

But Bede does not speak of her as God's lowly servant. In Bede's view, Mary is singular in her purity, obedience, and humility. Her virtues are a gift from God, but they are merits insofar as she has made use of them. That she has made use of them has merited her further singularity: she is singular in being given the *literal* gift of bearing Christ in her body. Bede can recognize that Mary's virtues have earned merits which God rewards. This also becomes a part of God's grace: that he himself ratifies this view of Mary, and attributes to Mary's merit that which he gave her in the first place. Mary "[n]il ergo meritis suis tribuit quae totam suam magnitudinem ad illius donum refert ..." ¹¹⁹ (therefore attributes nothing to her own merits, but she refers her whole greatness to (God)) ¹²⁰ but there is, in Bede's mind, no question that Mary is indeed great – she "[eum] cororaliter generare meruit." ¹²¹ (was worthy to bring him forth physically.) ¹²² That is, there is a difference in the way Mary refers to herself and the way others refer to her. While Bede reports that everything she had came from God, he, unlike Mary, attributes this merit to her own preeminence since he continually refers to her merit and her worth without continually mentioning that that was also God's gift in the first place.

There is then some sense of the astounding nature of God's gifts as Bede continues, drawing parallels between Mary and ordinary humans. At the beginning of Homily I.3 Bede established that the annunciation is not just to Mary but to all the elect, especially, by implication, those committed to chastity: ¹²³ "Vt ergo ad promissae salutis mereamur dona pertingere primordium eius intenta curemus aure percipere." ¹²⁴ (That therefore we may deserve to reach the gifts of promised salvation, we must take care to receive its beginning with an attentive ear.) ¹²⁵ For a moment he leaves ambiguous whether he means Christ as the beginning or origin of salvation, or the story of the annunciation and nativity as the beginning of the salvation process offered to humans. Through this ambiguity, Bede implies an equivalence for his audience between receiving the story and receiving Christ; as the congregation hears the story

¹¹⁹ CCSL 122, p. 26, ll. 191-2.

¹²⁰ Martin, 37.

¹²¹ CCSL 122, p. 26, l. 209.

¹²² Martin, 37.

¹²³ See Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 15.

¹²⁴ CCSL 122, p. 14, ll. 6-7

¹²⁵ My translation. Martin's translation (*Homilies*, p. 19) clarifies the ambiguity of the phrase.

of the Annunciation they can replicate Mary's conception of Christ¹²⁶ by hearing the story of his nativity and internalizing it.

He returns to this idea at the end. As ordinary humans show themselves obedient to God's commands they, like Mary, bring forth Christ into the world and through this merit a reward: "tamen in eadem uita perpetua beatitudinis locum et ipsi sint habituri qui eius fidem ac dilectionem casto in corde concipiunt qui sedula in mente praeceptorum eius memoriam portant qui hanc et in mente proximorum solerti exhortatione nutrire satagunt."¹²⁷ (those who conceive his faith and love in a chaste heart, who bear the recollection of his precepts in a sincere mind, and who busy themselves nourishing this recollection also in the mind of their neighbors by skillful exhortation, they too will have a place in the same everlasting life of blessedness (as Mary).)¹²⁸ Inasmuch as Mary is a model for Christians, and especially those devoted to chastity,¹²⁹ she presents a model for Bede's audience to consider their own relationship with God. This has special resonance for people, many of whom, like Bede himself, would not have chosen for themselves the monastic life of chastity. Bede's homily reorients thinking; chastity is not something imposed upon a person by the fate of the parental gift of a child to a monastery, but is rather a gift directly from God, given not in response to merit, but by God's special grace. As Bede's audience receives and enacts this gift already received, they too can share in the gift of bringing Christ into the world.

At the end of Homily I.3, Bede draws his hearers into a gift-relationship with God as well by calling on them to imitate Mary's

uocem mentemque nos ... pro modulo nostro sequentes famulos esse nos Christi in cunctis actibus nostris motibusque recolamus ... sicque perceptis eius munibus gratias recte uiuendo reddamus ut ad maiora percipienda digni existere mereamur. Precemur seduli cum beata Dei genetrice ut fiat nobis secundum uerbum eius ...¹³⁰

¹²⁶ According to tradition, Mary conceived Jesus through her ear. This tradition is mentioned by Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 6. Several passages throughout her book give evidence for Anglo-Saxon knowledge of this belief (for example, p. 88).

¹²⁷ CCSL 122, p. 27, ll. 221-5.

¹²⁸ Martin, 38.

¹²⁹ The tradition of viewing Mary this way goes back to Origen and reached the Middle Ages via Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine. They especially develop Mary as a model for celibate Christians. See Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 5, 11-12.

¹³⁰ CCSL 122, p. 20, ll. 231-3, 236-9.

[voice and mind ... let us recall that we are Christ's servants in all of our acts and motions. ... (S)ince we have received his gifts, let us give thanks by living properly, so that we may show ourselves worthy of receiving greater gifts. Let us unremmitingly (sic) pray, along with the blessed mother of God, that it may be done to us in accordance with his word ...]¹³¹

As his audience accepts the gift of chastity they have been given, they are to realize that this gift puts them in a special relationship with God, as his servants. Because they have *already* received his gifts, they must show *gratia* in return, by serving him. Their response to God's gifts precipitates further gift-giving, forging a relationship between them of lord and servants. Finally, God's gift of his Son becomes assurance that God will listen to his dependents' requests: "Nec dubitandum quin nos de profundis ad se clamantes citius exaudire dignabitur propter quos necdum se cognoscentes ipse ad profundam hanc conuallem lacrimarum descendere ..." ¹³² ([T]here is no doubt that he will very quickly deign to hearken to us who cry out to him from the depths, since for our sake, when we did not yet recognize him, he deigned to descend to this deep valley of tears ...) ¹³³

For Bede the Magnificat is a direct response to God's gifts. It sets forward a model of a relationship that monks will enact every day at Vespers (as Bede mentions at the end of the homily) ¹³⁴ as they chant the Magnificat themselves as part of the liturgy. Key to this model is a conception of humility and pride that centers on the human response to God's gifts. Chanting Mary's hymn daily gives monks a chance to reflect on Mary's example. It prompts prayers and tears by which the mind cleanses itself. It therefore gives a model for the intimacy of the relationship between human and God, an intimacy that can never be presumed upon because its primary condition is humility, the recognizing of gifts and favor unearned and unasked-for.

The first four homilies especially introduce themes that are touched on and referenced again and again throughout the succeeding homilies. Homilies 5 and 6 continue to build on these themes as Advent transitions to Christmas. Homily I.6, the first Christmas homily, details the

¹³¹ Martin, 27-8.

¹³² CCSL 122, p. 20, ll. 242-5.

¹³³ Martin, 28.

¹³⁴ Martin, 43; CCSL, vol. 122, p. 30, l. 355.

gift of Christ, but also presents other models available to Bede for conceptualizing the human relationship with God, namely taxation and servitude. These models, however, never attain the same importance as the gift-giving model. Through the motif of the giving of gifts, and the explication of grace and humility, Bede establishes a particular relationship between humans and God, one in which all good and all gifts proceed from God's favor. Bede contextualizes the gift-relationship not as mercenary or as passive but as reciprocal, though initiated and cemented with gifts – God's. Humans in humility must recognize that all they have comes from God; they are then obligated to use these gifts in service of their Lord. Once they recognize this, God endows them with even greater gifts, the ability to *act* in such a way as to deserve the future gifts of the heavenly kingdom. Gift-giving is characterized by three stages: the initial gift of God's Son, the continuing gifts of the Holy Spirit teaching us to live well, and the future, promised gift of eternal life in the heavenly kingdom. It is within this particular kind of relationship that people pray to God.

PRAYER WITHIN THE *GRATIA*-RELATIONSHIP

Homilies I.2-4 establish the *gratia* relationship that believing people find themselves in when they respond to God's *gratia* with *gratia*. However, Mary never asks God for anything in Homilies I.3 and 4. While she models the kind of relationship Christians have with God that frames petition, she does not seem to present a clear model of prayer. At the same time, she does hope for future gifts from God, which she puts herself in a position of receiving through gratefully performing the good deeds she has been given. It is in this important way that Mary's example becomes key for an understanding of prayer in Bede: Bede's conception of prayer is fundamentally oriented toward action within the *gratia*-relationship. In addition, prayer is primarily the petition for salvation. What Mary does is to enact the gifts given her in the hope of the future *gratia* of salvation. For Bede, prayer, which encompasses all actions, thoughts, and even silences, is also a gift enacted and given back to God in the hope of future *gratia*.

Prayer works in a complex way in Bede because he pulls in elements from the penitential tradition of prayer (God as judge, prayer as cleansing), the ritual structure of praying the canonical hours as part of the church's *opus Dei* (in Benedict's term), and elements of the eastern tradition of the purifying and transforming function of prayer (although heavily modified, as

DeGregorio, in part, shows). He does this all within the frame of the gift-relationship, and with a primary conception of prayer as gift and as the petition for gifts. From this conception a strong sense emerges that prayer enacts belonging within God's kingdom and before God's presence, tying together both gift and transformation within prayer

Bede's fifty-homily collection has a high number of homilies on prayer. Homilies II.12 and II.14 are both entirely about prayer. The first explicates John 16:23¹³⁵ and is primarily concerned to point out that this promise applies to anything pertaining to salvation, and to consider the reasons why a person's prayer might not be answered. The second focuses on Luke 11:9-13 and considers the reasons for and effects of perseverance in prayer. Homily II.10 begins with a passage on prayer as a gift to God, and Homily I.22 presents prayer for the forgiveness of sins of others and of oneself. Because Bede makes some of the same points in different homilies, I will not go through these homilies one by one. Instead, I propose to discuss some of the main points of Bede's understanding of prayer as they appear in these homilies, and then conclude by applying these observations to Homily I.22, one of Bede's more complicated discussions of the "psychology" of prayer.

INTEGRATED PRAYER: WORDS, DEEDS, AND THOUGHTS

To understand Bede's theory of prayer, it is key to realize first of all that prayer is for salvation, the only petition that God promises to hear and to grant. In Homily II.12 this is how Bede explains the problematic promise in John 16:23, that anything asked in Jesus's name will be given to the petitioner. To the naïve this could seem to promise anything at all, from physical health to a pony for Christmas; petition would thus seem to center on the will of the petitioner rather than of the granter. In response to this Bede teaches, "[I]llos solum in nomine saluatoris petere qui ea quae ad perpetuam salutem pertinent petunt."¹³⁶ ([T]hose people alone ask in the name of the Savior who ask for those things which pertain to eternal salvation.)¹³⁷ Many of the

¹³⁵ "Si quid petieritis patrem in nomine meo, dabit uobis" (CCSL 122, p. 260, l. 3) [If you ask anything of the Father in my name, he will give it to you].

¹³⁶ CCSL 122, p. 260, ll. 9-10. Compare this with Gregory: "[I]lle ergo in nomine Saluatoris petit, qui illud petit quod ad ueram salutem pertinet" (Homily XXVII, CCSL 141, p. 234, 6.141-2) [One who asks in the Savior's name asks what pertains to actual salvation] (Hurst, trans., Homily 27, p. 217).

¹³⁷ Martin, 108.

Fathers allow that people can ask for material things as well, so long as their requests are not excessive or greedy. Bede also makes this allowance in II.14, but he takes a harder line:

Male petunt et illi qui terrena magis in oratione quam caelestia bona requirunt Neque enim prohibentur ciues patriae caelestis in terra peregrinantes pro pace temporum pro salute corporum pro ubertate frugum pro serenitate aurarum pro ceteris uitae huius necessariis dominum petere, si tamen haec non nimie petantur et si ob id solummodo petantur ut abundante uiatico in praesenti liberius ad futura dona tendatur.¹³⁸

[They also ask wrongly who in their prayers demand earthly rather than heavenly goods. ... The citizens of the heavenly fatherland, while they are pilgrims on this earth, are not forbidden to ask the Lord for peaceful times, bodily health, abundant crops, good weather, and other necessities of this life, if these things are not asked for inordinately, and if they are asked for only for this reason, that with abundant food for the journey in this present life, they may more freely reach out toward future gifts.]¹³⁹

Compare this to Gregory:

In domo enim Jesu Jesum non quaeritis, si in aeternitatis templo importune pro temporalibus oratis. Ecce alius in oratione quaerit uxorem, alius petit uillam, alius postulat uestem, alius dari sibi deprecatur alimentum. Et quidem cum haec desunt, ab omnipotenti Deo petenda sunt. Sed meminisse continue debemus quod ex mandato eiusdem nostri Redemptoris accepimus, *Quaerite primum regnum Dei et iustitiam eius, et haec omnia adicientur uobis.*¹⁴⁰ Et haec itaque ad Iesu petere non est errare, si tamen non nimie petantur.¹⁴¹

[You are not seeking Jesus in the house of Jesus if you are praying unreasonably for temporal things in the temple of eternity. One seeks in his prayer for a wife, another a country estate, another for clothing, another prays earnestly for food. We are indeed to ask these things from almighty God when we lack them. But we must constantly remember what we have received from our Redeemer's precept: *Seek first the kingdom of*

¹³⁸ CCSL 122, p. 275, ll. 107-9, 112-17.

¹³⁹ Martin, p. 128.

¹⁴⁰ Matt. 6:33.

¹⁴¹ Homily XXVII, CCSL 141, pp. 235, 7.153-62.

*God and his justice, and all these things will be given you as well. To ask these things of Jesus, then, is not to go wrong, if our requests are not excessive.]*¹⁴²

While Gregory corrects his audience, he also assures them that they are free to pray for temporal things, so long as their requests are not excessive. Bede makes the same concession; however, he emphasizes first that they ask “male” who demand earthly rather than heavenly goods at all; Gregory uses the slightly softer “importune.” Bede then concedes that they are “not forbidden” to ask for material things, but ends by emphasizing once again that even these requests are to be made with an eye for eternal salvation.

Part of the explanation for Bede’s sterner tone is because his audience is monastic (and therefore held to a higher standard of renunciation) whereas Gregory preached to mixed congregations.¹⁴³ But partly this is also because prayer, in the works-encompassing definition preferred by Bede, can only become transformative if people are praying for transformation. That is, if people are praying for material goods, good works can become a means to that end, a *do ut des* bargain with God. In Bede’s relational context for prayer such calculation debases the *gratia* relationship, introducing the possibility that people would serve God to aggrandize themselves in this world. If, on the other hand, people pray for eternal life, good works enact that prayer as people perform the salvation for which they pray. That is, as he did with Mary, God gives eternal life as a reward for good works. As people perform good works, they both manifest their gratitude to God for previous gifts, and, as they pray, demonstrate their dependence upon him for future gifts.

Because prayer is relational, expressed and enacted within a *gratia* relationship, the question of unanswered prayer takes on some urgency. Unanswered prayer presents a danger to belief, and not only belief in God’s power: unanswered prayer could imply that the petitioner has fallen out of God’s favor. In a later homily, Bede formulates the relationship thus: “Ipse rogari ut praestet amat qui animos inopum ad se rogandum largus donator erigit.”¹⁴⁴ ((God) loves to be asked so that he can give – he who, as a generous donor, raises up the minds of the needy to ask

¹⁴² Hurst, trans. Homily 27, p. 217.

¹⁴³ Although, it is interesting to note, that authors writing to monastic audiences, such as Origen and Cassian, do not evidence any anxiety that this promise will be misused or misapplied. Origen mentions it in his treatise on prayer (Jay 129; xv.3 and 110, x.2). Cassian discusses it in the *Conferences* (Ramsey, p. 352, 9.34.9).

¹⁴⁴ CCSL 122, p. 274, ll. 61-3.

of him.)¹⁴⁵ If God is unresponsive to the petition of one with whom he is in a gift-giving relationship and who is using the gifts given him properly, his unresponsiveness calls the whole relationship between God and that person into question. God cannot selectively ignore the requests he does not want to hear; doing so implies that the petitioner is out of favor, that grace has been withdrawn, or that God himself does not keep faith with those who serve him. That a petitioner is out of favor is, indeed, one reason Bede gives for God not hearing petitions.¹⁴⁶ The other two reasons for unanswered prayer, however, explain it as a manifestation of God's continued *gratia*. In the first case, God's grace keeps the petitioner from harm: "Quotiescumque ergo petentes non exaudimur ideo fit quia ... contra auxilium nostrae salutis petimus ac propterea a misericorde patre beneficium gratia nobis quod inepte petimus negatur."¹⁴⁷ (Whenever we are not listened to when we ask, it happens ... because we are [sic] asking for something contrary to what would aid our salvation, and for this reason the grace of his kindness is denied us by our merciful Father because we are unsuitably asking.)¹⁴⁸ In the last instance Bede clarifies that when Christians are unable to obtain the salvation of those for whom they pray, the petitioners might not have their specific request granted, but they will be rewarded for the love they have shown: "tamen cum aliorum erratibus misericorditer interuenimus praemium nostrae benignitatis restituet."¹⁴⁹ (when we mercifully intercede for the lapses of others, he will grant us a reward for our generosity.)¹⁵⁰ Interceding for others, whether they personally "deserve" to be saved or not, is still a good work which will receive reward from God. Bede assures that those praying to God have a particular kind of relationship in which the one with a right to petition cannot simply be ignored.¹⁵¹

Bede blurs the line between prayer and works by focusing prayer as the petition for salvation; another way he does the same thing is in his solution to the problem presented by the

¹⁴⁵ Martin, II.14, p. 126.

¹⁴⁶ Homily II.12: "Quotiescumque ergo petentes non exaudimur ideo fit quia ... ipsi male uiuendo auditum a nobis uisti iudicis auertimus" (CCSL 122, p. 260, ll. 15-6, 22-3) [Whenever we are not listened to when we ask ... it happens because ... we ourselves, by our evil lives, divert away from us the voice of the just Judge] (Martin, 109). The following quotation is taken from the same passage.

¹⁴⁷ CCSL 122, p. 260, ll. 15-8.

¹⁴⁸ Martin, 109.

¹⁴⁹ CCSL 122, p. 261, ll. 45-7.

¹⁵⁰ Homily II.12, p. 110.

¹⁵¹ Homily I.22 presents an interesting twist on this since Jesus ignores the woman who asks him to heal her daughter, and then insults her when he finally does pay attention to her. See the discussion below.

command in I Thessalonians 5:17, to pray without ceasing. Early Christian literature on prayer often addresses how one can do this.¹⁵² Teachers had various solutions to this problem. Some, like Tertullian, understood it in part to mean that prayer was acceptable “[o]mni ... loco quem opportunitas aut etiam necessitas importarit.”¹⁵³ (in every place ... which propriety or even necessity suggests.) Many understood it as a command to pray continually (i.e., regularly); the Divine Office was one way to fulfill this command.¹⁵⁴ Others, however, aimed for continuous prayer. Augustine gave one solution:

Numquid sine intermissione genu flectimus, corpus prosternimus, aut manus leuamus, ut dicat: *Sine intermissione orate?* Aut si sic dicimus nos orare, hoc puto sine intermissione non possumus facere. Est alia interior sine intermissione oratio, quae est desiderium. ... Si non uis intermittere orare, noli intermittere desiderare.¹⁵⁵

[(C)an we be on our knees all the time, or prostrate ourselves continuously, or be holding up our hands uninterruptedly, that he bids us, *Pray without ceasing?* If we say that these things constitute prayer, I do not think we can pray without ceasing. But there is another kind of prayer that never ceases, an interior prayer that is desire. ... If you do not want to interrupt your prayer, let your desire be uninterrupted. Your continuous desire is your continuous voice.]¹⁵⁶

For Augustine the “oratio, quae est desiderium” is an interior state of longing for the heavenly kingdom. In the larger passage, he inflects this desire with a charity not obviously manifest in particular deeds, but in the cry of the heart.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵² The institution of prayer three times a day (which developed into the canonical hours) was one way of fulfilling this obligation. But most commentators took the command to be *continuously* rather than *continually*. They had different ways of dealing with it. For Cassian, the ascetic is able to reach this goal only after the mind has reached *apatheia* and is able to contemplate God (*Conl.* XI.iii.4 and vi.5), although Germanus later talks about prayer as something to be always said (XI.vii.3). Origen’s solution is mentioned below, n. 158.

¹⁵³ Text and translation from Q. Septimius Florens Tertullianus, *De Oratione Liber. Tertullian’s Tract on the Prayer*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (London: S.P.C.K., 1953), sect. 24.

¹⁵⁴ See Timothy Fry, ed., “Appendix 3: The Liturgical Code in the Rule of Benedict,” *RB*: 1980, 379-86.

¹⁵⁵ *Enarrationes in Psalmos. In Psalmum xxxvii Enarratio*, CCSL 38, p. 392, 14.8-12, 14-5.

¹⁵⁶ *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century. Expositions of the Psalms 35-50*, vol. III/16, trans. Maria Boulding (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2000), 157.

¹⁵⁷ “Frigus caritatis, silentium cordis est; flagrantia caritatis, clamor cordis est” (CCSL 38, *In Psalmum xxxvii Enar.*, CCSL 38, p. 392, 14.17-18) [The chilling of charity is the silence of the heart; the blazing of charity is the heart’s clamor] (Boulding, 157).

Bede's solution to the same problem is notably different. For Bede people fulfill the command to pray without ceasing by performing good works. In Homily II.22 he says:

quia quicquid boni operantur aut dicunt qui simplici intentione Deo deseruiunt totum profecto hoc uicem pro eis orationis adimplet quando deuotionem mentis eorum diuinis commendat aspectibus. Neque aliter apostolicum illud praeceptum quo ait, *sine intermissione orate*, perficere ualemus nisi sic omnes actus sermones cogitatus ipsa etiam silentia nostra ita domino donante dirigamus ut singula haec cum timoris illius respectu temperentur ut cuncta perpetuae nostrae saluti proficua reddantur.¹⁵⁸

[(W)hatever good work those who are zealous in their service of God perform or speak about with unfeigned intention fills for them the place of prayer, when it directs the devotion of their minds to the divine presence. We are not otherwise capable of carrying out the command of the Apostle wherein he says, *Pray without ceasing*, unless we direct all our actions, utterances, thoughts, and even our silence, by God's gift, in such a way that each of these may be carried out with regard to fear of him, so that all of them may be rendered profitable for our eternal salvation.]¹⁵⁹

If Augustine blurs the line between desire and prayer, Bede blurs the line between prayer and good works. He does so in a way that integrates the interior state of “unfeigned (*simplici*) intention” and “thoughts” with the exterior “actions,” so that the prayer of good works becomes a type of service to God, because it “*deuotionem mentis eorum diuinis commendat aspectibus*.” The wording here seems to resonate faintly with Augustine's “interior ... oratio, quae est desiderium.” Bede, however, emphasizes the way people perform their devotion to God through good works, in this way enacting what they are praying for through interiorizing and exteriorizing their prayer. It is “good work” that brings about the “devotion of their minds.” Bede imagines prayer as bringing one into the divine presence, carrying out actions, utterances,

¹⁵⁸ CCSL 122, pp. 344-5, ll. 91-9. This same idea is found more succinctly in the passage already mentioned from his commentary on Luke: “Aut certe omnia quae iustus secundum Deum gerit et dicit ad orationem esse reputanda” (*In Lucam* 5, CCSL 120, p. 322, ll. 1056-8) [everything that the just man does and says according to the will of God ought to be counted as prayer]. Bede's solution is notably similar to Origen's: “The man who links together his prayer with deeds of duty and fits seemly actions with his prayer is the man who prays without ceasing, for his virtuous deeds or the commandments he has fulfilled are taken up as part of his prayer. For only in this way can we take the saying ‘Pray without ceasing’ as being possible, if we can say that the whole life of the saint is one mighty integrated prayer” (*Origin's Treatise on Prayer*, trans. Eric Jay, 12.2).

¹⁵⁹ Homily II.22, p. 223.

thoughts and silence with regard to the fear of God, and so gaining *gratia* that will bring further *gratia*.

The interiorization and exteriorization of integrated prayer within the congruence between what one says, what one thinks, and what one does¹⁶⁰ is a continual theme in Bede. In the context of prayer, it comes up in each homily on prayer. It is this congruence that makes petition effective through making the precators “worthy.” In Homily II.14, for one example, Bede says:

regnum caelorum non otiosis et uacantibus sed petentibus quaerentibus pulsantibus dandum inueniendum et aperiendum esse testatur. Petenda est ergo ianua regni orando quaerenda recte uiuendo pulsanda perseuerando. Non enim sufficit uerbis tantummodo rogare, si non etiam quaesierimus diligentius qualiter nobis sit uiuendum ut digni simus impetrare quae poscimus.¹⁶¹

[(T)he kingdom of heaven is not to be given to, found by, and opened to those who are idle and unoccupied, but to those who ask for it, seek after it and knock at its gates. The gate of the kingdom must be asked for by praying; it must be sought after by living properly; it must be knocked at by persevering. It is not sufficient to ask in words only if we do not also seek diligently how we ought to be living, so that we may be worthy to obtain that for which we plead.]¹⁶²

It is the congruence between words and deeds (in this instance) that make a petition obtainable, but the two operate as more or less the same thing: both are integral parts to the petition for salvation. On the one hand, since people are praying for admission into the kingdom, they must behave in a way congruent with those who belong in the kingdom – one cannot plead to be a subject of God without at the same time seeking to act like a subject. On the other hand, these

¹⁶⁰ Patrick Sims-Williams, “Thought, Word, and Deed,” traces this theme from patristic sources, especially Gregory, through Irish dissemination: “[W]hereas the Fathers seem to have used the triad in a fairly casual way in connection with the theme of judgment, not as a traditional scheme, Irish authors used it in a wide variety of contexts, self-consciously as a triad *qua* triad” (82). While thought, word, deed is a common theme in Bede, his deployment is not consistent enough for it to work “self-consciously as a triad.” At times Bede uses only two of the elements (Homily II.14 concentrates on words and works, for instance, CCSL 122, p. 274, ll. 74-5). At times, all elements are there but without all of them being explicitly named (Homily II.10 is an example where both are brought up within the space of 30 lines or so, and Homily I.22 ends with the three being invoked). One of the closest instances of the three to a “triad” is in Homily II.12 uses “cordiam secreta” with “uerba ... et opera” (CCSL 122, p. 265, ll. 192-3).

¹⁶¹ CCSL 122, p. 272, ll. 6-13.

¹⁶² Homily II.14, p. 124.

good works enacted are themselves what allow people to gain the “worth” to obtain that for which they plead. That is, the good deeds are not traded for entrance into the kingdom. Rather, through them people gain the standing, a position, to gain the further *gratia* of having their petition addressed (and granted). Good deeds become part of the gift and the promise of the petition. In this passage salvation is thought of in terms of being-subject-to; petition and its attendant good works move a person from outside the kingdom to inside the kingdom through God’s *gratia* and through the way enactment of this *gratia* transforms the one praying. As we will see, this same movement from outside to inside is conceptualized in terms of transformation and purity in Homily I.22. In both cases integrated prayer places one in a position where one can be heard and can belong.

HOMILY II.10: DEVOTION, GIFTS, AND PURITY IN PRAYER

It is tempting to call the congruence between word and deed by the name of sincerity; from this perspective, the congruence of word and deed acts as guarantee for the sincere intention of the one praying, of his “simplex intentio.”¹⁶³ But Bede more commonly calls the congruence between word, thought, and deed by the name of purity.¹⁶⁴ Homily II.10 most clearly shows the way that purity in the petitioning relationship works to transform the petitioner into that which he is petitioning to be, and it roots the concept of purity within the word-based nature of prayer that is then enacted exteriorly and interiorly as a gift to God. Homily II.10 is an after-Easter homily on the women who come to Jesus’ tomb bearing spices on the morning of his resurrection.¹⁶⁵ For the purposes of prayer, Bede’s explication of Luke 24:1 is the important part: “una autem sabbati valde diluculo venerunt ad monumentum portantes quae paraverant aromata.”¹⁶⁶ (And on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they came to the sepulchre, bringing the spices which they had prepared.)¹⁶⁷

At first, it looks like the women’s action presents a particular emotional model of devoted love that motivates their actions and which Bede’s audience is perhaps to emulate: “Quod autem

¹⁶³ CCSL 122, pp. 344. *Simplex*, “unmixed,” also overlaps with notions of purity.

¹⁶⁴ Most notably at the end of Homily I.22, “pure orandi” and “orationis puritas,” CCSL 122, p. 160, l. 162, 164.

¹⁶⁵ The pericope is Luke 24:1-9.

¹⁶⁶ Vulgate.

¹⁶⁷ Douay-Rheims.

mulieres dominum quaesiturae ualde diluculo uenerunt ad monumentum magnam sui amoris erga illum deuotionem demonstrant.”¹⁶⁸ (The fact that the women came to the tomb very early in the morning in order to seek the Lord proves the great devotedness of their love for him.)¹⁶⁹ But when Bede applies their example to his audience he transmutes this “desire to find the Lord”¹⁷⁰ not into a call to emulate the women’s *devotio amoris*, but to perform good works and pray; he continually shifts devotion from an interior state to something to be enacted. Bede’s audience’s devotion to the Lord is to be expressed through the gift of their prayers as enacted through their deeds and internalized in their thoughts.

Bede’s explication of this verse could be outlined thus:

1. The women seek the Lord at dawn / We seek the Lord shining with good works.
2. They bring spices / We bring the gift of spiritual prayer.
 - a. Brought early in the morning / Accompanied by good works and inward compunction.
 - b. Prepared beforehand / Having purged our thoughts of pointless thoughts.

In his allegorical interpretation, Bede shifts the focus from the women’s supposed motive, devoted love, to what is “proper” for one seeking his Lord. He thus shifts the emphasis from love as the source of action to the necessity for good works to accompany prayer. While the women’s seeking of the tomb “sui amoris erga illum deuotionem demonstrant,”¹⁷¹ (proves the great devotedness of their love for (the Lord))¹⁷² Bede never specifically asks his audience to feel the *amor* associated with *devotio*, rather he asks them to perform *devotio* through the gift of their prayers: “Decet autem nos sicut operum bonorum luce fulgidos ita etiam spiritalium orationum gratia refertos dominum quaerere.”¹⁷³ (Just as it is proper for us to seek the Lord shining with the light of good works, so also is it proper for us to seek him abundantly provided with the gift of spiritual prayers.)¹⁷⁴ Prayer functions in a double way as both the gift a dependent brings as

¹⁶⁸ CCSL 122, p. 246, ll. 13-5.

¹⁶⁹ Martin, 88.

¹⁷⁰ Martin, 89. “si dominum inuenire ... desideramus,” CCSL 122, p. 246, ll. 18-9.

¹⁷¹ CCSL 122, p. 246, l. 15.

¹⁷² Martin, 88.

¹⁷³ CCSL 122, p. 247, ll. 21-2.

¹⁷⁴ Martin, 89.

acknowledgment of dependence and in hope of gaining a response to a request, as Bede makes clear in this negative example:

Nam qui ad orandum ecclesiam ingressus inter uerba obsecrationis consuetudinem superfluae cogitationis ab animo repellere negligit quasi dominum quaerens minus parata secum aromata detulit.¹⁷⁵

[One who enters a church to pray, and neglects to drive away from his mind its usual superfluous thoughts while he pours forth his words of entreaty, is like a person seeking the Lord without bringing with him the spices he has prepared.]¹⁷⁶

Relationally, this means that people confirm their place in the *gratia* relationship through bringing their petitions to their Lord. Petition expresses their sense of their dependence on the Lord, while at the same time reinforcing the sense of privilege inherent in the freedom to come before him. The gift of prayer that they bring binds together feeling and action as an expression of gratitude. Prayer is also the request itself. Bede describes these prayers in more detail:

“Aromata etenim nostra uoces sunt orationum in quibus desideria cordis nostri domino commendamus.”¹⁷⁷ (Our spices are our voices in prayer, in which we set forth before the Lord the desires of our hearts.)¹⁷⁸ Exactly whose desires these are will be addressed in a moment. For now, we notice that Bede once again shifts from desire to works. Prayer is accompanied by two things, good actions first of all:

Diluculo igitur aromata ad monumentum domini ferimus cum memores passionis ac mortis quam pro nobis suscepit et actionum bonarum proximis foris lucem monstramus et suauitate purae conpunctionis intus in corde feruemus quod et omnibus horis et tunc maxime fieri oportet cum ecclesiam oraturi ingredimur.¹⁷⁹

[We bear spices to the tomb of the Lord early in the morning when, mindful of the passion and death which he underwent for us, we show to our neighbor outwardly the light of our good actions, and are inwardly aflame in our heart with the delight of simple

¹⁷⁵ CCSL 122, p. 247, ll. 49-52.

¹⁷⁶ Martin, 90.

¹⁷⁷ CCSL 122, p. 247, ll. 24-6.

¹⁷⁸ Martin, 89.

¹⁷⁹ CCSL 122, p. 247, ll. 30-5.

compunction. We must do this at all times, but especially when we go into church in order to pray.]¹⁸⁰

And, secondly, pure thoughts:

aromata namque quae ad obsequium domini portemus prius parasse est adeo cor ante tempus orationis a superuacuis expurgare cogitationibus ut in ipso tempore orandi nil sordidum mente recipere nil rerum labentium cogitare nulla praeter ea quae precamur et ipsum cui supplicamus meminere nouerimus.¹⁸¹

[(T)he earlier preparation of the spices we carry to perform our service to the Lord is the purging of our hearts from pointless thoughts before the time of prayer, so that at the time of prayer we are able to admit nothing unclean into our minds, and to think of nothing that concerns transitory matters beyond what we are making our entreaty for, and to remember who it is whom we are supplicating.]¹⁸²

Bede continually binds these three things together in his discussions of prayer: the words and actions of prayer itself, good works, and singleness of mind. Bede gives here, not a formula for how to get what you want from God, but the way that prayer is transformative. Bede does not frame the issue at stake in prayer as one of incongruence between the primary inner self, and action as a reflection of the self (i.e., the true, inner self is not expressed in prayer), but rather as one of understanding one's position in relation to God, and that what one owes God be enacted both through the actions of good deeds and of thought. This conception of the self is fundamentally relational – the individual is “true” or “pure” only as he enacts what he is expected to be, a devoted subject of his Lord.

It is thus significant that when those praying express the desires of their hearts, they do not actually express desires originating with themselves in their prayers. When Bede says, “Aromata etenim nostra uoces sunt orationum in quibus desideria cordis nostri domino commendamus,”¹⁸³ (Our spices are our voices in prayer, in which we set forth before the Lord the desires of our hearts)¹⁸⁴ he continues to identify these desires with the “mundissima

¹⁸⁰ Martin, 89.

¹⁸¹ CCSL 122, p. 247, ll. 42-7.

¹⁸² Martin, 89-90.

¹⁸³ CCSL 122, p. 247, ll. 24-6.

¹⁸⁴ Martin, 89.

sanctorum praecordia,”¹⁸⁵ (the purest inmost longings of the saints).¹⁸⁶ These desires are not primarily the desires of the individual praying; rather, those praying adopt the desires of the saints captured and preserved within the prayers of the church which are then to be enacted by those praying.

People earn the final reward of the heavenly kingdom through the purity of their lives, which must be understood in the context of integrated prayer. Through this, Bede reforms the Cassianic notion of purity as *apatheia* – the monk’s disengagement from the material world and bodily desires – into a purity comparatively more engaged with the world, more integrated within community, and more concretely relational in its conception of God. This is not a watered-down version of monastic prayer aimed at unsophisticated new Christians,¹⁸⁷ but a coherent re-orientation of the relationship between humanity and God expressed in prayer as Bede moves away from Neo-platonic abstraction and toward a more concretely realized gift-oriented relationship with God.

For Bede, purity of thoughts and purity of works is linked in such a way that true pure prayer means congruence between what one is *saying* (prayer), *doing* (works), and *thinking* (thoughts) – an integrated performance of precators’ subjection to God. As is consistent throughout Bede’s work, works and thoughts originate in the words of prayer. Unlike the women, who seek Christ’s tomb early in the morning from devotion, many in Bede’s congregation would have found themselves in church first, devoted to such a life by their parents. Furthermore, they would not be praying their own thoughts and feelings, but the prescribed prayers of the Divine Office. It is these prayers that the person’s works and thoughts must conform to, and it is from this practice that devotion ideally springs, as the words and the practice of prayer are internalized. Without this congruence prayer-as-gift is neither prayer nor a gift at all but rather a species of neglect. As quoted above: “Nam qui ad orandum ecclesiam ingressus inter uerba obsecrationis consuetudinem superfluae cogitationis ab animo repellere negligit quasi dominum quaerens minus parata secum aromata detulit.”¹⁸⁸ (One who enters a church to pray, and neglects to drive away from his mind its usual superfluous thoughts while he

¹⁸⁵ CCSL 122, p. 247, l. 27.

¹⁸⁶ Martin, 89, although I might translate “mundissima” finest to avoid terminological confusion.

¹⁸⁷ As DeGregorio implies. See above, n. 13.

¹⁸⁸ CCSL 122, p. 247, ll. 49-52.

pours forth his words of entreaty, is like a person seeking the Lord without bringing with him the spices he has prepared.)¹⁸⁹

In this way prayer both expresses and creates devotion. Bede presents the women who seek Jesus' tomb as a model, but the way that he consistently displaces "devotio amoris" with the good works surrounding prayer in his discussion suggests that he understands devotion much as he understands humility and the response of *gratia*. That is, devotion is not primarily a feeling, but is the dutiful, moral response to gifts that is expressed through good works and pure thoughts. Bede's audience is asked to emulate the women's devotion by adopting the women's story as a model for how they should approach the Eucharist, and to seek their Lord with the same devotion. But in order for them to do this, the order of events is backward: the women come to seek the Lord because they are devoted. Bede's audience grows in devotion because, responding to God's gifts, they come.

HOMILY I.22 AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF BELONGING

Homily I.22 is one of Bede's most detailed and psychological explications of prayer, and thus is an excellent way to bring together and conclude the preceding discussion of prayer. In this Lenten homily Bede lays out the way that prayer is an essential expression of the dependent relationship of humans upon God, complemented by God's reciprocal responsibility to hear the prayers of those whom he has deigned to call his own, and he situates prayer within what we might call the "psychology of repentance." Although focusing more explicitly on individual prayer than the other homilies, Homily I.22 situates prayer both within the community and within the individual. Crucially, Homily I.22 also indicates the way that prayer is the essential means toward transformation from not-belonging to belonging, from slavery to sins instigated by the devil to obedience to the commands of Christ wherein lies full humanity. Complicating this, the homily also apparently presents a complex "psychology" of sin and repentance that, for modern readers, is too easily read through a post-Romantic interiorization of the "true" self as the source of action.

¹⁸⁹ Martin, 90.

The pericope for this homily is Matthew 15: 21-28, in which a gentile woman asks Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. Patristic authorities primarily represent the gentile woman as an example of humility.¹⁹⁰ For Bede, the gentile woman affords an opportunity to talk about prayer in a far more detailed way than others do. It is a nicely balanced and deceptively simple homily. The gentile woman comes to Jesus to beg him to heal her demon-possessed daughter. On the literal level of explication, this shows, for Bede, that she believes Jesus is God. She manifests this virtue of faith through three more virtues, patience, constancy,¹⁹¹ and humility. As a result, those around her, including Jesus, recognize that she deserves (*meruit*)¹⁹² to have her request granted. On the allegorical level, the mother stands first for the Church, who pleads for her “daughter,” any soul in the Church who has fallen under the influence of malign spirits. Since the Church cannot heal this soul herself, she prays for the “interius inspirando”¹⁹³ (interior inspiring) of Christ and enlists the help of the saints (represented in the literal story by the disciples) to gain her petition. As the church manifests the same virtues manifested by the mother, her petition is granted. Secondly, the mother stands for the individual praying for the healing of his “daughter,” his own demon-dominated conscience. As he prays with tears, begs the saints (again represented by the disciples) for help, and manifests his faith, humility, and constancy, God may grant his request, restoring serenity of mind and purity of works, transforming him in the process from gentile dog to Israelite sheep. Bede ends by emphasizing the necessity of congruence between word, thought, and deed: for prayer to be efficacious it must be prayed with attention. An individual’s thoughts must agree with what his mouth is saying, and that this is best done if everything a person does and says reflect the desired purity.

¹⁹⁰ There are several Augustinian sermons on the topic (77, 77a, 77b). Sermon 77 is about humility, 77a is about conversion, and 77b is about praying, although Augustine switches straight over to Mt. 7:7-8 (“Ask and you shall receive”) to talk about prayer. However, he does mention the idea, found in Bede, of the woman being transformed through Christ’s “training” her in persistence from a dog to a sheep. Jerome makes her an example of humility, patience, and faith (*Commentariorum in Matheum*, CCSL 77, bk. II, ll. 1536-1601).

¹⁹¹ It might seem that patience and constancy are very close to being the same thing, although Bede treats constancy and humility together. In fact, Jerome only lists patience; Augustine emphasizes humility but also mentions perseverance. Later adaptations of the homily, of which Ælfric’s CHII.8 is an indirect example, also drop constancy.

¹⁹² CCSL 122, p. 157, l. 62.

¹⁹³ CCSL 122, p. 158, l. 94. *Inspiravi* is the same verb used in Genesis 2:7 when God breathes life into the man.

The homily presents several layers of complexity. While Bede states that the mother's actions reveal her inner disposition of belief,¹⁹⁴ interior disposition is de-centered as a motivation as Bede applies her example to his audience. Toward the end of the homily he talks at length about attention in prayer. When he gets to the application at the end his emphasis is not at all on the interior disposition that motivated the mother's petition, but rather on the importance of not letting one's mind wander as one is repeatedly praying. This being the case, how exactly is prayer an exterior manifestation of either an individual's interior disposition or his virtues? As also happens in Homily II.10, prayer and the motivation to pray seem to work one way for the character in the story and quite another way for the audience.

Furthermore, even though the woman seems motivated by interior disposition to seek the Lord as an individual, Bede's first and most natural allegorization reads her as the Church as a whole rather than an individual Christian. The first allegorization works on the level of doctrinal teaching to express the new relationship between Jesus, the Jews, and the inclusion of gentiles in a reconstituted Israel. It explains the role of the Church as a whole in the salvation of the souls entrusted to her keeping. On this level, the allegory "works" in a straightforward fashion. The timeless and institutional Church, as a guardian of the true faith, shows her fidelity through particular instances of petition. In this sense, belief comes before any particular instance of petition. But in the second allegorization the two figures of mother and daughter represent one person, and the allegory does not so much present doctrine as it does practice – how to repent of sin and ask for pardon. It therefore becomes possible to read the allegory as a particular type of interior psychological representation of the individual struggling to express his "true" self as determined by interior desire.

Finally, the allegoresis presents an apparent challenge to my argument about the nature of prayer in Bede's homilies. I have been arguing that prayer in Bede is two things. First, it is primarily situated within a reciprocal *gratia*-relationship with God in which prayer and good deeds are interior and exterior enactments of God's gifts. This means that in prayer the self is understood and constituted through its imagined relationships to God and through adopting the

¹⁹⁴ For example, Bede says, "She named the Lord, 'son of David,' so it is evident that she believed that he was true human being and true God" (215). He goes on to explain how further of her actions show that she trusted Jesus and had no uncertainty concerning his divine power. "Cum enim eundem dominum quem filium Dauid appellat patet profecto quia uerum hunc hominem uerum credit et Deum" (CCSL, vol. 122, p. 156, ll. 9-11).

prayers of the community of saints and living Christians. As a result, and this is my second point, the self is primarily performed through enacting prayer and good deeds that create and reinforce these relationships. Change in exterior action leads to interior change. This makes the interior attributes of the mind or heart (feeling, emotion) not the *causes* of exterior change, but the products. We would expect, then, to see an emphasis on *doing* (performing devotion, as in Homily II.10, or performing repentance) rather than on *being* (being devoted, as the women in II.10 are, or being penitent). An initial reading of the repentant sinner seems to place emphasis on interior states as the source of repentance and of the “true self” that the penitent must reform and enact.

As in Homily II.10, Bede initially situates prayer in the reciprocal relationship of lordship and petitioning. This is evident from the beginning, where the problem is that the woman, as a gentile, has no apparent right to bring her petitions before Jesus, being “gentilis a diuinorum eloquiorum funditus erat segregata doctrinis.”¹⁹⁵ (as a gentile ... completely separated from the teachings of the divine thoughts.)¹⁹⁶ Bede continues, explaining that, although this is the case, “nec tamen illis quas eadem eloquia praedicant priuata uirtutibus.”¹⁹⁷)she was nevertheless not deprived of the virtues which those thoughts proclaim.)¹⁹⁸ The passive “nec ... priuata” indicates that those virtues were something given her of which she could have been deprived. She manifests these four virtues (faith, patience, constancy, and humility) in her subsequent petitioning of Jesus to heal her daughter. The manifestation of these virtues in her petition serves to prove to those watching, the disciples and the Jews, that the woman deserved to have her request granted because, fundamentally, she recognized that Jesus was God and recognized her position in relationship to him.¹⁹⁹ That is, the woman’s virtues serve to gain for her the ability to have her petition heard. At the same time, this is not something she presumes upon. When Jesus implies she is a dog, that is, *not* one of his own, Bede takes this as a kind of test of her constancy

¹⁹⁵ CCSL 122, p. 156, ll. 4-5.

¹⁹⁶ Martin, 215.

¹⁹⁷ CCSL 122, p. 156, ll. 5-6.

¹⁹⁸ Martin, 215.

¹⁹⁹ “Hence from the benevolent Savior ... she rightly deserved to hear: ‘O woman, your faith is great. Let it be done to you as you wish.’ Indeed, she had great enough faith ...” (Ibid., p. 217). “Vnde recte a pio saluatore ... *O mulier magna est fides tua; fiat tibi sicut uis.* Magnam quippe satis habebat fidem ...” (CCSL, vol. 122, p. 157-8, ll. 60-1, 63-4).

and humility. She “confirmed the Lord’s statement, but nevertheless she did not rest from the audacity of her request.”²⁰⁰ She responds as she does because she relied upon the largess of Jesus’ grace: “Being unworthy to be refreshed by the meal of the Lord’s entire teaching, which the Jews had for their use, she nevertheless supposed that however small the grace imparted to her by the Lord might be, it could be sufficient for her salvation.”²⁰¹ Paradoxically, it is her humble recognition that she has nothing to offer him to make him hear her petition, that she is thrown fully upon his grace, which she nevertheless believes is enough for her, that enables Jesus to extend his healing to her daughter. In contrast to Mary, this woman thus comes from outside the *gratia* relationship, presuming to make her petition on the basis of her four virtues, but knowing that this is not enough to oblige Jesus to respond to her request. Implicit is the idea that, because of her belief, the woman is transformed from a dog to a sheep, from one with no right to ask favors, to one with a right to ask.²⁰²

Bede’s first allegorization focuses on the role of the Church in bringing salvation for the souls entrusted to her care. The woman represents the Church, praying for “*anima quaelibet est in ecclesia malignorum magis spirituum deceptionibus quam conditoris sui mancipata praeceptis.*”²⁰³ (any soul in the Church that is delivered up to the deceptions of malign spirits rather than to her Maker’s commands.)²⁰⁴ The “soul’s” central problem is that she has fallen under the influence of devils rather than obeying the commands of her “Maker,” who has authority over her.²⁰⁵ Here Bede understands that prayer works objectively; it cannot work without Christ’s intervention:

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 217. “*domini quidem sententiam confirmat nec a suae tamen petitionis improbitate quiescit*” (CCSL, vol. 122, p. 157, ll. 48-50).

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 217. “*quae indigna quidem sit integris dominicae doctrinae qua Iudaei utebantur epulis refici sed quantulacumque ei a domino foret inperita gratia hanc sibi ad salutem sufficere posse putauerit*” (CCSL, vol. 122, p. 157, ll. 57-60).

²⁰² Augustine also emphasizes the idea of her transformation in Sermon 77, where her perseverance effects her transformation and 77b, where the instantaneous nature of her transformation is emphasized.

²⁰³ CCSL 122, p. 158, ll. 90-2.

²⁰⁴ Martin, 218.

²⁰⁵ This reflects the ransom theory of atonement, which is explored in more detail in its relationship to Ælfric’s teaching in the next chapter.

pro qua necesse est ecclesia mater dominum sollicita interpellat ut quam ipso foris monendo obsecrando increpando non ualet ille interior inspirando corrigat atque ab errorum tenebris conuersam ad agnitionem uerae lucis excitet.²⁰⁶

[The Church, as a solicitous mother, must intercede for this soul so that since the Church is not capable of converting such a one by warning, entreating and rebuking her outwardly, Christ may convert her by inspiring her interiorly, and, when she has been turned from the darkness of error, he may rouse her to the acknowledgement of the true light.]²⁰⁷

To be transformed, the deceived person must be brought to an awareness of her situation through the inspiration of Christ. It looks as though the “interior” state of inspiration by Christ brings about the exterior transformation. We can see how interior inspiration works in the next allegory, in which Bede shifts the allegorical signification so that the mother represents “quis nostrum”,²⁰⁸ [one of us]²⁰⁹ and the demon-possessed daughter represents that one’s defiled conscience. Up to this point in the homily, Bede’s presentation of the figure of the mother, whose perseveres in²¹⁰ her “mentem” (mind) in entreaty, whose prayer springs from “intus gerat pectoris constantiam,”²¹¹ (constancy she bore within her inmost heart)²¹² and whose requests (as the Church) will be heard “si mentem ab intentione proposita non mutauerit,”²¹³ (if she does not turn aside her mind from its proposed intention²¹⁴) seem to challenge my contention that prayer in Bede works through exterior actions. Furthermore, Bede says that the Church *cannot* convert an errant soul outwardly, but that Christ must convert her inwardly, thereby seeming to indicate that the individual’s action springs from interior disposition.

But what does this look like as Bede applies it to his audience? The second allegorization answers this question, and shows that Bede subtly shifts his emphasis onto action. Bede is *not*

²⁰⁶ CCSL 122, p. 158, ll. 92-6.

²⁰⁷ Martin, 218.

²⁰⁸ CCSL 122, p. 159, l. 107.

²⁰⁹ Martin, 219.

²¹⁰ “[N]e sic quidem ab instantia precandi desistit uel a sperando pietatis munere mentem reuocat,” CCSL 122, p. 157, ll. 44-6.

²¹¹ CCSL 122, p. 157, ll. 56-7.

²¹² Martin, 217.

²¹³ CCSL 122, p. 159, l. 104.

²¹⁴ Martin, 219.

picturing a psychic split between consciousness and conscience, a body inhabited by dueling impulses, an id and a superego that the ego must choose between. Rather, Bede imagines the soul more as a territory controlled either by devils or by God.²¹⁵ He imagines the sinner as one seduced away from the commands of his true Lord, “*cogitationem de corde progenitam diabolica*”²¹⁶ (by thoughts born of the devil’s heart),²¹⁷ putting himself into the false position of serving his Lord’s enemy. The individual’s primary problem is that he has responded to the thoughts (*cogitatio*) of the devil as though he were subject to him. In this case, action does not follow interior disposition but instead follows a relationship, that is, the commands of one’s lord, imagined as an external force. Action, both verbal and physical, is not an expression of one’s true interior self perceived as an independent subject; rather, action is a response to and acting out of one’s position as a subject *to* – in this case, either God or the devil. From Bede’s perspective, responding to the devil is a sort of madness because the person under discussion is “one of us,” a subject of God. Christ’s inspiration “converts” this person to recognize his crime. His conscience is polluted²¹⁸ – but Christ causes him to become aware of his sin and of his devilish tormentor. The individual’s pollution seems to come as he recognizes the disjuncture between what is and what ought to be. His position is “in the church,” but in his state he is devil-dominated.

The moment of conviction is described as a moment in which the individual recognizes, not his error, not his incoherence or insincerity, not his failure to live by his best impulses, not even his guilt, but his crime.²¹⁹ Naming sin “*reatus*” situates it within a legalistic relationship typical within penitential discourse. The individual has trespassed against his lord, not against himself, by madly enduring the devil’s harassment rather than obeying the commands of his Lord.²²⁰ As mentioned in Chapter 1, the penitential relationship conceptualizing God as Judge

²¹⁵ I.e., a psychomachia rather than a psychology.

²¹⁶ CCSL 122, p. 159, l. 111.

²¹⁷ Martin, 219.

²¹⁸ “*pollutam*,” CCSL 122, p. 159, l. 109.

²¹⁹ *Reatus*, l. 119, primarily judicial guilt for the offense of which he stands charged rather than the subjective feeling of guilt. See Lewis and Short, but also see Bede’s use of the word, which is judicial or assessed guilt. This invokes penitential paradigms of imagining God as judge and sin as a crime against God.

²²⁰ Note the earlier formulation of this same idea: *malignorum magis spirituum deceptionibus quam conditoris sui mancipata praeceptis*” (CCSL, vol. 122, p. 158, ll. 91-2). The devil has no authority to give commands; his influence is spurious.

changes what the human has to offer from a gift to restitution, the payment for a crime. Bede accordingly acknowledges the disruption of the *gratia*-relationship as the petitioner seeks to be reinstated into it:

Ideoque necesse est talis ut reatum sum cognouerit mox ad preces lacrimasque confugiat sanctorum crebras intercessionem et auxilia quaerat qui pro animae eius salute rogantes domino dicant, precamur domine *miserator et misericors patiens et multae miserationis* dimitte eam quia clamat post nos dimitte reatum et dona gratiam.²²¹

[as soon as such a one has recognized his crime, he must flee to petitions and tears; he must seek the frequent intercessions and help of the saints, so that asking for the salvation of his soul, they may say to the Lord, “We entreat you, Lord who are compassionate and merciful, patient and full of compassion, pardon her because she is crying after us. Pardon her crimes and give her grace.”]²²²

But Bede quickly moves back into a *gratia*-framed relationship with God as Benefactor, for this is where transformation is to be found:

indubia mente de largitoris summi bonitate confidat quia qui de latrone confessorem de persecutore apostolum de publicano euangelistam de lapidibus potuit facere filios Abrahae ipse etiam canem inpudentissimum conuertere Israheliticam posit in ouem; cui merito donatae castitatis etiam uitae aeternae pascua largiatur, id est peccatorem conuersum a uia sua mala iustum facere dignetur quem merito bonae actionis ad regnum caeleste perducatur.²²³

[with his mind free of doubt let him trust in the goodness of the supreme Benefactor, for the one who could make a confessor from a robber, an apostle from a persecutor, an evangelist from a publican, and who could make sons for Abraham from stones, could turn even the most shameless dog into an Israelite sheep. He may even bestow upon him, as a reward for chastity attained, the pasture of eternal life – that is, he may deign to make

²²¹ CCSL 122, p. 159, ll. 118-124.

²²² Martin, 219.

²²³ CCSL 122, p. 159, ll. 129-37.

righteous a sinner who has turned from his evil way, and as a reward for his good action he may lead him to the heavenly kingdom.]²²⁴

The things that distinguish a confessor from a robber, or a dog from a sheep are the things they do in response to God's *gratia*. In *gratia*, God "deign[s] to make righteous," and the sinner responds in *gratia* by turning from his evil way. And it is what they do in this turning – attain chastity, turn from evil ways, or petition in humility and with persistence – that allows God to give the further *gratia* of the heavenly kingdom.

Central to this transformation is repeated, persistent prayer and the enactment of the postures and affect that go with it. This prayer is not accompanied by sorrow (inner affect) but by tears (an outward performance). The one praying for the intercession of the saints is prostrate²²⁵ because that is the position in which a person begs. His prostration is a result of his begging, of his realization of his crime, not of his *intimus affectus*, which then, rather than a cause of his action, is an accompaniment to it. Feelings and thoughts are important for Bede. But as his ensuing discussion of the mechanics of prayer indicates, these things follow the fact, the gift, of prayer. Prayer is situated within a relational context – the sinner responds to Christ, understands his crime, and begs to be cleared of his crime and have the relationship restored through the repeated action of prayer. It is because of this that prayer is able to be transformational.

Bede ends the sermon by emphasizing the necessity of thoughts matching what one is praying. For prayer to be transformational, it must be integrated into both actions and thoughts. The necessary persistence in prayer does not have quite the same function in each of these examples – the woman as the Church, and the woman as an individual sinner. In the first case, it works objectively to bring the sinner to the position of recognizing the pollution of her conscience. In the second case, the repeated action of prayer is transformative in and of itself (as a response to God's grace). Bede shows this by ending the sermon with a couple of practical points on the act of praying itself. First, he emphasizes the necessary congruence between words and thoughts: "Notandum interea quod haec orandi pertinacia ita solum meretur esse fructifera, si quod ore precamur hoc etiam mente meditemur neque alio clamor labiorum quam cogitationum

²²⁴ Martin, 219-20.

²²⁵ Martin, 219. "Pronus" (CCSL 122, p. 159, l. 125).

scindatur intuitus.”²²⁶ ([T]his tenacity in praying can only deserve to bear fruit if what we ask for with our mouth we also meditate on in our mind, and if the crying of our lips is not cut apart in another direction from the focus of our thoughts.)²²⁷ Bede demands purity in prayer, that one’s thoughts match one’s actions. But it is worth noting again that, for Bede, the *act* of praying (the words) comes before interior thoughts. He assumes, with his monastic audience in mind, that they are already enacting prayer, and that these actions of prayer must be then interiorized so that thoughts match the action. The one praying must discipline his mind to do what his body is already doing. It is this congruence between actions and thoughts that then allow prayer to become transformative. All of a person’s good works form the basis of that person’s prayer for salvation, entry into the heavenly kingdom, but they also help to realize that salvation in the present life. As these just actions are interiorized, they are God’s means to effect the prayed-for transformation, to expel the “tumults of depraved thoughts” and loosen the bonds of sin. All the actions of one’s life must be a preparation for prayer in order to attain this congruence between thoughts and words: “Quaecumque enim saepius agere loqui uel audire solemus eadem necesse est saepius ad animum quasi solitam propriamque recurrant ad sedem.”²²⁸ (Whatever things we are accustomed to do, speak, or hear most often, these same things will necessarily return to our mind most often as though to their accustomed and proper place.)²²⁹ In a petitionary model, preparation for petition easily slides into being petition itself.

Bede recognizes that the battle to control one’s thoughts is brought about “antiqui hostis instinctu,”²³⁰ (at the instigation of the ancient enemy)²³¹ and that the ability to pray is itself, like any other good deed, a gift: “Sciens enim utilitatem orandi et inuidens hominibus gratiam inpetrandi.”²³² (He (the enemy) is aware of the benefit of praying, and he envies human beings the gift of having their requests granted.)²³³ So Bede returns to the idea of the gift: all that humans have, even the transformational ability to pray itself, comes from the grace of the

²²⁶ CCSL 122, p. 160, ll. 142-5.

²²⁷ Martin, 220.

²²⁸ CCSL 122, p. 160, ll. 167-70.

²²⁹ Martin, 221.

²³⁰ CCSL 122, p. 160, l. 150.

²³¹ Martin, 220.

²³² CCSL 122, p. 160, l. 151-2.

²³³ Martin, 220.

supreme Benefactor. This gift is one that is transformative as humans use it. When, in humility they recognize that central fact of their relationship – that they can make no demands of God based on their own merits or anything they could offer to God – they enter into what is to Bede an astounding relationship with God, marked by a notable freedom to persist in prayer, to demand that he hear their requests.

CONCLUSION

Prayer within the *gratia*-relationship brings together both prayer as petition and gift, and prayer as transformation, as both are folded into the concerns of a relationship with God. This relationship is primarily formed within the already-praying church, as individuals place themselves within the community of God’s servants and adopt the prayers of this community. At the same time, in the way that prayer enacts the *gratia* of God’s gifts, enacting and thereby returning them to him, prayer is also transformational. It brings the precators into a position God’s favor and transforms them into beings worthy in word, thought, and deed, of being favored by God.

In a way, the method of using formal prayer as a means of transformation of the self seems close to the idea presented by Scott DeGregorio of King Alfred’s “textualization” of himself. Arguing against reading Asser’s life of King Alfred as “a string of textual fictions,” DeGregorio “outlines a context for understanding Alfred’s spirituality as a functional process of living texts, or of ‘textualizing’ the self.”²³⁴ In keeping with the ancient idea that what people read is not something separate from their own experience, but is their experience,²³⁵ people should live out what they hear.²³⁶ This can easily be misunderstood to emphasize the mind as primary creator of the self, since now we commonly view reading as primarily a mental exercise. DeGregorio is not, in this case, talking about prayer, which, as I have been arguing, is a different activity from reading. Although formal prayer is ultimately text-based in the way *we* experience it (that is, after all, our primary mode of access to long-gone cultures) in practice, prayer is rarely experienced as written text and tends to move from generation to generation through oral

²³⁴ DeGregorio, “Texts, *Topoi*, and the Self,” 76.

²³⁵ DeGregorio, “Texts, *Topoi*, and the Self,” 81.

²³⁶ He cites Gregory in support of this, *Moralia in Job* I.33 (CCSL 143, p. 43, ll. 16-18).

transmission.²³⁷ Bede himself emphasizes the communal and active nature of prayer. People learned the Psalms, for instance, as much from praying them as from reading them, and even private prayer is imagined as taking place within the Church and the community of saints. Another frame for considering prayer as Bede understands it is within the context of ritual action. The rituals of the Divine Office with its prayers, its actions, its silences, and of the monastic day, with its room for work, communal prayer, personal prayer, and reading create a ritual frame in which its participants experience and participate in the creation of time, the world, themselves.

Rather than underlying meaning, ritual emphasizes doing. Because early Christianity did in fact emphasize the necessity for interior transformation, early Christian ritual performance raises interesting questions regarding the tension between ritual enactments and questions of sincerity, a tension present in all cultures,²³⁸ and a tension that we see within Bede's work as well. Modern studies of ritual tend to place an "overly subjectivist and individualist emphasis on meaning and interaction," according to Adam B. Seligman. For Seligman this is problematic: "Such a view sees the 'essential' or constitutive arena of action (often read as intention) as something within the social actor or actors, with the external, formal ritual seen as but the marker of these internal processes." In contrast, he says, "Ritual ... is about *doing* more than about saying something."²³⁹

Bede's work on prayer speaks to this tension. He emphasizes that petitions should be made with "simplici intentione"; he places further stress on devotion, and makes the point that what fills one's mind should reflect the words on one's lips. In these ways, Bede seems curiously *sincere*. But this would imply that, for Bede, congruence between words and deeds is primarily important as an indicator of interior disposition, that people's interior understanding and devotion should come first. This is the way Frantzen tends to read this type of evidence in his search for the affective individual before Anselm.²⁴⁰ Arguing that "affective piety" is to be found in the Anglo-Saxon penitentials, Frantzen says,

²³⁷ This is one reason why there is so little early literature on prayer theory or praxis. There are, of course, prayerbooks, an innovation that apparently began in England; these collections of prayers themselves gave no explicit theory of prayer and would not have been a common part of the normal experience of prayer.

²³⁸ Adam B. Seligman, et al. *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 9.

²³⁹ Seligman, et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 4, ital. orig.

²⁴⁰ Frantzen, "Spirituality and Devotion in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials."

Contrition is not something that happens to the penitent but is rather an affect he or she creates, as the focus on humility and on the weeping voice suggests. Affectivity is the translation of idea into expressive gesture, and this moment is surely an affective one. If the genuineness of a late-medieval spiritual experience is confirmed by its external signs – by its affectivity, in other words – we should extend the same criterion to the early evidence, where we find it works just as well.

Frantzen's language is slightly unclear here, however. Whose idea is being translated into "expressive gesture"? He seems to assume it is the penitent's. Indeed, if we are going to judge the "genuineness" of spiritual experience (including repentance), the criterion is usually some expectation of sincerity – i.e., that the "idea" comes from the interior state of the penitent himself, that his weeping springs from his own guilt and sadness which motivates his confession. But this is to judge the genuineness of spiritual experience by modern criteria of sincerity.

In this chapter, I have argued that, for Bede, the ritual actions and words come first and are the elements out of which a coherent "self" is constructed. There is no particular primary interior "self" who loves or is devoted to God before being transformed by God's *gratia*, given through the "good deeds" of prayer, almsgiving, etc. that people are given to perform. God's way of transforming people is through good works for them to carry out. Bede assumes that the words and actions of prayer come first. That it is important to him that the words and deeds are internalized makes it easy to read him as sharing an essentially modern conception of sincerity. But Bede never conceptualizes congruence between thoughts, words, and deeds (which I have also called "integrated prayer") as "sincerity," but rather within the ritual category of purity: cleanness, lack of defilement. The iterative recitation and actions of prayer – adopting words which are *not* one's own – gives prayer its purifying potential. In fact, to pray "sincerely" would defeat the purpose, for, in prayer, the precator would merely re-represent the self to the self rather than using the words given by God to transform a dog to a sheep, a sinner to a saint. For Bede, purity is achieved as the individual becomes more integrated into the believing community, and as the thoughts and deeds of those praying become more coherently integrated to the words of prayer. For Bede, God's *gratia* is indeed what makes people fully human because God's *gratia* is what gives them the means to become human.

CHAPTER 3

ÆLFRIC AND THE COMMUNITY OF PRAYER

*Eall swa gelice se ðe gelyfð wiglunum
oððe be fugelum . oððe be fnorum .
oððe be horsum . oððe be hundum .
ne bið he na cristen . ac bið for-cuð wiðer-saca .
Ne sceal nan man cepan be dagum
on hwilcum dæge he fare . oððe on hwylcum he gecyrre .
forðan þe god gesceop ealle ða seofan dagas .
þe yrnað on þære wucan oð þysre worulde geendunge .
Ac seðe hwider faran wille . singe his paternoster .
and credan . gif he cunne . and clypige to his dryhten .
and bletsige hine sylfne . and siðige orsorh
þurh godes gescyldnysse . butan ðæra sceoccena wiglunga.¹*

[Also likewise he who believes in sorceries, either by birds or by sneezings or by horses or by hounds, he is not at all Christian, but is a despised apostate. Nor may any man observe according to days, on which day he travel or on which he returns; because God made all the seven days which run through the week until this world's ending. But he who wishes to travel should sing his Paternoster and Creed, if he knows them, and call to his Lord, and bless himself, and travel safely through God's protection without the devil's sorceries.]

My initial interest in Anglo-Saxon prayer grew out of the specific passage in Ælfric's famous sermon *De auguriis*, quoted above. In it, Ælfric preaches against all forms of pagan practice, advocating that his audience turn to God instead.² Striking in this passage is the way a

¹ LSI.xvii, ll. 88-99.

² Since this sermon largely draws from sources by Caesarius of Arles, Martin of Braga, and others, it is somewhat doubtful whether the practices enumerated were practiced in Anglo-Saxon England. See Audrey Meaney, "Ælfric's Use of His Sources in His Homily on Auguries," *English Studies* 66.6 (1985): 477-95. Meaney believes, however,

sermon *against* sorcery and superstition seems to advocate a superstitious, charm-like use of the Paternoster, Creed, and the sign of the cross for protection while traveling. Charms are substituted out, and the Paternoster et al. are substituted in, in what seems to be clear evidence of syncretism.³ Central to the perception that they are used like charms is the fact that the content of these prayers has little to no relation to their use – the LP is not about safety while traveling; the Creed (technically not a prayer at all) is a doctrinal précis. Indeed, this seems to be prayer of the most objectively efficacious nature, working by formula or gesture alone to confer protection automatically.

A similar moment occurs at the end of CH I.31, *Passio S. Bartholomei Apostoli*, where Ælfric again preaches against “unalyfed” practices for healing the sick. Christians are not to seek healing from “nanum stane: ne æt nanum treowe buton hit sy halig rodetacen. ne æt nanre stowe buton hit sy hali godes hus. se þe elles deð he begæð untwylice hæþengyld”⁴ (any stone, nor from any tree unless it be the holy cross-sign, nor from any place, unless it be the holy house of God. He who does otherwise, he undoubtedly engages in idolatry). And later: “Ne sceal nan man mid galdre wyrte besingan ac mid godes wordum hi gebletsian 7 swa picgan”⁵ (Nor shall anyone enchant herbs with charms, but with God’s words bless them and so partake). As *De Auguriis* seems to use the LP and Creed as a traveling charm, here God’s house is substituted in for pagan holy places, and God’s words for unallowed charms. Although the source of power has evidently changed with Christianization, the underlying way of thinking has not. But what is ironic – and is part of the reason I quote *De auguriis* above at such length – is that, in the very passages scholars point to as evidence of syncretism, Ælfric himself preaches adamantly *against* the combining of pagan and Christian systems, insisting that people *not* engage in pagan practices, and that one who does “ne bið he na cristen” but “wiðersaca” of Christ.

These passages, however, should be situated within the larger context of Ælfric’s teaching, both his more explicit teaching on prayer and the way he imagines the relationship between humans and God enacted by prayer. Ælfric begins the *Catholic Homilies* with a brief

that “we can accept what he has to say about idolatrous practices as referring to things current in the society that he knew” (495).

³ For a summary of this position and a more nuanced reading of the “syncretism” in Anglo-Saxon charms, see Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*.

⁴ CHI.31, ll. 313-5.

⁵ CHI.31, ll. 323-5.

history of the world up through Christ. Rather than invoking gift and gratitude through the concept of *gratia* (OE *gifu*) Ælfric's account grapples with the related theological conundrum of free will. *Gratia* more obviously invokes a reciprocal relationship than does *liberum arbitrium* or, in Old English, *agen cyre*, since *liber* emphasizes the freedom of one's choice (while *gratia*, paradoxically invokes the constraint of reciprocity), and *agen* emphasizes that the choice is one's own to make. Thus, it is harder to see how reciprocity is at work in CHI.1; in fact, Ælfric's emphasis on God as Creator initially looks strikingly like the Augustinian formulation: all gifts come freely from God while all obligation is on the side of the human *þeowas*,⁶ who (by virtue of this status) are not free to leave if they so choose, *agen cyre* or no. But as we will see, Ælfric uses this concept of freely-chosen service to God to place humans and God within a reciprocal relationship in which God rewards such freely-chosen obedience.

With the relational frame established by CHI.1 in place, we will look at Ælfric's most extended discussions of prayer, which occur in three homilies: CHI.19 represents his explication of a particular prayer (the Lord's Prayer); CHI.18 explains the reason for a particular period of prayer (Rogationtide) and focuses on what people should ask for in prayer; CHI.10, a Lenten homily, explicates an example from the Gospels of someone petitioning God, which Ælfric then directly applies to his audience. Ælfric's explicit teachings on prayer derive primarily from Augustine and Gregory, whose works reflect Neo-platonic structures of thought to a great extent.⁷ Ælfric's adaptations of these teachings systematically remove most of the Neo-platonic abstractions, replacing them with a coherently relational view of the bond between humans and God. As he established in CHI.1, this bond is formed through human obedience to God, which God rewards. As a corollary, prayer becomes more thoroughly objectively efficacious than it is in either Augustine or Gregory. An outgrowth of this is that the formulae of prayer gain greater power both as words given by God, and as prayer is conceived as an action the performance of which places precaters in a particular relationship with God – his obedient servants, deserving of God's protection and worthy of future reward. For Ælfric, the central tension and choice in human life is between subservience to the devil and obedience to God. This tension structures

⁶ CHI.1, l. 77.

⁷ Augustine's *De sermone Domini in monte* (c. 393) is one of his earlier works, and as such is more overtly Neo-platonic than works from the later part of his career.

his idea of how prayer functions, so that prayer becomes, at its most essential, about whom one prays to, and whom one obeys. The act of praying itself, almost secondary to the content, becomes a statement of allegiance and a means to tap into the power of God. In addition, the orientation of Ælfric's prayer shifts strongly away from *sanctus* toward *halig*, a vision of communal wholeness and salvation oriented around a gift-network binding together all members of society as brothers with mutual ties of prayer and alms that similarly bind humans to God.

The theory of prayer we see emerging within these homilies is one in which prayers serve as an objectively efficacious means of expressing the precators' allegiance to God instead of the devil – that is, Christians choose to serve their rightful Lord, the one who made and redeemed them, rather than the false (in both the sense that he is the wrong one, and in the sense that he is treacherous) lord, the devil. Allegiance to God is characterized by both obedience to him and the fact that God is the one the precators turn to for protection and healing. In this relationship gifts, comprehensively defined as prayer, almsgiving, and other good works,⁸ serve to strengthen the bonds between God and his people. As a natural result of this service those who declare themselves to be in God's kingdom while in this life will find themselves rewarded with inclusion in God's kingdom in eternity. For Ælfric the human relationship with God also has implications for humans' social relationships with each other, not only in the fact that they should live at peace with each other, but in the way that prayer and almsgiving serve to bind together various strata of human society within an gift-relationship with God.

CATHOLIC HOMILY I.1

Like Bede, Ælfric (c. 950-c. 1010) was one of the most learned men of his day. His large body of work, much of it vernacular sermons,⁹ manifests a similar concern for pastoral care as

⁸ CHI.3: “Ure gastlican lac sint ure gebedu. 7 lofsang. 7 huselhalgung 7 gehwilce oðre lac þe we gode offriað. þa we sceolun mid gesibsumere heortan. 7 broðorlicere lufe gode betæcan” (ll. 164-6) [Our spiritual offerings are our prayers and hymns and attendance at mass and whatever other offerings that we give to God, which we should entrust to God with peaceful hearts and brotherly love.]

⁹ Ælfric has two main sermon collections of 40 homilies each organized around the liturgical year, the *Catholic Homilies I* and *II*. He rewrote some of these over the course of his life (for one example of his types of revisions, see Robert Upchurch's article on the re-writing of CHI.17, “A Big Dog Barks: Ælfric of Eynsham's Indictment of the English Pastorate and *Witan*,” *Speculum* 85 (2010): 505-33), wrote a further 40 or so homilies, and wrote an additional series mainly focusing on saints' lives.

does Bede's, and, like Bede, Ælfric's work remained influential long after his death.¹⁰ Ælfric's sermon series, the *Catholic Homilies*, was unusual in its day both in the scope of the collection and in his development of an Old English prose style for preaching.¹¹ His series was an ambitious undertaking designed to be distributed throughout England in order to make orthodox teaching available to the unlearned – both those who did not adequately understand Latin, and those who could not read in any language. Thus, Ælfric's homilies are largely pitched to a much broader audience than Bede's, not merely to monks and nuns but also to lay people.¹² Like Bede, Ælfric situates prayer within a reciprocal relationship between humans and God, in which humans cooperate with God's grace for their own salvation.¹³ And, like Bede, Ælfric begins his own sermon series by clarifying the relationship between humans and God. While Bede does this by focusing the Advent homilies on the figure of Mary as a model of one who receives and uses God's gifts, Ælfric does so by including an "extra" homily outside of the liturgical cycle that begins with creation and gives a brief summary of human history up to Christ.

Indeed, Ælfric presents a much different God/human relationship that does Bede, one more apparently oriented around power and fiat, without the same sense of *gratia*-enabled intimacy with God. In fact, Ælfric's account of creation seems in some ways to emphasize human distance from God, who is presented as the powerful creator and disposer of all things – "ealra cyninga cyning. 7 ealra hlaforda hlaford. ... ne mæg nan þinc his willan wiðstandan"¹⁴

¹⁰ See Mary Swan, "Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* in the Twelfth Century," in *Rewriting Old English in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Mary Swan and Elaine M. Treharne, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 30 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 62-82. For an example of his influence following a particular homily (CHI.14) see Mary Swan, "Old English Made New: One Catholic Homily and Its Reuses," *Leeds Studies in English* n.s. 28 (1997), 1-18.

¹¹ See Milton McC. Gatch, "The Achievement of Aelfric and his Colleagues in European Perspective," in *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Bernard Huppé (Albany: University of New York Press, 1978), 43-73: "No one before Ælfric or in the century after him produced or attempted to assemble in the vernaculars a coherent set of exegetical commentaries on the pericopes for the Christian year. Thus Ælfric seems to be *sui generis*, without precursors or followers in his effort to provide a cycle of exegetical addresses *ad populum* for the Temporale" (60). See also Mary Clayton, "Homiliaries and Preaching in Anglo-Saxon England," in *Old English Prose: Basic Readings*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (New York: Garland Publishing, 2000), 151-198. She argues with Gatch by emphasizing the religious element of Ælfric's audience: "What Ælfric is doing to an ever-increasing degree, therefore, is rendering 'monastic' material into the vernacular" (187).

¹² For the complicated question of Ælfric's audience, see Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies*, xxi-xxix. While the main audience for the *Catholic Homilies* is the laity, he also anticipated readers (xxii).

¹³ See Aaron Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, chapter 7, for Ælfric's position on the doctrinal question.

¹⁴ Clemons, ed., *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, the First Series*, Homily I, ll.8-9, 12-3. All Ælfric quotations come from Clemons and Godden; crossed þ will be silently expanded, and *puncti elevati* replaced with colons.

(king of all kings and lord of all lords. . . . nor can any thing resist his will)¹⁵ – rather than the kindly gift-giver from the sky. Moreover, in some ways the angels seem to be God’s primary creation, who, when they sin, are replaced by humanity. The one thing humans must do is obey; it is through the limits of this obedience that they are to define and know themselves: “hu mihte adam tocnawan hwæt he wære. buton he wære gehyrsum on sumum þincge his hlaforde; swilce god cwæde to him; Nast ðu þæt ic eom þin hlaford 7 þæt ðu eart min þeowa buton ðu do þæt ic ðe hate. 7 forgang þæt ic ðe forbeode.”¹⁶ (How could Adam understand what he was unless he were obedient in one thing to his lord? As though God said to him, “You cannot know that I am your lord and that you are my servant unless you do what I command you and avoid what I forbid you.”) Words for gifting, grace, or gratitude are not specifically used in this homily.

Furthermore, Ælfric carefully avoids the heroic language of the lord-thegn relationship and gift-giving used in poetic accounts of the Creation and Fall.¹⁷ For instance, while *Genesis A* begins with the idea that praise is the only return-gift humans can give to God,¹⁸ and speaks of God exiling the fallen angels, giving them a *lean* in hell, and depriving them of their *eðel*,¹⁹ and while *Genesis B* focuses more tightly on the relationship between God and Lucifer as between a *hearra* and his retainer and on Lucifer’s violation of *hylde*,²⁰ Ælfric uses none of this terminology, even where it might seem most natural.²¹ In comparison to the fleshed-out

¹⁵ Translations mine unless otherwise noted.

¹⁶ CHI.1, ll. 75-8.

¹⁷ See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “The Hero in Christian Reception: Ælfric and Heroic Poetry,” in *Old English Literature: Critical Essays*, ed. Roy M. Liuzza (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 215-35. She examines the ways that Ælfric’s rhetorical forms and concerns might overlap with heroic literature, examining especially Ælfric’s presentation of martial themes, but she concludes: “In tenth and eleventh-century social structures there is, then, a version of the lord and retainer bond central to heroic verse, but it is a Christian society’s system of obligation and its terms of loyalty are common to legal and doctrinal discourses and to social history, rather than a prerogative of heroic poetry” (219).

¹⁸ Ruth Louise Coy, “The Gift in Old English Literature,” emphasizes God’s gifts and the human obligation to praise him for them in *Genesis A*. Her work as a whole discusses the role of gift-giving in *Genesis A*, *Christ II*, and *Beowulf*.

¹⁹ *Christ and Satan* also mentions that God will never give the fallen angels an *eard* or an *eðel*.

²⁰ For discussions of God and Satan’s lord/thegn relationship in *Genesis A* see Alvin A. Lee, *The Guest-Hall of Eden*. Hugh Magennis, *Images of Community in Old English Poetry*, focuses on Satan as a traitor within *Genesis B*. Coy makes the point in *Genesis A* (a repetition of Huppé, perhaps) that the poem is structured around gift-giving, in which the only possible return-gift people can offer God is their praise for his generosity.

²¹ For instance, in l. 9 he is “ealra hlaforda hlaford” rather than “ealra dryhtena dryhten.” Again, he is referred to as *Scyppend* and *God Ælmihtiga* in the passage recounting Lucifer’s rebellion (ll. 22 ff) rather than *drihten* (this is a term Ælfric usually uses for Jesus rather than God the father, however) and the angels’ fall from heaven is not referred to either in the ironic terms the poets use (*lean*) or even as an exile. Rather, “Ælmihtiga Scyppend”

personalities to be found in these poems, Ælfric's account is much more driven by concerns for overt doctrinal explication. Thus, he begins (as do the other poems, with the exception of *Genesis B*, for which *Genesis A* serves as a beginning) by emphasizing that God has power and sovereignty and that he is the origin of all things. Unlike the other accounts, Ælfric also manages to briefly touch on the Trinity, the nature of the soul, and the necessity of free will during the course of the first part of his sermon. This sort of difference is, of course, to be expected between poem and sermon. Ælfric's purpose is to provide his hearers with a grounding in the basics of the Christian mythos and doctrine rather than translating it into Old English poetic idiom.

However, even though Ælfric's primary interest is doctrinal, he still structures the story around the personalities and relationships between God and Lucifer and God and humans. Through this, he invokes forms of reciprocity that presuppose and draw upon affect for their power: loyalty and gratitude. This stands out much more clearly when compared with the story as told by someone who is also interested in doctrine (of the most abstract kind) and who in many ways shaped the church's understanding of the Fall: Augustine. Augustine's account of the angels' fall in *De civitate Dei* book XI neither encourages an understanding of God or the devils as personalities nor makes much sense when read that way.²² Ælfric's orientation is much more relational. Acts of giving, taking, obedience, and refusing gratitude inform Ælfric's narrative and help to structure the relationships between God and Lucifer, God and Adam and Eve, and Satan and Adam and Eve in ways that simultaneously teach humans "what they are." "What they are" are subjects of God, recipients of his gifts, obliged to obey him, people who, through fulfillment of that obligation, will earn the vacated seats of the fallen angels.

Ælfric's account of the Fall is informed by a gift-economy and its assumptions about agency, although not one cast in heroic terms. Ever since the Pelagian controversy agency and its attendant questions of free will have been important concepts in Christianity, but while the terms of that debate were shaped by Greek and Roman philosophy, especially Neo-platonism and

"gearcode" hell torments for Lucifer and his companions (*geferan*, ll. 43-4) – again, God is referred to in terms of his power and creative ability.

²² That is, questions of interior psychology lie outside the framework of Augustine's argument.

Stoicism,²³ these abstractions did not evidently have much resonance in Anglo-Saxon England. Rather, agency in Ælfric is constructed relationally through giving, keeping, taking, and serving.²⁴ One participates in such an economy by having something to give, whether gifts or service. This raises an obvious problem: everything created beings have is already given by God; nothing they have is not owed him, including their obedience. Therefore, having nothing to give with which to assert any sort of reciprocity (and thus agency) in the relationship, they are in fact not free – not free to leave, not free to choose whom they will serve. At the same time, as with the Augustinian formulation, God has no particular obligations to humanity. In Ælfric’s case this is not because of his concern to protect God’s independence, but because, within the strictures of the creation account, humans have nothing to offer to God of their own with which to enter into a reciprocal relationship. In Ælfric’s sermon, this problem is solved through *agen cyre* (“own choice”). It is God’s gift of free will, and of the command through which to exercise it, that allows created beings a rooted sense of their identity, in which they are able to freely choose to serve God, for which service they will be rewarded in the end: “[M]id þære eaðelican gehyrsumnysse,” God says, “þu gearnast heofenan rices myrhðe. 7 þone stede þe se deofol of afeoll þurh ungehyrsumnesse.”²⁵ (With this easy obedience you will earn the joy of the kingdom of heaven and the place which the devil fell from through disobedience). Lucifer, Adam, and Eve²⁶ withheld *agen cyre* from God, Lucifer by rebelling and Adam and Eve by obeying Satan rather than their rightful lord. Through this, all of them put themselves in a position where God did not owe them anything; they were in no reciprocal relationship.

²³ Michael Hanby, *Augustine and Modernity* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 109.

²⁴ While scholars like Cowell point to a difference between secular and ecclesiastical values surrounding both gift-giving and identity formation, I would like to draw attention to the fact that I am eschewing this distinction. Both Augustine and Ælfric seek to understand the human relationship with the divine; one does so through Neo-platonic abstraction; the other does so through a more concrete social way of thinking. Neither of these is more intrinsically “Christian” than the other; and both approaches (one *formulated* by Augustine, the other *represented* by Ælfric) leave their mark on medieval Christianity.

²⁵ CHI.1, ll. 80-2.

²⁶ Issues of *agen cyre* in Eve’s transgression seem to be complicated by the fact that she was deceived. Christian doctrine recognizes this as a problem in various ways. However, I will be arguing that, for Ælfric, deception does not make a difference in either the outcome of Eve’s choice or the way its severity and impact is judged.

The tension between God and the devil that Ælfric's account of the fall establishes is situated within the doctrine of the ransom theory of atonement.²⁷ Ransom theory was developed in the second century by the patristic writer Irenaeus to combat Gnostic beliefs in the absolute duality of good and evil. Briefly summarized, he taught that because Adam obeyed the devil by eating the forbidden fruit instead of obeying God, his sin put humankind under the devil's power, giving the devil legitimate claim to human souls. The devil's domination was only broken when Christ gave himself as a ransom paid to the devil to free humankind.²⁸ As doctrine forged in apologetic fires tends to do, ransom theory ends up retaining the structures of the heresy it was developed against. Thus, this model gives the devil a much more prominent role in humanity's destruction and in God's salvific work than does the later soteriological model, substitutionary atonement, developed by Anselm.²⁹ Essentially, ransom theory makes God and the devil into rival lords. This model was further popularized by Gregory the Great,³⁰ and we can see specific references to it throughout the Anglo-Saxon corpus. Both Chapters 3 and 4 show the importance of the way the ransom theory structures the relationship between humans, God, and the Devil within Ælfric's conception of prayer. CHI.1 establishes the nature of Lucifer's rebellion, thus showing Ælfric's audience what manner of lords they have to choose between.

²⁷ See Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor*. Ransom theory was never doctrinally codified the way that substitutionary atonement later was; hence, it may be most usefully seen as the dominant metaphor for salvation in the early church. Substitutionary atonement is also a metaphor, but by the time of Calvin (and hence in modern theology), its metaphorical element was mostly lost; it is now usually seen as a literal explanation of Christ's salvific act. Additionally, see Jeffrey Burton Russell's multi-volume study of the historical development of the devil for a summary of Anglo-Saxon diabolology, including Ælfric's specifically, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1984), chapter 6, although he conflates Ælfric's presentations of devils with the Devil (Satan). C.W. Marx, *The Devil's Rights and the Redemption in the Literature of Medieval England*, emphasizes the continuity in soteriological models through Anselm and afterward to argue that appearances of the ransom theory in late medieval English literature are not anachronisms.

²⁸ Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V.1.1.

²⁹ Ransom theory was the predominant metaphor of salvation for the first thousand years of Christianity until Anselm developed the doctrine of substitutionary atonement in the 12th century. Substitutionary atonement removes the devil from the equation, so that man's sin is no longer conceptualized as placing him in thrall to the devil, and Christ's sacrifice is no longer imagined as ransoming humanity from the devil's just claims. Rather, man's sin is seen as an affront to God's honor; the debt he owes is owed to God, and Christ's sacrifice pays humanity's debt to God. Substitutionary atonement also conceptualizes God as a lord, but the model used for sin and debt is legal rather than more personally relational model of ransom theory. In this case, good deeds and other gifts are conceptualized as the payment of a debt rather than gifts that express a dependent relationship upon god. Anselm did not develop substitutionary atonement wholecloth; rather, it makes use of two models already available within Christian practice: the substitutionary sacrifice re-enacted in the Eucharist, and the practice of penance.

³⁰ For instance, in his Homily 25, CCSL 141, 8.226-48, for Easter Day.

Lucifer's Fall

After the account of creation, the homily takes up the cautionary example of one who resisted God's will: Lucifer. Lucifer's relationship with God is not parallel with humans' relationship with God, and yet in some ways it sets the pattern against which Adam and Eve's fall is to be read. The lack of symmetry is partially because the conditions of Lucifer's continuing favor with God are not set forth so clearly beforehand, and partially because Lucifer makes a bid for independence that is not open to Adam and Eve. Lucifer reaches for autonomy from God through his attempt to claim an identity for himself outside of God's gift and withhold gratitude (although it is not named that) from God. But Lucifer's struggle with and rebellion from God sets the conditions for humanity's own disobedience and that frame the terms of human bondage or freedom thereafter.

But before Lucifer, we come to the problem of God. As I have mentioned, Ælfric's opening statements emphasize the supremacy and self-sustaining nature of God: "An angin is ealra þinga þæt is god ælmihtig. he is ordfruma 7 ende; He is ordfruma for ði þe he wæs æfre; he is ende butan ælcere geendunge. for ðon þe he bið æfre ungeendod."³¹ (There is one beginning of all things, that is God Almighty. He is beginning and end. He is beginning because he always was; he is end without any ending because he will always be endless). Ælfric emphasizes the coherency of all things within God's design ("angin"), and that, while God contains beginning and end, he himself is outside of and encompasses all things. They are dependent on him for existence. Not only is God not reciprocally dependent on these things, he also extends beyond *ordfruma* into *æfre* and beyond *ende* into *æfre ungeendod*. His being is separate from that which he has brought forth. Within the frame of gift-economy, Ælfric's narrative presents God as the only truly independent actor. He owes no one anything. He creates out of his own will; once the universe is created, he sustains it out of his own will, against which will "mæg nan þinc ... wiðstandan."³² (nothing can resist). God is an individual independent of either the obligation to

³¹ CHI.1, ll. 6-8.

³² CHI.1, ll. 12-3.

give or receive gifts, who need answer to no-one, who is essentially “non-social” in that he is not tied to anyone by gift-bonds.³³

For people whose expectations of divine behavior have been formed within the Christian tradition, the self-sufficient nature of divine beings is axiomatic. It is therefore worth noting that self-sufficient deities are not necessarily the norm. Ancient Greeks saw themselves as being in reciprocal relationship with their gods, as did Romans.³⁴ Anglo-Saxon paganism is not as well attested, but we have little reason to doubt that they felt fundamentally the same about their own gods: gods are to be approached with gifts, and this gift-giving somehow obliges those gods to act in the behalf of the petitioner, perhaps to preserve the gods’ own honor or reputation as much as anything else.³⁵ If there is no fundamental reason to think of the gods as outside normal bonds of reciprocity, the kind of deity Ælfric presents is, relationally speaking, fundamentally outside of systems of reciprocal morality because he does not “owe” his creation anything. Rather, God gives freely and humans owe him everything – but the only one who has a true choice in this relationship is God. This does not present much of a problem for Augustine; because his notion of God is more abstract, God most obviously does *not* operate within a human economy. But for a society unaffected by the higher flights of Neo-Platonic fancy, and whose idea of morality is built upon the notion of reciprocal relationships, this is potentially unsettling. Insofar as God is independent of his creation, autonomous, owing nothing to those who serve him, he is at the very least distant, and can seem amoral. This creates a potential tension in an understanding of God – between a being who fundamentally owes humans nothing (although he voluntarily heaps gifts and graces upon humankind) and humans who owe God service but have no real claim on God (thus God can seem distant, uncaring, and immoral). There is, then, always a tendency to see at least some of God’s gifts as given out of moral obligation, and there is always a tendency to see

³³ This is what Louis Dumont’s definition of an individual is getting at: an “independent, autonomous, and thus essentially nonsocial moral being” (*Essays on Individualism*, 25), someone who exists outside of the “normal” (for a gift-society) bonds of reciprocity.

³⁴ See Simon Pulleyn, *Prayer in Greek Religion*; and John Scheid, “Sacrifices for Gods and Ancestors.”

³⁵ As Chapter 4 will show, Ælfric’s narratives tend to show pagans approaching their gods with *lac* while the Christian God is approached solely through prayer (the issue is slightly more complicated than this because of the Eucharist, as we will see). This same pattern holds in *Beowulf* – a Christian production, of course – where the pagan Danes are shown as bringing offerings to false gods to gain their protection against Grendel. All three of these might be thought of as Christian propaganda, except, again, the evidence is that ancient cultures thought of themselves bound by ties of mutual reciprocity to their gods.

some of these things as earned through human effort. Outside of Augustine, this circle is often squared by conceptualizing God as one who voluntarily enters into a reciprocal relationship with humankind; we saw how this worked in Bede, and we can now see how this works in Ælfric's homily.

Within Old English accounts of the Fall, the only other being who strives for similar independence is Lucifer. "Like" God in thinking of himself as an autonomous agent,³⁶ he fundamentally oversteps by trying to be "betera þonne he gesceapen wæs," (better than he was created) leading him to say "þæt he mihte beon þam ælmihtigum gode gelic."³⁷ (that he could be like the Almighty God). Lucifer at times seems like he wants to be equal to God (*gelic*) and share rulership with him ("dælan rice wið god"),³⁸ almost inserting himself as a strange fourth to the completely self-sufficient Trinity,³⁹ but Lucifer's desire for equality is inseparable from actual dominance over God. If Lucifer wants to be more essentially *the same as* God, he aspires to the same kind of singular sovereignty that God has. Lucifer wants the ability to determine his own fate, which, by nature of being creator and thus determiner of all fates, only God can do. The nature of this dominance is the more striking as Lucifer meditates ways to "dælan rice wið god." *Dælan*'s primary sense is to divide or separate, and then (often) to distribute the parts, but the attitude toward this distribution can be various: it can mean a willing sharing, giving out (as treasure or alms), or dividing and handing over (as in land in charters). This dividing is usually done by someone who has the right or at least the ability to do the dividing.⁴⁰ What *dælan* does not mean is *taking* – and this is what Lucifer actually proposes to do, not to *share* power with God, as though Lucifer had any right to do the *dælen*, but to take it. In fact, in spite of the potential slippage in *gelic* and *dælan*, Lucifer does not want to be *equal* to God or share power, acting as co-ruler in the north part of heaven, but to have "anweald 7 rice *ongean* gode ælmihtigum"⁴¹ (authority and a kingdom against God Almighty), to be the one to do the

³⁶ Although by the time he thinks of himself this way he is already fallen.

³⁷ CHI.1, ll. 39-41

³⁸ "share power with God," ll. 42-3. The DOE uses this phrase as an example for *dælan*, sense 2.

³⁹ His strange lie in *Christ and Satan* (ASPR 1, ll. 63-4), that Jesus is his son, becomes all the more intriguing from this perspective.

⁴⁰ In the DOE, sense 2, the only example of an inferior doing the dividing is this passage in CHI.1.

⁴¹ CHI.1, ll. 33-4.

dælendē. Lucifer does not want any power that God hands over willingly; he in fact already has that.⁴² To assert independence from God, his power has to be taken by force.

Andrew Cowell, in his book on gift-giving and the formation of a secular individual identity in the 11th- and 12th-centuries, points to various historical and literary instances of people refusing gifts, giving splendid counter-gifts, and attempting to claim and keep symbolic property for themselves (or their family) independent of a lord's bestowal⁴³ as part of a strategy to declare or keep one's autonomy when threatened by a lord of equal or greater power. Those who have the power and social position to give gifts while not receiving them (except in certain clearly-defined instances), or to outgive someone who gives gifts to them, and, most importantly, to claim property of their own safe from the demands of a gift-economy are able to function outside the normal social bonds restricting autonomy.⁴⁴ It is within this sort of system that Lucifer attempts autonomy. Lucifer's position is difficult in that he cannot reject God's gifts, since one

⁴² As the "teoðan weredes ealdor" (l. 29, "leader of the tenth host"), according to Ælfric. In other sources Lucifer has more power even than this; for instance, in *Genesis B* he is second in command after God (ASPR 1, ll. 253-4).

⁴³ Cowell is drawing on Annette B. Weiner's theory of inalienable possessions, the possession of which gives a person or family a sense of particular identity, and the keeping of which solidifies a person or family's claims to status (see Cowell, pp. 87-101).

⁴⁴ The Anglo-Saxon period is obviously earlier than Cowell's period of focus (his evidence is also largely French), and we might consider how well evidence from this later period maps onto ASE. The existing AS corpus does not present instances of the kind of insulting gift-giving and counter-giving Cowell discusses. Rather – except in the case of Satan – the AS corpus tends to present the beneficent side of gift-giving. For instance, in *Beowulf*, Hrothgar is shown as a good king through his lavish rewards to Beowulf for his service; Beowulf himself is shown to be a loyal thegn when he returns to Geatland and gives Hygelac most of what Hrothgar has given him, and Hygelac rewards Beowulf's loyalty (and asserts his own supremacy) by in turn giving Beowulf a hall and other gifts. At the same time, whether we focus on the community or the individual in this gift-giving colors our idea of what's going on. The poem's overt focus seems to be on the community in gift-giving, presenting the role of gift-giving in smoothing over and binding together communal relations; however, shifting focus to individuals reveals a more subtle jockeying for position through the giving of gifts. While Beowulf introduces himself as the son of Ecgtheow, a person known in Hrothgar's court, he presents his desire to take care of the Grendel problem as his own magnanimity. Hrothgar's later speech reminds hearers that he had helped Ecgtheow in the past, therefore, in some sense, Beowulf's generous gesture repays this debt. Hrothgar's later generous gifts both elevate and honor Beowulf while putting him in his place as one who, even through monster-slaying, cannot outgive the Danish king. When Beowulf returns to Geatland, his gifts to Hygelac are both a statement of loyalty and a challenge – one which Hygelac meets by outgiving Beowulf. As in Denmark, this generous giving puts Beowulf in position to have some claim to the Geatish throne when Hygelac dies – a claim which Hygd implicitly recognizes when she offers Beowulf the throne; the real test of Beowulf's loyalty, then, comes when he declines to take the throne from Heardred and serves as regent instead. But, through all of this, Beowulf never tries to put himself outside or above the gift-giving cycle. Thus, since Satan is the only character presented as reaching for autonomous individuality (although some other AS characters, the Wanderer, the Seafarer, achieve this, it is not presented as a good state to be in), this seems to reflect a belief that sort of independence is in some sense diabolical and problematically anti-social rather than admirable. What is more difficult to say is whether this reflects the values of the culture at large, or whether this reflects the values of AS churchmen.

of them is his very existence, and because all he has is given him by God (and all that exists was made by God). To keep these things is to keep his identity as God's servant, and yet he has no way of refusing them.

It is therefore significant that in Ælfric's homily Lucifer asserts his independence by taking his beauty as an essential attribute belonging to himself – something particular of his own which he makes central to his identity and uses to set himself apart from the other created beings. As Ælfric says, he was

swiðe fæger 7 wlitig gesceapen. swa þæt he wæs gehaten leohtberend. þa began he to modigeanne for ðære fægernysse. þe he hæfde. and cwæð on his heortan. þæt he wolde and eaðe mihte beon his scyppende gelic.⁴⁵

[created very fair and beautiful, so that he was called Lucifer. Then he became prideful because of the fairness that he had, and said in his heart that he desired and easily could be like his Creator.]

By claiming something that “he hæfde” as his own, independent of God's gift, Lucifer is able to understand himself as independent of God, precipitating his desire to usurp God's place. Able to imagine himself as independent on the basis of his own singular beauty, he asserts this independence by seeking to *dælan* power.

Significantly, in Ælfric's sermon, God's first reaction to Lucifer's rebellion is to change all the rebel angels “of ðam fægeran hiwe þe hi on gescapene wæron. to laðlicum deoflum,”⁴⁶ (from the fair forms in which they were created to loathly devils) attacking the source of Satan's pride. Ælfric emphasizes the fitness of this punishment: “And swiðe rihtlice him swa getimode. þa ða he wolde mid modignysse beon betera þonne he gesceapen wæs”⁴⁷ (And very rightly it so befell him, when he wished with pride to be better than he was created). Satan, understanding his beauty as his own, had plotted how he might take a kingdom for himself as well; God's actions respond to both these attempts at independence:

⁴⁵ CHI.1, ll. 29-32.

⁴⁶ CHI.1, ll. 37-8.

⁴⁷ CHI.1, ll. 38-40.

hwile þe he smeade hu he mihte dælan rice wið god. þa hwile gearcode se ælmihtiga scyppend him 7 his geferan hellewite. 7 hi ealle adræfde of heofenan rices myrihðe. 7 let befeallan on ðæt ece fyr þe him gegearcod wæs for heora ofermettum.”⁴⁸

[while he considered how he could share out power with God, the Almighty Creator prepared hell torments for him and his companions, and drove them all out of the joy of the heavenly kingdom and allowed to fall into the eternal fire which was made for them for their pride.]

God removes the beauty Lucifer had taken for his essential attribute, and prepares a place for all the fallen angels so that even in their punishment they cannot escape being in a God-created place. At this point, Ælfric also switches from considering Lucifer as an individual to grouping him with the rest of the devils who fell.

This is notably different from Augustine’s treatment of the same subject. In *De civitate Dei*, Augustine traces the devils’ fall back to pride, which he defines as a created beings’ preference for himself over his creator: the bad angels “ab illo, qui summe est, auersi ad se ipsos conuersi sunt, qui non summe sunt; et hoc uitium quid aliud quam superbia nuncupatur?”⁴⁹ (abandoned Him whose Being is absolute and turned to themselves whose being is relative – a sin that can have no better name than pride).⁵⁰ In Augustine’s thought this pride is the root cause of their evil decision; there is no deeper cause: “Huius porro malae uoluntatis causa efficiens si quaeratur, nihil inuenitur.”⁵¹ (If one seeks for the efficient cause of their evil will, none is to be found).⁵² Throughout this discussion Augustine’s thinking is obviously imbued with Neo-platonic ideas of mutability and immutability. This world of abstract, Neo-platonic reasoning is far removed from the concerns of Ælfric’s treatment of the subject. Unlike Augustine’s treatment of the fallen angels as a unit, Ælfric focuses on Lucifer, setting his fall apart from that of the other angels who “ealle to ðam ræde gebugon,”⁵³ (all assented to that counsel) and Ælfric also assigns a cause for Lucifer’s pride: he seeks power and independence from God on account

⁴⁸ CHI.1, ll. 42-5.

⁴⁹ *De civitate Dei*, CCSL 48, XII.6.4-6.

⁵⁰ *The City of God*, trans. Gerald G. Walsh et al. (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958), 250-1.

⁵¹ *De civitate Dei*, CCSL 48, XII.6.14-5.

⁵² Walsh, 251.

⁵³ CHI.1, l. 35.

of his singular beauty.⁵⁴ Ælfric then has a subtly different understanding of pride than does Augustine. While for both of them pride involves violating a hierarchy, for Augustine the hierarchy is between the relative values of the mutable and immutable. Pride is turning to the self (which is created, hence mutable) and valuing it above the immutability of God, an evil will for which there is no cause. For Ælfric, Lucifer's pride is rooted in his sense of preeminent singularity – valuing himself in a very concrete, specific way – and rooting his identity in something that sets him apart from the rest of the communion of angels. This singularity causes him to rise even higher and seek to become “betera þonne he gesceapen wæs.” Situated within a gift-giving economy, Lucifer takes his beauty as a singular attribute belonging essentially to himself, thus as a marker of his individuality upon which further independence can be claimed, rather than understanding it as a gift bestowed through God's generosity.⁵⁵

It is within this context that *agen cyre* is significant. While choice, like all things, is a gift of God (God “let hi habban agenne cyre”),⁵⁶ it is through freedom of choice that God's creatures can either break with God or accept their identity as his dependents. Still, they need something to exercise this choice upon. Lucifer, like the other angels, had no specific commands to obey; he can only turn away from God into himself. In the situation of the fallen angels *agen cyre* primarily works in Ælfric the same way that it does for Augustine. For Augustine the fact that God gave the angels *liberum arbitrium* allowed them the choice whether to follow God or not. In Augustine's thinking this free choice is instrumental, a doctrinal device intended to absolve God from having created evil or the necessity for evil.⁵⁷ Ælfric emphasizes much the same thing. Concerned to clarify that God did not create evil, he initially says that Lucifer, like the rest of the angels, was created “ealle gode. 7 [God] let hi habban agenne cyre. swa hi heora scyppend lufedon 7 filidon. swa hi hine forleton.”⁵⁸ (completely good, and God allowed them to

⁵⁴ Since this motive is also given in *Genesis B*, the idea obviously isn't Ælfric's invention, but I'm not yet sure where it came from.

⁵⁵ *Genesis B* also shows Lucifer having the same motivation, unlike *Genesis A* or *Christ and Satan*, where Satan's motivation is just the desire for power.

⁵⁶ CHI.1, ll. 27-8, “allowed them to have own choice.” Ælfric consistently uses “agen cyre” without a possessive pronoun, perhaps in this way marking it as a specialized doctrinal term.

⁵⁷ See Kleist's account of the development of Augustine's thought against the Manichean heresy, *Striving with Grace*, p. 4.

⁵⁸ CHI.1, ll. 27-9.

have own choice, so they loved and followed their Creator or they abandoned him). Ending the account, Ælfric further emphasizes: God

let hi habban agenne cyre. 7 hi næfre ne gebigde ne ne nydde mid nanum þingum to ðam yfelan ræde. ne næfre se yfela ræd ne com of godes geþanc. ac com of ðæs deofles. swa swa we ær cwædon.⁵⁹

[allowed them to have own choice, and he never neither forced nor compelled them in any way to that evil counsel; neither did the evil counsel come from God's thought, but it came from the devil's, just as we previously said.]

The only (and limited) way that Lucifer can be autonomous is insofar as God has given him, with the rest of the angels, his "agen cyre." Lucifer uses this choice to break with God, forming his sense of identity through a beauty he claims as his own rather than recognizing it as God's gift for which the moral response is gratitude.

Gratitude, as Georg Simmel pointed out, can have the taste of bondage if the desired state is independence.⁶⁰ Lucifer's fundamental problem is that he does not want the relationship with God that comes from accepting his gifts. His desire for independence shifts the focus from the love and joy that gifts should engender to power. The primary point at which power relations are likely to be a problem is when the recipient of gifts feels himself to be equal or near equal to the giver.⁶¹ In this case, the giver's generosity threatens the recipient's own conception of himself. Ælfric's account of Lucifer's fall reveals the specious nature of Lucifer's claims in that all Lucifer had was given him. Lucifer's failure of gratitude is a moral failure, a refusal of the ideals of reciprocity. He insists on casting his relationship with God in terms of power rather than

⁵⁹ CHI.1, ll. 53-6.

⁶⁰ Simmel discusses the value of the first gift, which can never be fully repaid because it has an essential freedom that the subsequent gifts lack by virtue of the fact that there is some element of moral obligation in returning a gift. "This, perhaps, is the reason why some people do not like to accept, and try to avoid as much as possible, being given gifts. . . . these people act on the instinct, perhaps, that the return gift cannot possibly contain the decisive element of the original, namely, freedom; and that, in accepting it, therefore, they would contract an irredeemable obligation. As a rule, such people have a strong impulse to independence and individuality; and this suggests that the condition of gratitude easily has a taste of bondage. . . . A service, a sacrifice, a benefit, once accepted, may engender an inner relation which can never be eliminated completely, because gratitude is perhaps the only feeling which, under all circumstances, can be morally demanded and rendered" ("Faithfulness and Gratitude," in *The Gift*, ed. Komter, 48).

⁶¹ Indeed, Simmel's essay presupposes social equality between parties exchanging gifts.

love,⁶² thus reducing God's gifts to a power play instead of understanding them through personal affection. In an ironic twist, what Lucifer takes as autonomy is really a warped dependence. He set himself up in opposition to God ("ongean," l. 33). Locking himself into being God's opposite, he can never truly break free. It is as God's opposite, a wicked lord in contrast to God's good lordship, that Satan operates in the world of humans, and it is within the tension of this relationship that human prayer functions to declare the precator's subservience to one lord or the other.

Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve are also given *agen cyre* but their case is not precisely parallel to Lucifer's. Whereas Lucifer tries to gain an independent identity through claiming his beauty as his own particular possession, Adam and Eve are given a specific command to follow, and identity for them never holds the promise of independence. As is the case with the angels, Ælfric uses this term at a point when he wants to clarify that God is not responsible for creating Adam with evil desire: "Næs him gesceapen fram gode. ne he næs genedd þæt he sceolde godes bebod tobrecan. ac god hine let frigne. 7 sealde him agenne cyre. swa he wære gehyrsum. swa he wære ungehyrsum."⁶³ (He was not created thus by God, nor was he compelled to break God's command, but God allowed him freedom, and gave him own choice, whether he would be obedient, or he would be disobedient). Ælfric clarifies what Adam has to choose between: obedience or disobedience. Unlike the angels, God had given Adam a specific command, not to eat from the fruit of a certain tree.⁶⁴ It is this command that, paradoxically, gives Adam and Eve something of their own, hence freedom of choice. As they choose to obey God, God intends that

⁶² I choose the word "love" here for its affective resonance, but the concept is loyalty and faithfulness sourced in both duty and affection – the very response that the gift ideally calls forth. In Fred C. Robinson, "God, Death, and Loyalty in the Battle of Maldon," in *J.R.R. Tolkien, Scholar and Story-Teller: Essays in Memoriam*, ed. Mary Sau and Robert T. Farrell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 76-98, Robinson argues that the central conflict of the poem is over loyalty, an concept central to Anglo-Saxon social organization: "the interlocking bonds of loyalty were the principle on which Anglo-Saxon civilization rested, the only bulwark against primitive chaos and anarchy" (95). Within a study of an heroic poem, this might seem to be somewhat of a poetical take on historical reality. However, Alice Sheppard, *Families of the King: Writing Identity in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2004) argues similarly for the *Chronicle's* presentation of the importance of loyalty in lordship, although she is careful not to claim that this is more than a literary construct here, either.

⁶³ CHI.1., ll. 155-7.

⁶⁴ Unnamed in Ælfric.

“mid þære eaðelican gehyrsumnyse. þu gearnast heofenan rices myrhðe. 7 þone stede þe se deofol of afeoll þurh ungehyrsumnesse.”⁶⁵ (with that easy obedience you will earn the joy of the heavenly kingdom and the position that the devil fell from through disobedience). That is, Adam and Eve’s obedience allows them to enter into a relationship with God in which he promises to reward their obedience to him. But their ability to choose to obey, their *agen cyre*, gives obedience meaning enough to be reciprocated.

According to Annette B. Weiner, inalienable possessions are the ones people cannot lose without losing some sense of their identity:

Some things, like most commodities, are easy to give. But there are other possessions that are imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners which are not easy to give away. Ideally, these inalienable possessions are kept by their owners from one generation to the next within the closed context of family, descent group, or dynasty. The loss of such an inalienable possession diminishes the self and by extension, the group to which the person belongs.⁶⁶

While Wiener is speaking out of her field research of specific *things*, as we saw in Chapter 1, gift theory can accommodate service within the category of gift.⁶⁷ Furthermore, as Tertullian’s statement about prayer replacing sacrifice indicates, Christianity tends to “spiritualize” what were once concrete gifts and sacrifices to the gods into actions, prayers, and dispositions. To Weiner, Godelier adds that the strongest sense of identity rooted in gifts traces those gifts back to the divine realm.⁶⁸ Accordingly, Adam and Eve are not given an object to mark their identity or their connection with God, rather, they are given a tree and a taboo. This command gives Adam his identity, teaching him “hwæt he wære”:

⁶⁵ CHI.1, ll. 80-2.

⁶⁶ Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 6.

⁶⁷ Simmel, for instance, conflates given *things* and given *attributes* or affections in his discussion of gifts: “[A]n individual, perhaps, gives ‘spirit,’ that is, intellectual values, while the other shows his gratitude by returning affective values. Another offers the aesthetic charms of his personality, for instance, and the receiver, who happens to be the stronger nature, compensates him for it by injecting will power into him, as it were, or firmness and resoluteness” (45).

⁶⁸ Godelier is especially interested in notions of sacral kingship or leadership authenticated by the leaders’ possession of sacred items. See *The Enigma of the Gift*, 8.

hwi wolde god swa lytles þinges him forwyrnan. þe him swa micle oðre þincg betæhte; gyse. hu mihte adam tocnawan hwæt he wære. buton he wære gehyrsum on sumum þincge his hlaforde; swilce god cwæde to him; Nast ðu þæt ic eom þin hlaford and þæt ðu eart min þeowa buton ðu do þæt ic ðe hate. 7 forgang þæt ic þe forebeode.⁶⁹

[why would God prohibit him such a little thing when he entrusted so much greater things to him. Yes, how might Adam know what he was unless he were obedient in one thing to his Lord. As if God said to him: “You do not know that I am your lord and that you are my servant unless you do what I command you and avoid that which I forbid you.”]

Adam’s identity is thus bound up in his dependent relationship with God. The command gives him something upon which to exercise his *agen cyre*, as he can choose whether to maintain an identity centered on keeping God’s taboo, or to disobey him. And Adam’s own choice to keep the taboo allows him to enter into a reciprocal relationship with God. When Adam chooses to listen to Satan rather than to God, he gives up this marker of his identity, gives up his status as God’s servant, and gives up any claims to God’s protection. Adam loses his identity. In so doing, however, he does not become free (not even in the negative sense of lordless), he instead becomes thrall to Satan, the one he listened to: “He wearð þa deofle gehyrsum. 7 gode ungehrsum. 7 wearð betæht he 7 eal mancynn æfter ðisum life into hellewite. mid þam deofle ðe hine forlærde.”⁷⁰ (He became obedient to the devil and disobedient to God, and he and all mankind were given up after this life to hell torments with the devil who led him astray). Rather than independence, “*agen cyre*” gives Adam and Eve an avenue to self-knowledge through obedience. It allows Adam “*tocnawan hwæt he wære,*” which, in Ælfric’s mind, is far more important than independence because it gives Adam a place in the created order.

The tree itself cannot impart self-knowledge to Adam and Eve. God does not name the tree from which they are forbidden to eat, and the only consequence he gives for disobedience is death; it holds no promise of knowledge in itself. In her transgression, Eve mistakes the fruit of the tree for the thing itself – knowledge of good and evil – rather than as the symbolic object it is, a marker of humanity’s relationship with God, the *not* eating of which brings the knowledge

⁶⁹ CHI.1., ll. 74-8.

⁷⁰ CHI.1., ll. 157-9.

they need – an understanding of their relationship with God. That is, by not eating the fruit they know good, but in eating it, as Ælfric goes on to say, they come to know evil. It is Satan’s promise that the fruit will give Adam and Eve knowledge of good and evil, making them like the angels: “gif ge of ðam treowe geetað. þonne beoð eowere eagan geopenode. 7 ge magon geseon 7 tocnawan ægðer ge god. ge yfel. 7 ge beoð englum gelice.”⁷¹ (if you eat from the tree your eyes will be opened, and you will see and know both good and evil, and you will be like the angels). The tragedy is that, in reaching to be like the angels Adam and Eve were reaching for something that God already intended to give them within a reciprocal relationship with him, earned through humility and obedience: the vacated seats of the fallen angels.

Within a conception of *agen cyre* oriented around gift-giving and keeping, it does not really matter that Eve’s disobedience was occasioned by deception. While deception might (and does) lead to questions of culpability within the context of free will (how free of a choice does a person make who is deceived?), it does not matter one way or another if a person is deceived into giving up something she knew she was supposed to keep, since it is the status of the kept thing that is important rather than the conditions of turning it over.⁷² Within the rest of Ælfric’s corpus this is a significant point, since people are often deceived into worshipping idols.⁷³ Of course, after Adam, the human situation is reversed, in that they are in thrall to Satan, and all the human choice in the world cannot change this fact. The surprising thing, then, is that in some ways Lucifer’s rebellion was successful. Insofar as he wanted to have “anweald 7 rice ongean gode” he gains exactly this in his domination over humans who serve him. Ælfric’s point, then, is that humans who listen to the devil must realize they are serving a traitor rather than the true Creator of all things.

Ælfric’s CHI.1 establishes the relationship between humans and God oriented around obedience and choice. For Adam and Eve, choice is given through a taboo: by keeping this

⁷¹ CHI.1, ll. 134-6.

⁷² It is interesting to note that Eve’s temptation in *Genesis B* does not work according to the same model. In that case, she transgresses out of the best intentions and her deception engenders a great deal of sympathy for her.

⁷³ Within this homily, for example, after the Tower of Babel, people make idols who become inhabited by demons who then claim that they are gods. The people “weorðodon hi. 7 him lac ofredon. ... 7 þæt beswicone mennisc feoll on cneowum to þam anlicnyssum and cwædon ge sind ure godas ...” (CHI.1, ll. 215-16, 217-19, “worshipped them and offered them offerings ... and that deceived race fell on their knees before the idols and said, ‘You are our gods.’”).

taboo inviolate humans gain knowledge of their identity, their connection to God as his servants whom God intends to reward for obedience. Thus, in preserving this choice, humans both preserve their fullest identity and enter into a reciprocal relationship with God wherein he rewards them for obedience by giving them a place in heaven. As we will see in the following chapters, for Ælfric, petition happens within this relationship and is a marker of that choice: people petition the one whom they acknowledge as lord. To pray to God is to acknowledge him as lord, whereas to pray to devils is to renounce God and claim the devil as lord. The devil, as Ælfric makes clear, is a lesser lord, whose rule is based on deception. To serve him is to serve one who rejected gifts rather than the God who created all things and who considers “hu he mihte his 7 ealles mancynnes eft gemiltsian.”⁷⁴ (how he might have mercy on him and all humankind).

CATHOLIC HOMILY I.19: THE LORD’S PRAYER

From the relational context provided by CHI.1, I turn now to Ælfric’s most explicit homilies on prayer. Because of its central place in Christian practice and catechetical teaching, I first examine Ælfric’s homily on the LP. This homily, CHI.19, is unique in several ways.⁷⁵ First, it is one of the few homilies on the LP *not* addressed to catechumens; second, it is the only extant Old English homily on the LP (aside from a translation and brief encouragement to pray it by Wulfstan⁷⁶); third, it emphasizes the idea that God’s fatherhood makes all Christians brothers much more than any of the other treatments of the prayer; and, fourth, it introduces the devil to the discussion in a much more structured and pervasive way than any of the other treatments, emphasizing the role of the devil as a counter-lord to God to an extent unusual within the

⁷⁴ CHI.1, ll. 160-1.

⁷⁵ For a summary list of early Western writings on the LP see Karlfried Froehlich, “The Lord’s Prayer in Patristic Literature.” For a more complete treatment, see K.B. Schnurr, *Hören und Handeln: Lateinische Auslegungen des Vaterunsers in der Alten Kirche bis zum fünften Jahrhundert*, Freiburger Theologische Studien 132 (Freiburg: Herder, 1985).

⁷⁶ In Bethurum VII, *De fide catholica*, Wulfstan uses the PN to go into an explication of the Creed. Every Christian should know both things, he says, and he mentions that the PN contains 7 petitions for everything needful that people can pray privately to God. But then he asks how a man can pray inwardly to God if he does not believe truly, and he goes from there into an explication of the Creed. The following “sermon,” VIIa gives a translation of the PN and the Creed, although it might be noted that Wulfstan’s translation of the prayer is very odd if he really intends this to be the version that Christians should pray – highly alliterative and ornate, it is not the most literal of translations.

tradition of teaching on the LP. While this homily has no particular source, Godden identifies some affinities to Augustine's commentary on the LP in *De sermone Domini in monte*.⁷⁷ But while Ælfric's sermon is certainly influenced by Augustine – one might even say it is broadly Augustinian – the differences in emphasis are quite striking when one compares it either to Augustine's commentary or his sermons to catechumens.

Augustine's most detailed exposition of the prayer is in his commentary on the Sermon on the Mount. Because it is in a commentary it is necessarily intended for a different sort of audience than Ælfric's sermon, and it is situated in a different interpretive context, bounded by a set of preoccupations seemingly directed by the text preceding the prayer itself.⁷⁸ However, the way Augustine situates the prayer within the context of purity echoes catechetical teaching and the liturgical use of the prayer. When he states, regarding the "eye" of the heart through which God is seen, "Huic autem oculo magna ex parte mundato difficile est non subripere sordes aliquas"⁷⁹ (But even when this eye is in great part cleansed, it is difficult to prevent certain

⁷⁷ "Förster suggested that Ælfric was drawing on Augustine's sermons *ad competentes*, numbers 55-9 [sic], as well as material traditionally used in teaching in the monastic schools. The sermons do contain similar material, but the same points are made more fully in Augustine's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, which includes some passages very close to Ælfric. ... Occasional similarities of phrasing in the sermons, especially 59, suggest that Ælfric may have known those too, but the debt could be indirect. ... There remains much however for which no source is yet in evidence," Godden 154 (Augustine's sermons *ad competentes* are actually numbers 56-9). Augustine has four explications of the LP extant (counting all the sermons as one): his commentary *De sermone Domini in monti secundum Mattheaum* (CCSL 35), four catechetical sermons on the prayer (CCSL 41Aa, numbers 56-59), and expositions on it both in his Letter CXXX *Ad Probam* (CCSL 31B, pp. 212-37. This letter is the closest thing Augustine wrote to a treatise on prayer; his discussion of the LP is very brief indeed, but the letter includes much of interest on a theory of prayer), and in his anti-Pelagian text *De dono perseverantiae* (PL 45, col. 993-1000). Augustine's explication in *De dono perseverantiae* uses Cyprian's treatise to show that the Catholic church's historical understanding is that perseverance is a gift from God; thus, he interprets every petition except the fifth as a petition for perseverance. This raises some interesting questions regarding the theory of prayer. Chiefly, in the statement, "Imperavit autem Deus, ut ei sancti ejus dicant orantes, *Ne inferas nos in tentationem*. Quisquis igitur exauditur hoc poscens, non infertur in contumaciae tentationem, qua possit vel dignus sit perseverantiam sanctitatis amittere" (vi.11, PL 45, col. 1000, "But God commanded that His saints should say to Him in prayer, 'Lead us not into temptation.' Whoever, therefore, is heard when he asks this, is not led into the temptation of contumacy, whereby he could or would be worthy to lose perseverance in holiness," NPNF, ser. 1, vol. 5, ch. 11). Is this because the person praying is expressing a sort of submission that is at impossible odds with contumacy? Or is it because of a more direct protection of God in response to this prayer?

⁷⁸ Matthew 6 begins by stating that almsgiving should be done in secret rather than for the praise of men (6:1-4) and moves to prayer, which should be private and brief (6:5-8). At this point the LP is given (9-13), followed by instructions on fasting (16-18), and further teaching on the correct relationship to material wealth (19-34). Verse 22, "lucerna corporis est oculus si fuerit oculus tuus simplex totum corpus tuum lucidum erit," [The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome] is the idea that Augustine uses to begin his discussion (as seen in the quote given below), and it governs his discussion of the passage.

⁷⁹ *De sermone Domini in monte*, CCSL 35, II.i.i7-8.

defilements from creeping insensibly over it),⁸⁰ the reference here echoes the function of baptism that cleanses the catechumen of all his sins, and then to the daily praying of the LP that cleanses the precator from the small defilements that creep over him.⁸¹ Therefore, Augustine's relation of purity to prayer comes as much from the typical context for teaching on (in baptismal catechesis) and praying the LP (in the communion cycle) as it does from the contextualizing passage in Matthew, which does not introduce the idea of purity that Augustine uses to start his discussion until verse 22.⁸²

Augustine's primary focus on the cleansing of the heart through prayer and almsgiving situates prayer within the private realm of the individual's heart. Augustine defines cleansing of the heart as what happens as one's motives become rightly aligned, when one does what one does for the praise of God rather than other people.⁸³ The secrecy of spiritual practice clarifies motive; therefore, Augustine situates prayer within the heart of the one praying.⁸⁴ But the incorporeal nature of the heart and of desire give it natural affinity with the spiritual realm. Through these associations, he links the sacred with the private and interior parts of the person,⁸⁵

⁸⁰ NPNF II.i.i.

⁸¹ This idea is found in all his sermons on the LP, but for example: "Remissio peccatorum una est quae semel datur in sancto baptisate, alia quae quamdiu uiuimus hic datur dominica oratione" (Augustine, sermon 58, CCSL 41Aa.6123-5, "There is one forgiveness of sins that is given only once in holy baptism; another which, as long as we live here, is given in the Lord's Prayer," Hill, 58.6).

⁸² And need not necessarily govern the discussion on the passage. Compare Jerome's commentary on Matthew.

⁸³ "Pertinet ergo ad oculum mundum non intueri in recte faciendo laudes hominum et ad eas referre quod recte facis, id est propterea recte facere aliquid, ut hominibus placeas. Sic enim etiam simulare bonum libebit, si non adtenditur nisi ut homo laudet, qui quoniam uidere cor non potest, potest etiam falsa laudare. Quod qui faciunt, id est qui bonitatem simulant, duplici corde sunt. Non ergo habet simplex cor, id est mundum cor, nisi qui transcendit humanas laudes et illum solum intuetur, cum recte uiuit, et ei placere nititur qui conscientiae solus inspector est" (CCSL 35, II.i.1.24-33) [It belongs therefore to the pure eye not to look at the praises of men in acting rightly, i.e., to do anything rightly with the very design of pleasing men. For thus you will be disposed also to counterfeit what is good, if nothing is kept in view except the praise of man; who, inasmuch as he cannot see the heart, may also praise things that are false. And they who do this, i.e. who counterfeit goodness, are of a double heart. No one therefore has a single, i.e. a pure heart, except the man who rises above the praises of men; and when he lives well, looks at Him only, and strives to please Him who is the only Searcher of the conscience] (NPNF 6, II.i.1).

⁸⁴ "VOS AVTEM CVM ORATIS, inquit, INTROITE IN CVBICVLA VESTRA. Quae sunt ista cubacula nisi ipsa corda" (II.iii.11.233-4) ["But when ye pray," says He, "enter into your bed-chambers." What are those bed-chambers but just our hearts themselves?] (NPNF vi, II.iii.9).

⁸⁵ "Parum est intrare in cubacula, si ostium pateat importunis, per quod ostium ea quae foris sunt inprobe se inmergunt et interiora nostra appetunt. ... Claudendum est ergo ostium, id est carnali sensui resistendum est, ut oratio spiritualis dirigatur ad patrem, quae fit in intimis cordis, ubi oratur pater in abscondito" (II.iii.11.237-40, 243-6) [It is a small matter to enter into our bed-chambers if the door stand open to the unmannerly, through which the things that are outside profanely rush in and assail our inner man. ... Hence the door is to be shut, i.e. the fleshly sense is to be resisted, so that spiritual prayer may be directed to the Father, which is done in the inmost heart, where prayer is offered to the Father which is in secret] (NPNF vi, II.iii.11).

a conception of *sanctus*-oriented prayer that is also strikingly individual. All of this adds up to a theory of prayer that emphasizes prayer's subjective efficacy: the discipline of praying retrains desire.⁸⁶

Augustine's focus throws Ælfric's preoccupations into relief and show the marked ways he differs from explications that are more closely Augustinian. Even though traditional teaching lurks behind all aspects of Ælfric's homily, he reworks the sermon to reflect a relationship imagined between God and humans oriented around obedience and protection, and he places his explication within a different complex of concerns, namely those of the praying community. Through all of this, Ælfric largely excises Augustine's conception of purity as detachment from the material world and replaces it with a vision of a reciprocal community made whole through prayer and almsgiving.

Like most sermons on the LP, Ælfric's sermon about the central Christian prayer says almost nothing explicit about the practice of prayer, and says very little about a theory of prayer, especially when compared to treatises like Origen's and Cassian's, and even Augustine's commentary. Ælfric opens with the disciples' request to learn how to pray; he introduces and concludes the homily by considering what it means that God is the father of Christians, pointing out that God's fatherhood makes all Christians brothers and thus all have equal access to God. The middle section is literal line-by-line explication of the seven petitions of the LP. From the very earliest examples, this type of explication is always at the heart of teaching on the LP.

Ælfric mentions the devil in the explication of seven out of the eight phrases of the prayer, and mentions hell-torment in the remaining phrase. In effect, the devil's prominence sets up the devil's power as a rival to God's. The rivalry between God and the devil mirrors the relationship between the two established in the ransom theory of salvation. Within the ransom

⁸⁶ "Sed rursus quaeri potest – siue rebus siue uerbis orandum sit –, quid opus sit ipsa oratione, si deus iam nouit, quid nobis sit necessarium, nisi quia ipsa orationis intentio cor nostrum serenat et purgat capaciusque efficit ad excipienda diuina munera [S]ed nos non semper parati sumus accipere, cum inclinamur in alia et rerum temporalium cupiditate tenebramur. Fit ergo in oratione conuersio cordis ad eum qui semper dare paratus est, si nos capiamus quod dederit, et in ipsa conuersione purgatio interioris oculi" (II.iii.14.281-5, 288-92) [But again, it may be asked (whether we are to pray in ideas or in words) what need there is for prayer itself, if God already knows what is necessary for us; unless it be that the very effort involved in prayer calms and purifies our heart, and makes it more capacious for receiving the divine gifts (B)ut we are not always ready to receive, since we are inclined towards other things, and are involved in darkness through our desire for temporal things. Hence there is brought about in prayer a turning of the heart to Him, . . . and in the very act of turning there is effected a purging of the inner eye] (NPNF vi, II.iii.14).

theory formulation God and the devil are rivals for human obedience; as we saw in CHI.1, the question is which one humans will obey.⁸⁷ After Christ's atoning work, the devil has no longer any legitimate right over people, but he still seeks to control them by tricking them into assuming a relationship subordinate to him. Ælfric specifically references the ransom theory in a passage from his homily on Palm Sunday.⁸⁸ But, as CHI.1 indicates, it really underlies much of Ælfric's presentation of humanity's relationship with the devil.

The devil's introduction to the exposition has the effect of clarifying that humans must make a choice between serving God or serving the devil. Like Adam and Eve's choice, human choice to obey and pray to God gives them some amount of agency within the relationship, so that their choice to obey is rewardable: as they decide to serve God in this life, this decision is rewarded by inclusion in the kingdom of God in the next life. As we would expect, throughout the homily Ælfric makes the case that God is both humans' rightful lord, and the better of the two to serve. Although Ælfric presents the two as rival powers, he undermines any sense of legitimacy to the devil's rule, or any idea that he might function in the same way as God does, as a lord or father who rewards those who serve him.

Ælfric's homily on the LP begins by reminding his hearers that God "asend his agen bearn us to alysednysse" (sent his own son to free us) when we were "forwyrhte"⁸⁹ (forfeited), a reference to the ransom theory's idea that Christ delivered humanity from ruin, bondage to the devil. Ælfric's presentation of the devil as a rival lord is the case is initially obscured by the fact that Ælfric uses the terminology of the LP – God as father – and the terminology of the standard

⁸⁷ "He wearð þa deofle gehyrsum. 7 gode ungehyrsum. 7 wearð betæht he 7 eal mancynn æfter ðisum life into hellewite. mid þam deofle ðe hine forlærde" (CHI.1, ll. 157-9) [(Adam) was obedient to the devil and disobedient to God, and he was delivered with all mankind after this life into hell torment with the devil who led him astray].

⁸⁸ "cristes rihtwisnys. is swa micel þæt he nolde niman mancynn. neadunga of ðam deofle buton he hit forwyrhte; He hit forwyrhte þa ða he tihte þæt folc to cristes cweale þæs ælmihtigan godes; 7 þa þurh his unscedðian deaðe wurdon we alysed: fram þam ecan deaðe. gif we us sylfe ne forpærað; ... [deofol] geseh þa mennyscnysse on criste. 7 na ða godcundysse: Þa sprytte he þæt iudeisce folc to his slege. 7 gefredde þa ðone angel cristes godcundysse þurh þe he wæs. to deaðe aceocod. 7 benæmed ealles mancynnes þara þe on god belyfað" (CHI.14, ll. 167-71, 175-8) [Christ's justice is so great that he would not take mankind by force from the devil unless he forfeited them. He forfeited them when he incited the people to the death of Christ the Almighty God. And through his innocent death we were freed from the eternal death, if we do not destroy ourselves. ... The devil saw the human nature in Christ and not the divinity. Then he incited the Jewish people to his slaying and then felt the hook of Christ's divinity through which he was choked to death and deprived of all mankind, of those who believe in God].

⁸⁹ CHI.19, l. 25.

explications – human as dwelling, God as leader, etc. – to set up the tension between God and the devil. In regard to God, he says:

[W]e men sind godes bearn for þan ðe he us geworhte. 7 eft þa ða we forwyrhte wæron he asende his agen bearn us to alysednysse; Nu sind we godes bearn. 7 crist is ure broðer gif we þam fæder on riht gehyrsumiað 7 mid eallum mode hine wurþiað.⁹⁰

[We are God’s children because he made us, and then, when we were ruined, he sent his own son to free us. Now we are God’s children, and Christ is our brother, if we rightly obey the Father and honor him with all our mind.]

God’s authority is based on his right to his own creation. In spite of human disobedience, he mercifully freed humanity, but for people to actually become God’s children it is necessary for them to obey God and honor him; that is, to respond to his gift with their service, a service that places them in a familial relationship. Ælfric then contrasts the situation of the children of God to those who are children of the devil:

[W]itodlice se man þe deofle geefenlæcð. se bið deofles bearn. na þurh gecynde. oððe þurh gesceapennyse. ac þurh ða geefenlæcunge. 7 yfelum gearnungum; And se man þe gode gecwemð he bið godes bearn. na gecyndelice ac þurh gesceapenyse. 7 þurh godum gearnungum.⁹¹

[Truly, the one who imitates the devil, he is the devil’s child, not in the natural way or through creation but through imitation and evil deeds. But the man who serves God he is God’s child, not in the natural way, but through creation and through good deeds.]

⁹⁰ CHI.19, ll. 23-7.

⁹¹ CHI.19, ll. 34-8. As Godden points out, this idea is similar to one found in Augustine’s Tract., 42.15.11-14, 37, which Ælfric uses in CHII.13: “Et ex Deo sunt, et ex Deo non sunt; natura ex Deo sunt, vitio non sunt ex Deo: natura enim bona quae ex Deo est, peccavit voluntate, credendo quod diabolus persuasit, et vitiata est. ... imitando diabolus, filii diaboli facti erant” (Godden 468) [They (the Jews) are both of God, and not of God. By nature they are of God: by depravity they are not of God; for the good nature which is of God sinned voluntarily by believing the persuasive words of the devil, and was corrupted. ... imitating the devil, they had become the children of the devil] (NPNF vol. 7, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, sect. 15). Jerome also links the idea of sonship and obedience in his commentary on Matthew, right before the LP section: “Vt sitis filii Patris uestri qui in caelis est. Si Dei praecepta custodiens filius quis efficitur Dei, ergo non est natura filius sed arbitrio suo” (CCSL 77, I.706-8) [“So that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.” If one becomes a son of God by keeping God’s commands, then he is not a son by nature but by his own choice] (comm. on 5.45, p. 85). In neither case is the correspondence especially close. Augustine’s explication is much longer, and focuses on explaining why Jesus called the Pharisees children of the devil. Jerome’s context is closer to Ælfric’s, but in Ælfric the idea of being a son by one’s own choice is buried within the concept of making oneself acceptable to God (“se man þe gode gecwemð,” CHI.19, l. 36).

That people become children of the devil through imitation, but children of God through service, is striking. Imitating the devil causes humans to bear his likeness as children bear the likeness of their parents, but it does not necessarily establish a hierarchy (*geefenlæcan*, to emulate, to make equal). Within *geefenlæcan* there is no particular sense that the devil recognizes this imitation. Furthermore, the devil has no inherent rights over people, because he has not created any of them. Therefore, Ælfric does not imply any particular mutual obligation or relationship resulting from that imitation. In contrast, good deeds put one in a position of “gecwemende” God, which implies not only that the person serves him but also God’s response to this service. This does establish a mutual relationship.

Ælfric continues the contrast of God with the devil throughout the homily. In the explication of the third petition, he presents the devil as an alternate indweller, saying: “se goda man bið þæs halgan gastes templ; swa eac þærtogeanes se fordona man bið deofles templ 7 deofles wunung”⁹² (the good man is the temple of the Holy Spirit; so contrariwise, the corrupted man is the devil’s temple and the devil’s dwelling). And then in the discussion of the sixth petition, the devil is an alternate leader: “Se man þe wile gelomlice syngian. 7 gelomlice betan. he gremað god; And swa he swiðor syngað. swa he deofle. gewyldra bið. 7 hine þonne god forlæt. 7 he færð swa him deofol wissað”⁹³ (The one who often sins and often amends, he angers God. And the more he sins, the more he will be in the power of the devil, and God will abandon him and he will go as the devil directs). Once again, the word Ælfric chooses to convey the devil’s direction, “wissað,” depersonalizes the relationship.⁹⁴ Those who follow the devil’s direction are not rendering service to him; rather, they have fallen under his influence, an influence that carries with it no inherent promise of protection or reward. Thus, the devil is not presented as a lord who rewards and protects his own, but rather a leader whose doom they share

⁹² CHI.19, ll. 67-8.

⁹³ CHI.19, ll. 160-3.

⁹⁴ Ælfric often uses *wissian* in somewhat depersonalized instances, such as when God guides the magi to Bethlehem through the star: “Eaþe mihte god hi gewissian þurh ðone steorran to þære byrig” (CHI.7, l. 83, “God could easily guide them through the stars to the town”), or when something is controlled by a sort of animating force, as the soul controls the body, “Heo is ungesewenlic. ac þeahhwæðre heo wissað þone gesewenlican lichaman” (CHI.10, l. 121-2) [She is invisible but nevertheless she directs the visible body], or when the Holy Spirit directs those who believe in God: “hi sind þurh þone halgan gast gewissode” (CHI.7, l. 178-9) [they are directed through the Holy Spirit]. He also uses it in a more direct sense in collocation with “gewearðan,” to rule; for instance: “of þe cymþ se heretoga. se þe gewylt 7 gewissað israhela folc (CHI.5, ll. 19-20) [from you will come the leader, he who will rule and direct the people of Israel].

as they fall under his control. Although Ælfric’s language for God and the devil (father, dweller-within, etc.) borrow from the prayer, the Bible, and standard explication, the underlying tension in the homily is within the formulation of the ransom theory. If humans imitate the devil, God abandons them to his lordship. The devil’s domination does not bring promises of closeness or reward; his is a rather atomized, dysfunctional family. On the other hand, those who serve God become members of an orderly family in which obedience is rewarded with further belonging. Ælfric again returns to this opposition at the end of the homily while discussing “deliver us from evil.” He makes clear what kind of lords both God and the devil are:

Alys us fram deofle 7 fram eallum his syrwingum; God lufað us. 7 deofol us hatað; God us fet 7 gefrefrað. 7 deofol us wile ofslean gif he mot. ... for þi we sceolon forbegan 7 forseon þone lyþran deofol mid eallum his lotwrencum. for þan ðe him ne gebyrað naht to us. 7 we sceolon lufian 7 fyligan urum drihtne. se þe us læt to þam ecan life.⁹⁵

[Deliver us from the devil and from all his tricks. God loves us, and the devil hates us. God feeds and comforts us, and the devil will kill us if he can. ... Therefore, we should flee from and reject the wicked devil with all his deceits, because he is of no concern to us at all, and we must love and follow our Lord, he who leads us to the eternal life.]

Within the structure of this rivalry Ælfric emphasizes people’s duty to obey God in order to call him Father or Lord – this, again, is the language Ælfric uses when talking about Adam’s fall, and in this homily, it is the condition under which people can call God father (even though he made and redeemed them): “*gif we þam fæder on riht gehyrsumiað*”⁹⁶ (*if we will rightly obey the Father*) and, several lines later: “we magon cuðlice to him clypian swa swa to urum breþer. *gif we þa broðerrædene swa healdað ... þæt is þæt we ne sceolon na gepafian. þæt deofol mid ænigum unþeawum us geweme fram cristes broþorrædene*”⁹⁷ (*we may familiarly cry to him as to our brother, if we so observe our brotherhood ... that is, that we should not allow the devil with any evil practices to seduce us from the brotherhood of Christ*). Obedience and the relational position to petition go hand in hand; brotherhood with Christ is conditional upon people recognizing the favors he has proffered and responding in obedience.

⁹⁵ CHI.19, ll. 179-85.

⁹⁶ CHI.19, ll. 26-7, emphasis added.

⁹⁷ CHI.19, ll. 30-3 (emphasis added).

Ælfric's homily thus situates the primary Christian prayer within a relationship with God in which the individual chooses, on the basis of his actions (his obedience to God or his imitation of the devil) with whom he is allied. Prayer becomes a part of and a characteristic of this relationship in which precaters enact their choice of lords, rather than a subjectively efficacious means of attaining purity. Gustav Aulén's summary of the difference between ransom theory and Anselm's doctrine of substitutionary atonement helpfully highlights the difference in concern attendant on ransom theory:

[I]t scarcely needs to be said that this "dramatic" type stands in sharp contrast with the "subjective" type of view. It does not set forth only or chiefly a change taking place in men; it describes a complete change in the situation, a change in the relation between God and the world, and a change also in God's own attitude. The idea is, indeed, thoroughly "objective"; and its objectivity is further emphasised by the fact that the Atonement is not regarded as affecting men primarily as individuals, but is set forth as a drama of a world's salvation.⁹⁸

Most notably, the ransom theory predisposes people to think in terms of God as a lord, and salvation as a matter of allegiance to one lord or the other predicated upon which lord one obeys – that is, a change in the situation of the one obeying. In these terms, obedience is not a matter of learning to purify one's inner eye or training the desires, nor does it focus on a change in the inner disposition from unwilling and unable to please God, but rather it brings about release from a prior condition of bondage and makes humans free to serve their rightful Lord. Within this structure, however, Ælfric systematically undermines any sense of closeness or reward attendant upon following the devil. Being a child of God implies a close relationship; being a child of the devil does not, because the devil "us wile ofslean gif he mot."

As Aulén mentions, the ransom theory also tends to see the Atonement as affecting the world, and, we might say, the community, rather than people as individuals. This brings us to Ælfric's other strikingly different focus, which is his emphasis on the brotherhood of believers in

⁹⁸ Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 6.

his introduction and conclusion. The basic idea of brotherhood can be found in Augustine's commentary and sermons:⁹⁹

Admonentur hic etiam diuites uel genere nobiles secundum saeculum, cum christiani facti fuerint, non superbire aduersus pauperes et ignobiles, quoniam simul dicunt deo: pater noster, quod non possunt uere ac pie dicere, nisi se fratres esse cognoscant.¹⁰⁰

[Here (in the salutation) also there is an admonition to the rich and to those of noble birth, so far as this world is concerned, that when they have become Christians they should not comport themselves proudly towards the poor and the low of birth; since together with them they call God "Our Father," – an expression which they cannot truly and piously use, unless they recognise that they are brethren.]¹⁰¹

The idea of brotherhood in Augustine is conveyed in two sentences that do not gain much emphasis within the explication.¹⁰² In contrast, the idea of brotherhood essentially forms the

⁹⁹ Augustine's commentary is, in fact, the earliest one that contains this idea as fully formulated as this, although Cyprian discusses the meaning of the plural pronoun used throughout the prayer (more on this later).

¹⁰⁰ CCSL 35, II.iv.16358-62. The same idea is found in two of his sermons, neither of which give the weight to it that Ælfric does: Sermo 58: "Dicimus autem communiter: *Pater noster*. Quanta dignatio! Hoc dicit imperator, hoc dicit mendicus; hoc dicit seruus, hoc dicit dominus eius. Simul dicunt: *Pater noster, qui es in caelis*. Intellegant ergo se esse fratres, quando unum habent patrem. Sed non dedignetur fratrem habere seruus suum dominus eius, quem fratrem uoluit habere Dominus Christus" (CCSL 41Aa, 58.2.22-8) [Now we say *Our Father* all together; what all-embracing generosity! The emperor says it, the beggar says it; the slave says it, his master says it. They all say together, *Our Father who art in heaven*. So they must realize that they are brothers, since they all have one Father. The master must not scorn to have as a brother the slave of his whom the Lord Christ was willing to have as a brother] (Hill, 58.2). Sermo 59: "Ad magnum genus pertinere coepistis. Sub isto Patre fratres sunt diues et pauper, sub isto Patre fratres sunt dominus et seruus, sub isto Patre fratres sunt imperator et miles. Omnes christiani fideles diuersos in terra habent patres, alii nobiles, alii ignobiles; unum uero Patrem inuocant, qui est in caelis" (CCSL 41Aa, 59.2.14-18) [You have begun to belong to a huge family. Under this Father rich and poor are brothers; under this Father master and slave are brothers; under this Father emperor and private soldier are brothers. Christian believers all have different fathers on earth, some aristocrats, some commoners. But they all call upon one Father who is in heaven] (Hill, 9.2).

¹⁰¹ NPNF vi, II.iv.16.

¹⁰² While Augustine does not overly emphasize the idea that all Christians are brothers, the idea he does spend a comparatively long time on, and, indeed, returns to frequently in other sermons as well, is that Christians need to forgive others their debts. Within the commentary he develops this idea at no greater length than any of the other petitions, and he focuses primarily there on forgiving monetary debts, even though he begins by acknowledging that "[n]on hic ergo quisque urgetur pecuniam dimittere debitoribus, sed quaecumque in eum alius peccauerit" (*De sermone Domini in monte*, CCSL 35, II.viii.28593-4) [it is not a money claim that one is pressed to remit, but whatever sins another may have committed against him] (NPNF, vol. vi, II.viii.28). Within sermons 56 and 58 he presents this as a bargain with God: "*Dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris*. Sponsionem facimus cum Deo, pactum et placitum" (CCSL 41Aa, 56.13.275-7) ["Forgive us our debts, as we too forgive our debtors." We are making a bargain with God, an agreement and a contract] (Hill, 56.13). If Christians do not uphold their end of the bargain, then God will not forgive them. In Sermon 56, Augustine spends sections 11-18 explicating this petition (out of 19 sections), even subsuming the final two petitions into his discussion of forgiveness. But Augustine's primary focus in his sermons is revenge, an idea he

introduction and conclusion to Ælfric’s sermon. He begins by discussing the significance of God’s fatherhood for the brotherhood of all Christians: “For þi nu ealle cristene men ægðer ge rice. ge heane. ge æðelborene ge unæðelborene. 7 se hlaford 7 se þeowa ealle hi sind gebroðra 7 ealle hi habbað ænne fæder on heofonum”¹⁰³ (Therefore now all Christians, whether rich or poor, noble-born or common, both the lord and the servant, all are brothers and all have one Father in heaven). For Ælfric this equality is primarily manifest in the boldness with which all people can address God as father: “Ealswa bealdlice mot se þeowa clypian god him to fæder ealswa se cyning”¹⁰⁴ (Just as boldly may the servant call God his father as the king). The only thing that gains people higher standing before God is through the same obedience that Ælfric continually emphasizes is necessary to enter into a relationship with God: “ealle we sind gelice ætforan gode. buton hwa oðerne mid godum weorcum forþeo”¹⁰⁵ (we are all alike before God, unless one outserve the other with good works). Indeed, good works have the possibility of reversing the normal social order: “oft bið se earma betera ætforan gode þonne se rica”¹⁰⁶ (often the poor is better before God than the rich). And, finally, this brotherly bond has radical implications for the way different members of society treat each other, so that: “ælc oþerne lufige swa swa hine sylfne. 7 nanum ne gebeode þæt he nelle þæt man him gebeode”¹⁰⁷ (each loves the other just as himself, and commands no one anything that he does not wish someone command him). Although Ælfric speaks of a fundamental equality of all Christians, clearly he does not envision a leveling of social roles. Rather, he calls for people to act toward each other with “soþan sibbe”¹⁰⁸ (true peace), enacting true kinship bonds toward each other that, as we will see in CHI.18, he characterizes through the mutual exchange of gifts and services.

At the end of the homily he returns to the idea of unity for another forty lines or so. His main point is that all Christians need each other; the rich especially need the poor.¹⁰⁹ As Godden notes, this is an appropriate theme for Rogationtide, when the whole community might be

comes back to again and again: Christians should not seek revenge on their enemies. Interestingly, this is not an idea found in Ælfric’s sermon at all.

¹⁰³ CHI.19, 40-2.

¹⁰⁴ CHI.19, 43-4.

¹⁰⁵ CHI.19, 44-5.

¹⁰⁶ CHI.19, 46-7.

¹⁰⁷ CHI.19, 49-51.

¹⁰⁸ CHI.19, l. 49.

¹⁰⁹ Godden points out that this passage owes nothing to Augustine.

expected to gather in church,¹¹⁰ but it also has the effect of situating prayer in a complex of communal concerns focused on peace and unity rather than on the purification of the individual as in Augustine.¹¹¹ Ælfric seems to use as his starting point an idea found toward the beginning of Cyprian's treatise on the LP, which presents the LP as a "public and common" prayer on the basis of the plural pronouns used throughout:

Non dicimus: *Pater meus, qui es in caelis* ... Publica est nobis et communis oratio, et quando oramus, non pro uno sed pro populo toto rogamus, quia totus populus unum sumus. Deus pacis et concordiae magister qui docuit unitatem, sic orare unum pro omnibus uoluit, quomodo in uno omnes ipse portauit.¹¹²

[For we say not "My Father, which art in heaven"... . Our prayer is public and common; and when we pray, we pray not for one, but for the whole people, because we the whole people are one. The God of peace and the Teacher of concord, who taught unity, willed that one should thus pray for all, even as He Himself bore us all in one.]¹¹³

Ælfric echoes the same ideas: "Ne cwyð na on þam gebede. min fæder. þu ðe eart on heofonum. ac cwyþ ure fæder ... On þam is geswutelod hu swiðe god lufað annysse. 7 geþwærnyse on his folce"¹¹⁴ (It is not said in the prayer, "My Father, you who are in heaven," but it is said, "Our Father" ... In this is revealed how much God loves unity and concord in his people). While Cyprian follows the passage above with a catena of biblical quotations developing this theme, Ælfric moves on into the metaphor of the human body from I Cor. 12: "Æfter godes gesetnyse ealle cristene men sceoldon beon swa geþwære. swilce hit an man wære"¹¹⁵ (According to God's decree all Christians should be so united as though they were one man). In emphasizing community over the individual what Ælfric emphasizes is a sense of communal wholeness, an idea of the *halig*, as opposed to *sanctus*. Thus, while both Augustine and Ælfric teach that God's name needs to be hallowed in each of us, Augustine says "ut sanctum habeatur ab hominibus, id

¹¹⁰ "The opening and closing sections draw out the general implications of the prayer to stress ideas of community and the equality of all ranks before God. Possibly this was felt to be an appropriate theme for Rogationtide when the whole populace might be present" (Godden 154).

¹¹¹ Even though Augustine does mention that baptism brings the individual into a new community and new family.

¹¹² *Liber de oratione dominica*, CCSL 3A, viii.103, 106-11.

¹¹³ Trans. ANF, vol. 5, viii.

¹¹⁴ CHI.19, ll. 215-7.

¹¹⁵ CHI.19, ll. 219-21.

est ita illis innotescat deus, ut non existiment aliquid sanctius, quod magis offendere timeant”¹¹⁶ (that it may be held holy by men; i.e., that God may so become known to them, that they shall reckon nothing more holy, and which they are more afraid of offending).¹¹⁷ In sermon 56 Augustine defines “hallowed” more specifically for his congregation: “Quid est *sanctifectur*? Sanctum habeatur, non contemnatur”¹¹⁸ (What does ‘hallowed be’ mean? May it be treated as holy (*sanctus*), not disdained).¹¹⁹ Augustine’s idea of *sanctificatio* situates the concept within the realm of taboo/sacred, that which a person fears to defile or transgress, and thus shows proper respect to. His teaching correspondingly focuses on set-apartness, on purity, on detachment from the material world.

On the other hand, Ælfric says,

Ac þis word is swa to understandenne þæt his nama sy on us gehalgod. 7 he us þæs getipige þæt we moton his naman mid urum muþe gebletsian. 7 he us sylle þæt geþanc. þæt we magon understandan þæt nan ðing nis swa halig swa his nama.¹²⁰

[But this word should so be understood that his name be in us hallowed, and he grants to us that we may bless his name with our mouth, and he gives us that thought that we can understand that nothing is so holy as his name.]

Ælfric’s teaching notably situates the idea of holiness within a more positive context, associating it, not with fear of offending God, but with blessing him. Furthermore, the ability both to bless God and to understand his holiness is considered a gift from God. Rather than something to be feared, Ælfric sees the holy as something to be praised, and notes that holiness comes from God to man: “he us ealle gebletsað and gehalgað”¹²¹ (he blesses and hallows all of us), and then is returned from man to God as people strive to live holiness and to speak blessings back to God. Ælfric’s ideal community is one that exists in a cycle of gift and return gift, being blessed and blessing. Thus, for Ælfric, prayer functions as part of the individual’s identifying himself with a particular community. Certain obligations go along with belonging to this community, both

¹¹⁶ *De sermone Domini in monte*, CCSL 35, II.v.19.412-15.

¹¹⁷ NPNF, vol. vi, II.v.19.

¹¹⁸ CCSL 41Aa, 56.5.96-7.

¹¹⁹ Hill, 56.5.

¹²⁰ CHI.19, ll. 76-9.

¹²¹ CHI.19, ll. 75-6.

toward obeying God and toward realizing one's fundamental equality with other believers and thus one's obligations towards them.

This concern for holiness thus plays out in Ælfric's idea of human relations bookending the sermon, although *halgung/halgian* is not a word he uses in his discussion of relationships among Christians. The result of this wholeness, however, is that

on eallum þingum we sceolon healdan sibbe and annysse. gif we wyllað habban þa micclan geþincþe. þæt we beon godes bearn se þe on heofonum is: on þære he rixað mid eallum his halgum. on ealra worulda world.¹²²

[in all things we should hold peace and unity if we wish to have the great privilege that we be God's children, he who is in heaven where he rules with all his saints through all ages].

Ælfric's hearers can expect to partake in this situation if "hi mid earfoðnyssum. 7 mid geswince. geearnian þæt ece rice 7 þa ecan blisse mid gode. 7 mid eallum his halgum"¹²³ (they with humility and with toil earn that eternal kingdom and the eternal bliss with God and with all his saints).

In many ways then, Ælfric's teaching on the central Christian prayer hardly seems to be about prayer at all, and barely addresses theoretical concerns about what prayer is. What Ælfric *does* emphasize is the particular relationship between Christians and God that is manifested through prayer and enacted as people cry out to Christ as brother and God as father. This relationship has, for Ælfric, real social implications for the members of a community constituted by and oriented around the continual reiteration of the central Christian prayer.

CATHOLIC HOMILY I.18: THE COMMUNITY AT PRAYER

Like CHI.19, CHI.18 was written for Rogationtide, the three days before Ascension when a large proportion of the community could be expected in church.¹²⁴ CHI.18 explains the origins of Rogationtide, but the last half focuses on petitioning God. This homily also notably situates

¹²² CHI.19, ll. 240-3.

¹²³ CHI.19, ll. 173-5.

¹²⁴ For the liturgical context of Ælfric's Rogationtide sermons (of which he wrote nine in total), and the way the liturgy is reflected in Ælfric's themes, see Stephen J. Harris, "The Liturgical Context of Ælfric's Homilies," in *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. Aaron J Kleist, Studies in the Early Middle Ages, vol. 17 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 143-69.

prayer within a three-way gift exchange between the rich, the poor, and God, deepening the ideal of communal wholeness presented in CHI.19. CHI.18 deepens the communal orientation of prayer presented in CHI.19 through presenting prayer – the petition for salvation – as a three-way gift-cycle involving the community and God. This gift-cycle involves both prayer and almsgiving.¹²⁵ Within gift-theory, alms are the perfect representation of the “free” gift, given by the donor out of no obligation to a recipient with whom he has no particular ties and from whom he expects no return.¹²⁶ As we have seen up to this point, in some ways almsgiving most perfectly represents the relationship between God and humans: all gifts come freely from God; humans have nothing with which to reciprocate since all they have (including life itself) comes from God. Humans are therefore God’s beggars, dependent on God’s *gratia* but in no way able to approach intimacy of relationship with him. As with all “free” gifts, alms negate a relationship by calling attention to the disparity in situations between the donor and the recipient. In practice, the hierarchy alms establish between donor and needy calls attention to the inequality that exists between them. Thus: “The unreciprocated gift debases the recipient,” according to Parry.¹²⁷ But alms are *more* debasing to the recipient in a situation in which the recipient feels the social distance between the donor and himself is closer than the act of almsgiving implies. At the same time, this is a conceptualization of the relationship between God and humans that Anglo-Saxon teaching on prayer tends to resist. Because of *gratia* in Bede and the closely related concept of *agen cyre* and *gehyrsumness* in Ælfric, humans are able to enter into a reciprocal relationship with God in which they give God gifts for which he rewards them.

As Boniface Ramsey’s account of early almsgiving makes clear,¹²⁸ almsgiving in the late antique church was quickly subsumed into *do ut des* exchange in which alms are sacrificed to

¹²⁵ Stephen Harris notes that this homily seems to shift suddenly from prayer to poverty (almsgiving), but the connection between the two (and more generalized good deeds) is standard in teaching on prayer. The textual origin of this collocation is ultimately from the context of the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6 (“Liturgical Context,” 154).

¹²⁶ As Derrida points out, the perfect freeness of a gift is more or less impossible. At the very least, the donor expects gratitude, and perhaps social approbation, or at least a subjective sense of her own largesse or goodness (*Given Time*). In addition, in the case of direct donation there is always a “danger” (to the freeness of the gift) that a relationship will result; the recipient will come to expect alms; the donor will feel obliged to give them.

¹²⁷ Parry, “*The Gift*, the Indian Gift, and the ‘Indian Gift,’” 458.

¹²⁸ Boniface Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church: The Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries,” *Theological Studies* 43.1 (1982): 226-59.

God (via the poor) for the cleansing of sins and salvation of the donor.¹²⁹ That is, the transaction that takes place can be seen as one essentially between the donor and God in which the poor are instrumental rather than essential partners. However, early Christian teachings on prayer often emphasize the way that the poor can also give alms to those less fortunate than themselves, or through acts of service to the wealthy, such as helping stranded travelers. This gives alms a leveling effect, but still makes the primary transaction one between the donor and God. As Angenendt and others have pointed out, almsgiving and other donations *pro anima* become significant forces in the medieval economy.¹³⁰ Alms and prayer become subsumed more and more into a model of exchange in which sins and cleansing all have their prices calculated in prayers and good deeds. Ælfric avoids this, and it is to a large extent the structures of gift-exchange that allow him to do this.

But before looking at Ælfric in more detail, it is worth spending a moment with Augustine's commentary on almsgiving in the prayer passage from *De sermone Domini in monte*. For Augustine (as for most early writers on prayer), both almsgiving and prayer operate on the same plane of action, since both are good works oriented toward salvation. Specifically, within this text, both of these works bring the practitioner of them to the purity necessary for salvation. Almsgiving, then, is essentially a matter between the one giving alms and God, but it is not a *do ut des* relationship, nor are alms conceptualized relationally. Almsgiving is subsumed into the same concern for purity manifest in his teaching on prayer: giving alms for the praise of God rather than men leads to cleansing of the heart. In fact, almsgiving is an important part of this cleansing: through almsgiving the individual demonstrates (and perhaps helps bring about) his detachment from the material world – a conception of the holy oriented around *sanctus*. Augustine asks: “Simplex autem quomodo erit, si duobus dominis seruit, nec una intentione rerum aeternarum purificat aciem suam, sed eam mortalium quoque fragiliumque rerum amore obnubilat?”¹³¹ (How will [the heart] be single, if it serves two masters, and does not purge its

¹²⁹ This would seem to give the wealthy an advantage within a kingdom of God hierarchy, but many teachers emphasize that the poor can also give alms by behaving generously and helping the rich in situations where they need help, and, of course, there is a strong tradition within Christian teaching of the closeness of the poor to God, as exemplified in the Gospel story of Dives and Lazarus.

¹³⁰ See also Angenendt's article on the way medieval almsgiving and prayer contributed to the wealth of monasteries (“*Donationes pro anima*”).

¹³¹ CCSL 35, II.ii.9.209-11.

vision by the striving after eternal things alone, but clouds it by the love of mortal and perishable things as well?)¹³² Through giving secretly, as the Gospel commands, the one giving demonstrates his detachment both from material things and from the praise of men. Almsgiving shows that the one giving alms is not ruled by his own possessions, and it acts as a purificatory practice in training the eye of the heart to be single.

Augustine's idea of alms thus resonates strangely with Derrida's idea of the pure gift. In Derrida's thinking, a pure gift is one from which the giver gains nothing, including praise or even her own satisfied feeling. The main difference between alms in this passage and Derrida's pure gift¹³³ is that, for Augustine, detachment transfers the function of the alms from the mundane to the spiritual realm. Within the gift-theories of sacrifice, this sort of transference is usually what differentiates a gift from a sacrifice. However, for Augustine, the gift transferred to the spiritual realm has no function there. One does not, in this passage, give alms as a gift to God in return for purity; one gives alms to people as a means to purification. The gift disappears and all that is left is the single-hearted pure eye, an achieved state of affinity with or likeness to God. Thus, almsgiving brings about a change in the giver that leads to further ability to see God, but the alms themselves have no relational function binding together donor and recipient or even the giver and God. This also is unlike anything Ælfric does.

Unlike the other two homilies this chapter examines, CHI.19 and CHI.10, CHI.18 is an amalgamation of many different elements. In the first part of the sermon, Ælfric explains the origins of Rogationtide, which itself incorporates two different traditions, beating the bounds and penitential practices intended to ward off natural disasters. In the second part he explicates the pericope for the day (Luke 11:5-13), on God's willingness to grant requests, by adapting two Augustinian sermons.¹³⁴ The first sentence of the homily brings all these elements together:

Pas dagas sind gehatene. letaniae. þæt sind gebeddagas. on þisum dagum we sceolon gebiddan ure eorðlicra wæstma. genihtsumnysse: 7 us sylfum gesundfulnysse 7 sibbe. 7 þæt git mare is ure synna forgifenyse.¹³⁵

¹³² NPNF vi, II.ii.9.

¹³³ Aside from the fact that Augustine's alms would have some effect on the recipient, even if given in perfect secrecy.

¹³⁴ Sermons 105 and 61 (which is on the parallel passage in Matthew 7:7-11).

¹³⁵ CHI.18, ll. 2-5.

[These days are called *Litaniae*, that is, Prayer Days. In these days we ought to pray for abundance of our earthly fruits, and health for ourselves, and peace, and, what is yet more, our sins' forgiveness.]

Foremost, the days are set aside for praying for material blessings, but, as is typical, Ælfric moves quickly from this to “*þæt gyt mare is,*” spiritual blessings. After giving a history of Rogationtide, including an excursion through the story of Jonah, Ælfric shifts attention to prayer, asking for favors from God.

The pericope, which follows Luke's version of the LP, gives two parables designed to assure precaters that God is willing to hear and grant requests. In the first of these, a man asks his neighbor for bread. Persistence is the main point of the story: “*dico vobis et si non dabit illi surgens eo quod amicus eius sit propter improbitatem tamen eius surget et dabit illi quotquot habet necessarios*”¹³⁶ (Yet if he shall continue knocking, I say to you, although he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend; yet, because of his importunity, he will rise, and give him as many as he needeth). In the second parable, Jesus likens prayer to God to a child asking his father for food, assuring his hearers of God's good intentions toward them:

*quis autem ex vobis patrem petet panem numquid lapidem dabit illi aut piscem numquid pro pisce serpentem dabit illi aut si petierit ovum numquid porriget illi scorpionem si ergo vos cum sitis mali nostis bona data dare filiis vestris quanto magis Pater vester de caelo dabit spiritum bonum petentibus se.*¹³⁷

[And which of you, if he ask his father bread, will he give him a stone? or a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he reach him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father from heaven give the good Spirit to them that ask him?]

Augustine, allowing no parable to go unallegorized, interprets the various food-stuffs in the parables (the bread in the first, the bread, fish, and egg in the second) as spiritual gifts, belief, and faith, hope, and charity. In Sermon 61, he takes care to point out that temporal goods are “[b]ona ergo secundum tempus”¹³⁸ (good for a time),¹³⁹ but that the truly precious things are the

¹³⁶ Luc. 11:8.

¹³⁷ Luc. 11:11-13.

¹³⁸ Homily 61, CCSL 41Aa, 2.38.

spiritual gifts, and he considers at some length the relationship Christians ought to have to material possessions: “Est ergo bonum quod faciat bonum; et est bonum unde facias bonum. Bonum quod facit bonum, Deus est”¹⁴⁰ (So there is a good that can make good, and there’s a good with which you can do good. The good that makes good is God).¹⁴¹ He then continues to develop a metaphor of trading one’s goods for justice:

Magis eroga pecuniam, ut habeas iustitiam. A quo enim habebis iustitiam, nisi a Deo, fonte iustitiae? Ergo, si uis habere iustitiam, esto mendicus Dei, qui te paulo ante ex euangelio ut peteres, quaereres, pulsares monebat.¹⁴²

[Rather, I’m telling you, disburse money in order to get justice. After all, whom will you get justice from if not from God the fountain of justice? So if you want to get some justice, be a beggar to God, who a little while ago was advising you in the gospel to ask, to seek, to knock.]¹⁴³

Ælfric follows Augustine’s major points fairly closely; however, as in CHI.19, he reorients the alms-mediated relationship between people. In Augustine’s explication, almsgiving is primarily a matter between the giver and God; he emphasizes the ethical responsibility of the wealthy to care for the poor, but as far as righteousness (*iustitia*) is concerned, the goods given to the poor become part of an exchange between the wealthy and God. That this metaphor is broadly painted and not perfect in the details can be seen in the non-personal way he imagines alms functioning in *De sermone Domini in monte*. Furthermore, the exchange metaphor involves a little finessing on Augustine’s part to clarify that he is not suggesting that people can buy justice from God. This can be seen in the way he switches the terms of the exchange in the passage above: justice comes from begging God for it – a petition where the precator has nothing to offer himself – not, ultimately, from giving away one’s goods.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁹ Hill, 61.2.

¹⁴⁰ Homily 61, CCSL 41Aa, 3.49-50.

¹⁴¹ Hill, 61.3.

¹⁴² Homily 61, CCSL 41Aa, 4.80-3.

¹⁴³ Hill, 61.4.

¹⁴⁴ Here one can see clearly the way that almsgiving and prayer are often collapsed into essentially the same thing. Although Augustine’s sermon does not put almsgiving into the clear context of purity, as he does in his *Tractatus III* on John, the same idea of lessening one’s attachment to material possessions still underlies his discussion. The *Tractates*, in fact, reflect much more obviously Neo-platonic terminology and ways of thinking in common with much of Augustine’s early work. In Augustine’s later work, the concept of *iustitia* gains in importance (see

In Ælfric’s homily, in contrast, the poor become essential partners in the exchange. Although Ælfric does not use the term “ælmesse” in this homily, the rich giving to the needy is a central concept. As we have seen, alms are an important part of petitionary practice, sometimes, as in Augustine’s commentary, associated with purificatory practices, and sometimes, as here, presented as part of an exchange relationship with God. But Ælfric’s explication of Luke 11.5-13 primarily emphasizes the unidirectionality of God’s gifts. While in both parables the petitioner asks within a pre-existing relationship, in both cases the petitioner asks for *ben* without apparently appealing to or offering anything in return. Ælfric emphasizes this: “þy he cwæð na for freondrædene. for ðan þe nan mann nære wurðe ne ðæs geleafan. ne ðæs ecan lifes gif godes mildheortnys nære ðe mare. ofer mancynne”¹⁴⁵ (So he says, “Not for friendship,” because no one is worthy of belief nor eternal life if God’s mercy were not the greater over mankind). Ælfric uses the unidirectionality of God’s gifts to make the point that “Ealle we sind godes þearfan”¹⁴⁶ (We are all God’s needy). That is, because God’s gifts are unidirectional rather than reciprocal, the relationship between humans and God is one in which humans are dependent upon God’s alms as beggars, having no particular claim upon him and able to offer him nothing in exchange, so that every gift springs from God’s unconstrained generosity – an appropriately Augustinian idea for a sermon based on Augustinian sources.

At the same time, Ælfric presents a model of exchange in which humans do return gifts to God through the linkage of almsgiving and prayer. Ælfric uses “Ealle we sind godes þearfan” (We are all God’s needy) to remind the wealthy that they are obliged to hear the petitions of the poor who ask of them if they want God to hear their own petitions: “Uton for ðy oncnawan þa þearfan þe us biddað: þæt god oncnawe us. þonne we hine biddað ure neode”¹⁴⁷ (Let us therefore acknowledge the needy who petition us so that God may acknowledge us when we ask him for our needs). In this model of almsgiving Ælfric does not appeal to any idea of purification or

McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 39). All *iustitia* comes ultimately from God.

¹⁴⁵ CHI.18, ll. 89-92.

¹⁴⁶ CHI.18, l. 179.

¹⁴⁷ CHI.18, ll. 179-81. Augustine says, “Mendici enim Dei sumus: ut agnoscat ille mendicos suos, agnoscamus et nos nostros” (CCSL 41Aa, 61.8.130-1, “We are God’s beggars, remember; for him to take notice of his beggars, we in our turn must take notice of ours,” Hill, 61.8).

disassociation from the material world,¹⁴⁸ but to a sense of reciprocity in that people should act toward each other as they wish God to act toward them and a sense that all are brothers: “Hu mihtu for sceame. æniges þinges æt gode biddan: gif ðu forwyrnst þinum gelican. þæs þe ðu foreaðelice him getiðian miht”¹⁴⁹ (How can you for shame ask anything from God if you refuse those like you that which you could easily grant them?) Unlike Augustine, however, Ælfric does not present the needy as having nothing of their own to offer the rich in return for their alms. Rather,

Se rica 7 se þearfa sind him betwynan nydbehefe; se welega is geworht for ðan þearfan. 7 se þearfa for ðam welegan. þam spedigum gedafenap þæt he spende 7 dæle. þam wædlan gedafenað þæt he gebidde for ðam dælere; Se earma is se weig. þe læt us to godes rice. Mare sylð se þearfa þam rican: þonne he æt him nime.¹⁵⁰

[The rich and the needy are necessary to each other. The wealthy is made for the needy, and the needy for the wealthy. It is fitting for the prosperous that he give and distribute; for the poor it is fitting that he pray for the giver. The poor man is the road that allows us into God’s kingdom. The needy gives more to the rich than he takes from him.]

Ælfric presents a model of interdependence in which the wealthy trade their material goods to the poor in exchange for righteousness. However, the poor for Ælfric are not merely recipients of goods in a relationship transaction that does not fundamentally involve them; instead, they reciprocate by praying for the wealthy – an action Ælfric calls more valuable than the material provision. In this way, the poor are set up as intercessors for the rich to petition on their behalf

¹⁴⁸ Augustine’s sermons contain the idea that riches are bad for a person insofar as a person desires them: “Aliud est esse diuitem, aliud uelle fieri diuitem. Diues est, quia diuitibus natus est, non quia uoluit; diues est, quia multi hereditates dimiserunt; uideo facultates, non interrogo uoluntates. Hic cupiditas accusatur: non aurum, non argentum, non diuitiae, sed cupiditas” (Hom. 61, CCSL 41Aa, 10.176-81) [It’s one thing to be rich, another to wish to become rich. A person is rich who was born of rich parents; he’s not rich because he wished to be, but because he is the heir of many generations. I note his possessions, I don’t ask questions about his wishes. In this text it’s greed that is being rebuked, not gold, not silver, not riches, but greed] (Hill, 61.10). Augustine advocates a sort of detachment, although Ælfric picks this up later: Oþer is þæt hwa rice beo. gif his ylðran him æhta becwædon: oðer is gif hwa þurh gitsunge. rice gewurðe; Ðises mannes gitsung is gewreht wið gode: Na þæs oðres æht” (CHI.18, ll. 196-8) [It is one thing that one is rich if his parents left him possessions; it is another thing if one becomes rich through greed. This person’s greed is accused before God, not the other’s possessions]. For Ælfric, within this context, *gytsung* takes on a greater social orientation, as a matter between rich and poor, rather than just a spiritual matter of the heart to be dealt with between the individual and God, as for Augustine.

¹⁴⁹ CHI.18, ll. 184-5.

¹⁵⁰ CHI.18, ll. 205-9.

for entry to the kingdom.¹⁵¹ They are essential participants in the gift-cycle instead of (as in Augustine’s teaching) instruments in the relationship between the rich and God. Ælfric’s idea of the righteousness or goodness that almsgiving brings has little in common with Augustine’s idea of purity, or even with Augustine’s ideas of almsgiving as laid out in these sermons; rather, as in CHI.19, he envisions goodness as a sort of communal wholeness, a right use of goods oriented around relationships, where every person has a role to play in ensuring the welfare, both material and spiritual of his “equals.” This shifts the emphasis from Augustine’s sermons, in which the central relationship is God and the wealthy almsgiver. The acts of generosity the almsgiver performs are done essentially in the sight of God, whereas for Ælfric, the prayers of the poor serve as testimony to the deeds of the rich. Their prayers mediate the good deeds of the rich.

Ælfric’s inclusion of the poor as essential participants in the alms-exchange makes petition and almsgiving into a complex three-way gift-giving cycle that binds together God and the human community. “We,” Ælfric says, are God’s needy (having nothing to give, and therefore receiving everything by charity). Reflecting the reality of this relationship, “we” have nothing to give God; rather “we” give in the human realm to the destitute.¹⁵² The needy *do* have something to return – prayer – transforming the relationship between rich and poor from charity to reciprocity. This, in turn, is read back onto the human/God relationship. In addition to bonding people together, however, the cyclical nature of the exchange creates a deferral that keeps gifts separate from commodities: the rich do not trade their wealth to God for salvation, nor do the poor trade their prayers. Rather, the gift binds everyone together within a web of reciprocal generosity and the joy of the gift. Because gifts and return-gifts are never fully commensurate and equal, the gift cycle creates imbalances of debt and obligation rather than the zero-sum balance found in commodity exchange that dissolves relationships. The never-fully-equal nature of gift-exchange creates productive space between gift and counter-gift in which relationships can form through ties of mutual obligation and gratitude. Because of this, the whole human community is necessary to one another, moving together toward salvation.

¹⁵¹ This idea is not found in Augustine, but it can be found in Paulinus of Nola and a sermon by Maximus, see Ramsey, 248-9. It is also in some Greek sources that Ælfric is unlikely to have known, namely, the Shepherd of Hermas and Clement’s *Stromateis* (see Jay, *Origen’s Treatise on Prayer*, 12).

¹⁵² Ælfric is not, at the moment, making use of the idea found in Matthew 25:40, that kindness shown to the “least” is actually done to Christ. For a study of the way early Christian discourse often does identify Christ with the poor (making gifts to the poor into direct gifts to Christ, see Ramsey, “Almsgiving in the Latin Church”).

The preceding discussion emphasizes prayer as a thing exchanged, a gift the poor can give in return for gifts from the rich. But what effect is prayer supposed to have in and for those praying? The point of the first parable in the Luke passage is that people should be persistent in prayer, not because God does not wish to give, but in order to increase the value of his gifts. Augustine addresses this in both of his sermons, linking persistence in prayer to growth in desire, as he puts it in Sermon 105: “Dare vult: tu pulsans nondum accepisti; pulsa, dare vult. Et quod dare vult, differt, ut amplius desideres dilatatum, ne vilescat cito datum”¹⁵³ (He really wants to give; while you are knocking, you haven’t yet received. Go on knocking, he wants to give. And he puts off giving what he wants to give, to increase your desire for the gift deferred, else if given at once it might lose its value).¹⁵⁴ As we saw in Chapter 2, desire is, for Augustine, at the heart of prayer. Persistence in prayer is subjectively efficacious as it retrains the precator’s desires, orienting them toward divine things.¹⁵⁵ Ælfric’s wording shifts the emphasis from desire to gift:

þeah he us þærrichte ne getiðie. ne sceole we for ði þære bene geswican; he elcað. 7 wyle hwæðere forgifan; þy he elcað. þæt we sceolon beon oflyste. 7 deorwurðlice healdan godes gyfe; Swa hwæt swa man eaðelice begiit. þæt ne bið na swa deorwurðe swa þæt ðæt eorfoðlice bið begiten.¹⁵⁶

[Although he does not grant to us immediately, we should not therefore cease that petition. He delays, and yet wants to give. He delays so that we should be eager for and hold as precious God’s gift. Whatever people obtain easily, that is not so precious as that which is gotten with difficulty.]

¹⁵³ Homily 105.3, PL 38, col. 619.

¹⁵⁴ Hill, 105.3.

¹⁵⁵ The two passages are: “Sed, cum aliquando tardius dat, commendat dona, non negat. Diu desiderata dulcius obtinentur; cito autem data uilescunt. Pete, quaere, insta. Petendo et quaerendo crescis, ut capias. Seruat tibi Deus quod non uult cito dare, ut et tu discas magna magne desiderare” (Homily 61, CCSL 41Aa, 6.108-12) [But when he is sometimes rather slow in giving, he is upping the value of his gifts, not refusing them. Things long desired are obtained with greater pleasure; if they are given at once, they lose their value. Ask, seek, insist. By asking and seeking you grow in your capacity to receive. God is keeping for you what he doesn’t wish to give you straightaway, so that you for your part may learn to have a great desire for great things] (Hill, 61.6). And, “Dare vult: tu pulsans nondum accepisti; pulsa, dare vult. Et quod dare vult, differt, ut amplius desideres dilatatum, ne vilescat cito datum” (105.3, PL 38, col. 619) [He really wants to give; while you are knocking, you haven’t yet received. Go on knocking, he wants to give. And he puts off giving what he wants to give, to increase your desire for the gift deferred, else if given at once it might lose its value] (Hill, 105.3).

¹⁵⁶ CHI.18, ll. 83-7.

Augustine emphasizes above all that God wants to give, repeating three times in this short passage, “dare vult ... dare vult ... dare vult.” God delays in order to increase desire; for Augustine, desire itself has value. Ælfric, however, repeats that God delays (“he elcað ... he elcað”). In this case, God delays so that his gift is valued. Thus, Ælfric’s wording centralizes the fact that it is *God’s* gift more than Augustine’s does. The effect is to emphasize that there is something precious about the source of the gift. But it is also notable that, in the way Ælfric structures his sermon, his precaters are not asking for the same thing as Augustine’s precaters. Augustine’s sermon 61 does not address the content of the petition when he speaks of desire, merely the reason God delays in answering petitions. In his sermon 105, the precaters petition for a better understanding of that in which he has believed. In Ælfric’s sermon, the petition is for belief (*geleafan*) itself.¹⁵⁷ Belief and prayer become closely bound up together: but how can one pray without first believing, at least to some extent? And why imagine belief as something one can have in a greater or lesser quantity?

In Ælfric’s teaching, the process of prayer does not subjectively move one toward belief (i.e., one’s belief does not grow as a result of persistence in prayer). Nor does persistence in prayer make one worthy of belief, as though it is somehow owed: “him getiþað þæs þe he bit. na for freondrædene. ac for his unstilnesse; þy he cwæð na for freondrædene. for ðan þe nan mann nære wurðe ne ðæs geleafan. ne ðæs ecan lifes gif godes mildheortnys nære ðe mare”¹⁵⁸ (he grants him that which he asks for, not for friendship but on account of his disturbance. He says, not for friendship, because no one is worthy of that belief, nor of that eternal life if God’s mercy were not the greater). This, admittedly, does not make much sense if one takes “belief” as “belief that God exists,” or as the intellectual knowledge of correct doctrine. Rather, as in CHI.19, one petitions the one to whom he subordinates himself.¹⁵⁹ Belief resonates with allegiance, “geleafan” and “freondræden” take on very similar meanings. Prayer expresses one’s desire to be subordinate to God, a “freondræden” of which no one is worthy. What God

¹⁵⁷ Old English uses the same words for faith and belief; *geleafa* is the noun; *gelyfan* is the verb. In order to try to keep my own terms straight, I will use “faith” to denote the objective content of what one believes in and “belief” to indicate the subjective aspect of a person’s choice to believe; belief is primarily what is at issue in this passage, but we return to the issue in Chapter 4’s discussion of the Life of St. Basil.

¹⁵⁸ CHI.18, ll. 88-91.

¹⁵⁹ As we will see in CHI.31 on St. Bartholomew, the act of petitioning gives the one petitioned power over the precaters.

eventually grants is belief, a particular relationship with him, which then leads toward eternal life. Between “geleafan” and “ecan lifes” there is, however, an elision: everything that happens in this life, the enactment of the declared belief. Thus, persistence in prayer becomes continual enactment of the precaters’ submission to God. And, “[æ]lc þæra þe geornlice bitt. 7 þære bene ne geswicð. þam getiðað god þæs ecan lifes”¹⁶⁰ (every one who zealously asks and does not cease from that petition, to them God will grant that eternal life). As Ælfric conceives it, belief is actively enacted through prayer. Salvation, the attainment of eternal life, is a process of believing and enacting belief. Belief is both a cause and an answer to petition.

Within the context of CHI.18 prayer is connected to almsgiving in a fundamental way, but not in its standard association with the reorientation of desire as found in Augustinian teaching. Rather than purity, prayer functions to place the precaters in a particular relationship to God, his dependents and subordinates, who then enact that dependency and subordination through their persistence in turning to God with their petitions. The rich give alms to the poor recognizing that they themselves are in the same dependent position upon God, modeling the treatment they would like to be shown. Prayer – the prayer of the poor for the rich – transforms the almsgiving relationship into a reciprocal one in which both parties are essential for the salvation of the other. As people enact generosity toward each other in almsgiving and prayer, they in turn give back to God within a complex cycle of exchange, enacting a belief for which God will eventually give them eternal life. Almsgiving and prayer are not a personal matter between the petitioner and God in Ælfric’s teaching, but rather a social matter binding together rich and poor in a community-wide statement of belief and petition for salvation.

CATHOLIC HOMILY I.10: PRAYER AS FOLLOWING

Catholic Homilies I.18 and I.19 both use Augustinian sources, and both teach on prayer within the context of the praying community. We turn now to CH.10, a homily based on a source by Gregory that presents prayer within a penitential context, a context that might presumably orient prayer more towards the individual and toward purity, and perhaps toward

¹⁶⁰ CHI.18, ll. 94-6.

subjective efficacy in prayer. Thus, CHI.10 is in some ways the odd man out in Ælfric's sermons on prayers, and is in some ways Ælfric's counterpart to Bede's Homily I.22.¹⁶¹

The source, Gregory's homily II,¹⁶² is a much more psychological treatment of prayer and penance than is usual for explications of the LP, or than we find in Ælfric's other treatments of prayer. Like Augustine's *Tractatus*, it is clearly influenced by Neo-platonic patterns of thought, in this case through the symbolism of the visible/material/transitory vs. the invisible/spiritual/eternal and through the imagery of light and sight.¹⁶³ Gregory's homily also shows interest in the interior work of penitential prayer; key to this prayer's work is persistence and a full commitment to crying out for healing and Jesus' mercy: "clamet medullis cordis, clamet et uocibus mentis"¹⁶⁴ (let him cry from the bottom of his heart, let him cry also with his whole mind).¹⁶⁵ Persistence in prayer is what overcomes the crowds of "desideriorum carnalium"¹⁶⁶ (bodily desires) that disturb the thoughts and muddle the words in the precator's heart as he prays. Gregory presents the penitential self as potentially divided:

Saepe namque dum conuerti ad Deum post perpetrata uitia uolumus, dum contra haec eadem exorare uitia quae perpetrauimus conamur, occurrunt cordi phantasmata peccatorum quae fecimus, mentis nostrae aciem reuerberant, confundunt animum, et uocem nostrae deprecationis premunt. ... in ipsa nos nostra oratione conturbant.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ Ælfric also has a homily on the gentile woman who asks for healing of her demon-possessed daughter, but it is not Bede's and does not deal with prayer.

¹⁶² CCSL 141 on Luke 18:31-43, translated as no. 13 in Hurst, trans., *Forty Gospel Homilies*.

¹⁶³ For instance: "... dum diuinitas defectum nostrae carnis suscepit, humanum genus lumen quod amiserat recepit. Vnde enim Deus humana patitur, inde homo ad diuina subleuatur" (Hom. II, CCSL 141, 2.25-7) [... when a divine person undertook the weakness of the body the human race recovered the light that it had lost. God suffered as a human being, and humans are raised up to divinity] (Hurst 95). And "haec ipsa quae sentit non per corpus sed per animam cogitat. ... Ex inuisibili namque anima uisibile regitur corpus. Si auferatur quod est inuisibile protinus corrui hoc quod uisibile stare uidebatur. Ex inuisibili ergo substantia in hac uita uisibili uiuitur" (Hom. II, CCSL 141, 7.114-21) [There are things we understand by reflecting on them not through the body but through the soul. ... Our visible body is ruled by an invisible soul. If what is invisible be taken away, what was visible and appeared to be lasting immediately perishes. We live in this visible life on account of an invisible substance] (Hurst 98). And, "quia rerum corporalium delectatione a gaudio interno cecidimus, cum qua amaritudine illuc redeatur ostendit" (Hom. II, CCSL 141, 8.145-7) [Because we had fallen away from inner joy by our delight in material things, he showed with what bitterness we must return to it] (Hurst 99).

¹⁶⁴ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 2.37.

¹⁶⁵ Hurst, trans., *Forty Gospel Homilies*, 96. Unattributed translations are my own.

¹⁶⁶ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 3.41.

¹⁶⁷ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 3.44-9, 51-2. Also, Gregory later presents a potential objection "our unspiritual mind" (98) might make to the prominence he gives the soul, as though people have spiritual minds through which they understand the truth, and unspiritual minds that lead to confused objections.

[We often wish to be converted to the Lord when we have committed some wrong. When we try to pray earnestly against the wrongs we have committed, images of our sins come into our hearts. They obscure our inner vision, they disturb our minds and overwhelm the sound of our petition ... and throw us into confusion in the very act of praying.]¹⁶⁸

This persistence eventually brings it about that “ad orationis opus conuertimur”¹⁶⁹ (we are converted to the work of prayer), when the vices the precator used to enjoy now seem burdensome. Persisting in prayer performs the work of prayer by fixing Christ in the heart of the one praying: “Cum uero orationi uehementer insistimus, stat Iesus”¹⁷⁰ (when we persist ardently in prayer, Jesus stands). Once Christ is fixed in the heart, he can then be followed or imitated. Gregory emphasizes that imitating Christ means suffering with him who suffered for humanity: “Quid itaque homo pro se pati debet, si tanta Deus pro hominibus pertulit?”¹⁷¹ (What must we not suffer on our own behalf if God bore so much for us?)¹⁷² and longing for the “uiam amaritudinis”¹⁷³ (way of bitterness)¹⁷⁴ so that we might come to the eternal joys. This life’s bitter sufferings perform a penitential/purgative function that prepares people for the joys of heaven. As we will see, what all this adds up to is an understanding of the work of prayer strongly structured by the association of the spiritual realm with the unchanging divine and the material realm with the changeable human. Perseverance is thus, for Gregory, an essential part of prayer’s work insofar as, through perseverance, the precator “fixes” Christ in his heart, stabilizing the heart and allowing it to take part in the unchangeable nature of the divine. Gregory’s emphasis on the heart as the location of prayer is also key because of the heart’s potential affinity with the spiritual realm.

While Ælfric picks up much of this language, he tends to replace interiority with greater emphasis on good deeds and with a more concretely relational idea of the petitioner’s connection to Christ. Because of this, prayer is less subjective, and Ælfric lessens the tension between the

¹⁶⁸ Hurst, 96.

¹⁶⁹ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 4.64.

¹⁷⁰ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 5.73-4.

¹⁷¹ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 8.146-7.

¹⁷² Hurst, 99.

¹⁷³ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 8.154.

¹⁷⁴ Hurst, 99.

transitory nature of the material world and the permanence of the spiritual realm. The clearest passage in which to see the different ways each author works out the way prayer functions is when they explain that the crowds who try to silence the blind man are the images of his past sins. Ælfric's changes tend to dissociate the strong link between the material world and the vices and to move the "location" of prayer from the heart to the voice. He also makes the precator more active in praying for Christ's help, and Christ's aid in overcoming temptation more direct. As part of this, he once again adds the devil to his discussion of prayer.

It is not that Gregory is against including the devil on principle. His soteriological views also align with the ransom theory,¹⁷⁵ and he also has passages considering the devil's role in the psychology of temptation.¹⁷⁶ But in this homily the governing tension is between the permanence and immutability of the divine/spiritual versus the changeable transitoriness of the mundane world. The contrast between the two is perhaps most clearly seen when he considers the significance of Christ's passing by the blind man on the way to Jericho and his standing still to heal him. As Gregory explicates it, Christ's passing is his taking on of human flesh, entering into this transitory world. It is the fact that Christ took on human flesh that allows him to hear the cry of the blind man and have pity on him. But it is Christ's standing still that represents the immutable nature of his divine power through which he is able to heal the blind and bring about spiritual sight of the eternal light.

The tension between mutable and immutable, then, is helpful to keep in mind when reading the passage in which Gregory discusses the psychology of prayer and temptation,¹⁷⁷ a

¹⁷⁵ "In Gregory the Great the classic idea of the Atonement [ransom theory] finds vigorous expression. He pictures the drama of redemption in lurid colours. Many realistic and even grotesque images had been employed in the previous centuries to illustrate this theme, but Gregory outdoes all his predecessors" (Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 40-1). An example of Gregory's treatment of the ransom theory can be found in Homily XXV, CSL 141 for Easter Day.

¹⁷⁶ See, for instance, the *Moralia in Iob*, CCSL 143, IV.xxvii.49.

¹⁷⁷ The whole passage in Gregory is: "Quid autem designant isti qui Iesum uenientem praecedunt, nisi desideriorum carnalium turbas tumultusque uitiorum, qui priusquam Iesus ad cor nostrum ueniat, tentationibus suis cogitationem nostram dissipant et uoces cordis in oratione perturbant? Saepe namque dum conuerti ad Deum post perpetrata uitia uolumus, dum contra haec eadem exorare uitia quae perpetravimus conamur, occurrunt cordi phantasmata peccatorum quae fecimus, mentis nostrae aciem reuerberant, confundunt animum et uocem nostrae deprecationis premunt. *Qui praeibant ergo increpabant eum ut taceret*, quia priusquam Iesus ad cor ueniat, mala quae fecimus cogitationi nostrae suis imaginibus illisa, in ipsa nos nostra oratione conturbant. Sed quid ad haec illuminandus caecus fecit audiamus. Sequitur: *Ipsae uero magis clamabat: Fili David, miserere mei*. Ecce quem turba increpat ut taceat magis ac magis clamabat, quia quanto grauiori tumultu cogitationum carnalium premimur, tanto orationi insistere ardentius debemus. Contradicunt turba ne clamemus, quia peccatorum nostrorum phantasmata plerumque et in oratione patimur. Sed nimirum necesse est ut uox cordis nostri quo durius repellitur, eo ualentius insistat,

passage that most clearly exemplifies the sorts of ways Ælfric changes his discussion of prayer. Gregory begins by interpreting the crowds as “desideriorum carnalium turbas tumultusque uitiorum” (the crowd of fleshly desires, and the tumult of vices), aligning them with the material, fleshly, world, and opposing them to the desirable, but not yet attained, state when “Iesus ad cor nostrum ueniat” (Jesus comes into our heart). The result is that these vices “uoces cordis in oratione perturbant” (confuse the utterances of the heart in prayer). Gregory then presents prayer as a process, beginning when “contra haec eadem exorare uitia quae perpetrauimus conamur” (we undertake to prevail against these same vices which we commit), when the one praying begins to make an effort to “be turned” (*conuertere*) to the Lord. According to Gregory, the precator first desires to be turned to the Lord after having committed some wrong, but when he begins to try to prevail against his vices, then images of past sins come into the heart, disturbing the mind and overwhelming the sound of his petition. Gregory’s solution is that the precator should persist through this confusion, crying out all the more. Eventually his mind is turned from the world to God, converted to the “opus orationis”; past sins no longer seem pleasurable but seem burdensome.

In Gregory’s homily, this kind of prayer and the struggle it potentially involves is something that occurs within the heart, as though the heart is its own kind of space that can be occupied either by vices or by Jesus; that is, it can be aligned either with the physical world or with the spiritual. The heart has a voice, and it is this “uox cordis” in persistent prayer that partially determines who eventually occupies the heart. But the agency portrayed is ambiguous. Prayer is presented as active, something that the one praying must firmly persist in to overcome the clamorous crowds of vices: “Ecce quem turba increpat ut taceat magis ac magis clamabat, quia quanto grauiori tumultu cogitationum carnalium premimur, tanto orationi insistere ardentius debemus” (Lo, how the one the crowd rebuked that he be silent cried out the more, because the

quatenus cogitationis illicitae tumultum superet, atque ad pias aures Domini nimietate suae importunitatis erumpat. In se, ut suspicor, recognoscit unusquisque quod dicimus, quia dum ab hoc mundo animum ad Deum mutamus, dum ad orationis opus conuertimur, ipsa quae prius delectabiliter gessimus importuna post et grauia in oratione nostra toleramus. Vix eorum cogitatio manu sancti desiderii ab oculis cordis abigitur, uix eorum phantasmata per paenitentiae lamenta superantur. Sed cum in oratione nostra uehementer insistimus, transeuntem Iesum figimus. Vnde illic subditur: *Stans autem Iesus iussit eum adduci ad se.* Ecce stat qui ante transiebat, quia dum adhuc turbas phantasmatum in oratione patimur, Iesum aliquatenus transeuntem sentimus. Cum uero orationi uehementer insistimus, stat Iesus ut lucem restituat, quia Deus in corde figitur et lux amissa reparatur,” (Hom. II, CCSL 141, 3-5.40-75).

more we are pressed by the burdensome tumult of our fleshly thoughts, the more we must ardently persist in prayer). In this sense, prayer seems to be subjectively efficacious; the discipline of prayer itself reforms the one praying, perhaps in part because this persistence repudiates the changeableness of the human condition and replicates the stability of the spiritual world the precator is aiming for.

But Gregory also recognizes that the spiritual condition is something people need help outside themselves to be converted to; they need to be “conuerti ad Deum.” This mixed agency is portrayed in the active/passive combination of verbs here: “dum ab hoc mundo animum ad Deum mutamus, dum ad orationis opus conuertimur” (when we remove the soul from this world to God, then we are turned to the work of prayer). “We” actively change or move the soul from this world to God, but then “we” are passively turned to prayer. Within that *mutans* the nature of human mutability accompanying mortality is emphasized, both through the necessity of change resulting from the human condition and the need to change to a more spiritual (hence, stable) condition. Changeableness constrains humans; they can turn to God, but (because of their mortality) they cannot fix themselves in this turning; they must turn their minds to God, but they must also be turned.¹⁷⁸ They can persist, but Christ must come into their hearts: “Sed cum in oratione nostra uehementer insistimus, transeuntem Iesum figimus. . . . Cum uero orationi uehementer insistimus, stat Iesus ut lucem restituat, quia Deus in corde figitur et lux amissa reparatur” (But when we earnestly pursue Jesus, who is passing by, in our prayers, we fasten him in our minds. . . . Truly, when we earnestly persist in prayer, Jesus stops so that he restores the light, because God is fixed in the heart, and the lost light is restored). Elsewhere in the homily, Gregory refers to this as “homo ad diuina subleuatur”¹⁷⁹ (humans are raised to divinity). Through persistence in prayer, Christ is fixed in the heart in his divine nature; humans are brought to the stability that comes with participating in the divine nature.

Thus, for Gregory, prayer must be “of the heart.” The emphasis here is not so much on sincerity, or even on a particular type of emotional affect, but on the heart’s potential affinity

¹⁷⁸ This is in line with Gregory’s more active view of grace and human will. See Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, chapter 2.

¹⁷⁹ “quia dum diuinitas defectum nostrae carnis suscepit, humanum genus lumen quod amiserat recepit. Vnde enim Deus humana patitur, inde homo ad diuina subleuatur” (Hom. II, CCSL 141, 2.25-7) [because when divinity took up the weakness of our flesh the human race received the light which it had lost. When God shares in humanity, then humans are raised to divinity].

with the spiritual realm. Prayer – true, efficacious prayer – for Gregory, then, is “of the heart”; it is the kind of speech through which one communicates with the spiritual realm because it potentially partakes in those same spiritual characteristics.

While Ælfric reproduces some of the language reflecting the tension between the spiritual and material worlds,¹⁸⁰ he actually excises much of it. Consequently, his idea of prayer is not informed by the same framework. So, for instance, rather than moving from the significance of the name Jericho to the idea of divinization, as Gregory does, Ælfric entirely drops the divinization.¹⁸¹ Later on in the homily, where Gregory states “et quia rerum corporalium delectatione a gaudio interno cecidimus, cum qua amaritudine illuc redeatur ostendit”¹⁸² (And because we were cut off from internal joy by delight in corporeal things, he showed with what bitterness we should return to it). Ælfric instead says, “Nis þeos woruld na ure eþel: ac is ure wræcsið; for ði ne sceole we na besettan urne hiht on ðisum swicelum life: Ac sceolon eþstan mid godum gearnungum to urum eðele. þær we to gesceapene wæron. þæt is to heofonanrice”¹⁸³ (This world is not our homeland, but it is our exile. Therefore, we should not set our hope in this deceitful life, but we must with good deeds return to our homeland which we were created for, that is, to the heavenly kingdom), replacing the tension between material and spiritual with the idea of exile.¹⁸⁴

One place where Ælfric fairly faithfully reproduces a discussion of the relationship between the spiritual and material is the passage on the relationship of the soul to the body, although he does not seem to make the same basic assumptions about what is apparent to his audience. Whereas Gregory represents the idea that the soul animates the body as obvious (“Everyone can make brief reply to this thought”), Ælfric does not appeal to common sense: “Nu

¹⁸⁰ See, for instance, the passages explaining Christ’s passing and his standing still, the relationship between the soul and the body, and the nature of the spiritual light. Each of these reproduces Gregory faithfully but without

¹⁸¹ He instead expands a bit on Gregory’s idea of light: “Nu hæbbe we þæt leoht on urum mode þæt is cristes geleafa: 7 we habbað þone hyht þæs ecan lifes myrhðe. þeah ðe we gyt lichamlice on urum cwearterne wunian” (CHI.10, ll. 48-50, “Now we have that light in our minds that is Christ’s faith, and we have the hope of eternal life’s joy, although we still dwell in our bodily prison”).

¹⁸² Hom. II, CCSL 141, 8.145-7.

¹⁸³ CHI.10, ll. 161-4.

¹⁸⁴ Blickling II also does this. By this point in Ælfric’s homily he has moved further away from Gregory. The idea of this life as exile is also patristic; the point here, however, is Ælfric’s selection of ideas.

cweðe ic to ðam men ...”¹⁸⁵ (Now to that one I say ...). Gregory says that “nec tamen se dubitat animam habere, quam non uidet”¹⁸⁶ (we do not doubt we have a soul that we do not see); at the same point, Ælfric merely states that the soul is invisible.¹⁸⁷ Where Gregory briefly states “Si auferatur quod est inuisibile, protinus corrui hoc quod uisibile stare uidebatur”¹⁸⁸ (If what is invisible be taken away, what was visible and appeared to be lasting immediately perishes), Ælfric expands on the body’s helplessness without the soul, and adds discussion of the soul’s corresponding helplessness without God. Gregory ends the passage with the rhetorical question: “esse uita inuisibilis dubitatur?”¹⁸⁹ (Can we doubt that invisible life exists?) Apparently Ælfric’s audience could; he skips the question and instead focuses on the eternal nature of the sinful soul. That is, Ælfric does not present the relationship between soul and body as such an intuitively obvious one as Gregory does, and he shifts the focus to the necessity of God’s support of the soul for good works. Shifting the emphasis to God and to good works seems to govern Ælfric’s strategy throughout the homily.

Thus, when we move to the passage on the psychology of temptation, we are not quite moving within the same cosmology as is in Gregory’s sermon.¹⁹⁰ This is evident immediately when Ælfric replaces Gregory’s *desideriorum carnalium* and *tumultus uitiorum* with *unlustas* and *leahtras*,¹⁹¹ moving away from the association of the fleshly with evil to that which is more generally forbidden (*un-*). Thus, the heart is involved, but does not fill the same role as the site of communication with the spiritual realm. For Ælfric, the vices occupy the heart; Jesus never

¹⁸⁵ CHI.10, l. 118.

¹⁸⁶ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 7.117-18.

¹⁸⁷ CHI.10, l. 121.

¹⁸⁸ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 7.119-20.

¹⁸⁹ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 7.121.

¹⁹⁰ The passage in full reads, “Seo meniu getacnað: ure unlustas 7 leahtras þe us hremað. 7 ure heortan ofsittað þæt we ne magon us swa geornlice gebiddan swa we behofedon; Hit gelimpð gelomlice þonne se man wyle yfeles geswican: 7 his synna gebetan. 7 mid eallum mode to gode gecyrran: þonne cumað þa ealdan leahtras þe he ær geworhte. 7 hi gedrefað his mood 7 willað gestillan his stemne: þæt he to gode ne clypige; Ac hwæt dyde se blinda þa ða þæt folc hine wolde gestillan? He hrymde þæs þe swiðor: oð þæt se hælend his stemne gehyrde: 7 hine gehælde; Swa we sculon eac don gif us deofol drece mid mænigfealdum geþohtum. 7 costnungum: we scolon hryman swiðor 7 swiðor to ðam hælende þæt he todræfe þa yfelan constunga fram ure heortan. 7 þæt he onlihte ure mod mid his gife; Gif we þonne þurhwuniað on urum gebedum. þonne mage we gedon mid urum hream þæt se hælend stent. se ðe ær eode 7 wyle gehyran ure clypunge 7 ure heortan onlihtan. mid godum 7 mid clænum geþohtum; Ne magon þa yfelan geþohtas. us derian; gif hi us ne licigeað ac swa us swiðor deofol breigð. mid yfelum geþohtum: swa we beteran beoð. 7 gode leofran: gif we þone deofel forseoð. 7 ealle his costnunga. þurh godes fultum” (CHI.10, ll. 69-87).

¹⁹¹ CHI.10, l. 69.

promises to do so. For Gregory, Jesus is the eventual occupant; the crowds of vices do not occupy the heart itself, but their images disturb it (obscure its inner vision, disturb the mind). Gregory's vices interfere with the words of prayer; Ælfric's interfere with zealotry in prayer. Ælfric's preceptor is more active than Gregory's – rather than being turned, Ælfric's preceptor “wyle yfeles geswican: 7 his synna gebetan. 7 mid eallum mode to gode gecyrran”¹⁹² (wishes to cease from evil and amend his sins, and with all his mind to turn to God). He still needs Christ's assistance, but Christ's assistance is more direct: “we scolon hryman swiðor 7 swiðor to ðam hælende þæt he todræfe þa yfelan costnunga fram ure heortan”¹⁹³ (we should cry more and more to the Savior, that he drive the evil temptations from our hearts).

Ælfric's passage contains the idea of perseverance, but his preceptors are more often told to “hryman swiðor” to the Savior. In Gregory's case, it is persistence in prayer that matters; for Ælfric, it is something like volume. This fits with the pattern in which Ælfric emphasizes the voice more while Gregory emphasizes the heart. Furthermore, in Ælfric, the vices “gedrefað his mood 7 willað gestillan his stemne: þæt he to gode ne clypige”¹⁹⁴ (trouble his mind and wish to still his voice so that he cannot call to God), a more direct appeal to God's aid than in Gregory, who emphasizes the act of praying: “uocem nostrae deprecationis premunt”¹⁹⁵ (crowd out the voice of our petition). Ælfric also introduces the devil as the agent of trouble, setting him up as Jesus' opponent: “Swa we sculon eac don gif us deoful drecce mid mænigfealdum geþohtum. 7 costnungum”¹⁹⁶ (So we should also do if the devil afflicts us with manifold thoughts and temptations). Thus, Jesus' aid at once gains victory for him over the devil, and victory for the preceptor over the thoughts and temptations that trouble him. Prayer is thus more directly an appeal to God, who will “todræfe þa yfelan costnunga fram ure heortan”¹⁹⁷ (drive the evil temptations from our heart), playing a more active and direct role than for Gregory, for whom the discipline of prayer itself seems to be part of the equation, as it trains the heart in persistence, aligning it with spiritual stability.

¹⁹² CHI.10, ll. 72-3.

¹⁹³ CHI.10, ll. 78-80.

¹⁹⁴ CHI.10, ll. 74-5.

¹⁹⁵ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 3.48-9.

¹⁹⁶ CHI.10, ll. 77-8.

¹⁹⁷ CHI.10, ll. 79-80.

For Gregory the “voice” that the vices interfere with is the heart’s; for Ælfric the voice is not specifically in the heart; the penitent need to persevere in their *gebed*, in their set prayers, in order to gain Jesus’ attention. Jesus’ role is also more direct in Ælfric’s version, countering the devil’s actions, which Ælfric introduces. Jesus himself will drive the evil temptations away, and Jesus himself will enlighten the hearts, replacing the temptations with good and clean thoughts. Jesus’ intervention is more direct, combating the temptations through his *gifu* rather than through the reorienting process of prayer itself.

Still, Ælfric does leave room for that reorienting process of prayer. At the end of this passage, he says, “Gif we þonne þurhwuniað on urum gebedum. þonne mage we gedon mid urum hream þæt se hælend stent”¹⁹⁸ (If we then persevere in our prayers then may we bring about with our cry that the Savior stands), although once again, he focuses on the sound of the cries: Christ “wyle gehyran ure clypunge”¹⁹⁹ (will hear our crying). Later, when he discusses why Jesus asked the blind man what he wanted, even though he, being divine already knew, he gives the standard Augustinian answer (also found in Gregory, though not worded quite the same way): “þurh þa gebedu. bið ure heorte onbryrd: 7 gewend to gode”²⁰⁰ (through prayer our heart is moved and turned to God). However, compare this to Gregory: “ad hoc requirit ut cor ad orationem excitet”²⁰¹ (to this end he questions, that the heart might be roused to prayer) and one can see the same shift in emphasis. Whereas Gregory emphasizes the process of prayer itself, Ælfric emphasizes turning directly to God, the relationship rather than the discipline.

Finally, Ælfric very much departs from Gregory’s emphasis at the end of the homily. Whereas Gregory emphasizes the need for suffering with Christ – “Quid itaque homo pro se pati debet, si tanta Deus pro hominibus pertulit?”²⁰² (What therefore ought humans suffer for themselves, if God bore so much for humans?) – Ælfric chooses to discuss the “sticolan weig”²⁰³ (narrow way) that leads to life, emphasizing first, not what one must leave behind, but what sorts of virtues the narrow way entails, mercy, chastity, etc. While Ælfric presents the narrow way as difficult, he does not present it within the same penitential, purificatory framework as Gregory

¹⁹⁸ CHI.10, II. 80-2.

¹⁹⁹ CHI.10, I. 82.

²⁰⁰ CHI.10, I. 104.

²⁰¹ Hom. II, CCSL 141, 7.97β-8.

²⁰² Hom. II, CCSL 141, 8.47-8.

²⁰³ CHI.10, I. 184.

does, of needing to suffer on our own behalf to gain the kingdom. Ælfric picks up on the “way” (from earlier in the sermon), so that his emphasis is on following Christ in difficulty more than suffering like he suffered. Ælfric ends with a call to penitence and confession.

Within this treatment of prayer, then, we can see ways in which Ælfric de-emphasizes or removes the alignment Gregory sets up between the spiritual/invisible/eternal and the mundane/visible/temporary. The precator is more active in praying for Christ’s help, and Christ gives his help more directly. Rather than the emphasis on more abstract suffering, Ælfric emphasizes the necessity of following, creating a more personally relational connection between the precator and Jesus. Because of these changes, Ælfric’s conception of prayer is consistently more objective; prayer works on Jesus to cause him to intervene rather than reforming the one praying through the discipline of prayer itself.

CONCLUSION

We return to the passage on praying over picking herbs from CHI.31 that this chapter began with: “Ne sceal nan man mid galdre wyrte besingan ac mid godes wordum hi gebletsian 7 swa picgan”²⁰⁴ (Nor shall anyone enchant herbs with charms, but with God’s words bless them and so partake). In this passage, Ælfric does not specify which particular words are God’s words that should be said when picking medicinal plants. Based on evidence such as the charms, it seems reasonable to assume that the LP is at least one of these prayers. In this case, this prayer, replacing unallowed “galdor,”²⁰⁵ specifies a different relationship with nature than the charm does, as, in stating the herbalist’s allegiance to God, it appeals to a right relationship between the herbalist and God, and the herbalist and the healing plants to which God “þone cræft forgeaf”²⁰⁶ (gave that power).

²⁰⁴ CHI.31, ll. 323-5.

²⁰⁵ Within Ælfric’s understanding of magic, it seems that magic is something people accuse the other side of. When, in Laurence’s *passio* (CHI.29), Laurence works healing miracles and refuses to die easily, the pagan king Decius accuses him of *drycraft* (ll. 174, 192) and commands him to renounce it. Thus, in the *passio* of Bartholomew, while Ælfric implies that the unallowed *galdre* sung over herbs is considered *wiccecraft*, it seems unlikely that those actually engaging in the practice would consider it to be magic. Magic is appealing to unallowed powers or beings rather than appealing to the spiritual world in the first place, something that everyone, Christian and pagan, did.

²⁰⁶ CHI.31, l. 323.

Thus, the view of prayer presented in this sermon is largely within a relational context of lordship, in which the petitioner implicitly promises allegiance to the person to whom he prays. Within this relational context, the rightness or trueness of prayer is determined not so much by what one is praying, but in the petitioner's attitude of submission. And within *this* context it is easy for the content of prayer to become divorced from its purpose, so that a statement of belief can serve to protect a traveler from devils because it enacts the believer's relationship with God, and the recitation of the LP over herbs can have effect because it enacts the picker's relationship with God the creator and the things created. This symbolic use of prayer is not a simple substitution of Christian words for pagan words, the Christian God for pagan gods to bring about whatever the petitioner desires, because it also involves a re-orientation of the believer's responsibilities, and it acknowledges that, within this relationship, the petitioner must be content with whatever way the grantor chooses to fulfill a request.

In *Catholic Homily I.19* the way that Ælfric's homily situates petition within the context of the ransom theory, with God and the devil as rival lords, shifts the theoretical frame for prayer away from purity towards allegiance – *geleafa* in CHI.18 – and away from the individual and individual notions of purity toward the community and ideas of communal coherence. Each of his major homilies on prayer moves the understanding of prayer presented in this direction. Both of these shifts tend to present an idea of prayer that is more objectively efficacious, and that allows room for the formula of prayer to have its own particular efficacy. At the same time, for Ælfric the meaning of the LP is important – he spends most of the sermon explicating it in a fairly literal way in order to correct potential misconceptions as to its meaning, so that people may understand one of the two texts “Ælc cristen man sceal ... cunnan”²⁰⁷ (every Christian must know). Like CHI.18 and CHI.10, the sermon on the LP does not offer any instruction on how to actually pray (apart from the fact that it is, presumably, to the east)²⁰⁸ except insofar as a verbal formula is seen as a sufficient answer to that question. That is, for Ælfric what words one should say seems to be sufficient answer to the question of how to pray. Although he explicates the

²⁰⁷ CHI.20, l. 2.

²⁰⁸ “[W]e wendað us eastweard þonne we us gebiddað ...” (CHI.19, ll. 57-8) [We turn eastward when we pray ...]. While this must certainly pertain to those praying in church, which would have been oriented toward the east, it says nothing about the private practice of prayer at home, unlike, for instance, Origen, who discusses proper places and orientations for prayer at home at length.

fuller version of the LP found in Matthew, Ælfric introduces his explication with the disciples' request to learn how to pray found in Luke. This makes the LP, then, a direct response to the request: "leof tæce us hu we magon us gebiddan"²⁰⁹ (sir, teach us how we should pray), but Ælfric rewords Jesus' response. Whereas in the Vulgate, Jesus responds: "illis cum oratis Pater sanctificetur ..." (with this you pray, "Father, hallowed be ...") and whereas Augustine takes this to be in what *manner* one should pray – Augustine quotes Jesus as saying, "Sic itaque orate vos"²¹⁰ (after this manner, therefore, pray ye)²¹¹ – in Ælfric's homily Jesus says, "Gebiddað eow mid þisum wordum ..." ²¹² (Pray with these words ...) Both authors take the slightly different approaches to clarifying the meaning. Augustine focuses on *manner*, which is consistent with his commentary's idea of the LP as a framework for petition, while Ælfric focuses on the words themselves.

But, for Ælfric, the words imply a particular disposition as well: the prayer indicates that humans are children of God, but praying it does not make them children of God, or make them more children of God than they were formerly. What makes them children is obedience and a correct disposition toward honoring God: "Nu sind we godes bearn ... gif we þam fæder on riht gehyrsumiað 7 mid eallum mode hine weorþiað"²¹³ (Now we are God's children ... if we rightly obey the Father and with all our minds honor him). That is, the prayer is an expression of this reality. In this sense, it is neither precisely subjectively or objectively efficacious. It does not construct reality or seek to change it, but expresses a reality enacted through obedience to God and right behavior towards one's fellow-Christians, and bound together as Christ's body and Christ's brothers:

Crist is ure heafod 7 we sind his lima: ... for þi we magon cuðlice to him [Christ] clypian swa swa to urum breþer. gif we þa broðerrædene swa healdað swa swa he us tæhte. þæt is

²⁰⁹ CHI.19, ll. 8-9.

²¹⁰ *De sermone Domini in monti*, CCSL 35, II.iv.15.300.

²¹¹ NPNF, vol. vi, II.iv.15.

²¹² CHI.19, ll. 9-10. The OE Gospels read: "Ða cwæþ he to him: cweðað þus. Þonne ge eow gebiddað; ..." (Luke 11:2) and "Eornustlice gebiddað eow ðus ..." (Matthew 6:9). *The Old English Version of the Gospels*, ed. Roy Liuzza. EETS vol. 304 (Oxford, 1995). The Vulgate Matthew is "sic ergo vos orabitis Pater noster ..."

²¹³ CHI.19, ll. 25-7.

þæt we ne sceolon na geþafian. þæt deofol mid ænigum unþeawum us geweme fram cristes broþorrædene.²¹⁴

[Christ is our head and we are his limbs ... therefore we can familiarly call to him, just as to our brother, if we so hold our brotherhood just as he taught us, that is, that we should not allow the devil with any evil practices to lead us astray from Christ's brotherhood.]

Brotherhood is something that is lived-into through obedience in prayer and in good deeds.

Within the terms of the ransom theory, with humanity's redemption from the devil already carried out, there is something both already-answered and yet-to-be-eternally answered about the petition to be subject to God: "hwæt is þæt rice þæt he betæcð his fæder buton ða halgan men ægðer ge weras ge wif. þa ðe he alysde fram hellewite mid his agenum deaðe"²¹⁵ (what is the kingdom that he delivers to his Father unless the holy people, both men and women, those whom he freed from hell torments with his own death). In this, Ælfric's idea seems close to the idea found in Bede, that prayer is all the actions of a just man. But whereas for Bede, these actions constitute part of the prayer for salvation, for Ælfric these actions signify a particular relationship with God characterized by obedience and honor which prayer then expresses and affirms. How exactly this works, we will pick up in the next chapter.

²¹⁴ CHI.19, ll. 25-6, 29-33.

²¹⁵ CHI.19, ll. 90-2.

CHAPTER 4

LAC: PRAYER IN ÆLFRIC'S NARRATIVES

*[P]a ða hi to him bugon þa geswac he þære lichamlican gedrecednysse.
for þan ðe he. ahte þa heora sawla.¹*

*[Then when they bowed to him he ceased their bodily affliction, because he owned their
souls.]*

Ælfric's three major homilies on prayer represent prayer as objectively efficacious: the act of praying itself, and the obedience that goes with the receipt of favors, rather than interiorization of the words prayed, puts the petitioner under God's protection. Precators, as God's faithful dependents, become worthy of the reward of the eternal kingdom. Ælfric's narratives, however, give insight into the way prayer works within the believing community and in mediating the relationship between saints and God. What Ælfric's narratives allow us to do that his teachings on prayer do not, is to look at how prayer is "lived" in the lives of various saints.

This presents problems of its own. First of all, because saints' lives are representative and stylized – fictionalized, we would say – they obviously are not "living" prayer at all, as the usual focus of scholarship on prayer attests.² From reading Ælfric's Life of St. Bartholomew we

¹ CHI.31, ll. 15-6.

² Few study Ælfric's sermons on prayer (and those who do study them tend to focus on other elements than prayer); Ælfric's narratives tend to get more attention. Donald G. Bzdyl, "Prayer in Old English Narratives," is the most comprehensive study of prayer in Ælfric's (and other) narratives. Bzdyl addresses the prayers of eight of Ælfric's saints, examining how their prayers compare to the English devotional prayer tradition, the rhetorical structure of the prayers, and how they are deployed in narrative in order to create distinct characters (reflecting their special virtues or vices overcome or providing insight into their emotional states), reveal self-characterization or (more usually) authorial characterization, or function as narrative devices unifying events in the story, heightening suspense by deferring action, or are used to teach important doctrinal concepts to the audience. Jonathan Wilcox, "Famous Last Words: Ælfric's Saints Facing Death," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 10 (1993): 1-13, addresses several prayers that perform the function of last words in order to show the changes that can be rung on this narrative convention. Thus, study of narrative prayers tends to focus on prayers' rhetorical form, narrative function, and the way prayers characterize their speakers. What is rarer is exploration of narrative prayers' ideological or doctrinal content or the social ties negotiated through those praying (usually saints), the believing community, society at large, and the relation of all these people to God. (An example of this sort of study can be found in Fred C. Robinson, "God, Death, and Loyalty in the Battle of Maldon".) Robinson discusses the doctrinal content of the prayer and relates it to the themes of the poem as a whole as Byrhtnoth's men make the choice whether to loyally die with him or to run

do not know, for example, how Bartholomew actually either prayed or experienced prayer, but only how Ælfric represented that experience as he received and adapted it from his sources. To that extent, however, Ælfric's representation evidences how he understood the lived prayer of the saint, and how he thought it could be relevant to and instructive for his audience. Yet because saints are exceptional, they do not necessarily give a sense of how actual people prayed or were expected to pray. This perhaps explains one of the most striking things about reading saints' lives looking for prayer: saints pray with surprising infrequency. This is not to say that saints do not pray; most lives will contain at least one prayer,³ and saints are often reported as having prayed.⁴ Most strikingly, few of Ælfric's saints' final words are prayers; in fact, most of those who do meet death with prayer (according to Jonathan Wilcox's list, which does not claim to be exhaustive⁵) are biblical figures: Mark, Stephen, Peter, John the Evangelist, and Andrew. Most of *these* pray some version of Christ's last words in Luke 23:46, "in manus tuas commendo spiritum meum" (into your hands I commend my spirit). More often, according to Wilcox's account, saints' last words express defiance to their tormentors (Laurence, as we will see, manages to do both).

Within three of Ælfric's lives, however, prayer is centrally situated: CHI.31, the *Passio S. Bartholomei Apostoli*, which presents the saint's conflict with the demonic inhabitants of some Indian idols; CHI.29, the *Passio Beati Laurentii Martyris*, which presents the martyr's death as a gift to God; and LSI.3, *Depositio Sancti Basilii episcopi*, in which prayer proves central to solving the conflicts presented in each episode and to mediating the text's central concern with the nature of belief.⁶ A major element in these saints' prayers is their relationship to gifts:

away). Particular theories of prayer reflected – that is, prayer's special status *as* prayer not just as regular speech – is also largely ignored.

³ Although some do not. Guthlac in *Guthlac A*, for example, is reported as praying (he moves out to Crowland to do that, after all), but no prayer-text is ever given. The closest he comes to a prayer is expressing his allegiance to God to the devils outside the entrance to hell.

⁴ Bartholomew is characterized by a report of his frequent prayers, for instance. Juliana, we are told, spends her night in prison in prayer.

⁵ Wilcox, "Famous Last Words."

⁶ A complicating factor in a study of Ælfric's narratives is his relationship with his sources, which is often much more faithful than in his homilies on prayer. This means that much of our discussion about Ælfric's presentation of prayer is about how Ælfric follows his sources, and how those sources allow him to think about prayer. Both the *passio* of Laurence and the life of Bartholomew were written in Latin in the Western church; the life of Bartholomew was purported to have been written in Hebrew by Abdias, the first bishop of Babylon, and translated into Greek by one of his disciples; however, it has been known since the nineteenth century that the work was

prayers are *lac*, *lac* function as petitions, saints function as gifts, and people offer saints gifts in order to get them to pray. In each of these lives gift-exchange – whether offerings to idols or to God, or offerings from people to saints – is prominent, and prominently entangled with prayer. In fact, *lac* is prayer: both the words and the offering that accompanies it are part of the petition made for salvation. Put another way, petitions are made with words and with gifts.

The three lives studied here each present different variations of the gift-relationship. In Bartholomew's *passio*, pagans expect something specific from their gods – healing – and give *lac* to achieve it. The apostle takes the gospel to India, where men worship the devil-inhabited idol Astaroth who is engaged in a soul-entrapping exchange relationship with his devotees. Exchange with devils most fully articulates the way that prayer is a declaration of allegiance, since when those in need of healing offer *lac*⁷ to Astaroth, they lose the protection of God and forfeit their souls. Asking for favors implies dependence; when people offer *lac* to the idols, they enter into a relationship with them, turning away from a dependent relationship with God. Yet within the narrative there is not a strict parallel between the way that humans come to be under the domination of devils as opposed to the way that they come under God's protection – in this narrative, *lac* is not offered to God in the same way that it is offered to devils; furthermore, evidently uncomfortable with the narrative's implicit promise of physical healing to those who transfer their allegiance to God, Ælfric ends with a coda that complicates both the exchange relationship set up in the narrative and the symbolic way that prayer is used. By teaching that

originally written in Latin no later than the sixth century. See Frederick M. Biggs, "Martyrdom of Bartholomew," in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture: The Apocrypha* (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007). The life of Basil was one of the few originally Greek lives and strongly reflects the more philosophical concerns of its original writing, and the different role Basil played in the Eastern than in the Western church.

⁷ *Lac* is one of those OE words with a very broad range of meanings: play, sport; battle; sacrifice, offering; gift, present; booty. BT says, "The idea which lies at the root of the various meanings of [lac] seems to be that of motion," and he quotes Grimm: "Grimm notes the association of dancing and playing with offerings and sacrifices," which specific meaning is then generalized further to "gift." Within Ælfric's corpus, *lac* is generally offered from humans to God (or devils), although they can also be given between humans. In CHI.31, l. 73 Bartholomew refuses the *lac* that Polymius offers him. This usage allows us to see that *lac* usually come from the inferior (in this particular situation Polymius is inferior because Bartholomew has just healed his daughter, quite aside from the question of the relative social situations of king and apostle) to the superior. Sometimes, as in the life of Bartholomew, *lac* are given in expectation of some return; sometimes they seem to have no particular expectation of return and yet seem to express submission (for instance, the magi's *lac* given to Jesus in CHI.7, l. 33); at other times they function as purificatory sacrifice (as in the purification of Mary in CHI.9, l. 74), which also sometimes also are part of an exchange ("mid lace his clænsunge gode þancian," CHI.8, ll. 64-5). Because of the potentially differing theoretical concerns between gift and sacrifice, which nevertheless are not tremendously illuminating here, for clarity's sake I will either translate *lac* as "offering" or leave it untranslated.

Christians should not expect healing from God he clarifies the way that the gift is symbolically oriented toward the recognition and reward of honor.

In Laurence's *passio* pagans expect nothing from their gods; *lac* seem to function as much to buy independence as anything else. By contrast, the *passio* sets up martyrdom as a *lac* of its own that parallels the prayer-consecrated Eucharistic sacrifice offered to God, a sacrament that binds together prayer and gift within the terms of the liturgy and the discourse surrounding it. The central conflict of the *passio* is that the emperor Decius wants bishop Sixtus and then Laurence, his arch-deacon, to offer *lac* and its accompanying prayer to his gods. Sixtus responds to this command: "Ic symle geoffrode 7 gyt offrige mine lac þam ælmyhtigum gode. 7 his suna hælendum criste. 7 þam halgum gaste: hluttre onsægednysse 7 ungewemmede"⁸ (I have always offered and will always offer my *lac* to the Almighty God and his son, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Ghost, a pure sacrifice and undefiled).⁹ Sixtus' conflict is inherited by Laurence, who faces the additional challenge that the Romans now also want the church's treasure from him. Laurence's martyrdom, and the prayer that accompanies it, emphasize the personalized nature of Christian *lac*, in which the martyr offers himself to a God who personally responds to his gift.

In both of these *passiones lac* is a more explicit concept and concern than prayer seems to be, and in both cases what differentiates Christians from pagans is to whom they offer their *lac*. Bartholomew's *passio* more often speaks of the Indians offering ("offrian") to Astaroth than praying and places no emphasis on the words that typically accompany the *lac* (except in the case where the *lac* is given specifically to get an answer to a question). But *lac* and prayer are the same thing: the Indians petition for the healing of their souls through the *lac* they offer.¹⁰ Likewise, Laurence's *passio* focuses far more on the *lac* than on the words, although it is clear

⁸ CHI.29, ll.14-6.

⁹ Sixtus' statement resonates with James 1:27: "religio munda et immaculata apud Deum et Patrem haec est visitare pupillos et viduas in tribulatione eorum immaculatum se custodire ab hoc saeculo" [Religion clean and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their tribulation: and to keep one's self unspotted from this world]. If this connection can be made, it puts sacrifice at the center of religion, just as it is at the center of this life. Laurence's struggle (bequeathed on him by Sixtus) is to protect the "treasure" of the church, which he does by dispersing the literal treasure to the poor, and then presenting the people of the church as God's treasure. Furthermore, Laurence's sacrifice of himself is presented as a parallel of the Eucharistic sacrifice, as will be discussed later.

¹⁰ The conflation of the two is evident when Bartholomew points out that their devil cannot answer their prayers, which have, up to this point, been more usually referred to as *lac*: "Ac þes deofol þe binnon eowrum temple wæs is gebunden. 7 ne mæg nateshwon andwyrðan. þam ðe him to gebiddað" (CHI.31, ll. 106-8) [But the devil who was within your temple is bound, and cannot at all answer those who pray to him].

that both things are meant.¹¹ In fact, the Eucharistic model that is so central to Laurence's *passio* prominently folds the two together. According to Enrico Mazzo, "Since the beginning of Christian history (chap. 9 and 10 of the *Didache*, for example), the word 'eucharist' has referred to two things: on the one hand, the bread and wine, and on the other, the eucharistic prayer."¹² In both *passiones*, *lac* and prayers are the same thing: a petition for healing, or a statement of allegiance.

Basil's Life, in contrast, is less concerned with *lac* than with belief. Many of the episodes in this life deal with anxieties surrounding true *geleafa* (belief, faith): how one recognizes the true *geleafa* (faith) objectively, how one recognizes *geleafa* (belief) in others, and how one knows if sins are forgiven. The saint's prayer mediates between the subjective aspect of *geleafa* and the exterior world: guaranteeing the true faith before humans, and confirming humans' belief before God and the world. In spite of the complicated nature of belief, it is largely presented as allegiance to God and is marked by whom one turns to with petitions. Thus, the youth in the central episode of the Life who bargains his soul away to the devil sees belief as something to be traded for favors.

In each of these lives, the Christian gift is presented as a counter-balance to the too-explicit pagan¹³ gift that functions either to turn gift-giving into exchange, or to assert the individuality, if not independence, of the two parties exchanging. Thus, the lives reveal the essentially relational nature of the gift for Ælfric, and, therefore, the nature of prayer. Following Mauss, gift-theory most commonly represents gift-giving as a cycle where the first gift invites a return gift,¹⁴ which – to keep the boundaries between gift and exchange clearly defined – cannot be made either in kind or immediately. The return-gift, when made, also invites a further return, which again must be delayed. Bourdieu notes that delay is what, from the subjective point of view, removes the gift from the economic sphere: "The interval inserted between the gift and the counter-gift is an instrument of denial which allows a subjective truth and a quite opposite

¹¹ Sixtus needs to "gebigedum cneowum gebiddan 7 heora lac offrian" at the temple of Mars (CHI.29, ll. 62-3).

¹² Mazzo, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1986; 2004), 45.

¹³ The youth in Basil's life is not a pagan, he is an apostate, but for simplicity's sake ...

¹⁴ Mauss is critiqued for this. Osteen, paraphrasing Rodolphe Gasché, writes: "In figuring the gift as a circle, then, Mauss reduces it to an economic exchange" ("Introduction: Questions of the Gift," 7). To counter this, Osteen argues for focusing on a "different set of norms ... a set founded upon spontaneity rather than calculation, upon risk instead of reciprocity, upon altruism in place of autonomy" (7).

objective truth [the economic function of the gift] to coexist.”¹⁵ But the very gap between the “subjective” and “objective” perspectives that Bourdieu notes and names as “denial” (the gap between the discourse and the praxis of the gift) is the productive site where the relationship is maintained. The very act of deferral is what keeps the relationship from balancing out and enables it to continue. The terms or expectations of this relationship are not and cannot be clearly spelled out without the relationship degenerating into a type of commodity exchange: because of the vagueness of the terms of the relationship each party relies on the good will and generosity of the other. And because of this, a failure to return gifts can be seen, not merely as a failure in manners, but as a species of deception. As *Maxims I* puts it, “lean sceal, gif we leogan nellað, þam þe us þas lisse geteod”¹⁶ (return must be made, if we do not wish to deceive, to him who ordained us these favors).

The modern notion of the “free” gift fails entirely to grasp this concept.¹⁷ The “free” gift seeks to preserve the essential autonomy and independence of both parties to the exchange by insisting that gifts should be essentially free. In this, theorists such as Derrida and Bourdieu see the distance between the discourse of the gift (unconstrained and unconstraining) and the practice of the gift (a gift calls forth a return) as a fault, a problem to be solved. Bourdieu “solves” the problem by positing misrecognition, Derrida by denying the possibility of a gift at all. However, if the purpose of gifts is actually to create and maintain relationships, the space between discourse and praxis is the most important thing of all. The lack of explicitness makes the gift-cycle an enactment of trust. Put another way, the actual gift given is trust. Within the circle made by the gift-cycle is space wherein the relationship can develop. As Lucifer’s example shows, a circle can be confining, or, as the saints in these lives show, it can be infinite.

¹⁵ Bourdieu, “Selections from *The Logic of Practice*,” 200.

¹⁶ ASPR III, l. 70.

¹⁷ As an example of modern popular notions of the gift: recently the online magazine Slate’s advice columnist, Prudence, fielded a question about whether an engaged couple should accept a \$50,000 wedding gift from the groom’s ex-girlfriend, which was supposed to be used to pay for the couple’s eventual children’s college education. While a number of readers’ comments seconded Prudence’s advice that the gift should be refused because of the strings that come attached to all gifts, a disturbingly large number of people urged them to take it and then cut off all ties with the donor on the grounds that gifts are “free” (“Sour about Sugar Mama,” September 9, 2010, <http://www.slate.com/id/2266604/>).

PAGAN LAC

Within the *passio* of Bartholomew, *lac* establishes a relationship between devils and the humans who petition them. The devil that inhabits the idol

derode manna gesihþum: 7 heora lichaman mid mislicum untrumnyssum awyrde. 7 andwyrde him þurh ða anlicnyse. þæt hi him heora lac offrian sceoldon. 7 he hi gehælde: ac he him ne heolp mid nanre hæle: ac þa ða hi to him bugon þa geswac he þære lichamlican gedrecednyse. for þan ðe he. ahte þa heora sawla. þa wendon dysige men þæt he hi gehælde: þa ða he ðære drecednyse geswac.¹⁸

[injured people's sight, and afflicted their bodies with various infirmities, and answered them through the idol, that they must offer to him their *lac*, and he would heal them. But he did not help them with any healing, but when they had bowed to him, then he ceased their bodily affliction because he owned their souls. Then foolish people thought that he healed them when he ceased their affliction.]

The exchange portrayed here is a tricky one, and not only because the devil is “healing” an affliction he causes. He seems to be presenting *lac* and healing as commensurate. *Lac* and healing have agreed-upon values (in which the value of a *lac* is one healing) with clear obligations set forth, and there is no particular reason to think that the idol or the petitioner need have further claim upon each other once the transaction is complete. But a petition does not, in fact, function the same way a commodity does. Thus, the type of exchange presented is ambiguous: is this a commodity exchange or a gift relationship? The devil does, in fact, gain some right to the petitioners. Partly this is because when petitioners turn to devils for healing, they transfer their souls out of God's protection. But Bartholomew also later explains more clearly that this exchange makes the Indians subordinate to the devils as gods:

Nu deð se deofol mid his lotwrencum þæt ða earman men geuntrumiað: 7 tiht hi þæt hi sceolon gelyfan on deofolgyldum. þonne geswicð he þære gedrecednyse 7 hæfð heora sawla on his anwealde þonne he cweðað to þære deofollican anlicnyse þu eart min god.¹⁹

¹⁸ CHI.31, ll. 12-7.

¹⁹ CHI.31, ll. 102-6.

[Now the devil with his deceits brings it about that he weakens wretched humanity and induces them that they must believe in the idol. Then he ceases from afflicting them and has their souls in his power, when he says to the diabolical idol, “You are my god.”] Like Adam and Eve’s “obedience” to the devil when they ate of the fruit of the tree, the Indians’ offerings are a promise of allegiance as they turn to the devil for favors.

The theology of the exchange between devil and humans cannot, it seems, literally be true: the Indians’ souls should already be forfeit through Adam’s sin which transferred Adam and all his heirs into the power of Satan; they are not previously in a relationship where they could expect God to protect them by possessing their souls. In some ways, then, the Indians’ situation with Astaroth typologically reproduces Adam and Eve’s fall. However, as Bartholomew explains, the devil’s ability to afflict these people does show some sort of power over them to begin with:

Se awyrigeda deofol syððan he ðone frumsceapenan man beswac. syððan he hæfde anweald ofer ungelyfedum mannum. on sumum maran on sumum læssan; On þam maran þe swiþor syngiað: on þam læssan ðe hwonlicor syngiað.²⁰

[The cursed devil, after he had deceived the first-created one, then he had power over unbelieving people, over some more, over some less: more over those who sin much, and less over those who only sin a little.]

The devil manifests his power over fallen humanity by afflicting their bodies, but the Indians’ severer sin of turning to Astaroth in their affliction in some sense legitimizes the devil’s power through an implied and more personal declaration of allegiance which gives the devil authority over their souls. Thus, the relationship is not understood to be over once *lac* are given and healing effected, but to be ongoing. The Indians’ offering-accompanied petitions reenact the Fall for this particular generation and this particular community. Like Eve’s fall, this one too is based on deception, but that fact does not mitigate the fact that they have turned away from God to enter into a relationship with another god characterized by the asking and granting of favors. “Ungelyfedum” means “unfaithful” as much as it means “unbelieving.”

²⁰ CHI.31, ll. 98-102.

The Indians' relationship with their devil is fundamentally a false one. The devil first tricks people into petitioning him by afflicting them – a parody and inversion of God's gifts. Whereas God's gifts cause people to turn to him in gratitude, the devil's "gift" of illness (or, contrariwise, his taking away of their health) cause them to turn to him in desperation.²¹ When they think he has answered their petition, in reality he has not given something good, but taken away something evil. The devil gains their souls by continually taking, not by giving.

In contrast to the active and conversational nature of the relationship between the Indians and the devils in Bartholomew's *passio*, the gods in Laurence's *passio* are shown to be passive and silent. In Laurence's case, the emperor Decius wants Christians to offer *lac* to the Roman gods in an obvious statement of allegiance. In this *passio*, however, *lac* seems to create little sense of obligation between devotee and god.²² The Roman gods are never appealed to for particular favors, nor do the Romans seem to have any sense that they owe the gods anything but whatever physical *lac* they offer– certainly not their lives, and not even, apparently, their service. The implied way such *lac* seem to work is actually to free the Romans from further responsibility to their gods. There is no sense of personal connection or obligation beyond the offering of *lac*.²³ Decius, in fact, sees Sixtus' refusal to offer *lac* as a challenge to his own political power rather than as an affront to the gods: "gif þes bealdwyrda biscop acweald ne bið. syððan ne bið ure ege ondrædendlic"²⁴ (if this bold bishop is not killed then our fear will not be dreaded). There is no further sense that his *ege* is a result of the gods' gift in response to people's sacrifices.²⁵ Furthermore, Mars is completely absent from the story. When Sixtus calls upon God to destroy part of his temple, there is no response from Mars, or any sense of the presence of

²¹ As is the case in *Beowulf* when the pagan Danes turn to idols after Grendel's depredations begin.

²² This, of course, would not have been true within the Roman religion, but we're not talking about it as it was but as it is here portrayed.

²³ Whether or not the deaths of the Christians themselves function as a *lac* to the gods is more ambiguous, but it does not seem to be so. Sixtus is killed before the temple of Mars, but this seems more a matter of convenience than anything else: "hat hi eft to þæs godes temple martis gelædan: 7 gif he nellað to him gebigedum cneowum gebiddan 7 heora lac offrian. underfon him beheafdunge on þære ylcan stowe" (CHI.29, ll. 61-3) [Command that he be led again to the temple of the god Mars, and if he will not pray to him on bent knees and offer his *lac*, perform his beheading in that same place]. Laurence, who similarly refuses to offer to Mars, is killed in Decius' dungeons.

²⁴ CHI.29, ll. 59-60.

²⁵ Obviously, the two would have been very closely connected within the Roman system of emperor-worship, but the god named in this *passio* as the object of sacrifice is specifically Mars, not the emperor's own cult, and this is background information that an Anglo-Saxon audience might not be expected to know.

an animating power at all.²⁶ The pagan gods are silent and uninvolved in the lives of their devotees, even though offering *lac* is still obviously a declaration of allegiance.

In both *passiones* the gift-relationship between humans and pagan gods is shown to be in some way dysfunctional. In Bartholomew's *passio* humans abandon God's protection, lured by the simple-seeming exchange of *lac* for healing. The issue of the clear benefit the Indians expect (and seem to get) is a sort of explicitness in the relationship that will be problematized in the Life of Basil as well as in the coda Ælfric adds to Bartholomew's *passio*, examined later in this chapter. In Laurence's *passio* humans offer to gods who do not respond, but the gods' non-responsiveness gives humans freedom to follow their own pursuits of power or money.

CHRISTIAN LAC: LAURENCE

The absence of any sort of reciprocal relationship between gods and humans for the pagan Romans contrasts strongly with God's support for his martyrs in Laurence's *passio*. The central conflict of Laurence's *passio* contrasts the pagan offerings to their gods with the things that the Christians offer to their God. In contrast to the unspecified pagan *lac*, Christian *lac* are multiple: the Eucharistic offering that Sixtus makes to God, the deaths of the martyrs, the alms the church gives for the poor, and the people gathered into God's kingdom. Christian *lac* are, above all, personal.

When Sixtus is first commanded to offer to Mars, he refuses, saying that he offers his *lac* to the Almighty God. Laurence later chides him for leaving him (Laurence) behind for imprisonment and then martyrdom, saying "Næs þin gewuna þæt ðu buton þimun diacone gode geoffrodest"²⁷ (It is not your custom that you offer to God without your deacon), clarifying that the *lac* Sixtus is talking about is chiefly understood as the Eucharistic offering, at which Laurence, as Sixtus' arch-deacon, would normally assist him. Laurence's statement also indicates that the directionality of the Eucharistic sacrifice is imagined as being from humans to God. This clarification is important, because the directionality of the Eucharist is usually

²⁶ "ða beseah se biscop wið ðæs temples. 7 þus cwæð; ðu dumba deofoldgyld. þurh ðe forleosað earne men þæt ece lif: towurpe þe se ælmihtiga godes sunu; ða mid þam worde tobærst sum dæl þæs temples mid færlicum hryre," (CHI.29, ll. 65-8) [Then the bishop looked toward the temple and said thus: "You mute idol, through you wretched me lose eternal life; may the Son of the Almighty God overthrow you. Then with these words the temple part of the temple burst with a loud noise].

²⁷ CHI.29, ll. 30-1.

understood as being dual, both from God to humans and from humans to God. Mazza words it this way, although his formula is overly simplified: “The bread and wine are God’s gift, given to human beings by Christ at his last meal; Christ himself is God’s gift to human beings. The eucharistic prayer, on the other hand, rises from human beings to God. It is our gift in exchange, our response to God’s gift.”²⁸ It commemorates Christ’s offering of himself to humanity, but through the Eucharistic response of thanksgiving, it also serves as a return-gift to God. Furthermore, offering the Eucharist to God is seen as part of the way the Church intercedes for the world.²⁹ From the Carolingian period on there was a strong tendency to see the mass as a gift given by humans to God in order to gain a counter-gift from God.³⁰ The *passio* of Laurence

²⁸ Mazza, *The Eucharistic Prayers of the Roman Rite*, 45. Mazza’s statement that the “bread and wine are God’s gift” is, however, misleading. Within the liturgy of the mass, the bread and wine are presented as the offerings of the people to God, which is transformed into the body and blood of Christ as a response to the celebrant’s prayer (see Josef Jungmann, *The Mass of the Roman Rite: Its Origins and Development*, vol. 2 [New York: Benziger Brothers, 1955], part IV.1.1-9). Furthermore, since the time of Cyprian at least, the Eucharist as a whole has been understood as the offering of the Church to God, both as a response to his gifts, and to obtain his favor. This does not, however, change the essentially reciprocal nature of the Eucharist; rather, the issue of directionality is a matter of emphasis that varies according to time and place (see n. 29 below).

²⁹ Ælfric seems to understand the same directionality in CHI.3 when he speaks of “huselhalgung” as one of the spiritual *lac* people give to God: “Ure gastlican lac sint ure gebedu. 7 lofsang. 7 huselhalgung 7 gehwilce oðre lac þe we gode offriað. þa we sceolun mid gesibsumere heortan. 7 broðorlicere lufe gode betæcan” (ll. 164-6) [Our spiritual offerings are our prayers and hymns and attendance at mass and whatever other offerings that we give to God, which we should entrust to God with peaceful hearts and brotherly love.] The directionality of the Eucharist has, it seems, always been dual. In earliest Christian practice the Eucharist was thought of as thanksgiving (eucharist = Greek “thanksgiving”) from men to God in commemoration of Christ’s sacrifice, but also as a gift from Christ to men as spiritual food. Christ’s status as both God and man allows for this dual directionality; it is this same special status that is substitutionary atonement appeals to for the efficacy of Christ’s work – Christ’s sacrifice is as man on behalf of men to repay the debt that they owe God. At the same time, the fact that Christ can do this at all is because of his divinity, a gift from God to men. The directionality of the Eucharist in particular instances is thus a matter of emphasis. Irenaeus talks about it as a sacrifice that the church offers to God (*Adversus Haereses* IV.18.1). Cyprian also presents it as a sacrifice from humans to God; the redeemed offer the cup in memory of Christ (Epist. 63.2.1 and 17.1); the priest takes the place of Christ in offering the sacrifice to God (Epist. 63.14.4). Cyprian also draws the interesting connection between the Eucharist and martyrdom in teaching that the Eucharist is an invitation to martyrdom and a preparation for it (Epist. 58.1 and 63.15). On the other hand, Ambrose calls the Eucharist a divine gift and emphasizes that, through it, Christ feeds believers (*De Mysteriis* VIII.46). In modern Catholic teaching, its directionality from God to men is emphasized. Joseph Ratzinger argues against understanding the Eucharist as a sacrifice from men to God, emphasizing the directionality from God to men: “It is to this very question that the Eucharist offers us an answer. First of all, it says this to us: *God himself gives to us, that we may give in turn*. The initiative in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ comes from God” (*God is Near Us: The Eucharist, the Heart of Life* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2003], 43 (ital. orig.)).

³⁰ For a study of the Eucharist as a gift to God that explores its social and political value, see Mayke de Jong, “Carolingian Monasticism: the Power of Prayer,” in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*, vol. 2, ed. Rosamond McKitterick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 622-53: “It was widely believed that a Mass could be a gift to God: to express gratitude, to beg for assistance or to placate impending wrath . . . The central ritual of the Church had become a gift (*munus*), for which a counter-gift (*remuneratio*) was to be expected” (648).

represents the Eucharist as a gift from humans to God, and in doing so, it preserves the standard way sacrifices are offered to gods – from the people to God, instead of reversing it, a gift from God to the people. Within Laurence’s *passio* this is significant because it means that there is no essential difference in the function of the sacrifices to the Roman gods or to the Almighty God. Each represent the same relationship of devotees offering *lac* to their god(s). As is the case within the life of Bartholomew, what is important here is to whom one sacrifices. At the same time, the *passio*’s presentation of the martyr himself as a parallel to the Eucharistic offering resists the reduction of the gift to a balanced *munus/remuneratio* exchange.

As Laurence’s statement above begins to show, the Christians’ *lac* is not only the Eucharistic sacrifice offered before the throne of God, it is also the lives of the martyrs. Laurence’s speech continues and makes this clear: “Geswutela þine mihte on þinum bearne 7 geoffra gode þone þe ðu getuge. þæt ðu þy orsorglicor becume to þam æþelan wulderbeage”³¹ (Reveal your power in your son and offer to God the one whom you trained so that you may come less sorrowfully to the noble crown of glory). This idea is repeated later when Decius wants Laurence to offer to his gods: “decius cwæð þa to þam godes cyðere: geoffra nu urum godum; laurentius andwyrde; Ic offrige me sylfne þam ælmihtigan gode on bræðe wynsumnyse. for þan ðe se gedrefeda gast is gode andfenge onsægednys”³² (Decius said then to God’s martyr, “Offer now to our gods!” Laurence answered: “I offer myself to the Almighty God in pleasant odor because the afflicted spirit is a welcome sacrifice to God). In contrast to the unspecified, impersonal pagan *lac*, the Christians’ *lac* is personal, a sacrifice of themselves made to please God.

At the same time, at the beginning of the *passio* there is not much focus either on God’s gifts to humans, or on the reward they expect to receive from him for their faithful service. For example, before his death Sixtus comforts Laurence: “Min cild geswic þines wopes. æfter þrim dagum þu cymst sigefæst to me. to þam ecan life”³³ (My child, cease your weeping. After three days you will come to me secure in victory, to the eternal life). While Sixtus holds out hope of eternal life, it is not presented as a reward directly from God in recognition of Laurence’s

³¹ CHI.29, ll. 31-3.

³² CHI.29, ll. 209-12.

³³ CHI.29, ll. 39-40.

service.³⁴ Rather, what is emphasized is the close tie of loyalty and affection between Laurence and Sixtus. The ties between Christians and those who become Christians prove to be most important and enduring, and, it turns out, this “treasure” is part of the *lac* that people like Sixtus and Laurence offer to God and for which they are rewarded. This can be seen in the suggestion Laurence makes that there is a reward – or at least joy – for Sixtus in Laurence’s martyrdom, “Geswutela þine mihte on þinum bearne 7 geoffra gode þone þe ðu getuge. þæt ðu þy orsorglicor becume to þam æþelan wulderbeage”³⁵ (Reveal your power in your son and offer to God the one whom you trained so that you may come less sorrowfully to the noble crown of glory).

That the treasure of the church is its people becomes a theme developed in the early stages of Laurence’s trouble with Decius. After Laurence’s offer to die with Sixtus, Sixtus sends Laurence away to distribute the treasures of the church to priests, the poor, and widows.³⁶ This manifests the close relationship between sanctity and almsgiving that we see continually throughout Ælfric,³⁷ and it also allows a brief glimpse into Laurence’s place within the community of Christians. The almsgiving again comes up at the moment of Sixtus’ death when Laurence cries out: “ne forlæt þu me for þan ðe ic aspende þære cyrican maðmas swa swa ðu me bebude”³⁸ (Do not abandon me! For I spent the church’s treasures just as you commanded me!). In one respect this is a plot device: Decius’ men hear mention of treasure and their desire for it is what gets Laurence in trouble. The Romans’ single-minded pursuit of earthly treasure causes them to torture Laurence. But this device also allows Laurence to reveal that the true treasure of the church is its people. When Laurence is eventually imprisoned a guard named Hippolytus converts and gains a dual sight when he is baptized: he sees that the church’s treasures are not the material goods the Romans have been trying to get, but the “*unscæððigra manna sawla on*

³⁴ Because of this, the ties between people function rather like alms in CHI.18, binding the community of Christians together in a cycle of loyalty, allowing the deferral necessary to keep a gift from slipping into the category of commodity.

³⁵ CHI.29, ll. 31-3.

³⁶ CHI.29, ll. 40ff.

³⁷ Almsgiving seems to be the number one way that saints manifest their sanctity or the seriousness of their conversion. That this is so in saints’ lives from varying original places (for instance, Basil, Oswald) and is a constant in teaching also shows that it is common to early Christianity as a whole, not unique to Ælfric or even the Western church.

³⁸ CHI.29, ll. 69-70.

gode blissian”³⁹ (innocent souls of men rejoicing in God). Laurence repeats this to Decius’ first-in-command, Valerianus, when he subsequently demands the treasure: “On godes þearfum ic hi aspende. 7 hi sind þa ecan maðmas. þe næfre ne beoð gewanode”⁴⁰ (I spent it on God’s needy, and they are the eternal treasure which will never be diminished). Loyalty to God is manifested through his people’s loyalty to each other, as Christians encourage one another and die with one another. Thus, again, the Christians’ focus is shown to be on the personal and relational ties resulting from their common service of God, as contrasted with the pagan Romans’ focus on power and treasure.

But the true revelation of God’s servants’ closeness with him is shown in the prayers Laurence prays at his death. Like the Eucharistic prayers, these consecrate Laurence’s sacrifice of himself. During his tortures Laurence prays six short prayers, a rather notable amount of prayer for a saint. The prayers underscore the continuing theme of the *passio*, of the closeness between the Christian God and his people. The effect of these multiple short prayers is to emphasize that God is someone Laurence can turn to in times of trial. It should be noticed that, so far in this *passio*, there has been little mention of prayer apart from its place accompanying *lac*, both in the pagan offerings and as it accompanies the sacrifice of the mass, and then later when Laurence marks a blind man with the sign of the cross to heal him,⁴¹ arguably a type of prayer. Often, the line between all these acts – the mass, almsgiving, martyrdom, and prayer – is hard to place insofar as all of them enact the relationship between devotee and god, all of the Christian acts are involved in the petition for salvation, and all of them are considered forms of offering.

Laurence starts praying after he is beaten and when he is first tortured. In the first torture episode, he prays three times; in the second one (ending in his death), three times again. The prayers are interspersed with defiant statements directed toward Laurence’s torturers. It is tempting to think that defiance represents the face Laurence presents toward his torturers, while the prayers represent his subjective experience of the situation and represent more fully his suffering, but this is not exactly the case. These first two prayers do represent Laurence’s

³⁹ CHI.29, ll. 102-3.

⁴⁰ CHI.29, ll. 113-4.

⁴¹ CHI.29, ll. 48-9.

suffering in a way that his brave and combative responses to Decius cannot. Laurence has this in common with the praying saints in OE poetry, Andreas and Judas, both of whose prayers come from a position of suffering.⁴² To some extent, then, they are a plot device representing Laurence's suffering to the narrative's audience. But within the world of the narrative they also represent Laurence's suffering to God, making it, through the medium of prayer, a part of the sacrifice of his death.

The first two prayers do ask for God's support in Laurence's situation: "Hælend crist god of gode gemiltsa þinum ðeowan. for þan ðe ic gewregeð þe ne wiðsoc: befrynen ic þe geandette"⁴³ (Jesus Christ, God from God, have mercy on your servant, because when accused I did not renounce you, when questioned I acknowledged you); and "Hælend crist þu ðe gemedemodest: þæt ðu to menniscum menn geboren wære. 7 us fram deofles þeowte alysdest: onfoh minne gast"⁴⁴ (Jesus Christ, you who humbled yourself so that you were born to human people and delivered us from the devil's servitude, receive my spirit). The second prayer is clearly a martyr's prayer, echoing as it does Jesus' final words, and both of them ask for God's mercy or support in Laurence's suffering. Furthermore, both appeal to the relationship that exists between Laurence and God: the first one especially appeals to the loyalty that Laurence is manifesting in the face of suffering and on this basis asks for God's mercy. The second appeals

⁴² Old English saints more usually operate in the "imperative" mood, as John P. Hermann observes about Juliana ("Language and Spirituality in Cynewulf's *Juliana*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 26:3 [1984]: 263-81, 273). Juliana, we are told, prays in her prison cell, but the implication is that she is praying the normal nightly prayers. Not even in the face of immanent death does she pray to God – not even anything so common as "God, receive my spirit." Rather, she denounces her tormentors to the end. Guthlac (of *Guthlac A*) also appears most comfortable in the declarative. Even when he is caught up in his most severe trial at the mouth of hell, he states his belief in God's favor rather than asking God for it. This, in fact, is a general trend when saints face their opponents. An exception to this is Andreas, who has long bouts of prayer when he thinks he is going to die at the hands of the Mermedonians. But Andreas is a rather odd portrayal of a saint (and he does not, in fact, die). Judas, tortured by Elena to reveal the whereabouts of the true cross, also prays, confessing his belief in God. Elena prays to know the whereabouts of the true cross, but her more effective means of information seems to be torturing Judas. To sum up with a generalization lacking nuance: the saints who pray, pray in weakness. Old English narrative – and Ælfric is no exception to this – is usually more interested in presenting saints as strong than weak.

⁴³ CHI.29, ll. 146-8. The opening of the prayer is essentially condensed from the Creed: "Ic gelyfe ... on ænne Crist, Hælend Drihten, þone ancennedan Godes Sunu, of ðam Fæder acenned ær ealle worulda, God of Gode, Leoht of Leohte ..." (Benjamin Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 596). "Ic þe andette" is common in the Psalms.

⁴⁴ CHI.29, ll. 157-9. The idea of Christ being born of humanity and thereby releasing humans from the devil's bondage is of course an encapsulation of the random theory of salvation. Ælfric uses some version of this phrase 6 times in his homilies. "Deofles andweald" is a much more common phrase, often used by Ælfric but used by others also.

to Christ's humanity and the fact that Christ has already delivered humanity from the devil. Furthermore, both of these prayers echo creedal language; they therefore serve as evidence of right belief as well as evidence of true – faithful – belief. Finally, Laurence's address is more personally and intimately to Jesus Christ, rather than (as in the Latin) calling him more formally "lord."⁴⁵

God's support of Laurence is at times represented quite literally. Twice when Laurence prays as he undergoes torture from Decius' men, God responds. God's first response is to Laurence's death-prayer, in reply to which a voice is heard from heaven saying, "Gyt þu scealt fela gewinn habban on þinum martyrdom"⁴⁶ (You must still have much strife in your martyrdom). While this "comfort," as Decius terms it,⁴⁷ seems hardly encouraging, it not only echoes Sixtus' earlier assurance,⁴⁸ but God's voice also stands in contrast to the silence and remove of the Roman gods. After this point, the tone of Laurence's prayers changes. No longer do they ask for God's mercy. Rather, the following prayer asks for God to reveal himself as a testimony to observers: "Drihten god. fæder hælendes cristes: sy þu gebletsod þe us forgeafe þine mildheortnyse; Cyð nu þine arfæstnyse þæt ðas ymbstandendan oncnawan þæt ðu gefrefrast þine þeowan"⁴⁹ (Lord God, Father of Jesus Christ, be you blessed, who forgave us with your mildheartedness; show now your mercy so that those standing about know that you comfort your servants). In response to this prayer, one of the soldiers standing nearby believes and tells Laurence he sees "godes engel standende ætforan þe mid handclaðe: 7 wipað ðine swatigan leomu"⁵⁰ (God's angel standing before you with a hand-cloth, and he wipes your sweaty limbs). God's direct, physical comfort administered through his angel serves as the central response to Laurence's prayer, a point that is emphasized the more both because at this

⁴⁵ In the Latin, both prayers begin "Domine Iesu Christe" (Godden 244).

⁴⁶ CHI.29, ll. 160-1.

⁴⁷ "frofor," l. 162.

⁴⁸ "þe gerist maran campdom on þinum gewinne; We underfoð swa swa ealde men scortne ryne þæs leohtran gewinnes. Soðlice þu geonga underfehst miccle wulderfulran sige æt þysum reþan cyninge" (CHI.29, ll. 36-8) [to you a greater struggle in your conflict is fitting. We receive, just as old men, a short course of lighter struggle; truly. Truly, you young will receive greater glorious victory from this cruel king].

⁴⁹ CHI.29, ll. 165-8. This is one of Ælfric's rare uses of "Drihten" to refer unambiguously to the first person of the godhead. In fact, in Ælfric's homilies, these Drihten is paired with God only 7 times; 6 of these times are translations from the Bible or a reference to the Old Testament, the seventh is St. Swithun's life. Here, obviously, Ælfric translates directly from the Latin.

⁵⁰ CHI.29, ll. 170-1.

point Decius ceases torturing Laurence for the day, and also because of the formal characteristics of the prayers. The first two begin “Hælend Crist,” the last three begin with praise and thanksgiving.

The final three prayers occur the next time Laurence’s tortures begin. They are all prayers of thanksgiving that illustrate the claim Laurence makes to Decius, paraphrased from Psalm 50, that “se gedrefeda gast is gode andfenge onsægednys”⁵¹(the afflicted spirit is an acceptable sacrifice to God) and further invoke the idea that Laurence’s mouth will declare the praise the Psalmist mentions in verse 17⁵² as part of the complete sacrifice that is Laurence’s death. First Laurence prays, “Sy þe lof drihten for þan ðe þu eart ealra þinga god”⁵³ (Be praise to you, Lord, because you are God of all things); after more tortures he prays, “Hælend crist ic þancie þe þæt ðu me gestrangian wylt”⁵⁴ (Jesus Christ, I thank you that you will strengthen me). Finally, just before his death, he says, “Hælend crist. Ic þancie þe mid inwerdre heortan. þæt ic mot faran into þinum rice”⁵⁵ (Jesus Christ, I thank you with inward heart that I can go into your kingdom).

In these cases Laurence thanks God for future gifts as though they have already been received. After the last prayer, he dies. If the first two prayers represent Laurence’s suffering before God, making his suffering part of his gift to God, the last three prayers complete the gift-cycle and express Laurence’s sense of God’s return-gift to him. His assurance comes from the closeness between suffering Christian and God manifest through God’s audible and visible interventions in Laurence’s *passio*. The types of *lac* the Romans offer their gods are less complete than the total *lac* of body and spirit that Laurence offers (partially quoted above): “Ic offrie me sylfne þam ælmihtigum gode on bræðe wynsumnysse. for þan ðe se gedrefeda gast is gode andfenge onsægednys”⁵⁶ (I offer myself to the Almighty God in a sweet odor, for the afflicted spirit is an acceptable sacrifice to God). Furthermore, in referencing this verse from one

⁵¹ CHI.29, ll. 211-2. Psalm 50:19 is “sacrificium Dei spiritus contribulatus cor contritum et humiliatum Deus non dispicies” [A sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit: a contrite and humbled heart, O God, thou wilt not despise].

⁵² “Domine labia mea aperies et os meum adnuntiabit laudem tuam” [O Lord, thou wilt open my lips: and my mouth shall declare thy praise].

⁵³ CHI.29, l. 204.

⁵⁴ CHI.29, ll. 216-7.

⁵⁵ CHI.29, ll. 219-20.

⁵⁶ CHI.29, ll. 210-12.

of the penitential Psalms in this situation, Laurence associates himself both with the holocaust that the Psalmist rejects in verse 18⁵⁷ and with the more acceptable sacrifice of an afflicted spirit in the verse he more directly quotes.

This picture of closeness between God and devotee is not uncontested. Decius' preferred response to Laurence's prayers is to accuse him of "drycræft." Decius' recognizes the power of Laurence's prayers, indicating that Laurence's prayers apparently have some immediate effect in allowing him to withstand Decius' tortures. Usually "magic" is defined oppositionally: the magician appeals to a power that those who name this "magic" do not recognize as legitimate. That is, for Christians, magic appeals to the devil's power; for pagans, magic appeals to God's power. This is, in part, how Decius seems to understand magic. After God's voice is heard comforting Laurence, Decius responds: "Romanisce weras gehyrde ge þæra deofla frofor. on þissum eawbræcum. þe ure godas geysode ne ondრæt. ne þa asmeadan tingregan"⁵⁸ (Roman men, did you hear the comfort of the devils for this lawbreaker, who angers our gods, and neither dreads them nor the carefully planned torments?). But Decius attributes the power of the "drycræft" to Laurence: "Ic geseo þæt ðu þurh ðinum drycræfte þas tingregan gebysmerast"⁵⁹ (I see that you mock these torments through your sorcery), as though Laurence controls a power that responds to him on account of his words.⁶⁰ Decius also, at another point, thinks that Laurence is putting his confidence in the treasures he supposedly has: "Wenst þu la þæt þu beo alysed mid þinum hordum fram þisum tintregum?"⁶¹ (Do you really expect that you will be released from these torments by your treasures?). Thus, Decius' understanding replicates his focus on power and the material wealth that he desires to gain by destroying the church.

Laurence's *passio* so strongly ties *lac* and prayer to sacrifice that Laurence's prayers become a part of that sacrifice. In the same way that Laurence was accustomed to assisting with the prayers and offering of the mass, he offers himself. In displaying his *inward heort*, a thankful response to God's former gifts, the prayers consecrate his offering. They are not a gift

⁵⁷ "non enim vis ut victimam feriam nec holocaustum tibi placet" [For if thou hadst desired sacrifice, I would indeed have given it: with burnt offerings thou wilt not be delighted].

⁵⁸ CHI.29, ll. 161-3.

⁵⁹ CHI.29, ll. 149-50.

⁶⁰ All the more interesting because of the prayer's relationship to the Creed.

⁶¹ CHI.29, ll. 140-1.

to God in exchange for salvation; rather, they appeal in gratitude to his past gifts and trustingly look toward being welcomed to join with the guiltless throng of the heavenly host.

CHRISTIAN LAC: BARTHOLOMEW

In both Bartholomew and Laurence's *passiones*, the conflict is focused around *lac*, and while, in both cases, such *lac* are obviously given to the deity to whom one submits and thus serve symbolically as a sign of allegiance, in each life the internal logic of the *lac*, and thus the way that prayer functions, operates with subtle difference. Central to Laurence's *passio* is the difference between the personal nature of Christian *lac* and the corresponding personal relationship between Christians and God and Christians and each other, and pagan *lac* with its sense of distance from the pagan gods, giving the pagans a correspondingly different focus on power and material wealth. In Bartholomew's *passio*, *lac* are given to the devils in order to get them to grant favors to the petitioners, but the same kind of *lac* are not similarly given to God. Rather, the relationship between petitioners and God is mediated through the figure of a saint notable for his prayer. *Lac* serve to entangle the deceived heathen within a relationship with devils; petition functions symbolically to mark whom one serves. The given text of Bartholomew's prayer connects the power of the saint to correct belief and establishes the relationship upon which his request for mass healing is based. But his prayer also ties the creedal belief to the power of God to heal/save, and although Ælfric clarifies that God is primarily interested in saving sinful humanity, this right relationship with God symbolized both through patient prayer for mercy in sickness and through "God's words" spoken over plants, shows that the power of prayer resides in whom one is praying to, not in precise understanding of the words one is saying.

If giving of *lac* to idols forfeits the precators' claim to protection from God, how then do those who have given their allegiance to devils return to God's kingdom, and what role does the saint have in this? In Bartholomew's *passio*, power for *hælu* resides in the figure of the saint. This power is a result of his close relationship with God manifest through his frequent prayer to God, and the power of his prayer and, more usually, his commands, to have effect on the world. Bartholomew's presence in Astaroth's temple is enough to bind the devil so that he can no longer speak or heal (though the sick are still afflicted). Confused, the Indians go to a nearby idol, once

again offering *lac* to him to establish a relationship before even posing their question: why cannot their god answer them?⁶² The devilish inhabitant of an idol called Berith informs the Indians that their devil is bound because of the presence of Bartholomew, a “freond þæs ælmihtigan godes”⁶³ (friend of the Almighty God). Berith’s devil goes on to give a detailed description of Bartholomew’s appearance, which includes: “hund siðon he bigð his cneowa on dæge. 7 hund siþon on nihte. biddende his drihten; his stemn is swilce ormæte byme: 7 him farað mid godes englas þe ne gepafiað. þæt him hungor derige. oððe ænig ateorung”⁶⁴ (a hundred times he bends his knees in the day and a hundred times at night praying to his Lord. His voice is like a great trumpet, and he goes with God’s angels which do not allow that hunger harass him or any weariness). One of Bartholomew’s defining features is that he continually⁶⁵ petitions his Lord. Although, as is typical, the content of his prayers is not given, they are described in a disciplined way, as something he continually and faithfully does as part of the structure of his life. Furthermore, these prayers are mentioned in such a context that shows they are a marker of Bartholomew’s close relationship to his Lord. In contrast to Laurence’s suffering (which suffering brings Laurence all the more victory in his gift of himself and prompts God’s comforting presence in his life), what is emphasized here is that Bartholomew does not suffer because of his relationship with God. In contrast to the Indians’ prayer to their gods, Bartholomew’s is continual; he does not pray because he is afflicted, although his relationship with God does protect him. So shaken is Berith’s devil by Bartholomew’s power that he then asks a favor from his petitioners: “Ic bidde eow þæt ge hine geornlice biddon. þæt he hider ne gewende”⁶⁶ (I pray you that you zealously ask him that he not come hither). Bartholomew’s habit of praying is part of what marks his relationship with God, and this relationship is the source of his power.

Because of Bartholomew’s close connection to God, his prayer itself also has effect upon the devil in a direct way. Bartholomew’s presence is revealed when a devil⁶⁷ afflicts a madman

⁶² CHI.31, ll. 23 ff.

⁶³ CHI.31, l. 30.

⁶⁴ CHI.31, ll. 37-40.

⁶⁵ In fact, it is very likely that this shows Bartholomew obeying the commandment to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thes. 5:17) that so occupied Christian thinking on prayer as they tried to figure out how to do this.

⁶⁶ CHI.31, l. 45.

⁶⁷ Perhaps a different devil from the one in Astaroth, but this is not made extremely clear.

into crying out: “Eala þu godes apostol bartholomee. þine gebedu geangsumiað me 7 ontendað”⁶⁸ (O you, God’s apostle Bartholomew! Your prayers afflict me and burn). Bartholomew responds by commanding the devil to be silent and come out of the madman. In light of Thomas D. Hill’s article on a similar theme in *Solomon and Saturn I*, it seems that what causes the devil such pain is the fervency (*oratio fervens*) of Bartholomew’s one-hundred-times-a-day prayer. In this case, the irritating nature of the prayer to the devil is more of a side-effect of Bartholomew’s prayer than an intended result. Although Bartholomew’s close connection to God manifest through prayer is the source of his power, he more usually commands devils to do his bidding than he prays for God’s intervention. In addition to Bartholomew’s response to this particular devil, he also binds the devil afflicting the king Polymius’ daughter,⁶⁹ and he commands the devil to come out of Astaroth.⁷⁰

After the Indians recognize their error when the devil is revealed, they are able to return to God’s protection, not through *lac*, but through attempted obedience. Bartholomew offers to intercede for the afflicted with the true God, their Creator,⁷¹ if they will overthrow the idol. Although they are not able to do this, they try. After Bartholomew commands the spirit to leave and crush the idol, the people cry out: “an ælmihtig god is þone þe bartholomeus bodað”⁷² (There is one Almighty God whom Bartholomew preaches!). Thus, although the people do not offer *lac* to God in the same way they had to Astaroth, they do attempt to fulfill Bartholomew’s condition for him to intercede for them to God, and they acknowledge that God is the Almighty God before he prays, although their moment of belief comes afterward.

Bartholomew’s prayer is a rather long précis of the Gospel (essentially, a creed), which then references Jesus’ promise to grant petitions prayed in his name, and is finally followed by the request of the moment:

Se apostol ða astrehte his handa wið heofonas weard þus biddende; þu ælmihtiga god on þam ðe abraham gelyfde. 7 isaac 7 iacob. þu ðe asendest þinne ancennedan sunu. þæt he us alysde mid his deorwurpum blode fram deofles þeowdome. 7 hæfþ us geworht þe to

⁶⁸ CHI.31, ll. 51-2.

⁶⁹ CHI.31, ll. 58 ff.

⁷⁰ CHI.31, ll. 156 ff.

⁷¹ CHI.31, ll. 147-8.

⁷² CHI.31, ll. 162-3.

bearnum; ðu eart unacenned fæder: he is sunu of þe æfre acenned. 7 se halga gast is æfre forðstæppende of þe 7 of þinum bearne: se forgeaf us on his naman þas mihte þæt we untrume gehælon 7 blinde onlihton hreoflige geclænsian. deoflu afligan. deade aræran. 7 cwæð to us. soð ic eow secge: swa hwæt swa ge biddað on minum naman æt minum fæder. hit bið eow gitiðod: nu bidde ic on his naman. þæt ðeos untrume meniu sy gehæled: þæt hi ealle oncnawon þæt ðu eart ana god on heofonum 7 on eorþan. 7 on sæ. þu ðe hælðe geedstapelast þurh þone ylcan urne drihten. se þe mid þe 7 mid þam halgan gaste. leofað 7 rixað on ealra worulda world.⁷³

[The apostle then stretched his hands toward heaven, thus praying, “You, Almighty God, on whom Abraham believed, and Isaac, and Jacob; you who sent your only begotten Son, so that he redeemed us with his precious blood from the devil’s slavery, and have made us your children; you are the unbegotten Father, he is the Son of you ever begotten, and the Holy Spirit is ever proceeding from you and from your Son. He gave us this power in his name, that we heal the infirm, and enlighten the blind, cleanse lepers, drive out devils, raise the dead, and he said to us, ‘Truth I say to you, whatever you ask in my name from my Father, it will be granted you.’ Now I ask in his name that this infirm crowd be healed, so that they all know that you alone are God in heaven, and on earth, and on the sea, you who establish healing/salvation through our same Lord, he who with you and with the Holy Spirit lives and rules for all ages.”]

This prayer is ostensibly addressed to God. Insofar as creeds function as prayer, stating the correctness of the believer’s faith and thus the basis upon which his relationship with God is established, this prayer operates in the same way. As such, it establishes the relationship upon which the request he is about to make is based, crucially reminding God of Christ’s promise that prayer in his name will be answered. Bartholomew also gives a reason why God would want to answer this particular request: to confirm the people in the belief that he is the true God. But even more crucially, this prayer is for those listening to it, both the Indians, who need instruction in the content of the faith they are about to embrace and for whom this is a performance of that faith, and also for those hearing Ælfric’s sermon. In this case, Bartholomew’s prayer establishes

⁷³ CHI.31, ll. 163-176.

his connection with the true faith, the one that the audience affirms each time they recite their own creed. Bartholomew's prayer ties credal belief to the power of God, who brings both bodily healing and spiritual salvation (*hældð*) through Jesus' sacrifice.

After Bartholomew's prayer the people are healed and an angel appears and sanctifies the temple, and then manifests the devil in his true, hideous image before banishing him to the wastelands. It is at this point that Polymius, his family, and all his people "gelyfde on þone soðan god"⁷⁴ (believe in the true God) and are baptized. After this point Bartholomew runs afoul of Polymius' brother Astryges and is summarily martyred.⁷⁵ But for Polymius, belief is the response to these miracles, not their pre-condition. It is the figure of Bartholomew, mediating between God and man, and manifesting the truth of the true faith, that makes this belief possible.

PRAYER IN THE LIFE OF ST. BASIL

The Life of St. Basil has a more complicated textual history than the *passiones* of Bartholomew and Laurence: the original was in Greek and compiled probably in the seventh century, and thus reflects several different stages of Christian practice already.⁷⁶ Toward the end of the ninth century it was translated into Latin three times, probably in the Carolingian court.⁷⁷ Therefore, the Life is long and complex and carries various strata of meaning. Whereas the *passiones* of both Bartholomew and Laurence focus on *lac* to portray the relationship between people and their gods, prayer is more central to the life of St. Basil. While no direct prayers are given, prayer resolves the conflicts of every major episode. Thus, prayer fluidly interacts with the different concerns manifest in the text. For instance, when Basil prays to receive the liturgy of the mass from God himself, in the Greek context this is centrally important in establishing the

⁷⁴ CHI.31, ll. 199-200.

⁷⁵ The heart of this story is not in Bartholomew's martyrdom. The conflict between him and Astryges lasts less than a page, and Bartholomew dies in a sentence – a summary death indeed compared to saints like Laurence and even Basil (who dies a natural death).

⁷⁶ See Gabriela Corona, *Ælfric's Life of Saint Basil the Great: Background and Context*, Anglo-Saxon Texts 5 (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2006), 7-8. Corona gives an edition of Ælfric's life with side-by-side translation along with an introduction detailing the relationship between the Latin and OE lives. She also includes the Latin life in an appendix to the book. Because I have no access to the Greek version (which apparently only exists in one difficult print edition, even if one does know Greek) I am taking Corona at her word that the Latin *vita* is a faithful, albeit shortened, translation of the Greek (down to mimicking Greek grammar, 9-14), with the fairly minor omissions she details on p. 13. My comparison of Ælfric will therefore be to the Latin *vita*.

⁷⁷ Corona, 25-8.

authority of the main Greek liturgies. The Carolingian Latin translators, however, might have found value in the way this episode speaks to the debates of their day concerning the nature of the real presence.⁷⁸ Additionally, the Greek hagiography and the Latin *vita* (a close translation) both contain actual prayers of Basil's that Ælfric's version excises. The interests of the Greek hagiographer were evidently different from Ælfric's own.

Within the Eastern church Basil is a central figure, active in the defense of orthodoxy against the Arian heresy (unnamed, in Ælfric's life), and the creator of one of the Greek liturgies. The *vita* begins with a summary of the key elements of Basil's importance for the Eastern church:

Ergo quomodo magister noster pastor et resonatus in orbe, caelestium uirtutum collocator ac angelicorum ordinum comminister, magniloquus ecclesiae praedicator, solida orthodoxorum dogmatum culmina, naturam rerum existentium expressit; inimicum trinitatis Iulianum apostatam deiecit; Valentis os blasphemum obstruxit; arrianorum debellauit malam gloriam; christianorum plane corroborauit rectam gloriam.⁷⁹

[Therefore I shall record how our pastor was a man great in every way, and a preacher of the heavenly virtues heard throughout the earth, a servant of the angelic orders, an eloquent spokesman of the Church, and a solid peak of orthodox doctrines who explained the nature of existing things, cast out that enemy of the Trinity, Julian the Apostate, shut the blasphemous mouth of Valens, vanquished the wicked boast of the Arians, and thoroughly strengthened the true boast of the Christians.]⁸⁰

Basil's teaching could be taken as reliably orthodox; he was a key figure in the struggle against Arianism and in protecting the church from hostile secular power such as Julian's, as is shown through his interactions with Julian and Valens. He presents the superiority of Christian belief to pagan philosophy through his ability to explain the nature of existing things, a major concern in

⁷⁸ Paschasius Radbertus, for instance, gives similar elements-to-flesh miracles in *De corpore et sanguine domini* (see Nathan D. Mitchell, "Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass," in *Handbook for Liturgical Studies: The Eucharist*, ed. Anscar J. Chupungco [Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1999], 262-76). For a more detailed summary of the debates see Mitchell, *Cult and Controversy: Worship of the Eucharist outside Mass* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1982; 1990), 73-86.

⁷⁹ Corona, Appendix I, Prologue, ll. 16-22.

⁸⁰ Translation by John Harman Nicholson, "*The Vita Sancti Basilii* of Pseudo-Amphilochius: A Critical Edition with Commentary and English Translation" (M.A. thesis, University of Georgia, 1986), Prologue.

the early chapters. In addition, through Basil's course of studies in Egypt and Jerusalem, he unites the major eastern centers of Christianity. Finally, Basil receives his liturgy directly from God, and several subsequent miracles testify to the power of this liturgy. Perhaps because of this, the Latin life gives multiple instances of Basil's actual prayers.

Basil is not the same sort of figure for Ælfric. Consequently, most of the sections detailing Basil's abilities in Greek philosophical thought and literary culture are removed. The ones that remain tend to focus more on the idea of wisdom; this is especially evident in Basil's show-down with Julian. Although Ælfric excises most of Basil's prayers, the source of Basil's liturgy remains important as a testimony to the power of the liturgy,⁸¹ even though Ælfric mentions that Basil's liturgy is not used in the Western church. Prayer – and the true belief it mediates – remains a central concern in the Life. What comes to the fore in Ælfric's version is a concern for belief that is continually mediated through the figure of the saint. While content is an important part of this belief, what seems to be more important is the relationship established through it, a relationship in which believers show their loyalty to God, while God responds with his mercy, protection, and healing/salvation.

The extent to which prayer is central to this Life and the ways in which it functions can be seen from the following outline. Ælfric's life contains 17 chapters in which prayer solves a central problem in eleven of them; Basil's earthly intercession is manifest in an additional chapter:

Chapter 2: At Basil's baptism he prays for a sign from God to confirm his faith.

Chapter 4: Basil prays for a liturgy in God's own form of words.

Chapter 6: Basil intercedes for a poor woman with a nobleman, and then for the nobleman with the emperor.

Chapter 7: Basil gets the better of Julian in a gift-exchange, then prays to God to avert Julian's anger.

Chapter 9: Basil prays for healing for Valens' son in what is a contest with the Arians.

Chapter 10: Basil gains a church back from the Arians through prayer.

Chapter 11: Basil intervenes through prayer in the case of a young man who has sold his

⁸¹ One of Basil's subsequent miracles testifies to the real presence in the Eucharist, potentially a topic of interest among the Carolingians.

soul to the devil.

Chapter 12: The mass reveals the honorable conduct of a priest, and Basil's prayer heals a leper.

Chapter 13: A Syrian hermit Ephrem prays to know about Basil's excellence; Basil prays that Ephrem might miraculously be granted a knowledge of Greek.

Chapter 14: Basil and Ephrem (by turns) pray for a woman's sins to be forgiven (this story is finished in Chapter 16).

Chapter 15: Basil prays for his life to be prolonged so that his Jewish doctor might come to belief.

Structurally, Corona notes that Ælfric's rearrangements of the *vita* – moving related episodes next to each other, for instance – make the life appear “a logically unified continuum, without the ‘patchwork’ effect characteristic of the *Vita Basilii*.”⁸² She notes that this rearrangement leads to a longer section of the text that perhaps shows concerns about kingship through Basil's dealings with Julian and Valens (chapters 7-10),⁸³ but she does not address the larger structure of the text as a whole.

Ælfric gives two structural cues that lead to a three-fold division of the life and place the proto-Faustian⁸⁴ story of chapter 11 at the center of the concerns of the text. The first is the way he begins each chapter of the text. In the first section after the Prologue (chapters 2-6), the chapters are very loosely linked by time or place: “Hi comon ða siððan” (ch. 2), “Ða gehadode” (ch. 3), “Ða æfter litlum fyrste” (ch. 4), “He eode æfter mæssan” (ch. 6). The exception to this is chapter 5, which begins, “Sum Iudeisc man.” In this case, the episode is thematically linked to the one before, in which Basil is given his liturgy by God. In the following chapter, the efficacy of this liturgy is seen through a Eucharistic miracle witnessed by a Jewish man who then converts. The following chapter is quite loosely linked temporally to the two Eucharist chapters: it happens afterward. However, chapter 6 also shows that Basil's intercession is just as efficacious among men as it is supposed to be with God. The second section concerns the two emperors. Each chapter begins with a marker of time: “On sumum dæge” (ch. 7), “Efne þæs

⁸² Corona, 84.

⁸³ Corona, 84-5.

⁸⁴ Identified as such by William Schipper, “A Faust Analogue in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* (LS 3.358-461).” *ELN* 21 (1983): 1-3.

ymbe seofan niht” (ch. 8), “Eft on sumne timan” (ch. 9), and “Eft on oðrum time” (ch. 10). Finally, in the third section, each chapter begins with a person: “Sum arwurpe þegn” (ch. 11), “Basilus se mæra” (ch. 12), “Effrem wæs gehaten” (ch. 13), “Sum swiðe welig wif” (ch. 14), “An æpele læce” (ch. 15), and a turn back to the woman: “We willað nu ful secgan” (ch. 16). Chapter 17 is the epilogue.

The second structural cue is seen if one focuses on prayer. Prayer in the first section establishes Basil as a rightly believing possessor of God’s words whose intercession is efficacious. The second sections’ prayers show Basil’s ability to protect the church against apostates and heretics, and the final sections’ prayers show his ability to intervene in the lives of those who come to him. Structurally, chapter 11 is the pivot of the Life (it is also the longest episode). The previous section shows him triumphing against human adversaries; this one shows him triumphing against the devil himself – a devil who has the forethought and cleverness to get those whom he seduces to sign a binding contract with him.

In chapter 11, at the instigation of the devil, a young man falls in love with a convent-bound woman and makes a bargain with the devil in order to gain her. As has been the case in the other saints’ lives examined, asking for favors from the devil forfeits the petitioner’s soul. Throughout, the relationship between the young man and the agents of the devil is mediated through money and through contract, establishing distance and (through the contract) a relationship of suspicion and mistrust. Their contract-mediated relationship is in contrast to the prayer-mediated relationship restored between the young man and God through the saint and the young man himself that void the contract.

The young man first approaches a sorcerer: “and behet him sceattas gif he mid his scinscræfte him þæt mæden mihte gemacian to wife”⁸⁵ (and promised him money if he with his magic could make that woman his wife). The young man is thus *not* proposing the type of exchange that leads to the creation of mutual bonds. The sorcerer, however, acts as a intermediary, taking the youth to his master, the devil. Between the sorcerer and the devil there evidently is a relationship based upon mutual favors. But this is not the sort of relationship that either the youth or the devil proposes to replicate between themselves: the youth has a very

⁸⁵ Corona, 364-5.

specific favor he wants to gain, and the devil sets a very clear price for that favor: “se deofol befran þone dweligendan cnapan gif he wolde on hine gelyfan and his Hælende wiðsacan siþþan þe he gefremode his fulan galnysse”⁸⁶ (the devil asked the erring youth if he wanted to believe in him and reject his Savior after he fulfilled his foul lust). While the youth explains what he wants to the sorcerer, the devil – without having heard or promised the youth anything – asks him “gif he wolde on hine gelyfan and his Hælende wiðsacan”⁸⁷ (if he wanted to believe in him and reject his Saviour). But at this point devil has given the youth nothing *to* believe – no promise, although he goes on: “siþþan þe he gefremode his fulan galnysse”⁸⁸ (after he fulfilled his foul lust). There is an implicit promise here, but the belief is to come after the devil has done the deed – that is, what is being proposed is not belief in the intellectual sense, it is allegiance. This “gelyfan” is opposed to the “wiðsacan” of Christ that the youth is supposed to do. Belief is opposed, not to unbelief, but to rejecting. The youth agrees to this conditionally: “gif he his lust gefremode”⁸⁹ (if he fulfilled his desire). That is, for the youth, belief is something exchanged for service.

Perhaps this is the reason why the devil mistrusts him:

“Ge synd swiðe ungetreowe,
þonne ge min behofiað þonne helpe ic eow
and ge wiþsacað me eft, and cyrrað to eowrum Criste
se þe is swiðe mildheort and mildelice eow underfehþ,
ac writ me nu sylf willes þæt þu wiðsace Criste
and þinum fulluhte, and ic gefremme ðinne lus,
and þu beo on domesdæge fordemed mid me.”

Ða awrat se earming mid his agenre handa
swa swa se deofol him gedihte þone pistol.⁹⁰

[“You are very untrustworthy, when it pleases you then I help you, and you will reject me afterward, and turn to your Christ, who is very mild-hearted and will mildly receive you.

⁸⁶ Corona, 367-9.

⁸⁷ Corona, 368.

⁸⁸ Corona, l. 369.

⁸⁹ Corona, l. 373.

⁹⁰ Corona, ll. 374-82.

So write me now of your own will that you reject Christ and your baptism, and I will satisfy your desire, and you will be damned with me on Judgment Day.” Then the wretch wrote the letter with his own hand just as the devil dictated to him.]

The devil tries to make his claim on the young man’s soul absolute through the contract that serves as a guarantee of the young man’s intention, especially as it is written personally in the youth’s own hand. Insofar as the contract is dictated by the devil, the young man adopts and enacts the words and conditions the devil gives him. Through this, the contract stands as a contrast to and inversion of the relationship that should exist between the youth and Christ, a relationship mediated by prayer. That is, the youth adopts and enacts the words the devil gives him, writing them in his own hand as a testimony that they reflect his own intention. But a contract-negotiated relationship is one founded, not on love, loyalty, and the joy of the gift, but rather in mistrust and suspicion, as each party negotiates to get out of what he wants.⁹¹

The youth marries the young woman, but he eventually realizes his deception.⁹² He turns to Basil, who asks him if he wants to return to Christ. The youth confesses he does: “ac ic ne mæg, þeah ic wille, forþanþe ic wiðsoc Criste and on gewrite afæstnode þæt ic wære þæs deofles”⁹³ (but I cannot, even though I wish it, because I rejected Christ and affirmed in a writ that I was the devil’s). Basil assures him that (as the devil had predicted) Christ is merciful – “gif þu mid soðre dædbote gecyrste eft to him”⁹⁴ (if you with true penance turn again to him). The contract was supposed to stand as a guarantee of intention to make sure the devil gets his due, but the intention is falsified by the young man’s change of mind and Christ’s mercy. This does leave two problems: one, the contract still exists. Two, there is a disquieting sort of fluidity in the character of a man who sees belief as something to be exchanged for service.

Prayer solves these problems. Basil locks the youth away for three days and prays for him. At the end of that time he returns, and the man reports that the devils frightened and

⁹¹ In the Latin this exchange is similar (although the sorcerer is more obviously an intimate of the devil), but there the details of the bargain have been worked out before the issue of belief comes up. The sorcerer proposes the denial in writing and explains everything to the devil before the devil ever asks the youth, “Credis in me?” (11.32). Thus, the youth has something to believe in – the devil’s implicit promise of help – when he answers the affirmative: “Credo” (11.33). Additionally, this exchange potentially seems creedal in Latin because it is given in direct speech; it does not in OE.

⁹² Corona, I. 410.

⁹³ Corona, II. 412-14.

⁹⁴ Corona, I. 417.

threatened him. Basil responds: “Ne beo ðu afyrht, gelyf soðlice on God”⁹⁵ (Do not be frightened; believe truly in God). But, at this point, what marks true belief in God? Partially it is the young man’s willingness to undergo penitential suffering, to “face his demons” (they appear to him as he is locked away) in his place of solitude and enact his belief that God will indeed be merciful. That is, the exchange between the youth and the devil was marked by a statement of specific obligations for each party to fulfill. There is no such specificity in the young man’s return: all he wants is to be taken back; all Basil promises is that God will do so. But the penitential stability that the youth must show also, in some way, heals his character, standing as a new marker of intention. The youth’s intention is not marked by dead words written on a page, but more dynamically through the continually iterated promises of prayer.

The figure of the saint stands as a guarantee, both of God’s mercy, and of the youth’s true belief. Thus, it is Basil’s prayer (already shown to be efficacious through the power of the mass God has given him) that the passage emphasizes. After fourteen days of prayer, the youth reports himself quite well, and says, “todæg ic seah hu ðu overswiðdest þone deofol”⁹⁶ (today I saw how you overcame the devil). Basil gathers the whole community for one more night’s vigil. After a night of prayer the devil appears with the writ. Basil responds by threatening to pray until he gives up the letter. After a time of praying the *kyrie*, the letter falls out of the air and Basil tears it up. Here the written word, although it is given to assure the devil he will get his due, becomes false through penance and the saints’ prayer – *not* a record of the youth’s true state or intention. It is this prayer that reveals and forms the true state of affairs, loosening the hold the devil has on the youth and bringing stability to his changeable heart. The episode ends with Basil teaching him “hu he lybban sceolde on Cristes geleafan”⁹⁷ (how he should live in Christ’s faith).

Subsequently, Basil is also called upon to help a penitent woman who has written all her sins down on a paper, sealed it with lead, and then asked Basil to erase the sins through his intercession. Basil’s initial prayer erases all the sins but one; however, the episode involves a complicated tag-team prayer between Basil and Ephrem as she tries to get the last, most heinous

⁹⁵ Corona, II. 426-7.

⁹⁶ Corona, I. 435.

⁹⁷ Corona, II. 459-60.

sin erased.⁹⁸ This is eventually resolved after Basil's death. Like the youth's situation, however, it involves a written record of sin that is destroyed through the saint's prayer and the penitent's own penitential practice. The point conveyed is that God is not one who keeps record of sins; his mercy is mediated through the spoken words of prayer and the guarantee of the saint.

Because of this, the first prayer in Basil's life takes on special significance. Just before Basil is baptized in the Jordan, he falls down on the ground "and mid wope gewilnode sum gewis tacen æt Gode his geleafan to trymminge"⁹⁹ (and with weeping desired a certain sign from God to confirm his belief). Why this weeping desire for a sign? Is Basil concerned that he does not truly believe, or that he might not believe in the right thing? That is, is he concerned about the subjective aspect of his belief, or the objective nature of the faith he is trusting? Finally, is Basil concerned for himself at all, or does he seek this sign as a testimony for others? As he is baptized fire and a dove come from heaven in a sign to rival Christ's own. Ælfric reports, not Basil's response to the sign, but the response of the bishop baptizing Basil: he "wundriende þæs tacnes"¹⁰⁰ (wondered at the sign). But within the concerns of the Life as Ælfric retells it, it seems more likely that what Basil seeks is confirmation that his *geleafa* has been accepted, that God recognizes him as one of his own.

In the Life of St. Basil, prayer mediates between the murky inner world, the subjective aspect of *geleafa* and the exterior world, the objective aspect both of what one has believed in and how one acts. However, it is Basil's prayer that has the particular power to reveal and confirm true belief, not necessarily the prayer of ordinary people. The power of Basil's prayer to confirm belief is manifest again and again – not through the healing miracles more normal in a saint's life, but through the obvious efficacy of his prayer in recognizing those who have believed "soðlic on Gode." In Basil's Life the efficacy of the subjective aspect of belief is rigorously upheld, over-determined, one might say. The trueness of another person's belief is something that no one else has direct confirmation of, since it is interior. The Life of St. Basil goes to great lengths to show both that the faith is true, and that individual belief is knowable, through the mediatory power of a saint and the enactment of prayer. In addition, prayer and

⁹⁸ Within the original hagiography, the interactions between Basil and the Syrian hermit Ephrem argue for the primary of the Greek church over the Syrian.

⁹⁹ Corona, ll. 67-8.

¹⁰⁰ Corona, l. 76.

belief establish a relationship that allows trust to be enacted between God and Christians. They turn to him for protection and for forgiveness, not, like the young man with the devil, trading belief for specific favors, but approaching God in the hope of good things.

CONCLUSION: WHAT TO PRAY FOR AND WHAT TO EXPECT IN RETURN

At the end of the *Ælfric's passio* of Bartholomew he turns to discuss a Christian understanding of disease and infirmity. While the devils cease afflicting those whose souls they have, God afflicts his chosen with disease: “he beswincð mid untrumnyssum his gecorenan swa swa he sylf cwæð; þa ðe ic lufie ða ic þreage 7 beswinge”¹⁰¹ (he afflicts with sickness his chosen, just as he himself said: “Those whom I love, those I correct and afflict”). The devils afflict in order to gain souls. God afflicts those whom he already has. *Ælfric* lists various reasons why God might choose to do this, but it is clear that, unlike the devil, God cannot be bought off with *lac* – bodily healing is not necessarily among the favors God gives. Thus, suffering has another purpose:

Gif se synfulla bið gebrocod for his unrihtwisnyse. þonne gif he mid geþylde his drihten herað 7 his miltsunge bit: he bið ðonne aþwogen fram his synnum þurh ða untrumnyse: swa swa horig hrægel. þurh sapan; gif he rihtwis bið he hæfð þonne maran geþingcðe þurh his brocunge gif he geþyldig bið; Se þe bið ungeþyldig 7 mid gealgum mode ceorað ongean god on his untrumnyse. he hæfð twyfealde geniþerunge. for þan ðe he geycð his synna mid þære ceorunge 7 þrowað na þe læs.¹⁰²

[If the sinful one is afflicted for his unrighteousness, if when he with patience praises his Lord, and asks for his mercy, he will then be cleansed from his sins through the sickness, just as a dirty garment is through soap. If he is righteous, he has the greater honor through his affliction if he is patient. He who is impatient, and with sad mind complains against God in his sickness, he has a two-fold condemnation, because he adds to his sins with the complaining, yet suffers nonetheless.]

¹⁰¹ CHI.31, ll. 249-50.

¹⁰² CHI.31, ll. 259-66.

The prayers for mercy (“*miltsunge bit*”) that the sick man offers, combined with the sickness, help to bring about his cleansing.¹⁰³ Without prayer, the sickness is only sickness; the prayer to God gives it its purifying power. But there are several elements to this praying: praising God with patience, and praying for mercy. In this case “*mid gēpylde ... herað*” seems to function as a petition-gift (as praises often do) to accompany the request for mercy. This puts the exchange squarely within the allegiance paradigm for prayer, where the sinner requests *miltsung* on the basis of the relationship established by the *herung*. But the petitioner cannot dictate the terms of the mercy shown him. The healing is transferred from the physical to the more important spiritual realm. God shows his *miltsung* and answers the request in the way he sees best, not through physical healing but through purification. In a way, this clarifies the intention of the one praising God – he is *not* doing so just to gain healing (or claiming that he can dictate its terms) but as an expression of subordination to God’s will.

In his eagerness to spiritualize prayers for healing, Ælfric at this point comes very close to the free gift; however, in this case the gift is freely given by God’s devotees to God with no expectation of return. That is, those who turn to idols for healing might end up losing their souls at the end of all things, but at least they will gain healing. Trading the promise of salvation later for health now might be a deal people are willing to make. But those who turn to God for healing are promised nothing: if the precator is sinful, God might not heal him; if he is righteous, God might not heal him. The gift as a material thing or benefit that God might give in return for service disappears. The “disappearing gift,” however, leaves space between gift and counter-gift. If God does not heal (or if God’s martyrs die, or if God’s apostates are received back without clear conditions defining their relationship), then to gain nothing from God, and yet still believe and serve him, shows the truest service of all because it proves one serves, not for one’s own enrichment, but purely as a response that shows one recognizes the honor due God. However, this response in turn brings honor to the one serving (or, in this case, the one suffering patiently through affliction). Consequently, and paradoxically, God’s non-gift allows Christians to earn the honor that comes from serving someone honorable just because they recognize his value. In a value-system where a person’s worth is measured by loyalty, their own

¹⁰³ Note that Ælfric does not use the common word for salvation here, *hælu*, which overlaps in meaning with healing. Since his emphasis is on spiritual healing, the potential for misunderstanding is too great.

honorableness is recognized by the reward of eternal salvation – a moment when the faithful are allowed through the gates and seated at the high table of the eternal feast.

Do saints' prayers tell us anything about the real practice of prayer? They are molded both to the situation the saints find themselves in and to the needs of the narrative. However, as Byzdl shows, these prayers tend to follow the same structure as prayers found in prayerbooks.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, the saints' prayers, while technically not set prayers, are still very conventional language, adapted from snatches of Psalms and liturgical texts. Yet, while saints' lives show saints praying "spontaneously," these are neither normal situations nor people.

What these prayers do show is a deep interiorization of biblical and liturgical texts that seems to mark an ideal of prayer appropriate to ideal Christians. Bartholomew, Laurence, and Basil are all notably praying saints: Basil solves the main conflicts in his text through prayer and receives his liturgy from God, Laurence habitually assists with the mass, Bartholomew is notable for praying one hundred times a day and then throughout the night. In this way, although no attention is paid to the subjective efficacy of prayer, these are men who have internalized the structures of formal prayer, and who also externalize the models presented in prayer in their lives. At the same time, because their stories are shaped narrative, it is hard to say the saints have internalized prayer so much as that their lives have been made by the hagiographers to conform to the ideals expressed in prayer. In this way, it is actually the authors of the texts who are shown to have internalized the structures of prayer rather than the fictionalized characters of the saints themselves.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, while saints might function as models for prayer, just as likely they give the devout, not so much a model of prayer, but actual prayers they can pray, and, of course, an intimate of God to whom they can turn with their own problems.

¹⁰⁴ Invocation, comment on the invocation, petition or petitions, concluding phrase glorifying God. Donald Byzdl, "Prayer in Old English Narratives," 138.

¹⁰⁵ In light of this, it is suggestive to note that, while Ælfric follows the Latin quite closely in the prayers Laurence prays, he ruins the parallel beginnings of the last three prayers. In Latin all three start, "Gratias ago tibi" or "Gratias tibi ago." Ælfric, in contrast, starts the first one, "Sy þe lof," following in the next two with "Hælend crist ic þancie þe." This could be because "Sy þe lof" sounds to Ælfric like a more appropriate beginning to a statement acknowledging that God is God of all things – the sort of statement that, in OE poetry (*Genesis A*, for example, and Cædmon's hymn) usually calls forth an admonishment to praise God.

CONCLUSION

*Hond sceal heofod inwyrcean, hord in streonum bidan,
gifstol gegierwed stondan, hwonne hine guman gedælen.
Gifre biþ se þam golde onfehð, guma þæs on heahsetle geneah;
lean sceal, gif we leogan nellað, þam þe us þas lisse geteod.*

– *Maxims I*, ll.67-70¹

*[The head must direct the hand, the hoard await in the treasury,
the gift-seat stand prepared for when men may disperse it.
Eager for it is he who receives the gold, of that the man on the throne has sufficient;
return must be made, if we do not wish to deceive, to him who ordained us these favors.]*

Our Prayers besiege God, ... but our praises prescribe in God, we urge him, and presse him with his ancient mercies, his mercies of old: By Prayer we incline him, we bend him, but by Praise we bind him; our thanks for former benefits, is a producing of a specialty, by which he hath contracted with us for more. – John Donne²

By virtue of the structure of this project and the way that Bede and Ælfric neatly bookend the Anglo-Saxon period, it would be easy to read Ælfric against Bede, to situate them too neatly as complements to or foils for one another. While Bede was one of the authorities Ælfric names as a source for his *Catholic Homilies*, none of his homilies on prayer is particularly indebted to Bede.³ This conclusion, therefore, is intended to clarify some ways in which Bede and Ælfric complement each other and some further ways in which this neat contrast does not work, allowing us to consider each author on his own terms.

First of all, Bede and Ælfric write in different languages. As far as the careful transmission of doctrine goes, Bede has the advantage of writing in Latin, the language of the

¹ *ASPR* III.

² Quoted in Donne, *The Prayers of John Donne*, ed. Herbert H. Umbach, New York: Bookman Associates, 1951, 28.

³ In their sermons on prayer, Bede and Ælfric share two pericopes in common, Luke 11:9-13 and Matthew 15:21-28. In neither of these does Ælfric borrow from Bede, and his sermon on Matthew 15 (CHII.8) barely touches on prayer, containing none of the allegorizations that Bede gives.

Church. Because Ælfric writes in Old English, he has the challenge, as he was well aware, of translating foreign cultures and concepts into Old English.⁴ *Gratia*, for instance, came with multivalent levels of meaning, from its social resonances and philosophical valences as well as the precise doctrinal meanings that had been hammered out through the fires of controversy. Thus, we face the question of to what extent *gifu* – which in Old English never could have meant the continual dependence of lower forms on higher forms (as *gratia* did in Neo-platonic philosophical discourse) – is the same thing as *gratia*, or (as mentioned in Chapter 1) *ben* or *gebed* are the same as *oratio*. To some extent we also face this challenge in Bede, who would not have had the same fields of reference for *gratia* as did Augustine, but because their language is the same, in Bede’s case, potential semantic shifts caused by different cultural assumptions are harder to detect. In Ælfric, however, the Old English words that translate Latin doctrinal and spiritual concepts contain the possibility of introducing new ideas into the discourse of prayer, and it becomes possible to see the way he forecloses potentially problematic readings that these words might introduce.⁵

Second, our two authors’ differing audiences lead them to emphasize different concerns. Bede’s audience – and especially his audience for his prayer sermons – was monastic. Thus, Bede’s teaching on prayer is situated within a monastic tradition of prayer, and the concerns of people devoted (in either sense) to pursue the salvation of their souls in a monastery and within regular life. Ælfric’s audience, on the contrary, was mixed. As we have seen, his sermons on prayer often particularly address lay people, both rich and poor,⁶ who would have had neither the same practice of or training in prayer as Bede’s audience. In fact, while it is easy to say for

⁴ Ælfric’s own prefaces to his biblical translations show his concern about translation issues. While he shows some awareness of the problem of semantic and syntax issues in translation, his greatest concern seems to be the potential for erroneous interpretation of the Bible resulting from the dissemination of faithfully translated biblical text without additional explanatory commentary to those who lack the training to fully understand it. See especially his Preface to the Translation of Genesis, Item 4 in Jonathan Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, Durham Medieval Texts, no. 9 (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994). Wilcox gives a brief orientation to Ælfric’s translation practice on pp. 37-40. For a more detailed study, see Robert Stanton, *The Culture of Translation in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), ch. 4 on “Ælfric and the Rhetoric of Translation.” Stanton studies Ælfric’s prefaces in order to argue that “Ælfric deployed rhetorical terminology with a combination of confidence and caution, in ways that illuminate his complex views of English translation as a hermeneutic tool” (145). Stanton argues that Ælfric sets up OE as a worthy language for translating scripture.

⁵ For an example of the way translation affects the meaning of doctrinal terms, see Alister E. McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*. McGrath traces the concept of justification through its translation from language to language. He focuses primarily on Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, of course, but briefly discusses the term in OE (*gerihtwisung*) on pp. 60-61.

⁶ A particularly clear example of this is CHI.19 which contains a standard catechetical explication of the LP.

certain that Bede's audience followed a monastic rule, and therefore kept to a cursus of the Divine Office, it is very difficult to say with any certainty what Ælfric's expectations were for lay practice of prayer. We know that he expected lay people to know both the LP and the Creed, although in which language is a little harder to say.⁷ It is also difficult to say what he expected them to do with it. In early Christian practice all Christians were to pray the LP three to seven times daily, but in Ælfric's time there is little evidence to indicate one way or the other what expectations were for lay people.⁸ Certainly, Ælfric encouraged them to pray the LP in their daily lives,⁹ but Ælfric's sermons record no evidence of prayer at set times being expected of lay people. Lay people would – presumably – have prayed the LP whenever they came to church. The extent of congregational participation can be hard to gauge.¹⁰ As today, there would have been a range of piety. Exceptionally pious (and well-educated) lay people might have kept set times of prayer and used prayer books.¹¹ Many other people would have known the LP, and

⁷ “Ælc cristen man sceal æfter rihte cunnan ægþer ge his pater noster ge his credan” (CHI.20, ll. 2-3) [Every Christian should correctly know both his Paternoster and his creed]. See Chapter 1's discussion of translations of the LP.

⁸ See Gail Ivy Berlin, “Memorization in Anglo-Saxon England: Some Case Studies,” in *Oral Tradition in the Middle Ages*, ed. W.F.H. Nicolaisen, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies*, vol. 112 (Binghamton: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1995), 97-113. She shows that lay people were widely expected to memorize the LP and Creed, but, again, gives no indication as to what they were expected to do with it (102-4). She also examines the differences between Ælfric's three versions of the LP as part of her larger argument about memorization in Anglo-Saxon England.

⁹ He mentions blessing herbs with “godes wordum” (God's words) in CHI.31, l. 324, and praying the LP as one travels in *De Auguriis* (*Lives of Saints* I, XVI, l. 96). In one of his non-CH homilies, he also indicates daily prayer of the LP: “Ælce dæge we biddæþ ure synne forgifennysse on þam paternoster” (Irving 2, ll. 98-9) [Every day we pray for forgiveness of sins in the Paternoster]; however, evidence points to a religious audience for this teaching. Susan Irving adopts Clemoes' earlier identification that this is a late copy of an Ælfrician sermon (xv-xviii). She argues that this particular sermon was designed for preaching to a congregation, but continues, regarding a particular section of the sermon that includes the line quoted above: “[I]t seems possible that Ælfric intended these parts of his text to apply primarily to a small, exclusive group from amongst his audience, that is the monks and clerics” (*Old English Homilies from MS Bodley 343*, EETS o.s. 302 [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993], 29). As an interesting side-note, Irving sources this sermon to Augustine. In Augustine's teaching such an idea *would* have applied to lay people.

¹⁰ See the sermons of Caesarius of Arles, who seems to have felt himself content if his congregation was not lying on the floor or gossiping during the service, let alone actually paying attention and joining in the prayers.

¹¹ We have, for instance, the example of King Alfred's piety as told in Asser's *Life of King Alfred* (see Scott DeGregorio's article on his piety, “Texts, Topoi, and the Self.” Additionally, Ælfric's work was encouraged by a layman, Æðelweard (mentioned in the OE preface to the *Lives of Saints* as having requested the series, see Wilcox, 5b, l. 1; and in the preface to Genesis as having commissioned that translation, see Wilcox 4, l. 1). But these people are exceptional. Focusing on popular piety in the time of Alcuin, Michael S. Driscoll reminds that “when speaking of lay popular spirituality, one is limited to the practices of a certain group of lay persons, those educated in the monastic schools” (“Penance in Transition: Popular Piety and Practice,” in *Medieval Liturgy: A Book of Essays*, ed. Lizette Larson-Miller, *Garland Medieval Case Books* 18 (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 121-63, 122), and

many of them would have used it often – as what we would think of as a charm, if in no other way. The best sources to examine for lay piety are the penitentials, but, again, what percentage of the lay population might be confessing to a priest and committed enough to carry out penances assigned is a difficult question.¹² All of this is a far cry from the monastic congregation to whom Bede preaches. This leads to one of the key differences between Bede and Ælfric, which is that Ælfric is much less concerned with what we have been calling “purity” in Bede, the congruence of words, thoughts, and deeds. Ælfric is concerned about *clænysse* (“cleanness, purity”), but the concept does not come up very frequently in his teachings on prayer. Additionally, while Bede uses language developed within the orbit of Neo-platonism (desire, love, etc.), as we have seen in Chapter 3, Ælfric systematically strips that sort of thing out of his sources as he adapts them to his own purposes.

The third point involves the particular orientation toward and understanding of the “holy” that was developed in Chapter 3, but marks a point of differentiation between Ælfric and Bede. The prayer coming out of the Egyptian desert and the early monasteries, and the prayer taught by people like Augustine and Cassian influenced by Neo-platonic structures of thought, might be termed *sanctus*-oriented. Going back to the root of the word *sanctus*, the primary idea is *set-apartness*. Within this tradition, the practice of prayer sets people apart from the pollutions, the distractions, and the desires of the world and reorients their desire away from the impermanent material world toward the eternal spiritual realm. Bede’s theory of prayer shares the language and goals of *sanctus*-oriented prayer; however, insofar as ideas of purity are related to an understanding of the holy, Bede’s imagined preceptor is not oriented to the same extent toward sanctity but rather wholeness: congruence of words, thoughts, and deeds all integrated within the petition for salvation. Thus, Bede’s orientation toward the holy blends ideas of set-apartness

Allen Frantzen affirms this in the context of Anglo-Saxon penitential practices (*The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983], 62).

¹² Again, see Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*. Most OE and Anglo-Latin literature reflects the practices and training of churchmen, whether monks or clerics. Sermons are often addressed to monks as well, or (as with Ælfric) are vague as to details of practice). Penitentials, however, reflect expectations of lay practice and standards of behavior. Although penitentials are oriented toward sin and its expiation rather than expectations for every day piety, they do give some information. For instance, according to Frantzen, “the laity would have undertaken [ascetic] exercises during Advent and Lent, when confession and penance were urged on the faithful” (82). But, once again, all evidence of disciplined, daily prayer is confined to the literate classes – those who could read prayer books (84).

with wholeness. While Ælfric is concerned about *clænnysse* (here meaning “cleanness, purity” more generally, not particularly chastity), his teaching on prayer is not particularly *sanctus*-oriented, yet it almost completely reflects an attitude that we might label *halig* (“holy”). Ælfric’s repeated emphasis in his teachings on prayer is on the community, in the way rich treat poor, and the way the poor pray for the rich. The OE semantic field of *halig*, including as it does salvation (*hælu*), healing (*hælu*), and wholeness (*hal*), richly evokes a fully functioning community oriented around the salvation-bringing/healing/wholeness of prayer. All of this is to say that, while comparison between Bede and Ælfric is inevitable (and, at times, illuminating), both theories of prayer need to be taken on their own terms.

Fourth, quite aside from the different expectations of piety that come with Bede and Ælfric’s differing audiences, almost 300 years of changing trends in prayer separate them. As I have noted in Chapter 1, spontaneous prayer was briefly part of early Christian practice, but prayer quickly became more and more formal as antiquity gave way to the medieval – this was true in Bede’s day and remains true in Ælfric’s. Formal prayer has a tendency to reify, to be seen as thing with particular powers and properties of its own.¹³ As we have seen, Ælfric’s teachings on prayer often tend to view it as more of an objective thing than do Bede’s. In addition, penitential practices pioneered by the Irish, such as the tariff system and commuted penance,¹⁴ and the gradual substitution of repeated prayers for the Psalter, all also tended to put a quantifiable value on prayer; that is, so many LPs stood for so many Psalms, or so many of a particular kind of prayer expiated a particular kind of sin. This also tends to reify prayer by making it more easily an object of exchange itself among people, not just between people and God.

As prayer tends to reify and become an object of exchange itself, this leads to the fifth point: the efficacy of prayer, whether subjective or objective, is one of the key points of contrast

¹³ The most striking example of a prayer with its own properties and powers (and, indeed, personality) is the Pater Noster sequence in *Solomon and Saturn* (see Daniel Anlezark, *ed. and trans., The Old English Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn*). Stephen Harris discusses more normal ways that prayer could be seen to have its own power: “There is evidence to suggest that a liturgy was thought to cohere not only symbolically or thematically, but also supernaturally. ... [A] properly executed liturgy could positively affect earthly and heavenly reality.” He later ties prayer and the liturgy together: “The affective power of liturgy is not categorically distinct from the affective power of prayer, since liturgies are comprised in part of prayers” (“The Liturgical Context of Ælfric’s Homilies for Rogation,” 147). The same way of thinking is manifest in many of the Anglo-Saxon charms and remedies.

¹⁴ See Angenendt, “*Donationes pro anima*,” 135-6.

for Bede and Ælfric. In fully subjective prayer the discipline of praying itself brings about the change in the precator; the presence or existence of the divine does not matter for the discipline of prayer to “work” on – bring about the desired change in – the precator. Its operation is personal and private, within the mind of the one praying. Prayer is “spiritual” in the sense that it works in the spirit or soul or psyche, the “inward heart,” of the one praying. Because of this, prayer can be secularized into a sort of meditational practice; subjective prayer is, then, not usually read by moderns as “superstitious,” and those with materialist commitments can thus find value in this kind of prayer quite aside from any supernatural content. Within Christian conceptions of prayer, no prayer is fully subjective; in the end it matters to the precators that there is a God existing who hears and answers prayer. There is no particular reason subjective prayer must be form-bound; however, as we have seen, for writers like Bede, Cassian, and even Augustine the form is an important part of prayer’s efficacy. The words of prayer are considered to come from God, and the internalization and externalization of these words brings about transformation. What is particularly interesting about Bede is the way he situates subjective prayer within a gift-cycle so that it enacts a relationship with God based on generosity and gratitude freely given on both sides. For Bede, God does not respond out of compulsion, he initiates out of *gratia*; humans do not respond to God out of obligation, but out of *gratia*, and God rewards this response with further *gratia*. *Gratiam pro gratia* thus personalizes prayer and the relationship with God in a way not typically found within other early authors whose theory of prayer is strongly subjective, such as Cassian and Augustine, but who have more abstract conceptions of God.

Fully objective prayer, on the other hand, works not on the petitioner but on either the divine (to cause the granting of favors) or even on the material world itself through the power of the form or words of the prayer. Fully objective prayer also need imply no particularly close relationship between the precator and the divine because of the power of the words themselves; it is spiritual in the sense that it acknowledges the primacy of a spiritual realm in which spiritual beings (who need not be fully personified) act in and upon the material world. Thus, this type of prayer often shades toward the magical: it reflects an expectation that the words or formula of prayer can have effect upon (the animating spirits of) the material world. No Christian prayer is fully objective, either. Even in the most objective, superstitious-seeming cases (praying over

herbs, for instance) it is a personified God's power that is being called upon to activate healing or protection. Objective prayer tends to have a necessarily closer association with form, both word formulas and ritual forms.

In allowing prayers over herbs or while traveling, Ælfric's theory of prayer is closer to the objective end of the spectrum. Even in his most "subjective" representation of prayer, CHI.10, the way he adapts Gregory's thought presents prayer as operating upon Jesus – not in a magical or necessary way, but through request – and it is then Jesus' response to the precator that brings about change. However, while prayer is certainly more objectively efficacious for Ælfric, I have come to think, as I conclude this project, that this terminology resulted from a too-neat binary with Bede and does not quite fit Ælfric's theory of prayer. For Ælfric, prayer changes or declares the status of the one praying – from subject of the devil to subject of God. This change is not a subjective change of reformation within the heart as a result of the discipline of prayer, nor is it exactly brought about by God objectively, since it is a response to his gifts and a recognition of his rights. Rather, it is a declaration of the precator's allegiance. That is, the asking of favors only occurs within a relationship in which the expectation is "lean sceal ... þam þe us þas lisse geteod" [return must be made ... to him who ordained us these favors], as *Maxims I* has it. The very act of praying implies that the precator means to return *lean* for *lisse* in a trustworthy fashion. In this way, prayer is more like a vow (which, oddly enough, also takes us back to Cassian),¹⁵ and thus more like performative language. Prayer changes (or reiterates) the status of the one praying and formalizes intent through the formality of the language – in this case, the intent to be subject to God.

My sixth point is that, to the extent prayer is situated within a reciprocal relationship, it unavoidably interacts with the doctrine of grace. Augustine's theology of grace, which both Bede and Ælfric worked within, directly resists the idea of reciprocity; and the idea that humans might compel God to do their own will is one that our authors never admit (or, in the case of Ælfric, admit only to resist). But Bede and Ælfric do imagine the human/divine relationship as essentially reciprocal, in which humans respond to God's gifts in grateful service, for which

¹⁵ In Conference IX.xii.1 Cassian's taxonomy of prayer includes prayers, thanksgivings, etc. (the list is from I Timothy). Prayer, he says, is a vow, in which we promise things to God. He takes this idea from the meaning of the Greek word for prayer, *euche*, which means both prayer and vow (both the taxonomy of prayer and prayer as vow is also in Origen).

service God is expected to reward them. Bede engages this doctrine directly, presenting *gratia* as a cycle that binds humans to God and vice-versa. While Ælfric also teaches about grace¹⁶ and sees its function as similarly embedded in a reciprocal cycle of grace and merit, he does not invoke grace as explicitly in the way he talks about prayer. Rather, Ælfric tends to focus more on obedience (*gehyrsumness*) and merit (*geearnung*). Thus, while both Bede and Ælfric invoke gift-giving structures, and while both present a version of grace in which humans cooperate with God to gain salvation, each author's view of grace is inflected with a different conception of the human relationship to God. Thus, as a marker of this relationship, humans turn to God with their needs. But prayer functions in a complex way: either as a return-gift to God, or as petition presenting needs – primarily the need for salvation. The same prayer can function in both of these ways at the same time. Not only that, prayer, in the way it mediates between interior and exterior, between the spiritual and the bodily, between individual and community, has enormous transformative potential, giving its practitioners new ways of imagining and enacting the self. Thus, for Bede, whose idea of salvation is an ongoing process of inner and outer reform culminating in purified people worthy of the kingdom of heaven, prayer is the key element of reform, as the words of prayer are interiorized and exteriorized in thought and action. But because, for Bede, the subject of prayer's petition is salvation, integrated prayer helps to bring about the transformation for which the petitioner begs.

Seventh, the language Bede uses to talk about prayer and the human relationship with God is what we might – with all the caveats of Chapter 2 in mind – call affective. That is, it has a certain emotional content, even though, as I have argued, this emotion is an ideal product of prayer not a cause of it. Even without the emotional language, Bede's presentation of the *gratia*-relationship is an intimate one in which humans and God shower *gratia* upon each other. Furthermore, even though his conception of the individual is within the praying community and adopts the language and “desire” of the church, Bede still gives place to the individual, primarily through the women he uses as examples of precaters: Mary, the three women at the tomb, and the gentile mother. These elements stand out in contrast to Ælfric, so much so that, in comparison to Bede, the orientation of prayer in Ælfric might seem to be impersonal and non-

¹⁶ See Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, chapter 7.

intimate. But to compare Bede with Ælfric in this way warps both Bede, in making him seem more affective and individualist than he was, and Ælfric, in making his prayer seem colder and more remote than it was.

Thus, my eighth and final point: even though Bede's idea of prayer leaves more room for consideration of the individual in prayer, Bede and Ælfric both situate the praying Christian in relationship to the community. In contrast, scholarship focused on devotion tends to center on the individual and individual forms of prayer, seeking out and emphasizing individual, interior, and emotive devotional practices. As Allen Frantzen's article arguing for the presence of affective prayer in Anglo-Saxon England demonstrates, part of the reason for this is a desire to seem relevant to later fields invested in a sort of teleology of the individual by which all earlier forms of religious experience are judged.¹⁷ Thomas Bestul's work demonstrating continuity between the Anglo-Saxon tradition and Anselm shows another reason for a recuperative sort of focus: a desire to resist the exclusion of the Anglo-Saxon Era from the Middle Ages by creating a link from the "Dark Ages" to the medieval period.¹⁸ But in both these cases the authors move from later forms of piety to earlier forms. This creates a sort of blindness in which the only forms of prayer worth studying seem to reflect (or proto-reflect) later forms, especially the emotive experience arising in the individual's response to God. Then again, as John Donne (of all people!) indicates, earlier forms and attitudes of devotion persist much later than we like to give them credit for: "You would scarce thanke a man for an extemporall Elegy, or Epigram or Panegyrique in your praise, if it cost the poet, or the orator no paines. God will scarce hearken to sudden inconsidered, irreverent prayers."¹⁹

¹⁷ Frantzen, "Spirituality and Devotion in the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials." His article sets up for the two following articles in the same issue, DeGregorio, "Affective Spirituality"; and Christina M. Heckman, "Imitatio in Early Medieval Spirituality: *The Dream of the Rood*, Anselm, and Militant Christology," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 141-53.

¹⁸ Bestul, "St. Anselm and the Continuity of Anglo-Saxon Devotional Traditions"; "The Book of Cerne and the English Devotional Tradition"; "St Anselm, the Monastic Community at Canterbury, and Devotional Writing in Late Anglo-Saxon England."

¹⁹ Quoted in John Donne, *The Prayers of John Donne*, 17. For an examination of the persistence of ritual form in the period, see also Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

While Bede is usually one of the authors trotted out to indicate the presence of individually oriented affective piety,²⁰ I have argued that this is an essentially anachronistic reading of his work. In fact, the focus on individual piety in the study of devotion tends to emphasize independence and exceptionality too much – the very things that the practice and discourse of gift-exchange discourage. Not only that, it focuses on the very thing – independence – that warps or destroys the sense of identity formed within gift-structures. For Bede, the precator adopts the words and practice of prayer performed by the Church, conforming himself to those words as he prays, and thus forming a coherent “self” within the community out of the ritual actions and words he continually performs. Nevertheless, this does not preclude a sense of the precator’s favored intimacy with God: for Bede the gift-cycle of *gratiam pro gratia* that humans participate in with God expresses this intimacy. The way that Bede’s precators are encouraged to identify themselves with Mary’s position in relation to God, receiving God’s gifts and, through this, bringing Christ forth into the world partly expresses the extreme sense of honor that this relationship carries.

The way that Ælfric’s teachings present prayer as a performative statement of allegiance does not lead to the same scholarly temptations (which is, perhaps, why Ælfric’s teaching on prayer has largely avoided scrutiny). In contrast to Bede, Ælfric develops the praying community’s relationships to each other more fully in his teachings on prayer. Scholars who study questions of ritualized prayer, the gift, and community in the period in which Ælfric writes tend to observe the ways that exchanges involving prayer between individuals and institutions contribute to the consolidation of power in the hands of the institutions (and those running them).²¹ Put another way, Ælfric’s emphasis on obedience, and his insistence that the praying relationship should be centered on and submissive to the will of God, gives God’s agency primacy. But who speaks for God? With our modern suspicion of authority and hierarchy, we tend to observe individuals and institutions gaining power as they appropriate the agency assigned to God within the prayer relationship. Yet Ælfric sees a fundamental equality within

²⁰ See, for example, DeGregorio, “Affective Spirituality.”

²¹ For examples of this type of focus see Mayke de Jong, “Carolingian Monasticism; and Angenendt, “*Donationes pro anima*.” For a more nuanced look at the way that gifts and prayer form community (although one that largely focuses on the upper ranks of society), see Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994).

the prayer relationship that binds the community together. While this is perhaps more ideal than realized, in CHI.18, he teaches a model of society where human obligations to each other are recognized as familial bonds oriented around a gift-economy in which all people, rich and poor, can participate because they all have the same divine father and they all have something to give. Furthermore, within relationships formed by gift-giving, agency is more diluted because the more powerful are just as bound by the moral imperatives of generosity and reciprocity as the weak. Thus, even though Ælfric emphasizes God's superiority over humans, he also insists that God will honor those who honor him.

Within the relational and communal context in which both Bede and Ælfric situate prayer, the free gift – the gift where nothing is expected in return, and no obligation is incurred between parties, the gift that allows people freedom to continue being their own, independent, autonomous beings while still, somehow, being accepted into community and remaining the recipient of gifts²² – is profoundly dysfunctional. In some sense, the gap between discourse and praxis in the gift allows the gift to be a test of the recipient's moral character.²³ The recipient is, in fact, under no legal obligation or threat of force to return a gift accepted – that she does (or does not) becomes a reflection of her character and of the way she views the relationship involved. Thus, according to *Maxims I*, receiving a gift with no intention of returning it is actually deceptive, not because the recipient refuses to engage in the economic exchange of gifts,²⁴ but because the recipient refuses to recognize the symbolic content of the gift, accepting the benefit but rejecting the person. Contrariwise, the gift freely given can be insulting insofar as the donor does not recognize obligation either. The free gift undermines communal ties, creating distance and an unbridgeable chasm between donor and recipient.

We can see why the Augustinian formulation of God's grace (unconstrained by constraining) might be resisted by Bede in his formulation of the prayer-enacted *gratia*-relationship between human and God: for Bede, both humans *and* God recognize their

²² Paul Simon's take on the subject reflects this view: "And I may be obliged to defend / Every love every ending / Or maybe there's no obligations now, / Maybe I've a reason to believe / We all will be received / In Graceland" ("Graceland" from *Graceland* [Warner Bros., 1986]).

²³ The gift exchange between Basil and Julian in LSI.3 functions exactly this way.

²⁴ Much of the theoretical response to Mauss focuses on gift-exchange as primarily an economic exchange, a way to circulate wealth.

obligations to one another. In Ælfric's focus on the communal nature of prayer, the way alms become a gift the poor can return through prayer also gets rid of the free gift implicit in Augustine's purity-based notion of almsgiving, thereby allowing alms and prayer to work for the salvation of the whole Christian community. As we saw in CHI.31, Ælfric also came close to restoring an idea of the free gift (this time from humans to God) in his insistence that God need not answer prayers for healing. In this case, it almost seems that the pagan gods are the ones who honor the gift-relationship inherent in petition. But what Ælfric actually does is restore the discourse of the gift while still expecting reciprocity: humans serve God freely because he is worthy of honor. God, being honorable, rewards those who show themselves honorable through serving him. The words and works of prayer both ask God to grant salvation as a gift, and perform the grateful service to God for which salvation is the reward.

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