

seo Godes circe: Figuring the Ecclesia in the Cynewulfian corpus

Jasmine Jones

Introduction

The four poems which contain the runic signature of the mysterious Old English poet Cynewulf—entitled ‘Christ II’, ‘Juliana’, ‘The Fates of the Apostles’ and ‘Elene’—as well as the wider corpus of poems suggesting “Cynewulfian” influence have attracted considerable critical attention. However, the role of the Church and its sacraments in this poetry has never been satisfactorily addressed and is therefore the topic about which this article wonders. Although various critics allude to the institutional Church in their arguments, they often do not explicitly pin down the Anglo-Saxon *Ecclesia*—the sacrament-administering ‘Church’—as providing the liturgical practice and divine grace to which their scholarship refers, or they misconstrue the Church’s identity as an ethereal abstraction existing as the ‘Church of the Spirit’ rather than as a material reality.¹

To insist on the solely utilitarian, catechetical function of Old English verse is to forget its contextualisation by the Augustinian tradition in which ‘aesthetic pleasure’ and the

¹ Colin Chase, ‘God’s Presence through Grace as the Theme of Cynewulf’s *Christ II* and the Relationship of This Theme to *Christ I* and *Christ III*’, *ASE*, 3 (1974), 87–110; Britt Mize, ‘Manipulations of the Mind-as-Container Motif in *Beowulf*, *Homiletic Fragment II*, and Alfred’s *Metrical Epilogue to the Pastoral Care*’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 107 (2008), 25–56; Judith N. Garde, *Old English Poetry in Medieval Christian Perspective: A Doctrinal Approach* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer Ltd., 1991), pp. 156, 158. Further references to these editions are given after quotations in the text.

enigmatic stimulation of *figurae*—allegorical images—were essential to advancing the mind towards divine Truth. Echoing Christ’s advocacy of *figurae* in His parables (Matthew 13. 10–13) and St Paul’s criticism of literalism’s constraints (II Corinthians 3.6–7), Augustine of Hippo promoted the exegetical process of cracking the “shell”—the superficial letter—to reach the “kernel”—the underlying meaning—as the means to Christian wisdom.² Therefore, the patristically-influenced Old English poet employs *figurae* as ‘a middle term between *littera-historia* and *veritas*’. A figure functions not as a “lifeless” metaphor but as a concrete reality, an extra-biblical “type” awaiting actual fulfilment within the ‘perspective of eternity’, corresponding to an actual historical event or essence.³

Revitalising an academic appreciation of allegory is a valuable critical intervention *now* because of figurative language’s ongoing political value and its immense influence over society’s perceptions of and actions towards nation, Church and community. This study argues that through *figurae*, which engage the ‘Christian imagination’, Cynewulf pioneers Old English poetic tradition as a vehicle for promoting the Church as the solution to societal problems, and the ‘Andreas’-poet imitates this project by also employing figures of the Church to ignite the same ecclesiastical zeal in the reader.⁴ Due to the texts’ verbal parallels, research has led to the growing scholarly consensus that the ‘Andreas’-poet knew *Beowulf* as a source, and critics are increasingly recognising the likelihood that the ‘Andreas’-poet also borrowed from Cynewulf.⁵

Through *figurae*, both Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet mediate Christian wisdom—an understanding of the Church’s ‘gæst-gerynas’—to the reader. In the eight occurrences of

² Bernard F. Huppé, *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine’s Influence on Old English Poetry* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1959), pp. 9–13.

³ Erich Auerbach, *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 43.

⁴ Edward B. Irving Jr., ‘The Advent of Poetry: *Christ I*, *ASE*, 25 (1996), pp. 123–34, (p. 134).

⁵ Alison Mary Powell, ‘Verbal parallels in *Andreas* and its relationship to *Beowulf* and Cynewulf’ (doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 2002), pp. 168–232, esp. 175–76; *Andreas: An Edition*, ed. by Richard North, Michael D. and J. Bintley (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 302–05; Francis Leneghan, ‘The Departure of the Hero in a Ship: The Intertextuality of *Beowulf*, Cynewulf and *Andreas*’, *Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature*, 24 (2019), 105–32.

the noun ‘gæst-gerynas’ in Old English literature, all of which are uniquely distributed across the Cynewulfian corpus, the “spiritual mysteries” of the Church’s sacraments and doctrines are signified.⁶ However, Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet’s different figurative approaches, as well as other metrical and orthographical evidence, suggest that Cynewulf’s signed poems date to the mid-to-late ninth century, earlier than ‘Andreas’.⁷ Cynewulf’s figurative technique is more similar in its subtlety to the concealed complexity of ‘The Dream of the Rood’, a poem in which layers of allegory must be penetrated in order to access the theological tenet—of Christ’s hypostatic union—which is articulated therein. The more blatant, expository tone of ‘Andreas’ is instead a hallmark of Alfredian literature: this implies that the poem was potentially influenced by or written during King Alfred’s late ninth-century reform programme, in which complex Latin theological texts, especially saints’ lives, were translated into the simplicity of vernacular English to enhance national learning.

Despite their stylistic differences, both Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet share an overarching ecclesiastical agenda. This agenda is perhaps inspired by the writers’ shared evangelisatory environment since the Anglo-Saxon missionary campaigns were ongoing until the tenth century, invigorating the peoples with a widespread enthusiasm for the Church. Societal concern for the conceptualisation of the Church’s identity as stimulated by recent ecclesiastical councils also influences both writers: the Synod of Whitby in 664 synchronised the English Church’s celebration of Easter with that of Rome; the Synod of Hatfield in 679 reaffirmed apostolic Tradition as the Church’s foundation; and the Council of Clovesho in 747 advocated more rigorous knowledge of the sacraments as well as drawing up 31 canons uniting the English and Roman Church. From the mid-eighth century the stabilisation of the Anglo-

⁶ s.v. ‘gæst-ge·rȳne’, *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, ed. Angus Cameron, Ashley Crandell Amos, Antonette diPaolo Healey *et al.* (Toronto: Dictionary of Old English Project, 2018) <<https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/>> [accessed 11 October 2020].

⁷ R. D. Fulk, ‘Cynewulf: Canon, Dialect and Date’, in *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, ed. by Robert E. Bjork (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), pp. 3–23.

Saxon Church was prioritised as a means of salvaging societal infrastructure, which had been damaged by Viking invasion and monarchical decline.⁸ Gregory the Great and Alcuin of York encouraged this reconsolidation of the Church and, mirroring Continental reforms, England's reinforcement of the ecclesiastical institution endeavoured to ameliorate national cohesion through pastoral care. The poets' mutual agenda of strengthening national cohesion by reinforcing the Church's authority is further amplified by the potential derivation of Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet from Mercia, a milieu wherein Church and state were tightly bonded, particularly at Lichfield and Tamworth.

It is contextual factors which support the hypothesis for the ecclesiastical agenda of both Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet. Not only does the Church feature *intratextually* as a concern *within* the narratives of 'Christ II', 'Elene' and 'Andreas', but also *extratextually*, as the poets build up the Church body *with-out* through the poet-reader relationship. Both poets possibly encourage the laity as well as clerics and members of religious orders—the potential audiences of their texts—to live worthily the priestly vocation instilled at their Baptism (I Peter 2.9–10). Therefore, this essay wonders how three key figures of the Church—as a protective space; as the sacramental *Corpus Christi*; and as the apostolic body—in 'Christ II', 'Elene', and 'Andreas' promote the reader's participation in the Church body politic. This ecclesiastical participation will publicly improve societal infrastructure and privately guarantee the individual's membership of the Church Triumphant, the Church rejoicing in heaven.

The Church as a protective space

Similar to the rumination encouraged by the monastic scriptural reading practice of *lectio divina*, the deciphering of *figurae* in 'Christ II', 'Elene' and 'Andreas' demands avid

⁸ Simon Coates, 'The Bishop as Benefactor and Civic Patron: Alcuin, York, and Episcopal Authority in Anglo-Saxon England', *Speculum* 71 (1996), 529–98. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

intellectual attention, absorbing the reader into the poets' persuasive promotion of the *Ecclesia*. According to Judith Garde, it is surprising that Cynewulf manages to appreciate the Ascension's 'spiritual' lesson in 'Christ II', since his figuring of the *Ecclesia* as a protective physical construct—a ship—contradicts the Church's supernaturalism (Garde, p. 158). However, it is unproblematic to figure the Church by such materiality, since both Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet emphasise the immediate accessibility of the Church rather than over-spiritualising its sacramentalism. Just as Britt Mize remarks that the "mind-as-container" motif in Old English literature solidifies theological sapience as immediately attainable rather than as a distant abstraction, it is through two spatial *figurae* – the Church as ship, and the Church as building – that Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet motivate their reader to tangibly appreciate the readily-available 'gæst-gerynas' housed by the *Ecclesia* (Mize, p. 46).

The Church as ship

The terminology used to denote the Church building—'nave'—derives from the figuration of the Church as ship—'navis'—which emphasises the *Ecclesia*'s security in bearing its indwellers through turbulent earthly life towards eternal peace. The Old English poets thus draw on a well-established theological tradition which originates from the Bible. As figured by Noah's ark, which rescued the righteous from destruction by the Flood, the Church is Christ's vehicle for the protection of mankind from both current earthly distress and eschatological eternal damnation (Matthew 24.37–44). The patristic writer Tertullian laments that blasphemers are 'naufragos' ('shipwrecked') for rejecting 'solacium nauis ecclesiae' ('the solace of the ship, the Church').⁹ Likewise, Alcuin of York, an important clerical scholar in the Carolingian Renaissance, encourages Archbishop Eanbald II in his governance of the Yorkish

⁹ Tertullian, *Tertulliani Liber de Pudicitia*, <http://www.tertullian.org/latin/de_pudicitia.htm> [accessed 17 June 2020], para. XIII.20.

Church to ‘guberna viriliter navem Christi’ (‘steer the ship of Christ manfully’) amidst the threatening ‘tempestas’ (‘storms’) of societal disorder.¹⁰ Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet likewise employ the ship *figura* to promote the *Ecclesia* as a vessel in which the reader should find salvific refuge during life’s voyage, as it keeps grace inside and sin outside. Cynewulf’s primary source for ‘Christ II’ is Gregory the Great’s homily on the Ascension, in which he advises listeners to ‘spei vestræ anchoram in æternam patriam figite’ (‘fix the anchor of your hope in the eternal fatherland’), encouraging desire for the Church Triumphant through this nautical figuration.¹¹ Cynewulf however alters this anagogic focus to more immediately figure the earthly Church Militant in ‘Christ II’. Colin Chase acknowledges this temporal shift, but does not equate the material gifts sent from ‘Godes Gæstsunu’ (‘the spiritual Son of God’) with the earthly Church and its ‘gæst-gerynas’: the sacraments and doctrines which operate in the present to guarantee the individual’s membership of the Church Triumphant in the future.¹²

The vocabulary describing the sea-journey in ‘Christ II’ is repeated or replicated by the sea-journey in ‘Elene’ – the poem narrating the finding of the True Cross, the material remnants of the crucifix on which Christ died, by Constantine’s mother, Helena – and, as set-piece descriptions, they demand to be read in light of one another. The two passages’ commonality implies the coherence of the Cynewulfian canon as a project promoting the *Ecclesia*, in which the Church’s steadfastness is conveyed by its consistent figuration as an invincible ship. The ‘Christ II’ sea-journey passage is structured in an envelope pattern—‘**ceolum** [...] **sundhengestum** [...] yða [...] **ceoles** [...] **sundhengestas** [...] yð**mearas**’—the tautology of which accentuates the Church’s fortitude in traversing the tumultuous waters of earthly life,

¹⁰ Alcuin of York, ‘Alcivini Epistolae 116’, in *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* iv, ed. by Ernst Dümmler (Berlin: Apvd Weidmannos, 1895), <http://www.mgh.de/dmgh/resolving/MGH_Epp._4_S._171> [accessed 8 December 2019], l. 22.

¹¹ Gregory the Great, ‘Homil. XXIX’ in *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Sancti Gregorii Papæ I, Opera Omnia* lxxvi, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier brothers, 1857), col. 1218–1219.

¹² Chase, p. 87; Cynewulf, *The Christ of Cynewulf*, ed. by Albert S. Cook (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1900), ll. 860a–863.

and which is echoed in the near-identical references to ‘**sæmearas**’, ‘**wæghengestas**’, and ‘**ceolas**’ in ‘Elene’ (‘sea-mares’, ‘wave-horses’, and ‘ships’, emphasis mine).¹³ The half-line ‘**ancrum fæste**’ appears in both passages along with ‘**hyðe**’ as both poems unitedly promote the Church as ‘fast at anchor’ in the ‘harbour’ of heaven. The *Ecclesia* not only functions as a shelter during earthly life’s troubles, but also as a guarantee of eternal stability in the afterlife, given the correspondence uniting the terrestrial and celestial Church (Matthew 16.18–19) (Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 863b–864a; Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 252b, 248a). The nautical figuration in both poems, which is expanded on from the Gregorian source of ‘Christ II’ and which is absent from the *Acta Quiriaci* source of ‘Elene’, is thus purposefully developed by Cynewulf to further his personal agenda. The ship *figura* encourages the reader’s participation in the Church Militant as their means to participation in the Church Triumphant, echoing Augustine’s conception of the Church as God’s pilgrim city voyaging towards the New Jerusalem.¹⁴

Cynewulf also evokes the earthly Church’s resilience by figurally asserting the reliability of its ecclesiastics and thus the strength of its pastoral care. Cynewulf exalts the ‘aras’ sent by God in ‘Christ II’ and ‘Elene’: this noun has multivalent definitions, and could equally refer to God’s ‘messengers’ and paronomastically to the homonym ‘oars’ (Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 980b, 1006a).¹⁵ This linguistic ambiguity supports the hypothesis of Cynewulf intentionally allegorising the Church: God’s messengers are synonymous with the Church’s oars, since it is the disciples of Christ and their missions which are responsible for propelling the Church on through the turbulent waves of history. This interpretation may be read in light of bishop Caesarius of Arles’ homiletic figuration of the Church as ‘**ita sanctae disciplinae remigiis**

¹³ Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 850–66. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text; Cynewulf, *Cynewulf’s Elene*, ed. by P. O. A. Gradon (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1977), ll. 225–55. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁴ Gillian Clark, ‘Imperium and the City of God: Augustine on Church and Empire’, *Studies in Church History*, 54 (2018), 46–70 (pp. 56–64).

¹⁵ Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, l. 759b. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

gubernatur, et flatu Spiritus sancti agitur, ut ad vitam aeternam [...] perducatur' ('so [well] directed by the oars of holy discipline, so well driven by the breath of the Holy Spirit, that she is led to eternal life', emphasis mine).¹⁶

Cynewulf perhaps even more specifically implies the constancy of the Church's clergy here, since they are the primary 'oars' of God's ship: by holding fast to Christian orthodoxy, they lead Christ's ecclesiastical ship through worldly dangers and encourage the laity to imitate their example by adhering to the Church and its teachings. In 'Christ II', the 'aras' of the ship propel it through its perilous surroundings, figuring how the Church Militant is protected from damage by its sinful exterior by the guidance and stability of its clerics, 'þa us gescildað wið sceppendra | eglum earhfarum' ('who shield us against the deadly arrow attacks of the evildoers') (Cynewulf, 'The Christ', ll. 761–762a). Meanwhile in 'Elene', the 'aras' ('messengers') who the title character sends to tell Constantine about the relic of Christ's cross which she has discovered, could also symbolise the ecclesiastics of the Anglo-Saxon Church who are reading or hearing this poem. It is the bishops and priests who will ensure that the Church's superlative message of salvation—the 'wilspella mæst' ('the greatest of joyful news')—is safely conveyed during its earthly mission 'ofer heanne holm' ('across the high sea') (Cynewulf, 'Elene', ll. 983b, 982a). These 'messenger-oars' must emulate the apostleship of Andreas as is described in the poem written about his life: it is by means of arriving by ship to his mission in the pagan land of Mermedonia that he disseminates the Word of God: 'leode lærde on lifes weg' ('teaching the people the path to life').¹⁷ The Church is thus the apostle's means of bringing soteriological solace to a place of unrest. It is therefore through the figure of the Church as ship that both Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet promote the Church and its

¹⁶ Caesarius of Arles, 'Sermon 136' in *Sancti Caesarii Arelatensis Sermones*, ed. by Germani D Morin (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953), p. 563.

¹⁷'Andreas', l. 170. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

ministers as Anglo-Saxon society's means to salvation during its unrest following the Viking invasions.

Cynewulf in 'Christ II' therefore collectively encourages himself and his reader to 'stabelian' ('fix') their hope in reaching heaven's harbour by being borne there in the ecclesiastical ship (Cynewulf, 'The Christ', l. 864b.) The 'Andreas'-poet employs this same architectural verb to describe God's having 'gestaðolade' ('established') heaven, which is juxtaposed with the immediacy of His sheltering the disciples within the ship during their sea-journey to Mermedonia.¹⁸ The building of heaven and the construction of the ship as two actions are thus associated by this juxtaposition. Benefitting from God's protection sacramentally and doctrinally in the Church Militant is thus equated with gaining God's subsequent protection in the Church Triumphant, as is explained in the Bible: Christ tells Peter, the Church's first Pope, that 'quodcumque ligaveris super terram erit ligatum in caelis' ('whatsoever thou shalt bind upon earth will be bound also in heaven').¹⁹

Like the Bible, Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet thus emphasise that the Church and its sacraments are not only efficacious during present earthly time, but that they have corresponding consequences in eternal time. In 'Andreas', the ship's soteriological purpose is amplified by the poet's figuration of Christ as helmsman of the ship: the reader is thus reassured that the earthly Church is fortified by Christ's salvific navigation of it towards heaven, as asserted by Christ's confident jussive, 'Læt nu geferian flotan userne, | lid to lande ofer lagufæsten' ("Allow me now to direct the ship's course over the mighty sea to land") ('Andreas', ll. 397–398).

The movement of this ecclesiastical ship is also described as bird-like: as well as parodying the ship of the pagans in *Beowulf* which sails to Heorot 'fugle gelicost' ('like a bird'), this

¹⁸ 'Andreas', ll. 536a, 534b–536. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

¹⁹ Matthew 16.19, <<http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=1&c=16>> [accessed 11 October 2020].

image echoes traditional iconography of Christ as a phoenix, whose resurrection promises the resurrection of His followers ('Andreas', ll. 496b–498a).²⁰ Christ is envisaged as a phoenix resurrecting the Church Militant to the Church Triumphant in another Old English poem often associated with Cynewulf.²¹ The Church is thus celebrated for disseminating this resurrective grace of Christ as the 'Andreas'-poet, similarly to Cynewulf and Alcuin of York before him, equates the *Ecclesia's* supervision by Christ as its 'hleo' ('protector') with the Church's guardianship by the bishop as 'hleo' ('Andreas', ll. 567a, 1672b). The Church's apostolic succession thus perpetuates Christ's protectiveness, and both poets reinforce this sacred authority of the *Ecclesia* by figuring the Church as building.

The Church as building

Figuring the Church as building enables both Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet to promote the *Ecclesia's* materiality in rendering the 'gæst-gerynas' tangible to Christians through its sacraments. In 'Elene', Constantine commissions a church to be constructed on the site where the True Cross was discovered. Cynewulf describes this church – a figure of the Anglo-Saxon *Ecclesia* – as having been built purposefully to provide 'rædum' ('counsel') as 'hæleðum to helpe' ('a help for men'), thus figuring the Church's sustenance of societal strength sacramentally and doctrinally (Cynewulf, 'Elene', ll. 1008b, 1011a). The location of Constantine's church at the place of the True Cross' discovery in 'Elene' reminds the reader of all churches' transtemporal connectedness to Calvary: the Church sacramentally administers the same objective graces which issued from the redemptive blood and water of Christ's body on the cross. This materiality of the *Ecclesia* is further figured by the church's situation 'on þam beorhhlīðe' ('on the mountain slope'): this echoes Christ's foundation of the Church on

²⁰ Klaeber's *Beowulf: Fourth Edition*, ed. by R. D. Fulk, Robert E. Bjork and John D. Niles (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), l. 218b.

²¹ *The Phoenix*, ed. by N. F. Blake (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1964), ll. 646b–677.

Peter the “Rock” (Matthew 16. 18) as Cynewulf accentuates the *Ecclesia*’s indefectibility in its apostolic succession.²²

In his letters, Alcuin similarly advises Archbishop Eanbald II, Peter’s episcopal successor, to be ‘templum esto Dei vivi super firmam petram constructum’ (‘the temple of the living God, constructed on solid rock’).²³ The bishop, even in non-poetic writing, is thus architecturally identified with the Church building since the episcopacy concretises the *Ecclesia*’s orthodoxy through its pastoral care of the Christian community. However, this vocation to pass on the Truth is not limited to the ecclesiastics themselves: in another poem written by Cynewulf about the saintly Christian maiden Juliana, Juliana is depicted as teaching entire heathen crowds to ‘þam lifgendan | stane, stiðhydge, stapol fæstniað’ (‘resolutely establish a foundation on the living stone’).²⁴ As microcosms of the Church, each individual Christian should embody the *Ecclesia* by holding in their heart ‘soðe treowe, ond sibbe mid eow’ (‘true faith and peace among you’).²⁵ The second-person pronoun ‘eow’ emphasises not only the social cohesion inevitable among the *intratextual* crowd, bound together by such faith and peace, but it also suggests the unity of the *extratextual* Christian audience of the poem to whom the ‘you’ could equally appeal. Cynewulf thus encourages his audience to recall their personal mission of perpetuating Christ the ‘lapidem vivum’ (‘living stone’): they should witness to Him in their own lives as ‘lapides vivi’ who build up the Church as a ‘domus spiritalis sacerdotium sanctum’ (‘a spiritual house, a holy priesthood’).²⁶

The Church’s sanctity in materially manifesting heaven on earth through the sacraments is promoted by further architectural figurations. Cynewulf portrays the construction of

²² Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, l. 1008a. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

²³ Alcuin of York, ‘Alcivini Epistolae 7’, < https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_epp_4/index.htm#page/167/mode/1up > [accessed 10 October 2020], l. 26.

²⁴ Cynewulf, *Juliana*, ed. by Rosemary Woolf (London: Methuen & Co, 1954), ll. 653b–654. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

²⁵ Cynewulf, ‘Juliana’, l. 655.

²⁶ I Peter 2. 4–5, <<http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=21&c=2>> [accessed 11 October 2020].

Constantine's church as a divinely-inspired act, delegated by Elene to the builders 'swa hire gasta weard | reord of roderum' ('as the guardian of souls had guided her from the firmament') (Cynewulf, 'Elene', ll. 1021b–1022a). The builders of Elene's church are those men who are 'cræftum getyde | [...] þa selestan' ('taught best in their craft'), just as Andreas is God's 'cræftiga' ('craftsman') when he commissions the church in Mermedonia and likewise, those to whom Juliana entrusts Church Tradition have 'halge rune | þurh modes myne' ('holy secrets with intent of mind') (Cynewulf, 'Elene', ll. 1017b–1018). The poets thus paronomastically promote the *Ecclesia* for sanctifying the labourers by whom it is physically crafted with 'cræft', signifying both divine Christian wisdom through knowledge of God, as well as physical skill.²⁷ It is the pursuit of this 'divine wisdom' proffered by the Church which both poets thus imply will bind the reader to their community and advance their individual salvation.

In order to amplify the Church's authority as a channel of salvific grace, Cynewulf juxtaposes the construction of Constantine's church with the ornamentation of the True Cross in 'Elene'. By both these wooden structures receiving analogous architectural attention, Cynewulf encourages the reader to equate the Church's authority with that of the Cross, since both are instruments of Christian redemption, particularly united in the Mass: a liturgical ritual in which the graces of Christ's sacrifice are re-presented in the celebration of the Eucharist. Cynewulf exalts the sacramental Church for its synonymity with the Cross as both are sources from which Christ's salvific graces flow. Therefore, he blurs the distinction between the two structures when describing the preservation of the Cross relic within the church building:

þær þæt lifes treo,
 selest sigebeama siððan wunode
 æðel[e], [u]nbrece; þær bið a gearu

²⁷ s.v. 'cræft', *Dictionary of Old English: A to I*, <<https://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doe/>> [accessed 11 October 2020].

wraðu wannhalum wita gehwylces,
 sæce ond sorge; hie sona þær
 þurh þa halgan gesceaft helpe findaþ
 godcunde gife

(‘There that tree of life, the best of victory-beams, has ever since remained, inviolable in nature;
 there is forever ready for the infirm a support for every single torment, in strife and sorrow.
 They, through that holy creation there, will instantly find help, a divine gift’)

(Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 1026b–1032a)

This analysis of the Cross follows Cynewulf’s description of the church. Cynewulf thus prompts the reader to read the descriptions in light of one another, and to therefore value the *Ecclesia* for its liturgical re-presentation of the Cross’ redemptive sacrifice. The repeated deitic ‘þær’ (‘there’) and the vividness of the present tense verbs evoke the Church’s immediate materialisation of the Passion’s graces centuries after the sacraments’ first emission from Christ’s body on the Cross in the baptismal fluids of blood and water. These stylistic techniques and the epithets for the Cross as ‘lifes treo, | selest sigebeama’ (‘tree of life, best of victory-beams’) recalls the identical employment of these in the early Old English poem ‘The Dream of the Rood’.²⁸ In this poem, the prosopopoeiac cross of Christ appears in a dream to a penitent persona and describes the Passion from its own perspective. The poem’s audience, vicariously through the dreaming penitent, is motivated to renew their own appreciation for Christ’s suffering and to share with others their hope for the eternal life earned through the cross (‘The Dream’, ll. 95–121).

Similarly, Cynewulf prompts his reader to benefit from Christ’s salvific graces through the Church’s provision of the sacrament of Penance, and to imitate the zeal with which Judas,

²⁸ ‘The Dream’, ll. 13a, 14b, 11a. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

a Jew, eventually receives Baptism in ‘Elene’ (Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 1032b–1038a). In the passage cited above, the adverbs ‘a gearu’ and ‘siððan’ figure the Church and its sacraments as ‘instantly’ and ‘always’ available given the *Ecclesia*’s continuation of the True Cross’ legacy ever ‘since’ the Crucifixion. It is also the pithiness of the alliterative doublet ‘sæce ond sorge’ which promotes the Church’s efficient elimination of such earthly ‘strife and sorrow’ by its sanctity as a ‘godcunde gife’ (‘divine gift’) looking towards its heavenly ecclesiastical counterpart, the communion of saints.

Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet also promote the Church’s transformation of individual lives by figuring the *Ecclesia* architecturally. It is by entering the protective space of the Church through Baptism that Judas grows in personal holiness, as articulated by containment imagery: ‘frofre gast | wic gewunode in þæs weres breostum’ (‘the Spirit of consolation took up abode in the man’s breast’) (Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 1036b–1037). As a neophyte, Judas’ own body becomes a dwelling-place for Christ much like the Church. Following his inspiration by the Holy Spirit, Judas’ humility is intensified, as he is ‘bylde to bote’ (‘encouraged to repentance’) for his past sins (Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, l. 1038a). The church’s construction above the Mermedonian prison in ‘Andreas’ likewise figures the *Ecclesia*’s transformative ability to liberate an individual from the captivity of sin as experienced by Judas in ‘Elene’.

Similarly the cross in ‘The Dream of the Rood’, like the sacrament-dispensing Church, transforms the superlative punishment of crucifixion from being ‘wita heardost, | leodum laðost’ (‘the cruelest of punishments, most hateful to people’) —into the glorious means to eternal life (‘The Dream’, ll. 87b–88a, 88b–89). Through the purifying graces of its sacraments, the Church perpetually re-enacts the Harrowing of Hell. This is demonstrated in ‘Andreas’, where God promises the imprisoned St Matthew that heaven will open for his entrance following the release of his shackles (‘Andreas’, ll. 102b–106). Likewise, the release of the

Mermedonian pagans from their torments is caused explicitly by their receipt of the sacraments administered by the Church: they are liberated by receiving ‘fulwihte ond freoðuwære’ (‘baptism and a covenant’), the pledge of heavenly glory and ‘mundbyrd meotudes’ (‘the creator’s protection’) (‘Andreas’, ll. 1630, 1632a).

When a stone pillar begins emitting water in ‘Andreas’, it is more specifically the sacraments of Baptism and Penance which are figured, thus accentuating the transformative power of the *Ecclesia* through its outpouring of these purifying graces (‘Andreas’, ll. 1522–53). As narrated in Andreas’ anecdote, God animates another stone which He uses to resurrect the patriarchs and evangelise the people: tasks which the *Ecclesia* undertakes scripturally and sacramentally in the liturgy of the Mass (‘Andreas’, ll. 773–810). The ‘Andreas’-poet thus promotes the Church as God’s vehicle of disseminating Christ, its living Tradition and cornerstone according to Ephesians 2.19–22. The subsequent stone pillar also amplifies the societally as well as spiritually transformative power of the *Ecclesia*: the pillar is converted ‘for the good of God and man’ into a source of the sacraments. This Church-like pillar thus remedies the ‘negative mythologies’ of heathenism connoted by stone ruins in elegiac poems such as the societal disintegration implied throughout ‘The Ruin’ and the dilapidated ‘eald enta geweorc’ (‘old works of giants’) in ‘The Wanderer’.²⁹

Gregory the Great, in his letter to the missionary Mellitus, expresses similar appreciation of the Church for its societally remedial power, yearning for the pagan temples to be converted into Christian churches rather than destroyed.³⁰ Cynewulf likewise promotes the Church’s initiation of this reconciliatory acculturation process by referring to churches with the vocabulary of pre-Christian worship: they are ‘hi Godes tempel’ (‘the temples of God’) in

²⁹ Michael D. J. Bintley, ‘Demythologising Urban Landscapes in *Andreas*’, *Leeds Studies in English* 40 (2009), 105–19 (pp. 110, 118); *The Wanderer*, ed. by R. F. Leslie (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), l. 87a; ‘The Ruin’ in *The Old English Elegies: A Critical Edition and Genre Study*, ed. by Anne Lingard Klinck (Montreal, Quebec: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2001) pp. 103–220.

³⁰ Gregory the Great, ‘Epistola LXXVI’ in *Patrologia Cursus Completus, Sancti Gregorii Papæ I, Opera Omnia* lxxvii, ed. by Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier brothers, 1862), col. 1215–1216.

‘Christ II’ (Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, l. 707b). Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet thus both emphasise the Church’s advancement of societal cohesion by its incorporation, rather than annihilation, of pagan materials. It is thus by the nautical and architectural figuration of the Church as a protective space that Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet encourage the reader’s fervent participation in the *Ecclesia*, so as to advance their salvation and that of the society they inhabit by taking shelter in the sacrament-issuing *Corpus Christi*.

The Church as the sacramental Corpus Christi

By figuring the Church as the sacrament-dispensing body of Christ, Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet encourage their reader’s appreciation of Baptism and the Eucharist as their sanctifying means of initiation to the Church body politic. In ‘Christ II’, the sacraments are implied as Christ’s means of perpetual presence among men – ‘Ic eow mid wunige | forð on frofre’ (‘I will remain with you as a consolation from now on’) – whilst the architectural connotations of ‘stapolfæstre’ assert how ‘steadfast’ is the strength with which Christ continues to hold His people in peace in churches ‘on stowa gehwa[m]’ (‘everywhere’) (Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 488b–489a, 490a, 490b).

The *Ecclesia*’s reliability is also amplified by Cynewulf’s figural appropriation of falling ‘deaw ond ren’ (‘dew and rain’) to emphasise the relentlessness with which God’s graces perpetually shower down, particularly through Baptismal water: this contrasts with the conventional connotation of precipitation with earthly transience and disintegration in elegiac poetry such as ‘The Wanderer’ (Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, l. 609a).³¹ Not only does Cynewulf echo Daniel 3.68–70 by praising God through the natural elements, but he also parallels Psalm 64.10–14 in which the earth is watered by God’s blessings and stirs the world to worship Him. It is this worship which is encouraged by the jussive in ‘Christ II’, ‘we ealles sculon | secgan

³¹ ‘The Wanderer’, l. 48.

þonc ond lof þeodne ussum' ('we ought to give thanks and praise to our Lord') (Cynewulf, 'The Christ', ll. 611b–612). Appropriating these biblical images of precipitation and the communal worship they inspire enables Cynewulf to figure the outpouring of sacramental graces in the Church body politic and to contextualise Scripture within the Old English poetic tradition. By highlighting the integration of the Church and Anglo-Saxon culture, Cynewulf – and the 'Andreas'-poet – encourage readerly recourse to the *Ecclesia* as the locus of heaven and earth's intersection.

Through Andreas' praise of the *Ecclesia*, which is figured by a building-stone surpassing any 'singife' ('treasure-gift') in its emission of a cleansing flood, the 'Andreas'-poet particularly glorifies the purification from sin offered by the Church through Baptism and Penance, prompting the reader's recourse to, or renewed appreciation of, these sacraments ('Andreas', l. 1509a). The Mermedonians fear they will drown in this flood, and it is a similar context of eschatological terror that links the '[m]eoduserwen' ('dispensing of mead') here and the 'ealuserwen' ('dispensing of ale') in *Beowulf*, when the Danes await destruction by Grendel in the meadhall ('Andreas', l. 1526b).³² Various critical interpretations of these paralleling hapax legomena include their connotation of a filled vessel with the cup of bitterness or impending death (*Beowulf*, pp. 352–53). However, informed by his ecclesiastical agenda, the 'Andreas'-poet likely uses '[m]eoduserwen' as a figure for the Eucharist: the poet depicts the Mermedonians imbibing Baptismal water—in a similar way to the practice of Christians drinking Eucharistic blood—to parody the mead-drinking of the doomed pagans in *Beowulf*. A later reference to the 'joyful city' of Mermedonia as 'winbyrig', which could also be read paronomastically as 'wine town', concretises the city's newly-Christianised identity following its baptism, and motivates the reader to also reflect on their own sacramental incorporation to the Church body politic ('Andreas', l. 1672a).

³² *Beowulf*, l. 769a. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text.

This scene also responds to the earlier “anti-Eucharist” of the Mermedonians’ cannibalism which was instigated by their deprivation of the true nourishment provided by the Eucharist: ‘næs þær hlafes wist | werum on þam wonge’ (‘there was not the sustenance of bread for the people in that place’) (‘Andreas’, ll. 21b–22a). The ‘Andreas’-poet’s persistent reference to Mermedonia’s geographical location as ‘mearcland’ (‘borderland’), ‘folcstede gumena’ (‘dwelling-place of men’), ‘hæleða eðel’ (‘land of men’), ‘on þam wonge’ (‘in that place’) — emphasises that there was no practical opportunity for the Mermedonians to know Christ the ‘panis vivus’ (‘living bread’) before Andreas arrived as a missionary to proclaim the Church and its ‘gæst-gerynas’ (‘spiritual mysteries’) (‘Andreas’, ll. 19–22a).³³

Figuratively, this ignorance of the Church was responsible for the Mermedonians’ intensely insatiable hunger: they are ‘hæleþ heorogrædige’ (‘men fiercely ravenous’) not for the consumption of one another’s bodies, but for the body of Christ, the ‘heofonlicne hlaf’ (‘the heavenly bread’) administered to Andreas by Christ, the Church’s helmsman (‘Andreas’, ll. 38a, 389a). Christ’s feeding of his shipmen with his body thus exalts the Church for supplying the *viaticum* which sustains the individual on their missionary journey of Christian life. The ‘Andreas’-poet also deviates from his probable Latin source by replacing the detail of the pagans sacrificing seven elderly men with the description of an innocent son being given over to death by his father (‘Andreas’, ll. 1103b–1134). This textual adaptation develops a figuration of the Mass—the liturgical re-presentation of Christ’s sacrifice as God’s only begotten Son—as the poet encourages his reader’s gratitude for the Eucharist as an expression of Christ’s *agape* love for mankind. The increasing centralisation of the Mass as a religious devotion in England, as inspired by the Carolingian reforms, potentially motivates the ‘Andreas’-poet—and more subtly, Cynewulf—to thus promote the Church for its salvific provision of the Eucharist.

³³ John 6.51, <<http://www.latinvulgate.com/lv/verse.aspx?t=1&b=4&c=6>> [accessed 11 October 2020].

Even Andreas' own body and blood imitates that of Christ, and thus the poet promotes the Church for *perpetuating* Christ through apostolic succession. When Andreas is persecuted by the pagans, flowers are described as sprouting from his blood as it spills to the ground ('Andreas', ll. 1448–49). This is an image recalling Tertullian's aphorism that 'semen est sanguis Christianorum' ('the blood of [martyred] Christians is the seed [of the Church]') since the apostle's body and blood represents that of Christ, the *Ecclesia*, on earth.³⁴ The Church is thus preserved by apostles who dedicate their lives to God, even by non-bloody sacrifice: it is the newly-converted Plato's consecration as Christian bishop that guarantees the availability of the sacraments and formation of clergy, the spiritual as well as structural cohesion of society ('Andreas', ll. 1646b–1654a). God's instant healing of Andreas' wounded apostolic body after his violent persecution also reassures the Anglo-Saxon reader that God will heal the Church body politic of any similar physical or spiritual damage by invasion or heresy.

The poets' Eucharistic figurations also promote the Church as providing partial communion with Christ during earthly life to pre-empt total eternal communion with Him in heaven: the ingestion of Christ's body sacramentally enables Him to live within the Christian's body and eventually resurrect it, as implied by 'Christ II': '[h]ælobearn heonan up stige | mid usse lichoman, lifgende God' ('that salvific child, the living God, will ascend from here with our body') (Cynewulf, 'The Christ', ll. 754–55). The Church Triumphant is also figured as the superlative banquet – 'symbla mæst | geworden in wuldre' ('the greatest feast, celebrated in glory') – which is anticipated by the sacred food, the Eucharist, administered by the Church Militant whilst 'under swegles hleo' ('under the shelter of the sky') (Cynewulf, 'The Christ', ll. 550b–551a, 606a). Likewise, the Dreamer's conceptualisation of the heavenly 'symle' in 'The Dream of the Rood' suggests that the earthly Christian community anticipates the

³⁴ Tertullian, *Apologeticus*, <http://www.tertullian.org/latin/apologeticum_becker.htm> [accessed 8 December 2019], para. XLIX.13.

celebration of the heavenly beatific ‘feast’, ‘mid þam halgum’ (‘with the holy ones’): the Church is therefore figured powerfully not only as a source of the sacramental *Corpus Christi*, but also as Christ’s earthly body politic, which aspires to join its heavenly counterpart, the communion of the saints (‘The Dream’, ll. 139b–144a).

Likewise, the miracles of Christ involving food and drink which are cited by Andreas during his narrative – the turning of water into wine, the feeding of the five thousand—indicate that the Church’s Eucharistic graces bind Christians not only sacramentally to God, but to one another ‘geond woruld wide’ (‘widely throughout the world’) (‘Andreas’, ll. 586–591a, 576a). The Church as the Eucharistic body politic is further exalted through the reunion of the missionary disciples Matthew and Andreas, as the balanced syntax stresses their mutual support on life’s missionary journey: ‘ægðer þara eorla oðrum trymede | heofonrices hyht’ (‘each of the warriors strengthened the other one’s hope of the heavenly kingdom’) (‘Andreas’, ll. 1051–1052a). Both Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet therefore reassert the importance of attending Mass in the Church Militant as a prerequisite for attending the eschatological banquet in the Church Triumphant, the latter being implied by the convivial depictions of heaven at the end of all three poems (Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 864–66; Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 1315–1321; ‘Andreas’, ll. 1718–22). By figuring the Church as the *Corpus Christi* then, both poets encourage their reader’s participation sacramentally and socially in the ecclesiastical community to further their personal salvation and to consolidate the infrastructure of Anglo-Saxon society.

The Church as the apostolic body

Not only is the Church promoted *intratextually* by its figuration as the sacrament-issuing *Corpus Christi*, but it is also endorsed *extratextually* through the poet-reader relationship which is microcosmic of the interpersonal communion binding the entire Church body politic. Just as

the ship in ‘Christ II’ conditions the reader to interpret the ship in ‘Elene’ in the same figural terms, so too Cynewulf’s engagement with ‘apostolhad’ (‘apostleship’) in another of his works, ‘The Fates of the Apostles’, encourages the identification of this concern elsewhere in his poems. This thematic thread reasserts a canonic unity which amplifies the ecclesiastical agenda of all Cynewulf’s work. Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet thus motivate their reader’s apostolic participation in the *Ecclesia* by figuring the Church as Christ’s body on earth, constituted by many different Christians as described in Ephesians 4.11–16. The apostles commonly feature in Old English litanies and calendars, indicating the contextualisation of them and their fellow Christians by the broader Church institution, the hub of divine wisdom to which they individually contribute. This irony of the Church receiving graces from God to use them in returning glory to God is also celebrated in Cynewulf’s description of the vast vocations divinely allotted to men in ‘Christ II’:

Sum mæg godcunde
 reccan ryhte æ. Sum mæg ryne tungla
 secgan, side gesceaft. Sum mæg searolice
 wordcwide writan.

(‘Some can rightly expound the divine law. Some can tell the course of the stars, the vast creation. Some can skilfully write words’)

(Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 670b–673a)

Cynewulf increases the number and secularity of those gifts listed in his source text, Gregory’s homily, in order to accentuate God’s all-encompassing sanctification of each individual as a constant channel of His grace. The gifts on which there is particular focus are the knowledge of divine law and writing, both of which contribute to Cynewulf’s own textual evangelisation

of the reader and his written attempts to enhance the Church body politic (Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 670b–671a, 673a).

Cynewulf thus parallels the persona of ‘The Dream of the Rood’ who also enacts the very verbal evangelisation which he encourages the reader to emulate as one of the Church’s ‘reordberend’ (‘speech-bearing people’) (‘The Dream’, l. 3a). Likewise, the ‘Andreas’-poet vicariously promotes zeal in his reader through Christ’s request of Andreas to be a more vocal disciple whilst on the missionary ship. Also as one of the ‘reordberend’, Andreas is commanded to ‘rece’ (‘explain’) the spiritual mysteries and pass on to others what he has been ‘lærde’ (‘taught’) by Christ in order to ‘worde becwist’ (‘declare’) with validity his identity as a disciple (‘Andreas’, ll. 419b, 419a, 420a, 418b). Christ’s pleonastic emphasis on speech-acts through these verbs thus accentuates the importance of words in figuring the Church and sustaining the Tradition of its body politic. Potentially in imitation of the Carolingian Renaissance’s renewal of dependence on Scripture for the advancement of theological study and thus societal cohesion, ‘Christ II’, ‘Elene’ and ‘Andreas’ promote the reliability of the English *Ecclesia* through its recurrent figuration by the written and spoken word.

By thus delegating to the reader the task of verbally enhancing the cohesion of the Church body politic and Anglo-Saxon society generally, the ecclesiastical project undertaken by Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet promotes Gregorian pastoral care by cultivating the religious-lay relationship through poetry. Imparting Christian wisdom interpersonally has ecclesiastical benefits: the illuminating effects of Elene’s evangelisation, as manifested in the speech given by Judas, lead to his becoming a bishop, ameliorating the organisation of the Church body politic (‘Andreas’, ll. 807–826). This is similar to the neophytic bishop’s consecration in ‘Andreas’, as Plato’s newness to Christianity is implied by his zeal to forsake worldly wealth so as to enter the nautically-figured *Ecclesia*, the ‘brimþisan | æt sæs faroðe’ (‘ocean-speeder at the sea’s edge’) (‘Andreas’, ll. 1646b–1654a, 1657b–1658a). Like Alcuin,

Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet exalt bishops ‘as benefactors and civic patrons’ who implement order to the Church body politic and Anglo-Saxon societal infrastructure, thus augmenting national prosperity (Coates, p. 558). Although the Church’s stability is promoted by its figuration as a hierarchically structured institution, this does not compromise the solidarity of the ecclesiastical community, in which each individual is united by their need for intercession. This is epitomised by Matthew and Andreas’ mutuality: their actions become amalgamated by the third-person singular as they are described ‘helle witu | wordum werede’ (‘with his words he warded off the torments of hell’) and their united embodiment of the Church Militant identifies them threefold as ‘wigend’ (‘warriors’), ‘hæleð higerofe’ (‘valiant men’), and ‘cempan coste’ (‘tried soldiers’) (‘Andreas’, ll. 1052b–1053a, 1053b–1055a). The disciples’ shared aspiration for Heaven recalls Cynewulf’s figuration of the earthly Church body in ‘Christ II’ as a heavenly covenant awaiting fulfilment, connecting humans and angels with a ‘[s]ib [...] gemæne’ (‘a common peace’) and a ‘gæsthalig treow’ (‘pledge holy in spirit’) (Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 581b, 584b).

The Church Militant is thus bound inextricably to the Church Triumphant, and members of the earthly Church body help one another to reach the heavenly Church body. It is in the epilogues to ‘Juliana’ and ‘The Fates of the Apostles’ that Cynewulf’s plea for the intercession of his Christian reader is most fervent: the runic inscription of Cynewulf’s name within the poem, like that on a gravestone, perpetuates his prayer request and concretises his everlasting dependency on the Church Militant’s prayers to accelerate his soul’s release from Purgatory into the Church Triumphant.³⁵ This intercessory role of the Church is sanctified by its alignment with Mary’s intercession in ‘Elene’, as well as by the Church’s alignment with Christ’s mediation between mankind and His Father in ‘Christ II’ (Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, l. 1232a;

³⁵ Cynewulf, ‘Juliana’, ll. 695b–731. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text; Cynewulf, ‘The Fates of the Apostles’ in *Andreas and The Fates of the Apostles*, ed. by Kenneth R. Brooks (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), ll. 88–122.

Cynewulf, ‘The Christ’, ll. 616–618a). Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet therefore advocate adherence to the Church body politic in order to advance oneself and, by charity, one’s fellow apostles, to heaven: this is the ultimate goal of the *Ecclesia*, as figured in ‘The Phoenix’ and the Bible.³⁶ Therefore, by engaging with the scriptural synonymisation of the Church with Christ’s body in I Corinthians 12.12–28, and by echoing Augustine’s conceptualisation of the Church as a united people, Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet promote the Church for its human inclusivity. The audience, whether lay or religious, is encouraged to benefit spiritually and socially from the conviviality of the Church’s ‘apostolhad’ rather than perceiving the *Ecclesia* as Anglo-Saxon society’s mere infrastructural backbone.

Conclusion

The fervent membership of the *Ecclesia* which Cynewulf—and the ‘Andreas’-poet, who undertakes a similar poetic project—encourages in the reader, is exemplified by Elene following her veneration of the True Cross’ nails:

Ongan þa geornlice gastgerynum
on sefan secean soðfæstnesse,
weg to wuldre; huru weorda God
gefullæste, fæder on roderum,
cining ælmihtig, þæt seo cwen begeat
willan in worulde; wæs se witedom
þurh fyrnwitan beforan sungen
eall æfter orde swa hit eft gelamp
ðinga gehwylces.

³⁶ ‘The Phoenix’, ll. 387–392; Ephesians 4.15–16.

(‘She then began keenly to seek truth in her heart through spiritual mysteries, the path to glory; indeed the God of hosts, father in the heavens, the almighty king, assisted the queen so that she got her desire in the world; the whole prophecy had been sung before by sages from the beginning, just as it afterward transpired in each and every way’)

(Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 1147–1155a)

While passages similar to this in ‘Juliana’ primarily narrativise the saintly experience, they also constitute a statement of figural exegesis, as is evident here (Cynewulf, ‘Juliana’, ll. 233b–242a). It is by means of the Church’s ‘gæst-gerynas’ and its provision of the wisdom necessary to understand these ‘spiritual mysteries’ that Elene progresses along the ‘weg to wuldre’ (‘path to glory’): the Church bridges the apparent gap between God ‘on roderum’ and Elene ‘in worulde’ as its sacraments and doctrines render heaven accessible on earth (Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, l. 1149a). As well as its collapse of this *spatial* boundary emphasising the Church’s authority, its collapse of any *temporal* boundary by means of the sacraments also accentuates the *Ecclesia*’s power since, through the sacraments, prophecies from ‘beforan’ are fulfilled throughout time, forever ‘eft’ (Cynewulf, ‘Elene’, ll. 1153b, 1154b). The unusualness of these two temporal adverbs in receiving metrical stress and alliteration in the above passage draws attention to their exposure of the Church’s awesome ability to vivify Tradition constantly, as the *Ecclesia*’s perpetuation of God’s past graces sustains present-day Christians. Promotion of the Anglo-Saxon Church and encouragement of recourse to the sacraments is thus the implicit purpose of the ecclesiastical *figurae* employed by Cynewulf and the ‘Andreas’-poet, who have successfully advertised the Church as a protective space, as the sacrament-dispensing *Corpus Christi* and as the Christian body politic.

In the three poems on which this study has concentrated, the Church Militant is exalted as the means to the Church Triumphant since, as indicated in ‘Andreas’, the individual Christian must depend upon earthly knowledge to find heavenly grace (‘Andreas’, ll. 979b–

980). In his signed poems' epilogues, the penitential Cynewulf epitomises this dependence on the *Ecclesia* as he relies on the prayers of the Church body politic to advance his soul to heaven, petitioning the audience for prayers after his death. This same need of the Church is promoted for national as well as personal salvation: in his letters, Alcuin insists on the Church and its sacraments as the solution to England's societal degredation, thus it is very feasible that Cynewulf and the 'Andreas'-poet similarly believe that peace can only prevail where obedience to God's teaching is universally undertaken.³⁷

It is by imparting such Christian wisdom in 'Christ II', 'Elene' and 'Andreas' that the two poets enact the Church's pastoral care. Readerly sanctification occurs through poetic *form* as well as *content*. Just as Christ gives parables so His hearers can 'nosse mysteria regni caelorum' ('know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven'), so too Old English poets employ *figurae* since "de-coding" these allegories exercises a spiritual understanding of the Church's 'gæst-gerynas', whether this poetry is read by monks trained in *lectio divina*, or by laity learned in sophisticated reading practices.³⁸

As well as the recurrence of these churchly concerns in Cynewulf's signed works encouraging conceptualisation of these texts as a canon and as a source for the poet of 'Andreas', the manuscript contexts in which the Cynewulfian corpus are situated amplify the poems' ecclesiastical purpose. Critics have likened the enigmatic content of the *Exeter Book*, particularly its simultaneous sublimity and tangibility, theological complexity and didactic simplicity to the similarly intricate structure of a medieval cathedral, and scholars have also argued that the consolidation of doctrine by which the Council of Vercelli was preoccupied in

³⁷ Alcuin, 'Alcivini Epistolae 122', <https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_epp_4/index.htm#page/179/mode/1up> [accessed 12 October 2020], ll. 4–15; Alcuin, 'Alcivini Epistolae 128', <https://www.dmgh.de/mgh_epp_4/index.htm#page/190/mode/1up> [accessed 12 October 2020], ll. 1–38.

³⁸ Matthew 13.11.

1050 pervades the *Vercelli Book*.³⁹ These critical observations suggest that reasserting the Church's identity remained a concern in later Anglo-Saxon England when these codices were compiled. Therefore, not only has *this* study recognised the ecclesiastical agenda linking these poems, but so have the medieval manuscript compilers all those centuries ago.

By conducting this interdisciplinary study of literature, theology and history then, this article has wondered how the Church – arguably *the* most influential institution in the Western world and the foundation on which our modern-day existence has been built – was perceived by the earliest English peoples. Such a study is important *now* in order to rectify the superficial and trivialised understanding of the Church so often promulgated by modern-day media. This is a *mis*understanding of the Church which needs reappraisal in light of what the earliest writings in the English language have to say about the impressively intricate ecclesiastical context which underlies both the sacred and secular spheres of Western civilisation's past, present and future.

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