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A Watchman on the Walls:
Ezekiel and Reaction to Invasion in Anglo-Saxon England

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

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Abstract

During the Viking Age, the Christian Anglo-Saxons in England found warnings and solace in the biblical text of Ezekiel. In this text, the God of Israel delivers a dual warning: first, the sins of the people call upon themselves divine wrath; second, it is incumbent upon God's messenger to warn the people of their extreme danger, or else find their blood on his hands. This thesis examines how the Anglo-Saxon applied Ezekiel's warnings to their own cultural crisis. It begins with the early development of this philosophy by the Britons in the 500s, its adoption by the Anglo-Saxons, Irish, and Franks in the later centuries, and how the Carolingians modified it during their political reform movement and reintroduced it to England when it was most needed: during the darkest days of the 9th-century Viking invasions of England. From there, Ezekiel's warnings are traced through the following century and a half as the English flush their oppressors from the island, but then are finally conquered by a Christian Viking, who in turn takes to heart the call to repent or face God's judgment.

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My first thanks I offer to God, who in His infinite goodness offers us redemption through His Son, and in His great mercy sets a watchman over His people.

On the mortal plane I would like to thank my committee members: Dr. Lynda Coon, for introducing me to the Carolingians' religious and political world, and for providing crucial insight for the research focus; Dr. Charles Muntz, for his enthusiasm and philological analysis; and especially Dr. Joshua Byron-Smith, for not only the copious practical help that he provided, but also his kindness, encouragement, and boundless patience, as well as his dedication in directing my thesis research.

Finally, thanks to my family and friends for constantly asking and encouraging me about *the thesis*, especially my parents, Mike and Kim Brinson, for their interest, pep-talks, and prayers.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the men and women who braved scornful crowds and violent mobs in God's name, thinking it a better thing to speak the truth than seek after the respect of fellow sinners.

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Introduction

England in AD 1014 was in crisis. The Viking assaults plaguing the island had reached a critical point for the second time in their two-hundred year history. As Sven Forkbeard and his son Cnut invaded and ravaged the land with seeming impunity, Wulfstan, the Archbishop of York, sat down to pen a sermon to the Anglo-Saxon people. It was to be a message tinged with righteous thunder and built upon an argument thousands of years old, one that originated in the ancient kingdoms of Israel and continued in use in Medieval Christian England: the people have sinned, and God's wrath will not be turned aside except by acts of national penance. In closing his argument, Wulfstan intones:

There was a historian in the time of the Britons called Gildas, who wrote about their misdeeds: how through their sins they angered God so very excessively that at last he allowed the army of the English to conquer their land and they destroyed the power of the Britons completely. And that happened, so he said, because of robbery by the powerful, and through the coveting of ill-gotten acquisitions, through the unlawfulness of the people, and through unjust judgements, through the idleness of bishops, and through the wicked cowardice of God's preachers, who kept silent about the truth all too often and mumbled with their jaws where they should have called out. Also, through the foul pride of the people and through gluttony and numerous sins, they forfeited their country and they themselves perished. But let us do what is necessary for us: take warning from such things [...] it is absolutely essential that we reflect among ourselves and earnestly pray to God himself.¹

¹ Archbishop Wulfstan, "Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos*," in *Old and Middle English: c.890-c.1450, An Anthology*, 3rd ed., ed. Elaine Treharne (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 259-267, at 267: "An þeodwita wæs on Brytta tidum, Gildas hatte, se awrat be heora misdædum: hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinna and Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle. And þæt wæs geworden, þæs the he sæde, þurh ricra reafiac, and þurh gitsunge wohgestreona, þurh leode unlaga and þurh wohdomas, þurh biscopa asolcennesse, and þurh lyðre yrhðe Godes bydela, the soþes geswugedan ealles to gelome and clumedan mid ceaflum þær hy scoldan clypian. Purh fulne eac folces gælsan and þurh oferfylla and mænigfealde synna, heora eard hy forworhtan and selfe hy

What is significant about this citation is that the historian Gildas himself drew upon a particular Old Testament text to justify his own castigation of the British: Ezekiel. In his denunciation of British sins and his interpretation of foreign invasion as just deserts, Gildas points to God's command to Ezekiel to warn the sinner of his extreme danger, or else be counted guilty of neglect, as Wulfstan also clearly points out. That Gildas should cite Ezekiel, and that Wulfstan in turn cited Gildas is no accident, for Ezekiel's message was directed towards a wayward nation that was to be punished for its sins by foreign invasion—just as Gildas the Briton and Wulfstan the Anglo-Saxon directed their injunctions at their own respective peoples. By drawing this connection from Ezekiel, Gildas' words contributed to a tradition of penitential scholarship fashionable in the post-Roman barbaric world, whereby British, Irish, Frankish, and Anglo-Saxon scholars sought to understand and address their circumstances from the perspective of national sins and the necessity of good watchmen warning their neighbors to repent. This thesis argues that, in Anglo-Saxon England in particular, Ezekiel became a controlling text for interpretations of barbarian invasions and national penance, from the wars of the ninth century that brought Alfred the Great to power, to the Viking conquests in the opening of the eleventh century.

Nearly the entire book of Ezekiel is comprised of warnings about penance and divine justice, but the first occurs in the book's third chapter, and it carries an intensely personal admonition. In the early years of the Babylonian Captivity, Ezekiel receives visions from God. There appears to him a brilliant throne upon which Yahweh sits, and in the ensuing visions the Hebrew exile receives a terrifying ultimatum:

forwurdan. Ac wutan don swa us þearf is: warnian us be swilcan [...] And þy us is þearf micel þæt we us beþencan and with God sylfne þingian georne.”

Son of man, I have made thee a watchman to the house of Israel: and thou shalt hear the word out of my mouth, and shalt tell it them from me. If, when I say to the wicked, Thou shalt surely die: thou declare it not to him, nor speak to him, that he may be converted from his wicked way, and live: the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but I will require his blood at thy hand. But if thou give warning to the wicked, and he be not converted from his wickedness, and from his evil way: he indeed shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul. Moreover if the just man shall turn away from his justice, and shall commit iniquity: I will lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die, because thou hast not given him warning: he shall die in his sin, and his justices which he hath done, shall not be remembered: but I will require his blood at thy hand. But if thou warn the just man, that the just may not sin, and he doth not sin: living he shall live, because thou hast warned him, and thou hast delivered thy soul (Ez. 3:18-21).

Reading Ezekiel reveals two truths about God’s warnings and the watchman who is to deliver them: on the one hand, the people are to heed God’s warnings or perish; on the other, the watchman himself will perish should he fail to do his duty. Thus the threat of damnation leveled at the watchman carries equal weight as that of the threat to the people at large. For medieval readers of Ezekiel, this meant that just as God chastised His people Israel in the past, so too would He chastise His church in the present day—and at the personal level, it was incumbent upon those same readers to go and warn their countrymen to change their ways, or else face God’s wrath as negligent watchmen. Such an interpretation of Ezekiel’s message resonated with the churchmen in northern Europe, surrounded as they were by pagan Danes, Saxons, Norwegians, Swedes, and other warlike peoples; when these came raiding or conquering through Christian British and Anglo-Saxon lands, Ezekiel was commonly invoked as a means of addressing the question, “Why?”, and to supply direction for the reformers seeking to influence their countrymen.²

That Ezekiel intended for his words to reach a broad audience is obvious, but one has to

² Chapter 1 of this thesis briefly addresses the British reaction, Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 the Anglo-Saxon.

wonder how the prophet would have reacted had he known that 1,500 years later his words would be quoted on an island in the north Atlantic rather than in the land of the Chaldeans, and used as justification for the deposition of kings in Frankia. Yet that was just the case in early medieval Europe. Following the Battle of Adrianople in AD 378, the history of the Christianized Roman Empire was dominated by barbarian invasions from the Black Sea to the English Channel.³ Across that channel the island of Britain, significant parts of which were long accustomed to the rule of Rome, was also subject to barbarian incursions.⁴ A common reaction to such trauma among both Christians and pagans was an appeal to the divine.⁵ Gildas' reaction is particularly interesting on account of his use of Ezekiel's commandment to warn the sinner lest the watchman's own soul be damned. Attendant upon that warning was the reasoning that national sins, mirroring those of the Israelites, had brought about this particular judgment, and that only repentance on the part of both the people and their leaders would alleviate the nation's woes.

³ A selection of studies about this subject include Alessandro Barbero, *The Day of the Barbarians: The Battle that Led to the Fall of the Roman Empire*, trans. John Cullen (New York: Walker & Company, 2005); Patrick J. Geary, *Before France and Germany: The Creation and Transformation of the Merovingian World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Walter Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006); Richard Hodges and David Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne & The Origins of Europe: Archeology and the Pirenne Thesis* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Peter Heather, *Empires and Barbarians: the Fall of Rome and the Birth of Europe* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Julia M.H. Smith, *Europe After Rome: A New Cultural History 500-1000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Peter S. Wells, *Barbarians to Angels: The Dark Ages Reconsidered* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008); Chris Wickham, *Framing the Early Middle Ages: Europe and the Mediterranean, 400-800* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁴ In addition to the texts above, see Geoffrey Ashe, *The Discovery of King Arthur* (London: Guild Publishing, 1985).

⁵ St. Augustine's *City of God* is a famous reaction to the pagan claim that Christianization had led to the burning of Rome by Goths in 410.

The following brief outline of Ezekiel makes clear its relevance to the medieval reader. After receiving his commission and God's ultimatum in the second and third chapter, Ezekiel proceeds to dramatize the coming judgment of Israel at the hands of foreign invaders whose purpose is to punish Israel's idolatry and other sins.⁶ After further elucidating the destruction of the Hebrews, Ezekiel proceeds to chastise great men and false teachers before turning his gaze abroad. Not only Israel, but foreign nations as well have sinned mightily and will suffer God's wrath—through destruction and foreign invasion.⁷ Thereafter, Ezekiel revisits the watchman's duties and again reminds Israel of its sins, but also promises redemption and everlasting peace.

Given the prevalence of Ezekiel in Anglo-Saxon homilies, it is surprising that a dedicated study of its influence in Anglo-Saxon penitential literature has not been yet conducted. The Old Testament in general was greatly loved by the Anglo-Saxons, informing and inspiring a third of their poetry, such as extravagantly embellished translations of Old Testament books like *Exodus* and *Judith*, or literature like *Beowulf*; the Bible even supplied the elements for rude jokes.⁸ Perhaps most significant is the parallel that may be seen when one compares the ancient Hebrews (God-fearing invaders of Canaan who were themselves eventually attacked as punishment for their sins) to the Anglo-Saxons (invaders—later God-fearing—who were themselves eventually attacked by Vikings).⁹ The Anglo-Saxons themselves drew this parallel, and thus stories lifted from the Old Testament could take on deep meaning. In the case of Lot's rescue from captivity by Abraham, for instance, the Anglo-Saxon author of the poem *Genesis A*

⁶ Ezekiel 4-8.

⁷ Ezekiel 11-13, 21, 25-32.

⁸ Malcolm Godden, "Biblical Literature: The Old Testament" in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, ed. Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991): 206-226, at 206-207.

⁹ Godden, "Biblical Literature: The Old Testament," 207-208.

embellishes the narrative in keeping with dramatic battlefield epics, alerting his listeners to the truth that he who fights while in God's good graces will overcome his foes.¹⁰ In a more ecclesiastical usage, commentators had much to say regarding Old Testament prophets, Wulfstan citing Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel while alluding to God's wrath and barbarian invasion in his homilies.¹¹ With this likeness to the martial—and frequently chastised—Hebrews in mind, one might expect to find Ezekiel's dire warning frequently echoed by conscientious Anglo-Saxon authors, and therefore a useful subject of scholarly study.

Thus far, however, it appears that Ezekiel's main place in current Anglo-Saxon scholarship is that of placeholder in discussions about the Anglo-Saxon love of Old Testament Scripture—seldom even meriting a place in the index—or as an entry in catalogues of Anglo-Saxon scriptural manuscripts.¹² References to Ezekiel are, of course, to be found in modern anthology collections of Old English texts and editions of the original texts themselves, but the prophet is rarely pointed out for individual scrutiny.¹³ Other modern sources draw upon Anglo-Saxon uses of Ezekiel for purposes of their own, and in these cases the contexts for its use do not

¹⁰ Godden, "Biblical Literature: The Old Testament," 209-210; "Genesis A" in *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, trans. R.K. Gordon (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1926), 95-99, at 99: "then he [Abraham], the prudent man, the son of Terah, spoke in words to his chiefs—there was great need for them to make a show of battle, of stern combat, fiercely on two sides upon the foe—he said that the holy eternal Lord could easily grant them success in the struggle [...] Abraham gave battle as ransom for his nephew, in no wise twisted gold; he slew and slaughtered the foe in flight; the Lord of heaven struck to aid him."

¹¹ Godden, "Biblical Literature: The Old Testament," 223.

¹² Godden, "Biblical Literature: The Old Testament," 223; Rosamond McKitterick, "Exchanges between the British Isles and the Continent, c. 450 – c. 900," in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, ed. Richard Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011): 311-337, at 322.

¹³ For an example of Ezekiel surfacing within an anthology, see Aelfric, "Old English Preface to his First Series of *Catholic Homilies*" in *Old and Middle English: c.890-c.1450, An Anthology*, 3rd ed. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010): 129-133, at 133.

allow for an examination of Ezekiel's penitential interpretation of invasion.¹⁴ Insofar as penitentials are explicitly concerned, Allen J. Frantzen has produced excellent work on the evolution of Anglo-Saxon penance, yet despite the prevalence of Ezekiel in penitential and homiletic literature, Frantzen is almost totally silent regarding the prophet.¹⁵ Levi Roach moves a step closer when he directly addresses the Anglo-Saxons' penitential interpretation of foreign invasion, arguing that the charters of Anglo-Saxon kings function as penitential works designed to right past wrongs and save the kingdom from disaster at the hands of invaders, with King Aethelred at one point even admitting to wrong doing; however, Ezekiel appears only once, and merely as a source of penitential language rather than harbinger of invasion.¹⁶

Mayke de Jong's *The Penitential State* brings Ezekiel to the fore, arguing that it was a controlling text for the Carolingians' formulation of *correctio*, though her use of Ezekiel remains strictly within the bounds of Carolingian religio-political theory, focusing upon the court culture that facilitated the infamous deposition and humiliation of Louis the Pious at Soissons in 833. Here the focus is largely upon the emperor and his penance, rather than a national focus with one eye towards the realm's borders.¹⁷ Given these observations, this thesis operates on the understanding that while some published research addressed penance, invasion, and the

¹⁴ Victoria Thompson, "The Pastoral Contract in Late Anglo-Saxon England: Priest and Parishioner in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Laud Miscellaneous 482" in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, edited by Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005): 106-220, at 111.

¹⁵ Allen J. Frantzen, "The Significance of the Fankish Penitentials," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 30 no.4 (October, 1979): 409-423; *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1983).

¹⁶ Levi Roach, "Apocalypse and Atonement in the Politics of Æthelredian England," *English Studies* (Routledge, 2014): 1-25, at 5.

¹⁷ Courtney M. Booker does the same, though to a lesser degree in his *Past Convictions: The Penance of Louis the Pious and the Decline of the Carolinians* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 140-144.

interactions between the same, none sufficiently examine Ezekiel's hand in informing Anglo-Saxon authors of their nation's extreme danger.

Thus, I argue that Ezekiel is a controlling text for Anglo-Saxon interpretations of barbarian invasion. My first chapter outlines Gildas' introduction of Ezekiel to the insular tradition of invasion. From there it examines the scholarly connections between Gildas and the Irish missionary Columbanus, who in AD 590 traveled to mainland Europe and introduced Irish monasticism to the upper crust of Frankish society, whose authors applied Ezekiel to their writings on penance and their understanding of personal responsibility for national woes. Within the framework of their formulation of political piety (*correctio*), Carolingian scholars redefined Gildas' teaching as an act of *ministerium*, or vigilance towards those within one's circle of influence. These writings benefited also from Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*. In this new, composite environment, the negligence that was so abhorrent to Ezekiel became a public concern—even enabling rebellious Carolingian princes to temporarily depose their royal father, Louis the Pious, in 833.

Chapter 2 sees Gildas' message (now redefined as *ministerium*) codified at Rheims and then reintroduced to England by Grimbold of St. Bertins, the protégé of the archbishop of Rheims. Gildas' teachings returned to England at a time when they were most needed: during the Danish wars. It was possibly with Gregory in mind that Grimbold of St. Bertin's traveled to England in the 800s to help king Alfred restore English learning, where the king's circle of scholars produced an Old English translation of *Pastoral Care*—its Latin counterpart already popular in Britain—and a copy of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, both texts rich in penitential themes and Ezekiel-esque language, indicating a conscious appreciation for Ezekiel's warnings. Thus, throughout this first chapter elements of Ezekiel appear at different times under

different authors, but always with the veiled threat of invasion as due punishment for misdeeds. Intellectuals carried their ideas with them wherever they went, and as such it should come as no surprise that these ideas changed hands and reappeared when and where they were needed most.

Where Chapter 1 and Chapter 2 follow the book of Ezekiel in a journey from pre-Saxon Britain, to Ireland, to Frankia, and back to Anglo-Saxon England, Chapter 3 takes a more episodic approach. The Carolingian application of Ezekiel having been introduced to the island, the chapter identifies several key texts, collectively representative of the religious teaching and preaching of the century following Alfred's victory up to the eventual submission of the English to Danish rule. At this time Ezekiel was very much a part of Anglo-Saxon homiletic culture. In the *Blickling Homilies* Ezekiel is tapped for admonition of the clergy, urging them to teach correctly at the risk of hellfire, but mention of invasion is noticeably absent. This brief interbellum usage begins to morph back into wartime use with the return of the Vikings in the late-tenth and early-eleventh centuries. England's old affinity with the prophet's more apocalyptic message reappears in full force in Aelfric's *Catholic Homilies* and *Lives of Saints*, while Archbishop Wulfstan's aggressive application of Ezekiel and a specific mention of Gildas in his the *Sermo Lupi ad Angulos* brings the narrative full circle.

What this thesis ultimately aims to achieve is to shed light on a source-text for analyzing Anglo-Saxon worldviews. Having identified no other scholarship that explicitly points to a connection between Anglo-Saxon penitential literature and the prophecies of Ezekiel, I hope to open a new avenue of study whereby scholars may examine what the Anglo-Saxons wrote and why. What I have found is clear evidence that Anglo-Saxons not only read Ezekiel, but actively applied his teachings to their worldview, infusing into their writings a sense of obligation to communicate to their readers the dread danger of God's wrath, an act by which the author might

save his own soul.

Chapter 1: “Sins of Israel: Ezekiel’s Watchman in the British Isles and Frankia”

In 886 Archbishop Fulco of Rheims sat down to pen a letter to King Alfred, the ruler of war-torn Wessex in southern Britain, who had dispatched men to the Continent in search of scholars to restore English learning.¹⁸ As a part of his delegation to Fulco, Alfred sent dogs as goodwill presents, each trained to chase away predatory wolves. To this, the archbishop remarked in his reply that the English desired and had need of spiritual dogs—teachers and preachers—to scare away “savage wolves of the impure spirits who threaten to devour our souls.”¹⁹ His mention of wolves was very apt, given the successful conclusion of the long wars between the English and the Danes, the latter having managed to subdue all of Alfred’s neighbors—Essex, Kent, Northumbria, and Mercia—even driving the West Saxon king into temporary exile during their foray into Wessex. The terrific struggle in the physical world provided a perfect parallel to that of the spiritual. With this in mind, and with apparent reluctance, Fulco sent to Alfred one of his associates, Grimbold of St. Bertin’s in St. Omer, with the expectation that the monk would be treated properly and that the “canonical decrees and ecclesiastical injunctions” as taught at

¹⁸ For criticism of Alfred’s political rhetoric in Gregory’s *Pastoral Care*, see note 179 below.

¹⁹ “The letter of Fulco, Archbishop of Rheims, to King Alfred,” in *Alfred the Great: Asser’s Life of King Alfred and other Contemporary Sources*, ed. and trans. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 184-185; Due to the wolf’s legendary rapaciousness, it came to represent Satan and his servants, while, true to biblical imagery, God’s faithful were likened to sheep in need of protection either from shepherds or dogs. For an analysis of the perception of wolves in Carolingian society—in particular a set of laws whereby Charlemagne effectively declared war on all wolf-kind—see Paul Edward Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 63-66. For references to predatory wolves in the Bible, see Ecclesiastes 13:21 (wolves as dissimilar to the godly), Ezekiel 22:27 and Zephaniah 3:3 (as a description for corrupt and rapacious state officials), Jeremiah 5:6 and Habakkuk 1:8-9 (as punishment for wickedness), John 10:11-13 (on the dangers of unreliable shepherds), and Matthew 7:15 and Acts 20:29-30 (warning against false teachers, likened to wolves).

Rheims would be preserved in England.²⁰

This vignette nicely sums up the struggle and worldview of the ninth-century Anglo-Saxons. Having been on the receiving end of Viking attacks for nearly a century, the English would have readily appreciated the reference to wolves; indeed, commentators such as Asser and Aelfric frequently likened the Vikings to feral predators.²¹ It did not hurt that Viking tactics lent themselves readily to comparison with a wolf in the sheepfold, such as when the men of Kent in 864 offered the raiders money in exchange for peace, only to see the truce broken and their lands ravaged for greater gain.²² In the spiritual sense too, Alfred believed that England was in desperate need of revival, in large part thanks to the same invaders, and so he required men of learning to kick-start the program of lay education he envisioned for his countrymen.²³ Naturally, a good deal of church learning would cross the Channel with the acquired scholars, and thus it is significant that Alfred acquired Grimbold in particular. As a monk of Rheims and worthy of Fulk's praise, Grimbold was likely steeped in the penitential teachings of Ezekiel, the Old Testament prophet whose teachings were much respected in Frankia, and as such he would have

²⁰ "The letter of Fulco, Archbishop of Rheims, to King Alfred," 185-186.

²¹ Asser, *Life of King Alfred in Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources*, trans. Simon Keynes, Michael Lapidge (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), 20, 53, 57: Asser's text was composed in 893, and the only surviving copy, Cotton Otho A.xii, was dated to 1000 before being lost to fire in 1731; Aelfric, "Passion of Edmund," in *Old and Middle English*, ed. Treharne, 147; Kevin Crossley-Holland, trans. *The Battle of Maldon and Other Old English Poems*, Bruce Mitchell ed. (London: MacMillan, 1996), 32. Cf. Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's Version of the Consolation of Boethius: Done into Modern English, With an Introduction*, trans. Walter John Sedgefield (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), 132: "If thou observe that a man is greedy and a robber, thou shalt not call him man, but wolf; and the fierce and froward thou shalt call hound, not man. The false and crafty thou shalt call fox, not man; him that is beyond measure savage and wrathful and over-passionate, thou shalt name lion, not man."

²² Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 20: Here Asser's comparison is to foxes, though I think the likening to the "wolfish" description in Maldon an equally fitting metaphor.

²³ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, trans. Henry Sweet (London: Pub. for the Early English Text Society, by N. Trübner & Co, 1871), 4.

brought this aspect of learning into his relationship with Alfred. On account of Grimbald's expertise, Alfred's choice of translations—especially Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*—are of great interest from the perspective of English learning and reform. This chapter explores the background of Ezekiel in England, its adoption by the Irish, and adaptation by the Franks, arguing that after this literary odyssey it returned to England as fully-fledged Carolingian *ministerium*, there to be reintroduced into Anglo-Saxon literature by King Alfred of Wessex. A spiritually sensitive man, Alfred was keenly aware of the weight of sin and ignorance, and greatly desired to free his countrymen from the perceived instruments of God's wrath: the Danish Vikings.²⁴ The seaborne raiders had long plagued the shores of Christendom and it was thought by some that such oppression was the hand of the Almighty acting out His vengeance upon sinful followers. To understand fully the circumstances that led to the adoption of a Carolingianized interpretation of Ezekiel into Alfredian scholarship, I would like to explore the origins of Viking activity in England and the parallel nature of the original Saxon invasions that first inspired penitential reaction in the British church.

Nearly one hundred years before Fulk wrote his letter to Alfred, the beast-headed longships of the Danes came roaring from out of the north to scourge the English through raids, wars, and conquest. The first of their ships appeared off of Dorchester around 789, where the Viking passengers slew the reeve Beaduheard and the men with him when they, thinking the

²⁴ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 4; Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 74, 76: According to Asser, young Alfred was certainly one to feel the pang of sin. More pains than just sin afflicted him, though, as he was also suffering from a mysterious malady that no doctor could successfully diagnose. This had ostensibly come about as a result of the young man's piety, when he, suffering from a more severe outward illness, had beseeched God to take away that which was external and instead subdue his carnal desires with a less severe—and hidden—thorn. That this new illness manifested itself on his wedding day, “in the presence of the entire gathering,” cannot have been ideal to his desires, but the young prince did not allow such mundane matters to distract from his duties.

strangers to be traders, went riding to the shore to direct the ships to proper harbor.²⁵ Four years later “dire portents” burned the Northumbrian skies as the air was lit by lightning and the people watched as flaming dragons beat their wings in air churned by whirlwinds, after which a famine struck the land and the Vikings came to Lindisfarne and destroyed the church.²⁶

In 794 there was a slight reprieve when a Viking raid upon Jarrow resulted in the death of their chief and the destruction of several ships, whose crews were left to the doubtful mercy of the locals waiting upon the shore. But the heavens were unrelenting, for in the succeeding thirty years eclipses darkened the skies by night and day, the final a Christmas eve of 829, as penances were issued across the Channel in Frankia, and Emperor Louis of the Carolingians scapegoated several chief officers in the wake of heathen victories upon every border of his realm.²⁷ Men like Agobard of Lyons believed that the weather was a domain wherein God might violently demonstrate His displeasure, and between the heavens and the heathen it must have appeared to onlookers as though the Divine was very angry indeed.²⁸ As Viking raids intensified through the latter-eighth and early-ninth centuries, the Anglo-Saxons would not have been ignorant of the distinct possibility that God was demanding penance. Such opinion was part of a long tradition of apocalyptic imagery from both sides of the Channel, with precedents in Great Britain originating with the Anglo-Saxons’ own invasion of the island in the sixth century. The sufferings of the Britons and the influx of pagan belief sparked serious soul-searching and

²⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* F, in *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, trans. and ed. M.J. Swanton (New York: Routledge, 1996), 55; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, Revised translation, trans. and ed. Dorothy Whitelock (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1961), 35, n.5.

²⁶ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, 55, 57.

²⁷ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, 57-60; Mayke de Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 151.

²⁸ Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, 180, 182.

religious reform. It was in this context of calamity and intense inner-scrutiny that penitential practice developed in the British Isles, a practice that looked to Ezekiel for justification.

Ezekiel and the History of Hiberno-British Penance

The penitential reading of Ezekiel appeared in the age before total Saxon domination of England, when the lands and peoples of Britain were subjected to harsh criticism by the author Gildas, a respected leader of the burgeoning insular monastic movement.²⁹ Around AD 540, seeing the sins and foolishness of the people that had since caused the downfall of the British kingdoms, Gildas set about admonishing his contemporaries through his *Ruin of Britain*.³⁰ In so doing, Gildas was operating from an “Old Testament conception of a prophet,” one not so much foretelling the future, but living totally in the present and warning his people of their sins based upon his own spiritual understanding of divine judgment.³¹ In Gildas’ mind, the prophecies of the Old Testament could be as equally fulfilled in the present Britain as in ancient Israel.³² The Preface to Gildas’ work details the rationale behind his writing, how when he realized the danger his people faced, he still remained silent on account of his own ignorance—ignorance apparently remedied over the ensuing decade of careful study, at the end of which he was a potent scholar

²⁹ Michael W. Herren, “Gildas and Early British Monasticism,” in *Britain 400-600: Language and History*, ed. Alfred Bammesberger and Alfred Wollmann (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1990): 78.

³⁰ Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, in *The Ruin of Britain and Other Works*, ed. & trans. Michael Winterbottom, Arthurian Period Sources (London: Phillimore, 1978), 1: the preface to Gildas’ work is “the only surviving narrative history of fifth century Britain,” and his whole work was likely produced around AD 540; for the dating of Gildas’ *De excidio*: c.530-545, or “the traditional date c. 540,” see T.M. Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons 350-1064* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 218.

³¹ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 204; cf. Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 37.3.

³² Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 204-205; cf. Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 24.2, 93.4.

and authority on Scripture.³³ Once his studies were completed, Gildas fearlessly set about castigating his fellows and superiors alike.³⁴

Gildas looks to the prophet Ezekiel for justification of his denunciation of sin, lifting the very words from the thirty-third chapter:

So, son of man, I have set you as a watchman for the house of Israel. You will hear the word from my mouth when I say to the sinner: You will die the death. If you do not speak, so that the wicked man can turn from his way, the wicked man will die for his wickedness: but I shall demand recompense from your hand for his blood.³⁵

Of equal importance, Gildas stresses the necessity for repentance as the remedy for divine displeasure. Vortipor, the so-called “tyrant of the Demetae” and an apparently stunning example of flagrant disregard for the ordinances of piety, receives from Gildas a brutal castigation, but one tinged with a promise: that “now is the acceptable time, the day of salvation shines on the faces of the penitent [...] The contrite heart that humbles itself in fear of him is never rejected by Christ.”³⁶ Moreover, Gildas defends the rights of the clergy to act as God’s instruments of admonition and judgment by adding, in his address to another offender, that the clergy are near at hand, and they “are the teeth of an appalling lioness that will one day break your bones.”³⁷ This is a faithful recreation of Ezekiel’s philosophy of the “watchman” compelled to stand guard and

³³ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 207.

³⁴ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 206; Cf. Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 26.1.

³⁵ Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 36.4-6, 91.3: “Et tu, fili hominis, speculatorem te dedi domui Israel et audies ex ore meo verbum, cum dicam peccatori: morte morieris, et non loqueris, ut avertat se a via sua impius, et ipse iniquus in iniquitate sua morietur, sanguinem autem eius de manu tua requiram.” C.f. Ez. 33:7-8.

³⁶ Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 31.2: “quia nunc tempus acceptabile et dies salutis vultibus paenitentium lucet [...] Cor siquidem contritum et humiliatum timore eius nusquam Christus spernit.”

³⁷ Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 32.2: “vice immanis leaenae dentium ossa tua quandoque fracturae.”

to alert the evildoer (thus saving his own life in the sight of God), who then might find mercy through repentance.

Following his death, Gildas' work was still read by scholars in the British Isles, some of them ironically Anglo-Saxon; Aldhelm of Malmesbury quotes Gildas in his prose *De virginitate*, and Bede the Northumbrian does likewise in his works *De temporum ratione*, *De orthographia*, and the famous *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*.³⁸ Nor was Gildas' influence confined to Britain. His style and method are reflected in Cumman's letter to the scholars Segene and Beccan, written c.633, which was apparently modeled off Gildas' Preface to the *Ruin of Britain*.³⁹ While Cumman's work differs from that of Gildas in some minor respects, it demonstrates a link between Gildas and the *Collectio Canonum Hibernensis*, an Irish text compiled in the first quarter of the eighth century that used the same methods in its structure as those used by Gildas, as well as the Briton's daring application of scriptural contexts to contemporary society, looking to "scriptural *exempla* and *testimonia* as the two principle categories of support for the rules it propounded."⁴⁰ In addition, a manuscript inventory from Fulda, c.800 (Basle, UB, F.III. 15a, fos. 17v-18r) lists the Pseudo-Isidore, *De ordine creaturarum*, a text now "known to be of seventh-century Hiberno-Latin composition" and apparently combined with Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate*.⁴¹ The mere fact that Fulda's library had a copy of this Irish text is of immense interest, as it reinforces the ties of mainland Europe with Ireland and Irish scholarship; and thus the mainland connection with Gildas, especially when considering the impact of Gildas' works upon the person of St. Columbanus, the Irish

³⁸ Michael Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 181, 208-209.

³⁹ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 207-209.

⁴⁰ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 207-209.

⁴¹ Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 151-153.

missionary to the Continent.

Born sometime around 550, Columbanus joined the community of Bangor, only a few miles distant from Movilla, the home of Vinniau (also known as St. Findbarr), the student of Gildas.⁴² That Columbanus studied Gildas' teachings may be shown in his letter to Pope Boniface IV, which draws upon the *Ruin of Britain* and Gildas' authority, and in the same place uses Gildas as a model for his own style.⁴³ Added to Cummian's letters and *De ordine creaturarum*, it is clear that Gildas' works were welcomed in Ireland and that his authority in such matters was greatly respected across the British Isles.⁴⁴

With this appreciation for Gildas firmly in mind, in 590 (the same year that Gregory the Great was elected pope) Columbanus travelled with a few followers into self-imposed exile to establish an Irish-style monastery in Gaul.⁴⁵ In fact, Columbanus founded several, Luxeuil most notable among them, and even produced a *Rule* for their administration.⁴⁶ What the Irishman contributed was not necessarily new, but constituted a significant shift in the importance of monasticism, as kings and nobles patronized and contributed to monastic foundations, and granted charters of exemption from authorities outside the monasteries, in exchange for prayers and petitions.⁴⁷ This resulted in acceptance among the elites of Frankish society, as religious houses flourished and the brothers' skills as well as prayers were sought out for administrative

⁴² Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200-1000* 2nd Ed.

(Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 246; cf. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland*, 291-3, n.45.

⁴³ Michael Winterbottom, "Columbanus and Gildas," *Vigiliae Christianae* 30, no.4 (December 1976): 311-313; Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 209.

⁴⁴ Charles-Edwards, *Wales and the Britons*, 209.

⁴⁵ F.L. Cross, *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 380, 706.

⁴⁶ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751* (New York: Longman, 1994), 185, 188.

⁴⁷ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 192-194.

purposes.⁴⁸ In addition to Columbanus' influence upon those around him, he also begot spiritual descendants, as a number of men taught by the Irishman went on to found monasteries of their own.⁴⁹ With such demand among the laity, church ideologies—Hiberno-British ideologies—would have mingled with and permeated this pre-Carolingian Frankish society. If it is indeed true that Gildas' name carried weight among even continentals, then his penitential appreciation for biblical condemnation, especially Ezekiel's, would have entered into continental society, or at least provided reinforcement for ideals already established there. Nor was Ireland the only source for such knowledge; Bede's *De temporum ratione* was in the library at St. Bertin's by the 9th century as was a manuscript of his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*; Fulda had likewise acquired 8th century copies of these texts, while another *Historia ecclesiastica* could be found in the Abbey of Saint-Vaast in Arras by the 11th century.⁵⁰ *De temporum ratione* was also introduced to Saint Denis and Rhiems by the 9th century.⁵¹ Even the library at Aachen, Charlemagne's court, had acquired *Historia ecclesiastica* by the 8th century.⁵² Any of these might have introduced Gildas to their continental readers.

Yet even if his name were by then lost to all but a few scholars, Gildas' rhetoric at least was firmly rooted in his readers' minds, and missionaries like Columbanus would have been eager to pass along the knowledge that years of strenuous study and labor had earned. Yet more was to come from Britain: penitential practice was being shaped and molded along new courses while penitentials, handbooks for administering penance, were being swiftly adapted from their

⁴⁸ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 254.

⁴⁹ Ian Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 185-186.

⁵⁰ Helmut Gneuss and Michael Lapidge, *Bibliography of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: A Bibliographical Handlist of Manuscripts and Manuscript Fragments Written or Owned in England Up To 1100* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 397, 576, 600, 614, 620.

⁵¹ Gneuss and Lapidge, *Bibliography of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 312, 397.

⁵² Gneuss and Lapidge, *Bibliography of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 38.

Irish roots to suit an English audience.⁵³ When these finally reached Frankia during the Carolingian reform movement, they added a further insular impact to the Frankish church, and helped to further define continental uses of Ezekiel.

Just as in Ireland, the influence of monasticism and penance was being felt in early Anglo-Saxon Britain. Indeed, in the years before and after Gildas' writing the country was likely a hotbed of fierce spiritual activity. As Anglo-Saxon influence spread, Britons found themselves tempted by the paganism of their victorious neighbors and overlords, an apostasy that lent an edge to the warnings in *De excidio*.⁵⁴ In their tenuous situation, the spiritual leaders of Britain and Ireland tackled sin "with unaccustomed rigor" by creating a system of tariffed penance whereby each sin was met and atoned for through "private confession and fixed penalties according to the seriousness of the offence."⁵⁵ In Ireland, this was a direct reflection of a culture "where honor and insult were basic notions around which social relations revolved" and where wrongs were customarily made right through some act of satisfaction.⁵⁶ In the spiritual realm, the all-encompassing forgiveness of God was freely available for the penitent who was truly contrite and willing to undergo purgation, no matter the severity of sin.⁵⁷ What was remarkable about this new form of penance was its communal nature, where the smallest of sins of even ordinary laymen could be met and dealt with in a categorical manner. This strict accounting resulted in the

⁵³ See Chapter 3, Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*.

⁵⁴ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 242.

⁵⁵ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 242; Marilyn Dunn, "Asceticism and Monasticism II: Western" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 2: Constantine to c.600*, ed. Augustine Casiday and Frederick W. Norris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 669-690, at 685.

⁵⁶ Rob Meens, "Remedies for Sins" in *The Cambridge History of Christianity Volume 3: Early Medieval Christianities, c.600–c.1100*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 399-415, at 404.

⁵⁷ Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain*, 31.2; Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's Version of the Consolation of Boethius*, 144; Meens, "Remedies for Sins," 405.

creation of penitentials, the handbooks carried by priests for use in careful and effective questioning, chastisement, and the administration of penances.

This revitalized piety had a long reach. Columbanus brought the Irish practice of private confession and penance with him to the Continent, where it was accepted into a penitential system that was likely already evolving from the strictly once-in-a-lifetime public penance into a private matter.⁵⁸ Such ideas would have likely been perpetuated by Columbanus' own *Rule*—which came to influence those of several convents, such as Faremoutiers and Besancon, and Chamalieres—and was instrumental in the spread of the *Rule of Saint Benedict*, with which it was often combined. At Faremoutiers (which was founded in part by Columbanus' successor, Eustasius), Columbanus' *Rule* was mined for that of Waldebert's (himself the successor to Eustasius).⁵⁹ There the nuns confessed thrice daily, thus extending the collective emphasis from Ireland to Francia.⁶⁰

In the case of English penance, the practice had become more organized with the arrival of Theodore of Tarsus, “the author of the first and possibly most influential English Penitential.”⁶¹ Theodore came to Canterbury in 669 at the behest of the pope and began a program of reorganization and centralization of the English church, his penitential a product of this effort—a reorganization of existing Irish penitential texts expanded to meet the needs of not

⁵⁸ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 191.

⁵⁹ Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms 450-751*, 188, 191.

⁶⁰ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 251-252.

⁶¹ Erika Nagy Lert, “Fault in the Law: The Influence of the Penitentials on the Anglo-Saxon Legal System”

Catholic Lawyer 31 (1987-1988): 264-276, at 267; Meens, “Remedies for Sins,” 406.

Apparently, Irish modes of penance had so influenced Anglo-Saxon England that upon Theodore's arrival public penance was, to all appearances, non-existent.

just monastic communities, but of English Christian society.⁶² However, Theodore's penitential was second to the king's authority, as it expected secular crimes to be addressed by the king's judgment first, then submitted to episcopal authority for penance.⁶³ This being the case, laws in pre-Conquest England developed in an environment of mingling cultures and church influence, one in which the kings were anxious to "[establish] political unity and stability" and thus willing to "[accommodate] the increasing influence of the Christian Church."⁶⁴ In this way was penance spread and eventually introduced into secular legislation.

Penance, as it developed in England, became a dichotomy between medicinal and punitive penance, the former intended to help the penitent to recover, the latter to punish him; punitive was also given more emphasis.⁶⁵ In addition, penance became standard procedure in pastoral care, as shown by the eighth-century Council of Clovesho, where it was decreed that priests be educated in the administration of penance, often associated with communion, and where vicarious penances, whether by paid substitution or by force, were denounced.⁶⁶ Indeed, penance took on diverse forms, such as surrogate penance, penance "commuted, redeemed by money, substituted or delegated," a flexible system allowing "the priest [...] to take into account the age, status, health, condition or occupation of the penitent."⁶⁷ Public penance in particular "was used most extensively during the ninth and tenth centuries" and "was required for sins of a particularly heinous nature, many of which were also punishable by law."⁶⁸ In many cases, such

⁶² Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 62-64, 65-67.

⁶³ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 76.

⁶⁴ Lert, "Fault in the Law," 265.

⁶⁵ Lert, "Fault in the Law," 267.

⁶⁶ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 81.

⁶⁷ Lert, "Fault in the Law," 268.

⁶⁸ Lert, "Fault in the Law," 268; Meens, "Remedies for Sins," 408: Meens considers the use of public penance an "invention of tradition," meaning that "Carolingian bishops tried to

high-profile sins were considered invitation for national disaster—for bystanders to ignore them was unthinkable.⁶⁹

In the pre-Conquest era, the church and government became mutually interdependent regarding crime, punishment, and penance, as church rulings on penance incorporated state concerns and compensation, while the state began issuing penances in its rulings.⁷⁰ Secular law was based upon societal norms and precedent and was further broken down into crimes of absolute liability, regardless of intent, and liability based upon fault, or the level of intention behind the crime. By contrast, “Church law was based on the Bible, on natural law, on councils and on local church authorities,” a breach of which resulted in sin and severance from God’s kingdom. Once blending of church and state commenced, penances were issued for breach of secular laws, taking into account all their complexities, such as the secular medium of *wergild*.⁷¹ The penitentials also levied harsher punishments where the secular laws were more lenient.⁷² This led to distinct ecclesiastical, semi-ecclesiastical, and secular crimes, for which the “secular

reconstruct what they thought was the ancient Christian way of handling penitents” and “introduced the distinction of public versus secret in the field of penance, arguing that sins that had remained secret could be atoned for in a secret way, while sins of a public nature needed correction under episcopal control through the ritual of public penance. Only at this point did it seem that people became aware of the difference from the ancient rite of public penance as it was described in canon law collections or sacramentaries, a difference which, for example, Boniface and Pope Zachary (741-52) had not been aware of, when discussing the possibility of reinstating a penitent priest.”

⁶⁹ See Louis the Pious below; also, recall the emphasis of Ezekiel—that great sin invites invasion.

⁷⁰ Lert, “Fault in the Law,” 270.

⁷¹ Lert, “Fault in the Law,” 271-272; Mark G. Thomas, Michael P. H. Stumpf and Heinrich Härke, “Evidence for an Apartheid-Like Social Structure in Early Anglo-Saxon England,” *Proceedings: Biological Sciences*, 273 no.1601 (Oct. 22, 2006): 2651-2657, at 2665: *wergild* is here described as “the ‘blood money’ payable to the family of any victim of killing in order to prevent a blood feud [and was] graded according to the social and ethnic status of the victim.” *Wergild* was frequently lower for Welshmen versus Anglo-Saxons, for example.

⁷² Lert, “Fault in the Law,” 272-273.

laws often required the wrongdoer to perform penance.”⁷³ This mutual interdependence increased in the years following Alfred’s reign, until the bishop was required to “witness that an oathbreaker had performed the penance assigned to him by his confessor.”⁷⁴

The traditions of English and Irish penitential literature were themselves influential in ninth-century Carolingian Francia, though the initial response by Archbishop Theodulf of Orléans was less than enthusiastic. Theodulf’s “celebrated contempt for the Irish scholars in Charlemagne’s court” may have colored his views of the penitentials, as he considered them “un-Roman” and instead offered his own penitential around 800, one that was “pure structure” but woefully inadequate compared to its inspirations.⁷⁵ This deficiency was remedied c.830 by Bishop Halitgar of Cambrai, who produced a handbook of his own for Archbishop Ebbo of Rheims. This became the “ultimate, and the only, genuinely Frankish penitential,” and it solidified the purpose of the penitential and codified the liturgical process of hearing confession and administering penance.⁷⁶ Ebbo’s interest in penitentials indicates a connection between Rheims and Hiberno-English thought, in an environment that had long been influenced by the mindset of Columbanus. Thus, Ezekiel’s penitential influence in Frankia came about in part through various influences from the British Isles. The British reaction to pagan invasion sparked a sort of reformation within the insular churches, whereby self-conscious attempts to live rightly and in conformity with God’s desires influenced not only monasticism but also legal and social

⁷³ Lert, “Fault in the Law,” 273-274.

⁷⁴ Lert, “Fault in the Law,” 274-275.

⁷⁵ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 102-103.

⁷⁶ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 104-106; Courtney M. Booker, *Past Convictions*, 143: It is significant that this process was carried out at the behest of Archbishop Ebbo, as he played a key role in the admonition of Louis the Pious in 833 (see below). What is more, Hincmar of Rheims was a student of Ambros’ letters to Theodosius, and Ebbo might have been as well, scholarship that would have greatly influenced their views of *ministerium* and penitential practice.

practices as well. From there, and at various times, these influences—from Gildas to the later English penitentials—reached the Continent where they were adopted and synthesized to create a new vision of religious expression. Then the process came full circle: when again needed, the penitential reading of Ezekiel, having been codified at Rheims, was reintroduced to England by Grimbald, the “missionary” from Archbishop Fulk.

Correctio, Ministerium, and Negligentia

Among Rheims’ canonical decrees that were derivative of Ezekiel was the teaching of *ministerium*, a component of *correctio*, the religious-political concept that dominated Charlemagne’s empire. *Correctio* may be variously defined, as “an essential component of an overall strategy of control [through] the acquisition of knowledge and the exercise of power,” or as “correcting, shaping up, getting things in order again,” or simply “reform.”⁷⁷ What these definitions share is the reinforcement of commonly-held beliefs through established and approved religious truths. There was a great deal of anxiety about the “vernacular” Christianity widely practiced throughout Europe, wherein local visionaries and texts were upheld by the populace at the expense of “correct” texts.⁷⁸ For the Carolingians, correct Latin was crucial to correct Christianity, and to deviate into rustic forms of language and liturgy risked a bastardized religious expression. Thus, in an effort to secure the salvation of their subjects, Carolingian kings and religious leaders believed in reformation and the constant reminder that local Christianity

⁷⁷ Rosamond McKitterick, *Charlemagne: The Formation of a European Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 294; Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 439-440; De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 5.

⁷⁸ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 450-451.

“was not Christian at all.”⁷⁹ This was not mere puritanism, as “[o]ne of the main goals of *correctio* was the eradication of the kind of ‘iniquity’ that might cause offense to God and the community.”⁸⁰ It was understood that failure to do so would result in God’s displeasure and the advent of war and invasion (perfectly in keeping with Ezekiel’s warnings).⁸¹

This negative aspect of *correctio* was summed up in its corollary, *negligentia*, neglect of one’s duty. These sins of omission were grave offenses, for when men allowed correct practice to slide, sin “undermine[d] the correct worship of God.”⁸² Such sins were to be met and dealt with, by violence if need be.⁸³ This was not idle talk, for Ezekiel ordered men of authority to warn others to change their ways, with grim consequences reserved for those who neglected to perform this duty.⁸⁴ Indeed, the Carolingians took their cues from a past ecclesiastic, Bishop Ambrose of Milan, who in the fourth century challenged Emperor Theodosius over certain scandals that occurred during his reign.⁸⁵ Ambros, who apparently kept in good contact with his emperor, on two occasions chastised Theodosius—once for daring to offend God by rebuilding a synagogue that had been burned by a Christian mob, and again to admonish Theodosius for the role he played in a massacre at Thessalonica. In both letters, Ambros relied upon Ezekiel’s warning to all watchmen, both urging the emperor to repent and at the same time washing his own hands of any responsibility for the emperor’s damnation—adding for good measure, “Sin is

⁷⁹ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 449.

⁸⁰ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 121.

⁸¹ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 439-440.

⁸² De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 121.

⁸³ Dhuoda, *Handbook for William: A Carolingian Woman’s Counsel for Her Son*, trans. Carol Neel (Washington, D.C.: The University of America Press, 1991), 61.

⁸⁴ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 113-114.

⁸⁵ Booker, *Past Convictions*: 142-143: Booker goes on to note that while Ambros’ letters were largely unknown in the Middle Ages, they were read and quoted by Hincmar of Rheims, a figure of prominence in Carolingian society.

not washed away but by tears and penitence.”⁸⁶ His example had been followed by Pope Gregory in his *Pastoral Care*, which carefully stresses the necessity of correcting any and all of one’s flock. In ninth-century Frankia, this precedent was codified in *ministerium*. Laypeople also adhered to this doctrine, as demonstrated by Dhuoda, a noblewoman living in mid-ninth-century Frankish Septimania. Her husband, Bernard of Septimania, was one of Louis the Pious’ chief officers and upon that king’s death, was forced to accept the overlordship of Charles the Bald, whom Bernard had initially opposed. As a guarantee for good behavior, Charles took Bernard and Dhuoda’s sons as hostages, thus depriving the mother of her whole family, her powerful husband was often on the road fulfilling royal obligations (before his eventual execution).⁸⁷ Seeking to educate her boys from afar, between 841-843 the lonely mother composed a handbook on good behavior, in which she reflected Ezekiel’s message of godly vigilance: “a certain author says, ‘I sin with all sinners, if I do not correct them when I see them sinning’ [...] if you love justice and do not allow evil men to do evil deeds, you will be able to say confidently with the Psalmist, *I have hated the unjust, and have loved the law.*”⁸⁸ Vigilance was the duty of every good Christian, and it was in exercising this prerogative that a man discovered his *ministerium*.

In light of these tendencies, and having adapted the ministerial content of Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care*, the Carolingians developed the idea that all men of authority had a ministry and were answerable to God for their actions, from the emperor and the greater officers

⁸⁶ Ambros of Milan, Letter 40.2 in *St. Ambros of Milan, Letters*, trans. H. Walford (Oxford: James Parker and Co., 1881); Letter 51.3, 51.11.

⁸⁷ Dhuoda, *Handbook for William*, x-xi.

⁸⁸ Dhuoda, *Handbook for William*, ix, 59.

of the realm, down to the “retainers and local sub-office-holders referred to as *plebs*.”⁸⁹ In the case of a king, wrote Bishop Jonas of Orleans in 829, he was “specifically to govern the people of God, to rule with equity and justice, and to strive so that they may have peace and concord.”⁹⁰ These diverse political figures operated in an environment charged with religious significance, where the emperor and his sworn men “spoke the same kind of language and shared similar values,” and where men of all social strata were subject to admonition to renounce sin, each “markedly preoccupied with sin and salvation”—and by extension, penance and the constant reminder that laymen and churchmen alike “were accountable to God for guiding their people to salvation.”⁹¹ In the eyes of Charlemagne’s son, Louis the Pious, “kingship entailed sublime authority and heavy responsibility at the same time: the ruler was directly accountable to God.”⁹²

In this way, the admonition of Ezekiel, as initially used by Gildas, become a standard feature of Carolingian society, one that carried tremendous importance for men of any influence. Noble and plebian, all men were required to look out for their neighbor’s salvation, and to actively shepherd their neighbors towards God—the king especially—a role that Emperor Louis apparently embraced with no small enthusiasm, as shall be shown below. One wonders whether

⁸⁹ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 4; For a life as ministry, see Einhard, “The Life of Charles the Emperor” in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer*, trans. Thomas F.X. Noble (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 21-50: in Walahfrid Strabo’s prologue to Einhard’s *Vita Karoli* [at 21], he declares that “of all kings Charles was most eager to seek out wise men so that they could think deeply in full comfort and improve with every science the darkness—or, as I might say, the widespread blindness—of the kingdom committed to him by God and bring back to this barbarian realm the light up to then largely unknown, with God illuminating and watching.” In the *Vita*, Einhard emphasizes Charlemagne’s attention to the actions of those around him [at 43]: “He was especially concerned that everything that was done in the church be carried out with the greatest dignity, and he regularly warned the sacristans no to permit anything unseemly or dirty to be brought into the church or to remain there.”

⁹⁰ Quoted in Booker, *Past Convictions*, 229-230; cf. note 233 below.

⁹¹ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 4, 5, 6.

⁹² De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 37.

the emperor appreciated the irony that such opinion would lead to not one, but two public humiliations and his temporary downfall.

Louis the Pious and the Field of Lies

Before the reign of Louis, Frankia underwent a series of reforms by Charlemagne, who by all accounts came to the Frankish throne in 768 with an agenda. A king of diverse and divided peoples, he is portrayed in his biographies largely as a Solomon-like paragon of *correctio* in action.⁹³ In 789 Charlemagne issued the *Admonitio generalis*, which “articulated the king’s responsibility for the people of God and the need for everyone in the kingdom, and especially the secular and ecclesiastical elites, to work towards creating order and a polity worthy of salvation.”⁹⁴ Drawing upon biblical precedent, Charlemagne sought to reform his kingdom along Scriptural lines, invoking the biblical reformer king Josiah as his muse, who “by visitation, correction and admonition, strove to recall the kingdom which God had given him to the worship of the true God.”⁹⁵ What followed was a tremendous effort at discovering and correcting those practices which conflicted with what was determined to be proper. This was *ministerium* in the public sphere, where reform and regulation were just as much king as the man wearing the crown. As such, it was also a powerful weapon in the hands of the king’s enemies.

After a lifetime spent expanding and reforming his realm Charlemagne died in 814, passing on his kingdom to Louis, his sole surviving son, the third pick behind two deceased

⁹³ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 1.

⁹⁴ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 308.

⁹⁵ Quoted in De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 17.

brothers.⁹⁶ Upon taking his father's throne *ministerium* was to become central to Louis' life, both publicly as king and privately in the future conflicts between himself, his sons, and the church.

As Louis' starry-eyed biographer, Ermold, tells it, Louis was every bit as interested in micromanaging his realm as his father had been. When sending out his men to take stock of Frankia, Louis asks for news on how monasteries are conducted:

“How do they live? Dress? What is the state of their learning and bearing? How do they practice their religion? What works of piety do they perform? Does harmony join the flock to the pastor? Does the flock love the pastor, and the pastor, the flock? Do the prelates provide walls, houses, food and drink, and clothing, in the right time and place? (For they cannot properly accomplish their divine service in the right way unless the faithful devotion of their fathers provides these things.)...Who lives well and maintains the teachings of the ancient fathers, who not so well, and who—heaven forbid—not at all?”⁹⁷

In an extreme reaction to Ezekiel, bringing nonconformists to heel was considered essential to proper governance in the Carolingian mindset, as illustrated in Louis' campaign against the Bretons. Unconcerned with the more worldly motivations for war, Ermold characterized the Bretons not so much as enemies to be defeated for the sake of peace, but as woeful sinners in need of a shepherd. When, in 818 Louis speaks about the Bretons with the count of the Breton March, Lambert, Louis asks not about skirmishes or tribute⁹⁸ but rather about their faith, in words mirroring that of his inquiry of monastic life: “How does that people worship God in cult and faith? What high regard for God and the church is to be found there? What affection is there

⁹⁶ *The Deeds of Emperor Louis*, in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer*, trans. Thomas F. X. Noble (University Park: The Pennsylvania State Press, 2009), 194-218, at 196.

⁹⁷ *In Honor of Louis, the Most Christian Caesar Augustus*, by *Ermoldus Nigellus, an Exile*, in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 127-186, at 154.

⁹⁸ *In Honor of Louis*, 156-157; Thomas F.X. Noble, trans., *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious: Lives by Einhard, Notker, Ermoldus, Thegan, and the Astronomer* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 156-157, n.96-97.

among the people? What justice, peace, respect for the king, works of piety? What is more [almost as an insightful afterthought], what safety is there for our frontiers?" To all this, Lambert dourly replies,

That people...dishonest and pompous, have been in rebellion right up to now, and lacking in goodwill. Untrustworthy, they keep only the Christian name, for their deeds and worship and belief are way off the mark. They take no thought for orphans, widow, or churches. A man will lie down with his sister; one brother will rape another brother's wife; everybody lives incestuously with everyone else; wickedness abounds. They live in briar patches and sleep in the woods and rejoice to live by theft in the manner of beasts. The force of justice claims no hall for itself with them, and the proper kinds of judgment escape them.⁹⁹

This report was enough for Louis, who dispatched the abbot Witchar to talk sense to the Bretons' king, his more militant admonition ending with the telling invective, "You cherish empty things, and you do not observe proper teachings."¹⁰⁰ Despite Witchar's admonition, war ensued and *ministerium* was carried out by force.¹⁰¹ Such experiences suggest that Louis must have learned much from his father's example, and was himself swiftly becoming a spiritual luminary, in the Carolingian sense.

As his modern title suggests, Louis the Pious came to be seen in some of his biographies as a spiritual giant, noted for his piety and humility. This latter quality became key for Louis' authority, another biographer called the Astronomer depicting him as the youngest son in the vein of biblical younger sons.¹⁰² Naturally, the best story for Louis' devotion is to be found in

⁹⁹ *In Honor of Louis*, 157.

¹⁰⁰ *In Honor of Louis*, 159.

¹⁰¹ *In Honor of Louis*, 130: similarly, Ermold tells how Louis had previously "tamed the rabid Basques with a teacher's skill, [bringing] forth sheep from fierce wolves."

¹⁰² De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 20; Andrew J. Romig, "In Praise of the Too-Clement Emperor: The Problem of Forgiveness in the Astronomer's *Vita Hludowici imperatoris*," *Speculum* 89/2 (April 2014): 382-409, at 384-386: The Astronomer is so-named for his apparent

Ermold. The poet tells how the patriarch of Aquileia, Paulinus, witnessed Charlemagne's two elder sons, Charles and Pippin, enter a church in impressive glory, but only the third son, Louis, comports himself properly by approaching the altar as a penitential supplicant, which greatly impressed Paulinus—as it might well have please the jaded Gildas.¹⁰³

However, it may be that Louis had something to repent. In addition to possible infidelity, on account of his sins—which in the Carolingian tradition of *correctio* made him guilty of *negligentia*—Louis voluntarily underwent the first of his famous humiliations.¹⁰⁴ The great stumbling block of Louis' reign was the division of his realm amongst his sons, and the

affinity for astronomical knowledge of the day. His real identity remains a mystery, but it appears that he was personally acquainted with Louis and was a loyal subject. His *Life of Louis the Emperor (Vita Hludowici imperatoris)* was likely written in the spring of 841, just after his death. This would place its composition at the outbreak of the civil war between Louis' sons, but before the ghastly bloodletting of Fontenoy, while hope of fraternal reconciliation was still a possibility. As Andrew Romig observes, part of the Astronomer's emphasis on Louis' overabundant clemency might have been as a none-too-subtle hint that royal sons should emulate their father: "There could never be 'too much clemency.'"

¹⁰³ *In Honor of Louis*, 141.

¹⁰⁴ *In Honor of Louis*, 148: Despite Ermold's enthusiastic assertion that Louis lived a chaste life, it seems that he had children of a concubine before his first marriage; De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 16: De Jong claims that "normal" marriage patterns were established in Louis' time; however, Dhuoda would have likely taken a dim view of De Jong's opinion. Dhuoda, *Handbook for William*, 52: Dhuoda cautions her son from the Scriptures to "flee fornication and keep your mind away from any prostitute" and even warned against "haughtiness" of the eyes "so that you may, in petitioning God, escape the thrill of such embraces and the temptation of such turmoil"; *The Deeds of Emperor Charles the Great*, in *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 59-118, at 80: Such temptations were assuredly at the disposal of every prince, but they were also just as feared by the circumspect. Notker tells of a certain bishop who defiled himself in seeming secret by adultery, but when confronted by Charlemagne's agents to perform the Sacrament for mass, took ill and died in its preparation; *The Life of Emperor Louis*, 234: indeed, it is altogether possible that Louis was familiar with such stories of divine chastisement and was thinking dour thoughts as he considered his future. This is what the Astronomer tells us was the cause for Louis seeking a wife, for "fearing that he might be led astray down the many paths of lust and overcome by the natural heat of the body, with the advice of his men, he chose Irmingard as his future queen," sometime around 794.

schizophrenic means by which he approached the policy.¹⁰⁵ The first inheritance document, called the *Ordinatio imperii*, was issued in 817. More than just a will, it was a division of the empire that placed each son as active ruler over a certain territory, with the eldest son, Lothar, acting as co-emperor with his father.¹⁰⁶ This otherwise prudent move brought unintended consequences that would haunt the entire reign: in the long term, it presupposed the notion that the number of royal sons would not change. In the short-term, it alienated Louis' nephew, Bernard, who was already serving as king in Italy, which was included in the allotment for Lothar. Within the same year Bernard rebelled, but was quickly defeated and condemned to death, a sentence magnanimously waved by Louis in favor of the old royal standby of blinding. The gesture was hardly conciliatory: Bernard was soon dead thanks to his wounds and Louis, who had allegedly promised his father to leave his relatives alone, was now a murderer.¹⁰⁷ However, well aware of the divisions such actions caused, Louis was not long in making things right.

The assembly in Attigny in 822 was scene to the first of Louis' public confessions. Desiring to make amends and rebuild burned bridges, Louis issued pardons to many of those he had ousted in the years immediately following his coronation.¹⁰⁸ Having made peace with men, the next step was to make peace with God, which Louis did in a lavish display of public penance,

¹⁰⁵ See Eric J. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict Under Louis the German, 817-876*

(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 58: This is a seemingly innocuous circumstance, but in a world where kings divided the kingdom as an inheritance amongst their boys, new arrivals could upset an already tedious relationship between brothers—indeed, Louis' namesake, Louis the German, continuously attempted to expand his holdings into his older brother Lothar's territory.

¹⁰⁶ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 25.

¹⁰⁷ Thegan, *The Deeds of Emperor Louis*, 197.

¹⁰⁸ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 35.

taking the blame for Bernard's death and the exile of relatives, an example that prompted the bishops to confess to their own shortcomings.¹⁰⁹ In the final analysis, Louis came out on top, for "The moral high ground during this assembly was undoubtedly dominated by the emperor himself."¹¹⁰ As Louis later explained,

...it seems to us wholly right that each of us should study to humble his heart in truth, and, on whatever occasion he should discover that he has offended God, whether in deed or in thought, should atone by doing penance, should lament by weeping and in the future should guard and protect himself to the best of his ability against these ills.¹¹¹

It is important to realize that, according to the Astronomer, this penance was voluntary and thus "a truly imperial gesture of atonement"—the laudable actions strengthening Louis' image as a godly emperor.¹¹² However, not everyone was impressed, and it would not be long before Louis the Pious was coerced into public humiliation again in 833. The process began innocently enough with the birth of a baby boy.

The decade between 822 and 833 marked a number of crises, the first being the birth of Louis' fourth child, Charles, in 823. Louis had since remarried after the death of his first wife, and Charles' arrival to the Carolingian family was the first of the complications the marriage entailed for the realm. Inheritance was immediately upon everyone's minds, as the kingdom already divided among three sons must now accommodate four. Queen Judith was herself a point

¹⁰⁹ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 178: In a council later held at Paris in 829, the bishops convened determined (or perhaps *affirmed* would be more appropriate) that, in the event of God's displeasure, He could be placated if offered the proper penance, a process in which the *sacerdotes*—translated at length by De Jong to essentially mean priest—played a critical role as messengers of God, whose forgiveness on earth would be honored in heaven.

¹¹⁰ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 36.

¹¹¹ Quoted in De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 156.

¹¹² De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 122-123; Dhuoda, *Handbook for William*, 8, 35.

of contention, having become a powerful go-between for the king and any would-be audience, a position much resented by courtiers.¹¹³ Then in 827 a series of unsettling military setbacks occurred on the borders of the empire, as pagans suddenly gained the upper hand in what was deemed the stirring up of divine wrath on account of public sins.¹¹⁴

In response, councils met in 829 to find a means of appeasing God. The underlying assumption of the meeting was that the Frankish ruling class had somehow incurred God's wrath and the answers were tooled accordingly, demanding the acknowledgement of, and penance for, the sins of the clergy, the royal household and ministers, and the people for good measure.¹¹⁵ The scholars Wala and Einhard even produced individual penitentials, which they presented to the emperor for his consideration.¹¹⁶ But among the answers sought, of greater material importance were the political sackings that immediately followed the military disasters. Hugh, Matfrid, and Baldric, all military leaders and magnates of such rank that they shared with Louis responsibility for the Frankish people, were promptly dismissed from the palace as admonition gave way to finger-pointing and the desire to quickly and decisively erase the scandal caused by the actions of such high officers. It may have been at this time that errors in politics came to be equated to public sins (as had been developing under Charlemagne already): the expectation that scandals would merit God's wrath upon the nation, which could only be turned aside by public penance—thus becoming another weapon in the arsenal of royal justice, a great irony, as shall be shortly

¹¹³ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 31-32, 41.

¹¹⁴ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 149-150; this was around the same time as the escalating Viking raids upon the English coasts and the thirty years of eclipses recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicles*, see page 14 above.

¹¹⁵ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 40.

¹¹⁶ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 157.

seen.¹¹⁷

Into this charged environment was injected the scandal between Judith and the royal chamberlain, Bernard of Septimania, who with the queen now held the king's ear. After the dismissal of the scapegoats, the queen filled their shoes as go-between for the emperor, and in their irritation the courtiers raised the time-honored specter of adultery and witchcraft in an effort to oust the powerful both queen and chamberlain.¹¹⁸ This led to two revolts by Louis' equally irritated sons, one in 830 and the next in 833—the latter ironically entailing the very sort of weapon that Louis had lately found useful: public penance.

The rebellion of 833 built upon the events of the first, as by this time Louis had reconfigured his succession plan to reward those sons who had remained loyal and to punish those (principally Lothar) who had rebelled. However, these very actions were used against Louis under claims of forcing perjury upon his sons and loyal men by way of multiple, conflicting oaths.¹¹⁹ But the war ended as soon as it began: the armies met on June 24, 833, upon what became known as the Field of Lies, where a mass defection solved the issue as the men in Louis' camp left for that of his sons amidst conflicting accounts of infidelity or divine judgment.¹²⁰ Louis was stripped of power for the second time in three years, and now his enemies were determined to see him never given the chance to regain what he had lost. Their answer was derived from the Carolingian usage of *correctio*, *ministerium*, and *neglegentia*.

¹¹⁷ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 151-152, 264.

¹¹⁸ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 41-42, 198: this relationship, while not without precedent, angered courtiers; De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 201: while the veracity of such accusations is greatly dependent upon the historical informant, this was far from simply a defamation spree: it is altogether plausible that Judith truly “feared for her life” once accused of witchcraft, as Bernard's own sister was shortly thereafter executed by drowning for the same crime.

¹¹⁹ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 45, 212.

¹²⁰ The Astronomer, *The Life of Emperor Louis*, 280; De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 225-226.

His sons now in control, Louis was placed under guard to wait out the deliberations of a royal assembly at Compiègne. There, the Astronomer writes,

The instigators of this unprecedented crime feared that if things turned around, they could not bear what they had done, so they quickly contrived an argument with a few bishops, so it seemed. They said the emperor would be condemned for those things for which he had already done penance, and then, having laid down his arms, do public penance again to make satisfaction to the church in some irrevocable way.¹²¹

This according to one loyal to Louis. Another account, written by one of the judges at the assembly, Bishop Agobard, claims that all was done in accordance with biblical precedent and a genuine fear for the emperor's soul, a fear equally reflected by Louis himself, who upon receiving formal notification of his sins, "prostrated in front of [the episcopal delegation], acknowledged his crimes, not once or twice, but for a third time and more, asked for forgiveness, beseeched the assistance of prayers, received advice, requested a penance, and promised to fulfil most willingly the humiliation imposed upon him."¹²² Agobard's description is apparently in keeping with Ezekiel's admonition to go and proselytize to the sinner for the sake of his soul—in sharp contrast with the Astronomer's pessimistic *realpolitik* account.

In either case, following the decision of the assembly, Louis—who had been in custody some distance away from his own trial—was admonished by the clergy to submit himself to another public penance (in addition to that of 822), which was witnessed at Soissons, where Louis "was condemned, although absent, unheard, unconfessed, and untried, and they compelled

¹²¹ The Astronomer, *The Life of Emperor Louis*, 282.

¹²² Agobard, *Cartula*, in *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840*, by Mayke De Jong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 277-279, at 279; for the duality of punishment and advice, seen above, see Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 30: "Like monastic rules, the penitentials did more than punish sin: they also provided a system for the giving of counsel."

him to remove his arms [...] and to place them before the altar. They dressed him in penitential garb and took him away under heavy guard to a certain house.”¹²³ The appalling lioness of Gildas’ warning had struck. An emperor had fallen under the blow of Ezekiel’s admonition and in the name of purging his sins had been stripped of his power. Yet it would prove not so simple to depose Louis, and the bishops knew that they needed to prove themselves justified.

To achieve this the bishops who officiated at Louis’ humiliation produced a document titled *Relatio*, in which they define their ministry through the dual exhortations from Paul, to challenge the sinner, and from Ezekiel, whom God warned of his own guilt should he provide no warning to the same, while adding for good measure the stern reminder that those who will not heed episcopal warnings are subject to “damning punishment.”¹²⁴ In this set-up, they recounted Louis’ confession and penance blow-for-blow, and enumerated his many sins in writing—murders, broken oaths, and *negligentia*, among others—before ending with a thunderous “after such and so great a penance, no one may ever return to the secular military service.”¹²⁵ All had been very carefully structured so as to force Louis into permanent exile. Yet the king still had room enough to maneuver back into power.¹²⁶

In spite of the care taken by the bishops, the outcome of the public humiliation remained

¹²³ The Astronomer, *The Life of Emperor Louis*, in Noble, *Charlemagne and Louis the Pious*, 282; Agobard, *Cartula*, in De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 279: again, Agobard’s account is all tears and sincere contrition on the part of Louis.

¹²⁴ Booker, *Past Convictions*, 140-142; Courtney M. Booker, trans., “The Episcopal Relatio of the Penance of Louis the Pious in October, 833, with a Later Prologue by Walafrid Strabo,” in *Past Convictions*, 257-264: 257-258.

¹²⁵ Booker, “The Episcopal Relatio, 259-263.

¹²⁶ The exact motives behind the bishops’ actions remain a topic of debate: on the one hand, they could have been acting out of a desire to appease God, or they might have been operating by more secular desires: see Booker, *Past Convictions*, 110, 123, 130, 158-159, 175-179 and De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 146, 231-235, 237, 249: Both historians place great emphasis upon the religious aspects of the penance, neither arguing exclusively for a secular reading of the event.

unclear, as evidenced by the bishops' attempts to finalize the episode with oaths, which Louis refused.¹²⁷ This final blow could not fall without making the emperor the clear subject of coercion, and this allowed Louis the necessary maneuverability to refuse to take up a permanent monastic penance. In time his sons had so fallen out that he was able to return to power and put Lothar in his place: up to the very end, Louis continued to punish his sons by re-dividing the empire.¹²⁸

It is fortunate for Louis that anxiety over his willingness to commit to monasticism allowed a way out.¹²⁹ Unfortunately for the bishops, their measures taken to direct the narrative fell through almost immediately: by focusing on the supposed voluntary nature of the penance, Louis went on the offensive, claiming that it was all coercion and abuse, his loyal biographers reminding their readers of the contrary nature of voluntary penance and an involuntary monastic profession, which the bishops had attempted to force on their emperor. Part of Louis' defense also stressed the twice-over nature of the penance, as old grievances from 822—already atoned for—were again aired on the grounds that the events of 822 had not been penance enough.¹³⁰ As the Astronomer explains, “the public law does not find twice against a person who has committed one crime a single time, and our law holds that ‘not even God judges twice for the same offense.’”¹³¹ Thus the winning side had the final say, the biographer Thegan even turning

¹²⁷ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 234.

¹²⁸ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 49-51, 55.

¹²⁹ Joanna Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750-870* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003): 22: there was precedent for such political maneuvers—King Ceolwulf had in 732 undergone tonsuring only to return before long; Story, *Carolingian Connections*, 141: However, there was also precedent for papal excommunication in the event of a royal tonsure being abandoned in favor a royal comeback—even if the monastic vow was forced.

¹³⁰ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 241-242.

¹³¹ The Astronomer, *The Life of Emperor Louis*, 282.

the embarrassed bishops' own Ezekiel 3:18 argument back upon them, declaring the emperor "to be the watchman against sin, with full and unimpaired authority."¹³² That Louis had regained authority once more was not in dispute, for an exact reversal of the humiliation process saw the emperor restored officially to power, and Lothar finally came to his father as a suppliant.¹³³ All was again right with the world.

In this way, having likely been exposed to Gildas through Bede's *De temporum ratione* and *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (and possibly Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate*¹³⁴) it might be said that what the Frankish bishops attempted in the ninth century is the culmination of what Gildas called for in the sixth. Clearly the philosophy, used in 833 to convict and depose Louis—and then return him to power—was the same as that preached by Gildas, that of the "watchman" compelled to stand guard and to alert the evildoer (thus saving his own life in the sight of God), who then might find mercy through repentance. What was new was the politicized nature of the penance, whereby real action could be taken against a monarch, potentially against his will, by those ostensibly under his secular authority, though his equals or even superiors in spiritual matters. Certainly there could be no more passively ignoring the lion-like clergy. Admonition had to be taken seriously, especially as the Viking raids of the ninth century intensified.

Thus far, we have seen that Gildas, through his understanding of Ezekiel, took upon himself the warning that he who knows God's will towards others, yet says nothing, is guilty of

¹³² De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 79.

¹³³ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 246, 250.

¹³⁴ Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 242-243: Abbo of Fleury visited the English abbey of Ramsey in 985-987 by invitation of Dunstan and Oswald. It is known that Abbo read the prose Aldhelm's *De virginitate*.

the spiritual death of his neighbors.¹³⁵ It is my opinion that this doctrine spread among Gildas' followers and readers, on account of the same notion surfacing again in Carolingian Frankia after Columbanus (a scholar only a few degrees removed from Gildas) visited and impacted the Continent. What we see in eight- and ninth-century Frankia is a highly structured and philosophical church that believed in the doctrine of *ministerium*, which bears striking resemblance to Gildas' message. Add to this the parallel language used in both Gildas' sixth-century *Ruin of Britain* and the ninth-century *Relatio* of the bishops presiding over the drama at Soissons and one finds the parallel developments striking indeed. What follows, then, is the retracing of Gildas' Ezekiel (now re-termed *ministerium*) to England, the country of its origin, where it shall first be drawn upon for the healing of the Anglo-Saxon nation and later used in a desperate attempt to save the same—the author of this latter attempt, Wulfstan of York, even citing Gildas by name.

Looking to England

In the days following the Easter of 839, an envoy arrived from England, where King Ecgberht, formerly an exile-guest of Charlemagne, lay dying. As the political niceties unfolded, the envoy presented Louis a letter from the English king himself, recounting the vision of a priest, its message of such importance that Ecgberht (if indeed he was yet alive¹³⁶) deemed it necessary to communicate to his continental neighbor. In a dream sequence that prefigures Dante's *Inferno*, the priest is led through a town where he witnesses the manifold sins of the Christians,

¹³⁵ Cf. Luke 10:29-37: it may be inferred that the good watchman is a faithful neighbor even as Jesus Christ so defines him.

¹³⁶ Story, *Carolingian Connections*, 218, 222: the actual name of the king is not disclosed, apparently, and there are other candidates for the author. However, on account of the letter's context, Story thinks its author to be Ecgberht.

represented by books whose words are written in blood, and by the highly English metaphor of an un-harvested field, the king having worked hard to produce while his sinful subjects are unwilling to reap. When the dreaming priest asks for an explanation, his guide answers that “Christians everywhere [need] urgently to reform in order to avoid being engulfed by a dense fog and scourged for their sins by pagan warriors.”¹³⁷ Although Louis would not live to see such troubles, his sons would, and the kingdoms of Ecgberht’s England would shortly be destroyed—all save one. Wessex would in the latter-ninth century weather the storm and emerge renewed under King Alfred, who, like Louis, believed that “the ruler was directly accountable to God,” as the communication between Fulk and Alfred indicates. Thus, it was with a desire for reform and education in mind that Alfred petitioned Fulk for aid, and to this purpose Grimbold of St. Bertain’s carried *ministerium* across the Channel.

¹³⁷ Story, *Carolingian Connections*, 219-220.

Chapter 2: “The Sins of the Conquered: England and Alfred the Great”

Having matured on the Continent, Gildas’ ideas returned to their homeland as the Carolingian doctrine *ministerium*. The timing could not have been more appropriate, as the traumatic invasions by Viking raiders would have sent their Anglo-Saxon foes running in search of answers both mundane and divine. This chapter focuses on the Viking conquests of Anglo-Saxon England (and their eventual stymying and defeat), and examines the written works of the reform-minded West Saxon king, Alfred the Great. I suggest that, thanks to his interaction with the Frankish scholar Grimbold of St. Bertin’s, Alfred became acquainted with the ideals of *ministerium* and that this Frankish doctrine made itself felt in the translations produced by Alfred and his scholarly circle.¹³⁸ While Alfred’s application of *ministerium* does not offer a link comparable to that between *The Ruin of Britain* and the *Relatio*, I have observed that Alfred’s choice of texts used to rehabilitate Anglo-Saxon piety make use of the very sort of argument first set forth in Ezekiel and refined by Gildas and the Frankish bishops.

As far as human eyes could tell, the dreaded punishment so feared in Frankia was soon carried out. Perhaps as a reflection of the ancient Israelites’ punishment at the hands of their neighbors, threat of invasion was a common theme among Christian Europeans regarding acts deemed sinful and immoral by observers, and was on the minds of certain commentators in the Carolingian and English world as they gazed north and east into the cold forests and islands of

¹³⁸ Grimbold is mentioned in Fulk’s letter to King Alfred above; for secondary scholarship, see Janet M. Batley, “Grimbold of St. Bertin’s,” *Medium Aevum* 35 no 1 (January 1, 1966): 1-10; and Philip Grierson, “Grimbold of St. Bertin’s,” *The English Historical Review*, v.55 no.220 (Oct., 1940): 529-561; these are analyzed below.

the Danes and Saxons.¹³⁹ According to Odbert of Utrecht, Bishop Frideric, when dying of mortal wounds inflicted by supposed supporters of Louis the Pious' queen, warned his fellows of impending invasion by the Northmen, "because of the iniquity of the emperor and his wife."¹⁴⁰ During the rebellions of Louis' sons in the 830s, and throughout the 840s and 850s, Viking raiders indeed stepped up their attacks, Horik I of the Danes even sending a large fleet up the Elbe in 845, sacking Hamburg before Louis the German managed to halt their rampage.¹⁴¹ However, where this Louis was able to keep the Danes impressed and at bay, his brother, Charles the Bald (supposedly a less fortunate tactician), found himself compelled to pay off the Vikings who raided his kingdom.¹⁴² Not only were these raids disastrous in a direct way, they also wove themselves into the existing turmoil that prevailed after Louis the Pious' death, when his sons went to war with one another in a myriad of shifting alliances that threatened to tear the Carolingian empire apart.¹⁴³ Similar opinion prevailed in the British Isles, a most curious

¹³⁹ According to Einhard, "The Life of Charles the Emperor," 28, the Saxons "like almost all the peoples who live in Germany, were ferocious by nature, devoted to the cult of demons, hostile to our religion, and did not consider it shameful to defile or transgress divine or human laws. There were always issues that could disturb the peace on any day, particularly because our borders and theirs touched almost everywhere in open lands [...] Murder, robbery, and arson never ceased on either side"; Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, 109-110, 112: once Charlemagne conquered Saxony, he forcefully introduced Carolingian culture and Christianization, much to the resentment of the common Saxons. This popular frustration found its outlet in the Stellinga Revolt, a popular uprising by the Saxon peasants that worried the feuding Carolingian kings, who feared that the stubbornly pagan Saxons would join forces with their (also pagan) Danish and Slavic neighbors. In 842, Louis the German mercilessly crushed the uprising.

¹⁴⁰ Booker, *Past Convictions*, 77.

¹⁴¹ Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, 134-135.

¹⁴² Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, 195-197.

¹⁴³ Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, 235; Notker, *The Deeds of Emperor Charles the Great*, 108: Notker even addresses the sorrow of fraternal strife in the context of Viking invasion, urging his patron, Charles III "the Fat," to unite with his brother Carloman in defying the seaborne raiders, "But I [Charlemagne] am very sad indeed that they [Vikings] have dared to attack this coast while I am alive, and I am torn up with particular grief because I foresee how much trouble they will cause for my successors and their subjects.' May the protection of our Lord Christ keep this

association of the community of St Cuthbert with political intrigues possibly having resulted in the Viking raid of Lindisfarne.¹⁴⁴ As the Northumbrian Alcuin comments, “It has not happened by chance, but is the sign of some great guilt.”¹⁴⁵ Moreover, mere ignorance could warrant divine wrath: King Alfred of Wessex, channeling the biblical King Josiah of Judah, later wrote how English ignorance resulted in God’s displeasure, an allusion to the devastation of the Viking wars that plagued his early life and reign.¹⁴⁶ Just as the ancient Israelites’ sins provoked God to exact vengeance, ignorant and sinful Christians could likewise draw heavenly ire upon themselves—as was evidently the case, given the relentless assaults from Denmark. The only way to avoid the fates of Israel and Judah was a corporate return to the Lord, as had been effected by Josiah, and it would seem that the Christians of Britain had much to return from. As it played out, the destruction of the Anglo-Saxon states was nearly total: all of England would fall to the invaders, but through the efforts of godly King Alfred the Anglo-Saxons would rebound by way of God’s favor.

Much like those of their British forbears, the Anglo-Saxons’ sins, private and corporate, seemed to contemporaries a likely fuel for divine wrath. In the case of Northumbria in particular,

from happening, and may your [Charles the Fat’s] sword, already hardened with the blood of the Normans, stand in their way, and may the sword of your brother Carloman, already tinged with their gore, be joined to yours”; Hodges and Whitehouse, *Mohammed, Charlemagne & the Origins of Europe*, 98-99, 162-163: The vicissitudes of this history are reflected in the fate of Dorestad, a trading colony on the Rhine: Dorestad grew rapidly from the 780s to the 830s, but with the decline and eventual annihilation of Carolingian unity the port town’s trade dwindled before further suffering from Viking raids.

¹⁴⁴ Joanna Story, *Carolingian Connections*, 92.

¹⁴⁵ Alcuin, “Letter 26” in *Alcuin of York c.A.D. 732 to 804: His Life and Letters*, translated by Stephen Allott, 36-38 (York: Ebor Press, 1974), 36; Alfred P. Smyth, *Scandinavian Kings in the British Isles: 850-880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 51: Alcuin’s opinion is reflected in the English *Historia de Sancto Cuthberto*, which claims that St. Cuthbert took revenge on those Northumbrians who confiscated Lindisfarne’s land.

¹⁴⁶ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 4-5; for Josiah’s reaction to hearing the reading of the Law, and his reforms, see II Kings 22-23.

the people indulged in vices that included serial regicide (not strictly restricted to Northumbria, as one might well suppose), “incest, adultery, and fornication,” and “pagan” fashion trends.¹⁴⁷ In Asser’s opinion, the very nature of the Northumbrian civil war that immediately predated the arrival of the Danes was indicative of “a people which has incurred the wrath of God.”¹⁴⁸ Nor were such sinful practices unique to the north, as King Aethelbald of Wessex (r. 855-860) demonstrated when he took his father’s wife (another Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald) as his own, “contrary to the practice of all pagans.”¹⁴⁹ If God was indeed angry with the English, then repentance was desperately needed, and time was running out: the Vikings shifted from pillage to conquest.

Over the first half of the ninth century, the Viking raids had been building in frequency and duration. Where once the raiders had landed and ravaged before decamping for their homes across the sea, in 851, eleven years after the English delegation handed Louis that prophetic letter, the Danes pitched their winter camp at Thanet.¹⁵⁰ Before long the Danes, if the English chroniclers are to be believed, had increased their fleet ten times over, and after four bloody years and varying fortunes, permanent settlement by the Vikings was to become the norm.¹⁵¹ Alfred was born during this troubled time, and it might be said that his was a divine calling. Though he would prove a capable general, the fifth son of King Aethelwulf of Wessex was a

¹⁴⁷ Story, *Carolingian Connections*, 84-85.

¹⁴⁸ Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 27.

¹⁴⁹ Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 73; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 235.

¹⁵⁰ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, 63, 65.

¹⁵¹ F.M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 243, note 1: Stenton reckons the armies of the Danes to have numbered in the thousands; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 13, 211: Keynes and Lapidge think the numbers of Vikings to be rather small, at least not so great as ‘350’ ships, though they concede that the point may be the impression of numbers over accuracy; *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* E, 65, 67.

scholar at heart, and was very eager to learn the liberal arts despite being illiterate.¹⁵² He carried with him a book of prayers and psalms and, according to his biographer, memorized a book of poetry with the aid of an instructor. But this passion was left unfulfilled on account of the lack of teachers in that part of England at that time.¹⁵³ Sadly for Alfred, these desires were ill-timed, for in his nineteenth year the Vikings seized York and Northumbria in the start of what became the wars that defined the formative years of Alfred's reign.¹⁵⁴ With an almost juggernaut intensity, the raiders crushed or outlasted the opposition, taking also Mercia and East Anglia before their advance was finally blunted in Wessex. The battle for Wessex was a very close call. Despite an initial victory at Ashdown, the English king, Alfred's brother, was soon dead and Alfred, newly crowned, was forced to do battle for the ensuing years to preserve his kingdom, finally overcoming the Viking king Guthrum after a perilous exile in the Somerset marshes.

The defeat of Guthrum had two immediate military consequences: first, it pushed the Vikings out of Wessex and back into East Anglia; second, a newly-arrived Viking fleet sitting in the Thames estuary came to the astute conclusion that the conquering life in southern England was decidedly less attractive than that promised on the Continent; so at one blow, Alfred largely freed his kingdom from the troubles of invasion for some thirteen years.¹⁵⁵ Guthrum submitted to baptism and agreed to a treaty of unprecedented benefit to the English, and Alfred set about recovering his kingdom.¹⁵⁶ He engaged in numerous strategic projects, but most near to his heart—and perhaps most importantly for the immediate history of England—were academic and spiritual pursuits. Thus the king, now in his thirties, set to rebuilding English scholarship.

¹⁵² Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 13.

¹⁵³ Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 24.

¹⁵⁴ Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 27.

¹⁵⁵ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 23.

¹⁵⁶ Asser, *Life of King Alfred* 56.

Of principal importance were ecclesiastical writings and the church's penitential program—while military measures counted as prevention of further ills, the revival of faith was to act as the cure.¹⁵⁷ In Alfred's royal opinion the state of decline was severe and such ignorance as apparently afflicted the Anglo-Saxon church was cause for divine chastisement.¹⁵⁸ This was the cause of the Alfredian reforms and the motivation for his translated works.

Grimbald of St. Bertin's and the Heritage of Rheims

In an effort to revitalize English learning, Alfred drew to himself a handful of scholars. Notable among them was a continental monk, Grimbald, formerly of St. Bertin's in Flanders, who was sent to him by Archbishop Fulk of Rheims.¹⁵⁹ Fulk was the successor to Hincmar, that latter a contributor to the *Annals of St. Bertin* and archbishop of Rheims from 845 following the trial of Ebbo (the one scapegoated in the aftermath of Louis the Pious' humiliations).¹⁶⁰ For Fulk to send Grimbald and also admonish the English to mind his teachings implies that all "the canonical decrees and ecclesiastical injunctions" held sacred at Rheims were to be so held in England. In this way updated Carolingian uses of Ezekiel (that is, *ministerium*) and penance arrived in England.

Given the destruction of the English Church during the Danish invasions, Alfred was likely dealing with a penitential system weakened by a destabilized episcopal structure, forcing

¹⁵⁷ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 25; Sedgefield, *King Alfred's Version of the Consolation of Boethius*, xiii.

¹⁵⁸ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 4; Cf. Godden, Malcolm and Susan Irvine, eds., *The Old English Boethius: An Edition of the Old English Versions of Boethius's De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2:1, 1:239.

¹⁵⁹ "The letter of Fulk," in Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 182-186, at 185.

¹⁶⁰ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 265, 255.

him to base both secular and religious reforms on Frankish example.¹⁶¹ His contact with Rheims was a wise decision. Years before, Hincmar had used his time as archbishop well, developing Rheims into “a principal center for the production of canonical texts,” and a place where the penitentials and their practices were upheld, an institution that Fulk “continued to improve upon until his death in 900.”¹⁶² Alfred must have been aware of the status enjoyed by Rheims. While on his second childhood visit to Rome (855-856), Alfred had been hosted by Charles the Bald, an occasion during which he could have been exposed to any number of Frankish cultural, legal, or religious ideas.¹⁶³ At some point thereafter, Alfred wisely struck up a discourse with Fulk, himself a prolific letter writer, who freely offered advice to Englishmen and Franks alike concerning moral and ecclesiastical matters.¹⁶⁴ On that particular occasion, c.886, Fulk was to answer a letter from Alfred regarding Grimbold, whom Alfred wished to employ in his revival.¹⁶⁵

A complete picture of Grimbold can only be guessed at. What is fairly certain is that he entered St. Bertin’s as a young man sometime in the decade from 834 to 844, and by the 860s was a deacon, then a priest by 873—he might have even been Fulk’s man by the 880s, given the instrumentality of one Grimbold in the archbishop’s promotion.¹⁶⁶ In 886, Grimbold left St.

¹⁶¹ Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 433; Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 3.

¹⁶² Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 127.

¹⁶³ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 14;

¹⁶⁴ Janet L. Nelson, “‘A King across the Sea’: Alfred in Continental Perspective,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, vol.36 (1986): 45-68, at 45.

¹⁶⁵ “The letter of Fulk,” 182; regarding the dates for the letter from Fulk, Nelson suggests that it was forged at Winchester, given its “heavy emphasis on Grimbold’s qualification for pastoral, that is episcopal office.” Moreover, the language of the letter has been “improved”; Nelson, “A King across the Sea,” 48.

¹⁶⁶ Grierson, “Grimbold of St. Bertin’s”: 541-543; “The Letter of Fulk,” 185, 332, n.6: of Grimbold, Fulk notes in his letter to Alfred that the church “nourished him from his earliest years in true faith and holy religion.” It seems reasonable to me to assume that Fulk, formerly Grimbold’s abbot, had known the man for much of his life and thus could be relied upon to have

Bertin's for Rheims on account of his "reputation as a competent administrator and a scholar" (and possibly due to a rivalry with a younger scholar) where he served Fulk, his former abbot, in the half decade from 878 to 883.¹⁶⁷ In this scholastic circle the subject of Gildas' writings is likely to have surfaced, and perhaps with some regularity. By the end of the 9th century Rheims had likely acquired a copy of Bede's *De temporum ratione*, while *Historia ecclesiastica* was on the shelf at St. Bertin's a little earlier than that.¹⁶⁸ Before 882 Rheims was also home to the manuscript "Cambridge, Pembroke College 308," which contains Hrabanus Maurus *Comm. In Epistulas Pauli*.¹⁶⁹ Hrabanus had been the abbot of Fulda, which, recall, had copies of Bede's *De temporum ratione* and *Historia ecclesiastica*, and would have been accessible to the abbot. Hincmar, Fulk, and Grimbald had all held offices at St. Bertin's and had all moved to Rheims at later points in their respective lives. Moreover, Hincmar and Grimbald were both scholars, roles placing them in direct contact with all the resources that St. Bertin's and Rheims had to offer. The possibility that neither of these men would have encountered Gildas by way of Bede seems unlikely.

Doubtless Grimbald was a fine choice, but how, then, did Alfred come to be acquainted with him? Asser assures his readers that the king summoned Grimbald specifically.¹⁷⁰ Whether Alfred truly knew of Grimbald is unclear, though there is the slimmest of possibilities that king

a full understanding of his biography. Grimbald originally joined St. Bertin's during the tenure of Hugh I as abbot, which leads me to wonder if perhaps Fulk was a young monk at the time.

¹⁶⁷ Grierson, "The Relations between England and Flanders before the Norman Conquest," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 4th series, vol.23 (1941): 84; Grierson, "Grimbald of St. Bertin's," 551.

¹⁶⁸ Gneuss and Lapidge, *Bibliography of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 397, 576.

¹⁶⁹ Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 168.

¹⁷⁰ Asser *Life of King Alfred* 78; Fulk's letter to Alfred may be read to mean the same thing, or perhaps his delegates had made the decision and Fulk wished merely to relay the information. Cf. "The letter of Fulco," 185; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 331-332, n. 5.

and cleric had personally met before: according to a *vita* in the medieval breviary of Hyde, during his sojourn to Rome young Alfred actually encountered then-prior Grimbald at St. Bertins and there determined to someday bring him to England.¹⁷¹ That Grimbald was the prior appears inaccurate, and his interaction with the child Alfred is in all likelihood mere legend—though Alfred’s visit to Rome did coincide with Grimbald’s residence at St. Bertin’s, and the two might have met if the prince had indeed stopped at that place. But however attractive this coincidence may be, once again it is almost certainly a later invention, since the pilgrim route to Rome would not pass through St. Omer for another hundred years.¹⁷² Another possibility is the favorable report of pilgrims returning to England from Rome who, passing through Rheims, had themselves made the acquaintance of the priest and later relayed their impressions to King Alfred.¹⁷³

There is a more direct possibility of Alfred’s awareness of Grimbald: the political relationship between England and Flanders, then recently initiated by the marriage of Judith, daughter of Charles the Bald, to Baldwin I of Flanders in 863 after her successive marriages to two kings of England (which also had the curious result of making her jointly Alfred’s step-mother and sister-in-law).¹⁷⁴ St. Bertin’s itself was also an auspicious and perhaps cosmopolitan hub of personalities, having already played host not only to Grimbald, but also “powerful men such as Fridegis the Englishman, protégé of Alcuin, Hugo son of Charlemagne, Adalard, and, of

¹⁷¹ Grierson, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 530-531.

¹⁷² Grierson, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 541.

¹⁷³ Grierson, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 552; Treharne, ed. “The Accounts of the Journeys of Ohthere and Wulfstan” in *Old and Middle English*, 24-31, at 24: Alfred was certainly interested in peaceful visitors to England, as evidenced by his entertaining of the Norse explorers Ohthere and Wulfstan.

¹⁷⁴ Grierson, “Relations between England and Flanders,” 83.

course, Fulk.”¹⁷⁵ Relations between England and Flanders must have only strengthened thereafter, when Alfred’s daughter married Baldwin II of Flanders.¹⁷⁶ Thus it may well be that Alfred was to some degree familiar with St. Bertin’s prior to his making contact with Fulk.

As to Alfred’s choice of Grimbald—out of all the residents of St. Bertin’s, of all the king’s foreign acquaintances or men of repute recommended by travelers—one possibility might have been that their languages were similar. If the *Vita prima*’s claim about Grimbald’s birthplace is to be believed, there is a chance that his hometown of Therouanne had him grow up speaking “a mixed Frankish and Saxon dialect”—though this is necessarily speculation at best, especially when one considers Alfred’s interaction with the other foreigners in his personal circle, Asser the Welshman and John the Old Saxon.¹⁷⁷

What cannot be doubted is Grimbald’s usefulness. He was not in Rheims for long, for almost immediately upon his arrival Fulk penned his response to King Alfred and between 886 and 887 the priest was en route for Britain.¹⁷⁸ Once in the king’s employ Grimbald acted faithfully and humbly, eventually serving in the New Minster where he died.¹⁷⁹ It seems that Fulk’s demands for a bishopric for his protégé were never met, as Grimbald was still a mass-priest upon his death, though perhaps Alfred’s “offer of Canterbury in 889 [was intended to be]

¹⁷⁵ Janet M. Bately, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” *Medium Aevum* 35 no 1 (January 1, 1966), 9; Grierson, “Relations between England and Flanders,” 83: it is interesting that an Englishman, Fridegis, having served under Louis the Pious and as abbot at St. Martin’s of Tours, also was abbot at St. Bertin’s for about fifteen years (820-834), where he reorganized the monastic order, much to the chagrin of those that would later write the monastery’s history.

¹⁷⁶ Grierson, “Relations between England and Flanders,” 85-86: Years later she desired to be buried next to her husband, and so the two were interred at St. Peter’s of Ghent, rather than St. Bertin’s, where no women were allowed.

¹⁷⁷ Bately, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 1, 8-9.

¹⁷⁸ Grierson, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 547.

¹⁷⁹ Grierson, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 530-531.

the fulfillment of the promise referred to in the letter of Fulk.”¹⁸⁰ If this is true, it may indicate the level of intellectual debt the king owed the priest. Since Alfred explicitly acknowledges Grimbald’s aid in his translation of Gregory the Great’s *Pastoral Care*, it is certain that his service proved invaluable for Alfred’s program:

When I remembered how the knowledge of Latin had formerly decayed throughout England, and yet many could read English writing, I began, among other various and manifold troubles of this kingdom, to translate into English the book which is called in Latin *Pastoralis*, and in English Shepherd’s Book, sometimes word by word and sometimes according to the sense, as I had learnt it from Plegmund my archbishop, and Asser my bishop, and Grimbald my mass-priest, and John my mass-priest.¹⁸¹

This Grimbald is the scholar who—among the other foreigners—was principally responsible for reintroducing a penitential reading of Ezekiel to Anglo-Saxon England.¹⁸² Recall his archbishop’s admonition to abide by the monk’s teachings, the current doctrines of Rheims. While it has been established that the notion of penance was itself nothing new to the English, one must consider that with the arrival of Grimbald the impact of Carolingian ideas would have influenced Alfred’s translations and national reforms. The Danes posed to the Anglo-Saxons the same threat that the Anglo-Saxons had posed to the Britons: a scourge, a triumphant paganism, an instrument by which the Anglo-Saxon church was deprived of its learning. Alfred believed that it was necessary to infuse old learning into current English religious thought, and his

¹⁸⁰ Grierson, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 550.

¹⁸¹ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, 7.

¹⁸² Frantzen, *The Penitential Literature*, 127-128; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 119, 233, 238: Asser the Welshman was also a likely conduit for Gildas, as he was familiar with the Briton through Aldhelm’s prose *De virginitate*. Evidence for this is suggested by the *Old English Martyrology*, a text likely composed or translated from an existing work during the reign of Alfred, which cites the prose *De virginitate*. It should likewise come as no surprise that Asser was familiar with Bede’s *De temporum ratione* and *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, and thus may well have encountered Gildas in those works.

translations demonstrate this focus. Several of the works are highly philosophical and deal intimately with the dual notions of admonition and repentance. It is my belief that Grimbald and other continentals had a hand in helping the king select his library of translated texts and what follows is an examination of two key works, ostensibly translated by the hand of Alfred himself. The first is Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, a text with which the English were well-acquainted, and the second is Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*, new to the island.¹⁸³ These works frequently exhort their readers to intense self-examination and admonition of others, encouraging and rebuking, and teaching the circumspect to do so in the name of salvation, either for themselves or their fellow man. This is essentially the words of Ezekiel in action.

Alfred's reforms

In Alfred's introduction to his translation of Gregory's *Pastoral Care*,¹⁸⁴ the king describes his ideal kingdom, as he believed it to have been in the past:

...it has very often come into my mind, what wise men there formerly were throughout England, both of sacred and secular orders; and how happy times there

¹⁸³ Frantzen, *King Alfred* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1986): 43-44. See also Godden Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:4-5.

¹⁸⁴ Sweet "Introduction" in Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, xiii-xiv, xvi, xlvi: Alfred's *Pastoral Care* is preserved in two manuscripts composed in Alfred's lifetime (and in a few copies produced later): the Hatton 20 and the Cotton Tiberius B. xi., the latter now a badly damaged, twice-burned fragment of its former self. Sweet considers the Cotton MS to be superior to the Hatton (he suggests it may have been one of the original copies of a "print run" that Alfred ordered)—as such, the Old English cited below is drawn from the former. Gneuss and Lapidge, *Bibliography of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 274, 361, 599, 646, 650: *Pastoral Care* was known in England as early as the 8th century, and was probably in Wales (the homeland of Asser) by the 9th century. An 8th-century copy from southern England made its way to the continent either in that century or the next, possibly to the library at Fulda, while another 8th-century southern English copy arrived in St. Bertin's by the 14th or 15th centuries, thus reinforcing one's impression of intellectual exchange between that place and the British libraries.

were then throughout England; and how the kings who had power over the nation in those days obeyed God and his ministers; and they preserved peace, morality, and order at home, and at the same time enlarged their territory abroad; and how they prospered both with war and with wisdom; and also the sacred orders how zealous they were both in teaching and learning, and in all the services they owed to God; and how foreigners came to this land in search of wisdom and instruction...¹⁸⁵

To return such education to England, Alfred continues, it is necessary “to translate some books which are most needful for all men to know.”¹⁸⁶ In this way, Alfred seems to have been actively implementing what he read (and also translated) in Psalm 2: that a king must be both student to the Divine and teacher of what he learns to his subjects:

And I nevertheless am placed by God as king over His holy Mount Sion, for the purpose of teaching His will and His law...Hear now, you kings, and learn, you judges who judge over the earth: Serve the Lord and fear Him; rejoice in God, yet with awe. Embrace learning, lest you incur God’s anger and lest you stray from

¹⁸⁵ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 2-3: “ðe kyðan hate þæt me com suiðe oft on gemynd, hwelce wutan gio wæron geond Angelkynn, ægðer ge godcundra hada ge woruldcundra: & hu gesæliglica tida þa wæron geond Angelcynn; & hu þa kyningas þe ðone anwald hæfdon ðæs folces Gode & his ærendwrecum hirsumedon; & hu hi ægðer ge hiora sibbe ge hiora oedel rymdon; & hu him ða speow ægðer ge mid wige ge mid wisdom; & eac ða godcundan hadas hu georne hie wæron ægðer ge ymb lare ge ymb leornunga, & ymb ealle þa ðeowutdomas þe hie Gode don sceoldon; & hu mon utanbordes wisdom & lare hider on lond sohte...”

¹⁸⁶ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 6; Cf. Malcolm Godden, “Prologues and Epilogues in the Old English Pastoral Care, and Their Carolingian Models,” *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* vol.110, no.4 (October 2011): 460: as a counter argument to this necessity, Godden observes that Alfred’s preface “ends by remarking on the presence of learned bishops nearly everywhere in his territories, as if they were the one category in his world who would not need the translation. One might legitimately wonder why in that case a translation of the standard guide for bishops was being sent to each bishopric.” He continues, saying that the purpose for the translation was ostensibly for general education, rather than just a handful of bishops, and thus does not even mention the contents of the book, as such would effectively minimize the intended audience. Indeed, Godden argues that the culture of translation was strong in England, that books were not so scarce as claimed, that scholars were not exactly uncommon, and that the *Pastoral Care* was only intended for bishops. However, it is my opinion that such objections do not seem like reason enough to denounce a need for translating the *Pastoral Care*.

the right path.¹⁸⁷

That the king chose translation into English, rather than a renewed understanding of Latin, seems to be in keeping with the use of vernacular English throughout prior church history, as “Bede, Alfred, Aethelwold and [later] Aelfric all thought it more important that God’s word be understood than that it should be understood in Latin, however desirable that was.”¹⁸⁸

It stands to reason that the scholars summoned to Alfred’s project brought books with them, possibly including some “fifty manuscripts [that] survive which are thought to have been written on the Continent in the ninth century and to have found their way to England before 1100.”¹⁸⁹ Grimbald has been associated with the Utrecht Psalter in particular since it originated “in the neighborhood of Rheims sometime between 816 and 835, and was almost certainly in England by the early eleventh century,” and with a copy of Prudentius that originated in St. Bertin’s and was in English hands “soon after Grimbald’s death.”¹⁹⁰ The manuscript “Cambridge, Pembroke College 308,” which contained Hrabanus’ *Comm. In Epistulas Paulinas*,

¹⁸⁷ Keynes and Lapidge, “From the prose translation of the Psalter,” in *Alfred the Great*, 154; equates to Psalm 2:6, 10-12.

¹⁸⁸ Helen Gittos, “Is there any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches in Late Anglo-Saxon England? The Red Book of Darley and the Status of Old English,” in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti, 63-82 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005), 82.

¹⁸⁹ Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 28, 214; Patrizia Lendinara, “Gregory and Damasus: two Popes and Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Rome and the North: The Early Reception of Gregory the Great in Germanic Europe*. Edited by Rolf H. Bremmer Jr., Kees Dekker, and David F. Johnson, 137-156 (Sterling: Peeters, 2001), 139-140: literature and erudition itself had a long tradition in England, as Gregory had sent books to England with Augustine’s 597 mission, and did so again with a later one; the introduction of such literature inspired the establishment of schools, “and the level of teaching reached a high standard with the arrival of Theodore of Tarsus, who was consecrated archbishop of Canterbury on 26 March 668.”

¹⁹⁰ Grierson, “Grimbald of St. Bertin’s,” 552-553; “Relations between England and Flanders,” 84-85.

was certainly in England by the 9th century.¹⁹¹ It is possible that Grimbald carried these with him on his journey to England where he would likely have added them to Alfred's growing library.

The king himself was instrumental in several translations, having learned to read and translate Latin in what Asser describes as a miracle.¹⁹² Alfred was most likely aware that he was following closely in the steps of his spiritual predecessor, Charlemagne, who from early in his reign until the Carolingian reform councils of 813, had selected texts that were essential to instruct the people, even encouraging translations into the vernacular tongues of his empire.¹⁹³ Similarly, in another parallel with Charlemagne's court, Alfred's own children were liberally educated, the English king enrolling at least one of them in a sort of royal school along with "all the nobly born children of virtually the entire area," likely with a view towards kingdom-wide improvement through the raising up of officials literate since childhood.¹⁹⁴ And finally at a most personal level, Charlemagne himself claimed to have examined translations to double check their veracity.¹⁹⁵ Charlemagne assures readers that, "Accordingly, God aiding us in all things, we have already corrected carefully all the books of the Old and New Testaments, corrupted by the ignorance of the copyists." He continues,

¹⁹¹ Gneuss and Lapidge, *Bibliography of Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, 134.

¹⁹² Asser, *Life of King Alfred*, 87.

¹⁹³ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 307-308, 317; Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire*, 180-184: This pattern was followed by Charlemagne's grandson, Louis the German (817-876), who, along with several ecclesiastical scholars, began a program of translating religious texts into Frankish and Saxon. This effort built upon a tradition of past movements, such as Ulfila's fourth-century Gothic Bible translation and the work of Anglo-Saxon missionaries; indeed, one of Louis the German's agents, Hrabanus Maurus, had studied under the Northumbrian Alcuin. The result of this East-Frankish program was a new corpus of vernacular texts, mostly religious in nature, including the Tatian Scripture translation, the *Heliand*, and *The Book of the Evangelists*—the "Lay of Hildebrand" being the only secular exception.

¹⁹⁴ Asser, *Life of King Alfred* 75; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 36.

¹⁹⁵ McKitterick, *Charlemagne*, 316, 334.

Finally, because we have found the lectionaries for the nocturnal offices, compiled by the fruitless labor of certain ones, in spite of their correct intention, unsuitable because they were written without the words of their authors and were full of an infinite number of errors, we cannot suffer in our days discordant solecisms to glide into the sacred lessons among the holy offices, and we purpose to improve these lessons.¹⁹⁶

This may well have inspired Alfred to actually compile translations of his own, not only to better his people but also “to stress the parallels between himself and Charlemagne and so create an ‘empire’ that could withstand the ravages of the Danes and provide a lasting tradition of letters.”¹⁹⁷ Indeed, the verse preface (that which follows the prose preface) to the Old English *Pastoral Care* mirrors Alcuin’s preface to his *De dialectica* and his verse preface to the *Categoriae decem*, both of which speak of transferring ancient knowledge to a new audience and even language.¹⁹⁸ In this way, Alfred and his scholars sought to situate themselves in a grand narrative of royal “recovery of ancient learning,” and claim their place “in a Latin and Carolingian tradition of scholarly transmission and renewal,” one that emphasized repentance and admonition by men exercising *ministerium*.¹⁹⁹ In addition, Alfred’s work focuses frequently upon idealized humility and self-examination, key ingredients in the Carolingian model of *ministerium*, and it is primarily through this medium that Ezekiel can be seen at work in Anglo-Saxon England.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Godden, “Prologues and Epilogues,” 451.

¹⁹⁷ Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 1986): 40.

¹⁹⁸ Godden, “Prologues and Epilogues,” 462-464.

¹⁹⁹ Godden, “Prologues and Epilogues,” 464.

²⁰⁰ See Dhuoda, above.

Ministerium and Penance in Alfred's Works

Significant among Alfred's translations are *Pastoral Care* by Gregory the Great and *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius. Whereas *The Consolation of Philosophy* would be new to England, *Pastoral Care* had long enjoyed popularity on the island, as it was supposed to have arrived with the missionary Augustine of Canterbury. It was known to both Bede and Alcuin, the former quoting from it, the latter recommending it be studied by teachers.²⁰¹ It was also popular on the Continent. Columbanus acquired a copy, which he described in a letter to its author as "sweeter than honey to the needy."²⁰² Years later, under Hincmar "it became traditional for bishops to hold copies of the text at their consecration."²⁰³ Given that Hincmar's successor Fulk considered Grimbold a candidate for a bishopric, as stated above, Grimbold would have had to be knowledgeable about Gregory's work in order to live up to Hincmar's expectations, and therefore, whether or not he carried a copy to England, his insight would have been invaluable to Alfred's translation.²⁰⁴

That *Pastoral Care* enjoyed such popularity among ecclesiastics should come as no great surprise because it was written as a manual for bishops, setting for them a good example of behavior and then how best to instruct and admonish their respective flocks.²⁰⁵ Yet it was not only ecclesiastics who would benefit from reading *Pastoral Care*, as "Gregory's work had

²⁰¹ Frantzen, *King Alfred*, 25.

²⁰² Cf. Ezekiel 3:3; it appears that the prophet was present in Columbanus' mind as he read Gregory's instructions concerning teaching, correction, confession, and penance. The comparison of God's word to honey in Ezekiel, and Columbanus' similar description of Gregory's work, implies that Columbanus considered Gregory's admonitions to be of a similar, if not identical, kind to that of God.

²⁰³ Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 248; Frantzen, *King Alfred*, 25.

²⁰⁴ "The letter of Fulco," 185.

²⁰⁵ Eleanor Shipley Duckett, *Alfred the Great*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 143.

applications reaching far beyond the narrow confines of a bishop's duties, for it also spoke directly to the problems faced by secular rulers."²⁰⁶ As such it very likely appealed to Alfred as a source of insight both for his subjects and for himself as their lord, and there is good reason to believe that "he could not have helped making the connection between the seven rules Gregory laid down for bishops and the ideals for which he himself strove."²⁰⁷ As for transmission of Rheims' brand of Ezekiel (*ministerium*), *Pastoral Care* was in a sense the textbook for the subject, the bulk of its chapters dedicated to admonition of one's subjects, meticulously broken up into sections dealing with various sorts of men, taking into consideration personalities as well as social standing. Indeed, the Carolingians used *Pastoral Care* in conjunction with *correctio*, as explained in their *Relatio*, the written case against Louis the Pious.²⁰⁸

In crafting this translation, Alfred keeps his alterations to a minimum, concerning himself mostly with the meaning of the text and making an effort to convey that meaning clearly, if not

²⁰⁶ Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 43-44.

²⁰⁷ Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 44.

²⁰⁸ "The report of Compiegne by the bishops of the realm concerning the penance of Emperor Louis (833)," in De Jong, *The Penitential State, 271-272*: The opening text of the *Relatio* reads, "It behooves those who belong to the Christian religion to know what is the ministry of the bishops, and how those who are evidently Christ's vicars and hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven should be watchful for and concern themselves with the salvation of all. On them such a power is conferred by Christ that, 'what they shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven, and what they shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven' [Matth. 18.18]. And in how great a danger will they be, if they neglect to administer the food of life to their sheep, and fail to try with all their might to recall those who are straying to the way of truth by reproving and entreating [them], according to the word of the prophet: 'If you do not announce to the iniquitous man his iniquity and he dies in his impiety, I shall require his blood from your hand' [cf. Ez. 3.18], and many similar [pronouncements] pertaining to the pastoral office, which are dispersed throughout Scripture. Accordingly, these pastors should strive above all to maintain the most circumspect discretion towards the errors of sinners, so that, in accordance with the blessed Gregory's teaching, they will be allies to the virtuous because of their humility, but resolutely set against the vices of sinners in their zeal for justice, so that, having left behind apathy and indifference, human flattery and worldly obsequiousness, they may exercise their ministry thus, that they give salutary counsel to their contemporaries and provide a model of salvation to future [generations]."

always stylishly.²⁰⁹ In this way Alfred remained a conservative translator of Gregory's text, keeping close to the original (a favor he did not extend to Boethius).²¹⁰ As a work dedicated to educating Christian teachers (both secular rulers and ecclesiastics), it should come as no surprise that *Pastoral Care* draws upon and emphasizes the very warnings issued by Ezekiel, stressing the necessity for watchmen to do their jobs. Incorporating the metaphor of the teacher as physician, Gregory spills a great deal of ink on confession, penance, and related topics,²¹¹ frequently urging the teacher to be mindful of his own shortcomings and need both for righteous living and constant self-examination:

...he who undertakes the office of bishop undertakes the charge of the people's health, and he must traverse the country like a physician, and visit the houses of sick men. If he has not yet given up his own vices, how can he doctor the minds of other men, while he has in his own mind many open wounds? The doctor is much too bold and shameless who visits the houses of other men, undertaking to cure them, and has on his own face an open wound unhealed.²¹²

In an echo of God's warning to Ezekiel, this same physician is urged to exercise his art with the utmost ardor, lest through his lack of attention another is allowed to go to his death in sin:

We can consider, that if a good physician, who well knows how to cut wounds, sees that someone has need of him, and from sloth is neglectful and withholds his help, we will say that he is very rightly guilty of his brother's death, because of his own sloth. If, then, the physicians of the body are thus held guilty, we must

²⁰⁹ William H. Brown, Jr. "Method and style in the Old English *Pastoral Care*," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol 68 no.4 (October 1969): 666-684, at 666, 669, 678.

²¹⁰ Frantzen, *King Alfred*, 30.

²¹¹ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 103-104.

²¹² Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 58-60: "se þe biscephad underfehð, he underfehð ðæs folces medtrymnesse, & he sceal faran gind lond swæ swæ læce æfter untrumra monna husum. Gif he ðonne git geswicen næfð his agenra unðeawa, hu mæg he ðonne oðerra mona mod lacnian, ðonne he bireð on his agnum monega opena wunda? Se læce bið micles to bald & to scomleas þe gæð æfter oðerra monna husum lacniende, & hæfð on his agnum nebbe opene wunde unlacnode."

consider how greatly they sin who understand the wounds of the mind, and neglect to treat and cut them with their words.²¹³

Gregory's argument clearly provides the foundation for later Carolingian notions of *ministerium* and Alfred's translation demonstrates that such admonition was also on his mind. The argument is two-fold: first, in keeping with Christ's demand that admonition follow self-examination, Gregory calls upon preachers to first take the plank from their own eyes before addressing their flocks.²¹⁴ Then, the plank having been removed, those preachers are condemned who dare to forgo their teaching duties, as this (in keeping with Ezekiel) is a source of life, the guilt for its loss through neglect being placed squarely on the shoulders of those who mumbled when they might have barked.

Having sufficiently put the fear of Ezekiel into his subjects, Gregory/Alfred turns to the matter of becoming a teacher. Essentially, if one *can* be a teacher, one *should* be. Specifically, those men who are blessed with the seven virtues suitable for rulership, should rule, but if they refuse to rule in the name of seeking personal betterment, they are guilty of hiding their light beneath a bushel and do "not love the Lord and high Shepherd."²¹⁵ Moreover, such abstinence as comes with the desire to pursue God's presence in private will be guilty of all the sins they could

²¹³ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 376-377: "Hwæt we magon gedencean, gif hwelc god læce biþ þe wel can wunda sniðan, & ðonne gesihð ðæt his hwæm ðearf bið, & ðonne for his slæwðe agiemeleasað & forwirnð ðæt he his helpe, ðonne wille we eweðan ðæt he sie genoh ryhtlice his broðer deaðes scyldig for his agenre slæwðe. Nu ðonne, nu tha licumlican læceas ðus scyldige gereakte sint, nu is to ongietonne aet hu micelre scylde ða bioð befangne ða þe ongietað ða wunda on ðæm modum, & agiemeleasiað ðæt hie hie lanigen, & mid hiora wordum sniðen."

²¹⁴ Matthew 7:1-5

²¹⁵ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 41-42: "Gif ðonne sio feding ðara sceapa bið þære lufan tacen, hwy forwið ðonne se þe him God swelce cræftas gifð þæt he ne fede his heorde, buton he sweðan wille þæt he ne lufige ðone Hlaford & ðone hean Hirde ealra gesceafta?"

have corrected had they otherwise been willing to teach.²¹⁶ This is a clear parallel to Ezekiel's warnings, here further developed to address those watchmen who are unresponsive out of ostensibly noble motivations. None are innocent who dare to ignore God's clear command to warn the sinner, whether out of stubbornness or altruism. There is but one route to follow: God's own command—for the teacher, this means teaching; for the king, ruling.

Once authority has been rightfully seized, the ruler must conscientiously monitor his flock:

It is the duty of the ruler with the voice of his instruction to display the glory of the lofty regions, and to show how many secret temptations of the old foe lurk in this present life, and not to suffer too gently the sins of his subjects, but correct them with great zeal and severity, lest he be responsible for all their sins, when he is not at all incensed at them.”²¹⁷

How might this play out?

Therefore when teachers perceive that their subjects fear God too little, it is necessary to make them at any rate fear human authority, that they may fear to sin, though they do not dread the divine judgment. Nor do the rulers become proud, although they desire to excite terror on account of such as these, because they do not therein seek their own glory, but desire the righteousness of their subjects, and wish to be feared by those who lead a corrupt life.”²¹⁸

²¹⁶ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 45.

²¹⁷ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 158-160: “Ðæt ðonne bið ðæs recceres ryht ðæt he ðurh ða stemne his lareowdomes ætiewe ðæt wuldor ðæs uplican eðles, & hu monega digla costunga ðæs ealdan feondes lutigeað on ðys andweardun life he eac geopenige, ond ðæt he his hieremonna yflu to hnesclice forberan ne sceal, ac mid miclum andan & reðnesse him stiere, ðylæs he sie scyldig ealra hiera scylda, ðonne him hiera na ne ofðyncð.”

²¹⁸ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 108-109: “Forðæm ðonne ða lareowas ongietað ðæt ða þe him underðiedde bioð him to hwon God ondrædað, ðonne is ðearf ðæt hie gedon ðæt hie huru him menniscne ege ondræden, ðæt hie ne durren syngian ða þe him ne ondrædað ðone godcundan dom. Ne ofermodgiað ða scirmen na forðy, ðeah hie for ðyslicum wilnien ðæt hie andrysne sien, forðon hien ne seceað na hiera selfra

This scheme sums up, in a word, *ministerium*: the interpretation of Ezekiel by Gildas, transferred from churchmen to kings in a manner similar to the Carolingian model. Whereas the Frankish bishops assumed the role of the watchman from Ezekiel, Gregory pressed the role upon secular authorities.²¹⁹ It is now the duty of the king to oversee the righteous living of his subjects and to punish those who err in order to prevent their damnation through his negligence and his own punishment for this grave error.

But fearing that kings grow power-hungry, Gregory reminds them that they are just as sinful as those to be punished, and that “when we ourselves sin, no one chastises or even blames us with a single word. Therefore our responsibility with God is the greater in proportion to the security and impunity with which we sin among men without any punishment.”²²⁰ To Gregory’s eyes, perhaps, those in authority carried along with their burdens a sort of immunity to censure, but the thought that kings and bishops should escape punishment or even mere chastisement was no longer current, at least in Carolingian Frankia. Hence Louis the Pious’ high-profile confessions (in 822 as leader in a sort of court revival, and in 833 at the insistence of his sons and their ecclesiastical allies) and ritual humiliation of Archbishop Ebbo of Rheims after Louis’ triumphant return to power.

This very notion of courtly accountability and self-regulation was what inspired *ministerium* in Francia, and there were numerous cases of criticisms against kings—if somewhat

gilp on ðæm, ac hiera hieremonna ryhtwisnesse hie wilniað, & ðæm hie wilniað ðæt hie andrysne sien ðæm þe on who libbað.”

²¹⁹ Cf. Romans 13:1-7

²²⁰ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 117: “Ac eft ðonne we selfe gesyngiað, ne ðreat us nan mon, ne furðum ane worde ne tælð. Forðæm we bioð mid Gode swæ micle swiður gebundne swæ we for mannum orsorglicor ungewitnode syngiað buton ælere wrace.”

less dramatic—in the Carolingian Empire.²²¹ It might well have come as a surprise to Gregory were he to learn that *Pastoral Care* would be cited as justification in the opening lines of the *Relatio*, the bishops' denunciation (and rationale for the overthrow) of Emperor Louis, the most powerful man in the West.²²² For the Carolingians, at least, fair admonition ought to be given due consideration.²²³ It seems King Alfred agreed. Though born almost twenty years after the drama of 833, such a high-profile event would have likely been known to the well-traveled king. Moreover, Grimbald, himself acquainted with the inner circles of ecclesiastical power, might have spun some outstanding admonitory tales for his Anglo-Saxon patron. What Alfred thought of Louis' humiliation we may not know, but he must have been sufficiently impressed with Carolingian piety to have so ardently desired for "all men" to be able to read the very book that provided the rebellious bishops their ammunition. If Ezekiel was used to justify calls to repentance, and it was *ministerium* and penance that cleansed a kingdom of its sins, then *Pastoral Care* was one instrument by which this aim might be achieved. Another such tool was an older text, newly introduced English readership.

The Consolation of Philosophy by Boethius was composed in 524 during the author's nine-month exile and possible imprisonment for alleged treason against his emperor, Theodoric the Ostrogoth.²²⁴ It is a work that incorporates many literary forms, most notably the consolation, "a work written to one in adversity, which seeks to reconcile him to his hardship."²²⁵ Boethius' written response to his misfortunes takes the form of a dialogue between the prisoner (called

²²¹ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 4, 115.

²²² "The report of Compiègne" in De Jong, 271.

²²³ De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 141.

²²⁴ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:3; Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 46.

²²⁵ Frantzen, *King Alfred*, 43.

“Mind”) and Philosophy, in which the former laments the successes of the wicked at the expense of the righteous while the latter seeks to disabuse Mind of his impressions and convince him instead of the purpose of his affliction.²²⁶ Following Boethius’ subsequent execution, *The Consolation* disappeared for several centuries, for while Boethius was long remembered as a noted author, evidence for this particular work did not appear until the eighth century when Alcuin wrote his *De vera philosophia*, which borrowed heavily from *The Consolation*; its popularity on the Continent spread thereafter.²²⁷ Yet while Alcuin was apparently the first to popularize *The Consolation* in the Middle Ages, Alfred might well take credit for introducing the “old Roman” to England.²²⁸ Through their translation of Boethius, Alfred and his circle of scholars took an old work and used it to speak to their new formula of penance and self-examination.

Unlike his more faithful treatment of Gregory, here “Alfred substantially altered the thought and the design of the work,” influenced as he was by commentaries on the *Consolation*, and possibly by “various early medieval texts, such as the writings of Isidore of Seville, and the

²²⁶ Frantzen, *King Alfred*, 45-46.

²²⁷ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:4

²²⁸ Frantzen, *King Alfred*, 43-44; William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings*, vol.1 ed. and trans. R.A.B. Mynors, R.M. Thompson, and M. Winterbottom (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998), 190-191: William claims that Asser explained *Consolation of Philosophy* to Alfred, who then translated the text into English. Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 1:8-9: of the Old English *Consolation*, there exist two versions: one in prose (B Manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 180 (2079)) and the other (C Manuscript, London, British Library, Cotton Otho A.vi) derived from the first, but consisting of alternating prose and verse, thus mirroring the original Latin text. Both texts begin with an attribution to Alfred as the author, and both are thought to be products Alfred’s reign or that of his immediate successors, being written after 885 and not after the first half of the following century.

classics, including Virgil and other poets.”²²⁹ Through his extensive editorializing, Alfred bequeathed to the English *Consolation* a “distinctly Christian colouring.”²³⁰ Boethius’ *Consolation* “was his reasoned answer to undeserved misfortune,” and Alfred “found many parallels between Boethius’ predicament and his own situation.”²³¹ This personal investment seems to redirect the “translation,” as Alfred shifts the work’s main focus from “the nature of order and justice” to “the question of power and goodness.”²³² Alfred places emphasis upon godly kingship, having Mind say,

Then the material for a king and his tools for ruling with are that he has his land fully manned. He must have prayer-men and army-men and work-men. [...] His material is also that he must have for these tools sustenance for the three communities. This then is their sustenance: land to inhabit, and gifts, and weapons, and food, and ale, and clothes, and everything that the three communities need. He cannot without these things keep the tools, nor without these tools perform any of the things that he is commanded to perform.²³³

²²⁹ Frantzen, *King Alfred*, 47-48; Sedgefield, *King Alfred’s Version of the Consolations of Boethius*, xxiv: Alfred decided to forgo the marginal notes common in Latin manuscripts and instead incorporate his own additions directly into the text—a method ideal for a work most likely intended to be read aloud; Cf. Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:1: “King Alfred was the translator of this book, and turned it from Latin into English, as it is now done. Sometimes he set it down word by word, sometimes sense from sense, in whatever way he could most clearly and intelligibly explain it”; Alfred the Great, *King Alfred’s West-Saxon Version of Gregory’s Pastoral Care*, 7: compare with his introduction to *Pastoral Care*, where Alfred makes the same claim.

²³⁰ Sedgefield, *King Alfred’s Version of the Consolation of Boethius*, xxiv-xxv.

²³¹ Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 46-47; Alfred the Great, *King Alfred’s Version of the Consolations of Boethius*, 2: curiously, in Alfred’s translation Boethius is very much at fault, having written to the Caesar of Constantinople to come and take back Italy from “cruel King Theodoric,” which conspiracy lands him in prison.

²³² Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 48-49.

²³³ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:27; 1:277: “Þæt bið þonne cyninges andweorc and his tol mid to ricsianne þæt he hæbbe his land fulmannod. He sceal habban gebedmen and fyrdmen and weorcmen. [...] Þæt is eac his andweorc þæt he habban sceal to þam tolum þam þrim geferscipum biwiste. Þæt is þonna heora biwist: land to bugianne and gifta and wæpnu and mete and ealo and clapas, and gehwæt þæs ðe þa þre geferscipas behofiað. Ne mæg he butan þisum as tol gehealdan, ne buton þisum tolum nan þara þinga wyrcan the him beboden

But Alfred is also eager to convince his readers that his revised translation is true to the original, reminding the reader about who Boethius is and that it is indeed he who is speaking—despite the additions and alterations introduced into the Old English text that sometimes stray into fiction—thereby gaining for his own work the authority and authenticity enjoyed by the original’s author.²³⁴

Because Boethius wrote his original *Consolation* while imprisoned for alleged treachery, a situation that provided ample opportunity for reflection upon justice (or injustice), crime, and punishment, these thoughts could be easily incorporated into an Alfredian worldview of confession and penance. In Chapter 31 Philosophy says,

What good can we say about fleshly vices? For whoever wants to leave them must endure great privation and many hardships; for superfluity always feeds vices, and the vices have great need of repentance, and there is no repentance without sorrow and privation. O how many diseases and how much pain and what great sleeplessness and how much grief has one who has wicked desires in this world! And how much more do you think they are destined to have after this world as reward for their actions [...] Truly the evil desire of wrongful coupling disturbs the mind of nearly every person alive. Just as the bee must perish when it angrily stings something, so must each soul perish after wrongful coupling unless the person turn to good.²³⁵

is to wycenne.” Cf. Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 49.

²³⁴ Malcolm Godden, “The translations of Alfred and his circle, and the misappropriation of the past,” *H.M. Chadwick Memorial Lectures* 14 (University of Cambridge, Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse, and Celtic, 2004): 1-28, at 11-12.

²³⁵ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:45, 46; 1:306, 307: “Hwæt godes magan we secgan on þa flæsclican unþeawas? Forþam swa hwa swa hi forlætann wile, he sceal geþolian micle nearanesse and manige gearfoðu; forþam seo oferfyll simle fet unþeawas, and tha unþeawas habbað oferðearfe hreowsunga, and seo hreowsung ne beoð na butan sorge and butan nearnesse. Eala eaw hu manega adla and hu micel sar and hu micele wæccan and hu micle unrotnesse se hæfð the ðone won willan hæfð on þisse worulde. And hu micele ma wenst ðu þæt hi scylon habban æfter þisse worulde edlean heora gearnunga [...] Hwæt se yfela willa unrihtþæmedes gedrefð fulneah ælcas libbendes monnes mod. Swa swa seo beo sceal losian þonne heo æt irringa stingð, swa sceal ælc sawl forweorðan æfter þam unrihtþæmede buton se mon hweorfe to gode.”

To further illustrate the destructive nature of sin and the necessity for repentance, Philosophy relates the tale of Orpheus, that peerless harpist who, losing his wife to death, descends into hell to ask the king thereof for his wife's return. Sadly, he disobeys the one order of the king, namely to not look back at as he leaves hell, and in so doing loses his wife a second time. To this Philosophy says,

These false stories teach everyone of those who wish to flee the darkness of hell and to come to the light of the true God, that he should not look behind him to his old evils so that he commits them again as fully as he did them before. For whoever with full desire turns his mind to the evils that he abandoned before and commits them then and takes full pleasure in them, and never intends to leave them, he then loses all his earlier goods, unless he make amends for it again.²³⁶

In both the passages cited above there is an emphasis placed upon the act of atonement—specifically that “so must each soul perish after wrongful coupling unless the person turn to good,” and “he then loses all his earlier goods, unless he make amends for it again,”—that bears strong resemblance to God's warning to Ezekiel.²³⁷

But with true repentance, penance is ubiquitous. Philosophy addresses penance through an analysis of just punishment for one's crimes, even invoking the physician metaphor: “Do you

²³⁶ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:66; 1:306, 307: “Ðas leasan spell lærað gehwiltne man þara the wilnað helle þeostra to flionne and to þæs soðan Godes lihte to cumenne, þæt he hine ne besio [to] his ealdum yfelum swa þæt he hi eft swa fullice fullfremme swa he hi ær dyde. Forþam swa hwa swa mid fullon willan his mod went to þam yflum the he ær forlet and hi þonne fullfremeð and [hi] him þonne fullice liciað, and he hi næfre forlætan ne þencð, þonne forlyst he eall his ærran god buton he hit eft gebete.” See also Ezekiel 3:20-21, “Moreover if the just man shall turn away from his justice, and shall commit iniquity: I will lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die, because thou hast not given him warning: he shall die in his sin, and his justices which he hath done, shall not be remembered: but I will require his blood at thy hand. But if thou warn the just man, that the just may not sin, and he doth not sin: living he shall live, because thou hast warned him, and thou hast delivered thy soul.” C.f. Hebrews 10:26-31.

²³⁷ C.f. Ezekiel 3:19-20.

understand that every evil-willing and evil-doing man is worthy of punishment?”²³⁸ After several lines of exchange, Boethius/Alfred responds saying that wrongs committed by a man make him wretched, to which Philosophy approvingly says, “Thou hast a right understanding of the matter,” and then makes the surprising observation that wrongdoers are more in need of legal representation than their victims, in that their own advocate in court should demand just punishment to the same degree as the crime committed, for “[j]ust as the sick man needs to be taken to the doctor so that he may take care of him, so one who does evil needs to be taken to the people in authority so that his vices can be cut away and burnt there.”²³⁹ Thus, to return to Philosophy’s prior observation on lusts and their painful results, the evils that befall sinners act as a form of penance, cleansing them of their past deeds—as Philosophy triumphantly concludes, “But I know that if the guilty had any spark of wisdom and understood to any degree that they could amend their crimes through punishment which fell upon them here in this world, they they would not say that it was punishment, but would say that it was their cleansing and their amendment.”²⁴⁰ This constitutes an interesting addition to *ministerium*: not only must God’s spokesmen provide warning to sinners, but those sinners must also count it all joy to undergo their prescribed penance, as this will cleans them and set them free.

If punishment is to be seen as a “cleansing and bettering,” then so too one must view

²³⁸ Alfred the Great, *King Alfred’s Version of the Consolation of Boethius*, 142; Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:78-79; 1:356: “Hwæþer þu ongite þæt aelc yfelwillende mon and yfelwyrccende sie wites wyrðe?”

²³⁹ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:79; 1:357: “Swa swa se sioca ah þearfe þæt hine mon læde to þam læce þæt he his tilige, swa ah se þe þæt yfel deð þæt hine mon læde to þam ricum þæt mon þær mæge sniðan and bænan his unþeawas.”

²⁴⁰ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:79; 1:357: “Ac ic wat gif þa scyldigan ænigne spearcan wisdomes | hæfdon and be ægnum dæle ongitan þæt hi mihtan hiora scylda þurh wite gebetan the him her on worulde on become, þonne noldan hi na cweþan þæt hit wære wite, ac woldon cweþan þæt hit wære hiora clænsung and heora betrung.”

shame in the proper light. Building upon a declaration made earlier to Mind's confession of guilt, Philosophy responds, "That is still part of of your wrongfulness that you are almost completely in despair. But I did not want you to despair. But I wanted you to be ashamed of such folly, because one who despairs is dispirited, but one who is ashamed is penitent."²⁴¹ Thus, by chastisement Mind comes to a realization of his sin, and through his remorse comes to repentance, the ideal state for every man. This is true wisdom, reached by means of an understanding of Paul and Ezekiel as Philosophy declares in another Alfredian passage, "love the man and hate his vices, cut them from him as much as he can."²⁴² All of this falls under the categorical process of *ministerium*: Philosophy carries out her duty by constantly exhorting Mind to repentance and wisdom, and through this shows how men ought to be likewise admonished. Then, having heard the admonition, the wise man comes sorrowfully before the Lord in supplication and repentance, but must undergo sorrow and discomfort in order to have his iniquities destroyed. As such, let no man despise his misfortunes, says Philosophy, as these are but a source of admonition and penance in and of themselves.²⁴³

²⁴¹ Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:13; 1:256: "Ðæt [is] nu git þinre unrihtwisnesse þæt þu eart fullneah forþoht. Ac ic nolde þæt þu þe forþohtest. Ac ic wolde þæt þe sceamode swelces gedwolan, forðam se se the hine forþencð se bið ormod, ac | se se þe hine sceamað se bið on hreow-sunga."

²⁴² Godden and Irvine, *The Old English Boethius*, 2:80; 1:258: "lufien þone man and hatige his unþeawas, ceorfe him of swa he swiðost mæg." Cf. Mat. 5:29, Mark 9:46.

²⁴³ Cf. Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies*, edited by Thomas A. Carnicelli (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 32: This sense of cleansing adversity reappears in a later work of Alfred's, the translation of Augustine's *Soliloquies*, wherein the exchange between Augustine and Reason in *Soliloquies* offers reassurance regarding adverse circumstances, Reason addressing Augustine in a way reminiscent of Philosophy's defense of corporal punishment: "Believe firmly in God, and commit thyself wholly to God, and seek not too much the fulfilling of thine own will above His; but be His servant, not thine own; and confess that thou art His servant. Then He will raise thee ever nearer to himself, and will not let any adversity befall thee. Howbeit if He permit any adversity to befall thee, it will be for thy good, although thou canst not understand it." Such would have been welcome reassurance to a

With a penitential education—an understanding of admonition, repentance, and penance—now on hand, it might be possible for England to prosper as a united nation under the guidance of men who were both learned in the writings most needful for the edification of all Christians, and wise in the philosophies of Christianity. That this triumph was appreciated is expressed through the poem possibly authored by John the Old Saxon, which reads,

Behold, may all the Graces descend from heaven upon you! You shall always be joyous, Alfred, through the happy walks of life. May you bend your mind to heavenly affairs; be disgusted with trappings. Rightly do you teach, hastening from the deceptive charm of worldly things. See, you apply yourself ever to gain the shining talents: run confidently through the fields of foreign learning!²⁴⁴

Apart from invoking an amusing mental image of a king skipping gaily through a field of daisies, this passage carries a sense of achievement and confidence—the belief that Alfred’s endeavors and accomplishments were of a spiritual nature, specifically that the foreign knowledge he had imported would amount to greater things in heaven than on earth. Considering the presence of Ezekiel in the works that Alfred translated, it might be supposed that what he had accomplished was England’s salvation.

Viking return and the triumph of Anglo-Saxon *ministerium*

Thus I believe that we can reasonably trace Carolingian application of Ezekiel back to Britain.

Once Gildas’ teachings arrived on the Continent, the Carolingians adopted them as *ministerium*

king whose early years had been spent fighting for the survival of his kingdom; Alfred the Great, *King Alfred's West-Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, 36: Indeed, the words of Gregory may well have come back to his mind when the pope likened King David’s trials and tribulations to a cleansing fire that brought him round after the murder of Uriah the Hittite. Cf. Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-8; Revelation 3:19.

²⁴⁴ “Two acrostic poems on King Alfred,” in *Alfred the Great*, 192.

to fit *correction*, and *ministerium* was thereafter introduced to England through Alfred's translations. The writings of Gildas formed a foundation for prophetic admonition of one's own people to correct their sinful and wayward habits and reorient with God's ordained life, or face the same consequences as the ancient Israelites. This admonition found students both in clergymen who wished to stem the onset of pagan revival and in Irish monastic schools—where Columbanus, growing up within proximity to Gildas' own student, St. Findbarr, came to appreciate Gildas' style and authority, using both in his own writings, and taking his bold teachings into voluntary exile on the Continent. There, this interpretation of Ezekiel passed into court circles as the Merovingians—and their successors, the Carolingians—encouraged monastic development and acquired men of learning at court. Added to this philosophy of admonition came the insular penitentials, augmenting Carolingian penance to form a new philosophy of admonition of one's neighbors, followed by penance, both public and private, and with varying degrees of political weight. From there, the main texts of *ministerium* returned to England with Grimbald of St. Bertin's and Rheims, a scholar who knew them well.

The Danish invasions proved to be a catalyst for the introduction of Carolingianized Ezekiel into England. Through these attacks the Anglo-Saxons came to regard themselves as under the divine judgment of God. Contemporary writers such as Alcuin and Asser corroborated this view, as they observed manifold sins among the people and considered the chilling possibility that God was punishing the Anglo-Saxons in the same way as he had the Britons before them, and the ancient Israelites long ago. Mindful of this possibility, Alfred, a man of exceeding piety in the eyes of his biographer, Asser, used the peacetime allowed him after driving back the Vikings to restore learning, drawing upon Continental and Insular scholars alike. The arrival of Grimbald meant a return to that old favorite of Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastics,

Pastoral Care, and a newfound work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, these translated for the edification of the English freemen; *Pastoral Care* served to educate the clergy and rulers, who would themselves admonish their followers to repentance, while *The Consolation* urged individuals to view themselves as wretched penitents in need of divine salvation. Between these two texts, the former a kind of “textbook” of *ministerium*, Ezekiel returned to England to admonish the sinner and urge him to fitting penance. Whether or not the Anglo-Saxons were timely in their repentance would be quickly tested, for the Vikings soon again visited England.

Despite some twelve years on the Continent, the year 891 proved a bad one to be a Viking. Privation and military defeats at the hands of the Franks and Bretons proved encouragement enough to make another attempt at the English, who had been left largely to their own devices for the last decade. Two armies arrived by ship at Kent, some thousands strong, and though they met with initial success and enjoyed aid and reinforcements from their cousins in the Danelaw, Alfred, now in his forties and a mere ten years from the end of his life, arrived to test his new army against the invaders.²⁴⁵ Though the Vikings were not easily defeated, Alfred proved that his military preparations had not been in vain, and the succeeding years saw as many victories by the English and their Welsh allies as by the Vikings, who found their raids constantly met and countered, and their ships captured and scuttled.²⁴⁶ This newfound success was continued at sea, as Alfred deployed his own fleet of war ships that managed to defeat the Vikings in their own element.²⁴⁷

Not many years after, Alfred passed away and a succession crisis saw his nephew attempt a civil war, much as had been seen in Northumbria, that ruined kingdom the Vikings had first

²⁴⁵ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* A, E, 83, 85-90; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 41.

²⁴⁶ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* A, 85-90.

²⁴⁷ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* A, 90.

scourged. Alfred's successor, Edward, spent the first decade of his reign combatting this and other threats, for the Vikings in the Danelaw frequently kept up their marauding ways. But now the West Saxons, allied with the Mercians, were capable of not only driving out the invaders, but becoming invaders themselves, ravaging the lands of the "northern army" in 909.²⁴⁸ The tables had greatly turned since those bleak days in the early 870s. To the victorious Christians, it must have seemed that their renewed dedication to God, in response to Ezekiel's warnings, had turned back the scourgings of the past and brought about a new age of piety; like David's own ills, their past troubles had acted to cut out and burn their impurities as a fitting penance.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁸ *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* D, 93, 95, 97.

²⁴⁹ Patrick Wormald, "Anglo-Saxon Society and Its Literature" in *The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature*, edited by Malcolm Godden and Michael Lapidge (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 1-22, at 16; see also William of Malmesbury, *Gesta regum Anglorum*, 182-183: It would seem that by William's day, this had perhaps become accepted fact, at least insofar as the following legend suggests: according to William, while exiled to the island of Athelney, Alfred encounters St. Cuthbert in a dream, wherein the saint says, "The Lord has sent me to bring you good tidings, for since England has long been paying very heavy penalties for all her sins, He now at length through the merits of her native saints looks on her with an eye of mercy" ("Misit me Dominus ut tibi prospera annuntiem: quia enim Anglia iam dudum peccatorum penas enormiter luit, modo tandem, indigenarum sanctorum meritis, super eam misericordiae suae oculo respicit").

Chapter 3: “Sins of the Conquerors: The Blickling Homilies, Aelfric, and Wulfstan”

Following the West Saxon victory over the Danes, England entered a time of comparative peace in which men could focus on rebuilding what had been destroyed during the Viking invasions. Throughout the bloody ordeal, Gildas’ interpretation of Ezekiel had served Alfred as a tool by which to earn God’s grace and re-orient English fortunes. To Alfred’s eyes, English sins had cursed the Anglo-Saxons to suffer the Danish assaults, and it was through true repentance and a return to pious living that insular Christians might again enjoy the peace that came with God’s favor. Alfred looked forward into an uncertain future, yet for the most part the English had won, and what followed was a period of West Saxon ascendancy, one that no longer required emergency protocols to return to piety. As such, *ministerium*, having been established in England, for a time entered church discourse as a doctrine independent of national obligation. Acting on its own, Ezekiel came to be used as a teaching tool for right living, guiding the Church and its congregations, at least for a time. However, it was not long until foreign raiders again ventured into Anglo-Saxon England, whereupon the religious authors Aelfric and Wulfstan resurrected Ezekiel’s more apocalyptic uses.

This chapter focuses on the use of Ezekiel in Anglo-Saxon society between the years of Alfred’s immediate successors in the early 900s (the West Saxon conquerors) and the ultimate Danish victory that put Cnut on the throne in 1016 (the Christianized Danish conquerors). It starts with the *Blickling Homilies*. After the Benedictine reform movement, the author Aelfric of Eynsham, this chapter’s second source, produced an expansive corpus of vernacular homilies and hagiographies that sought to teach correct belief to his audiences. He was a great influence upon Wulfstan, a prominent cleric of both Aethelred’s and Cnut’s courts, whose own use of Ezekiel in

the *Sermo lupi* sees the intellectual process come full circle to its originator, Gildas.

The Blickling Homilies²⁵⁰

The Blickling Homilies are a collection of miscellaneous homilies composed in the vernacular, these written in England possibly at the start of the Benedictine Reform near the end of the tenth century (though this is not certain).²⁵¹ It appears that the manuscript was composed by two scribes working in tandem (Kelly suggests the latter functions as supervisor to the former, considering the nature of the points at which Hand B takes over), who between them copied into the book eighteen different homilies (having been previously composed sometime either during the Benedictine Reform or prior to) for the purpose of preaching over the course of a liturgical year.²⁵² The texts included in the manuscript are in Old English and likely intended for both lay and ecclesiastical audiences. However, though oral delivery to a lay audience has commonly been the conclusion among historians, (on account of the vernacular language, the “oral” nature

²⁵⁰ For the distinction between homilies and sermons, see Richard J. Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies: Edition and Translation (with General Introduction, Textual Notes, Tables and Appendices, and Select Bibliography)* (New York: Continuum, 2003), xvi: “The two major forms of preaching text, the homily and the sermon, differed from the outset in form and function. A homily, definitively, interpreted specific scriptural passages, usually the Gospel lection from the liturgy of the day. The exegetical homily explaining a specific passage phrase by phrase became popular early on. Many other scriptural references were also cited. Scripture was invariably the authority and the homily was to elucidate its further meaning. The exposition was followed by an exhortation to the audience on how to respond. In contrast, the sermon was a moral discourse that often referred to various scriptural passages rather than to a particular biblical pericope. The rendering of both homilies and sermons was primarily, but not exclusively, the prerogative of the bishop.”

²⁵¹ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, vii, xxiii, xxix-xxx, xli-xliv; The original manuscript contains not only its original homilies, but also a selection of Gospel passages for use in the taking of oaths, a calendar, and sundry municipal and marginal entries accumulated during the manuscript’s use as a ledger for municipal miscellany in the county of Lincoln—in this sense, the Blickling manuscript functions as a living record of English writing from roughly the tenth to the early seventeenth centuries.

²⁵² Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, xxiii, xxxi, xxxvi-xxxvii.

of the composition itself, and the subject matter being geared towards “moral exhortation over exegesis”) this assumption has not been definitively proven.²⁵³

There are several key elements of Ezekiel and influences of Carolingian *ministerium* that are espoused in the *Blickling Homilies*: correct belief and the authority of those who preach it, *ministerium* maintained under threat of divine wrath, and repentance coupled with penance (albeit of a somewhat contrary nature, perhaps thanks to the *Blickling Homilies*’ composite nature). These key elements shall be addressed in order.

Several times the homilies turn to *ministerium* and the active maintenance of proper belief inseparable from it. The exhortation for Rogation Wednesday urges the people to exercise proper worship in addition to those individuals expressly called to serve the Church and state: “May we appropriately praise God, as is commanded of all people of faith and not just to those who are in exalted positions of service to God, such as bishops, kings, mass-priests and archdeacons.”²⁵⁴ Although speaking to the people generally, this telling statement recalls the dual responsibilities espoused in Gregory’s *Pastoral Care* that Alfred likely found so appealing. No longer is the king to negotiate with the clergy over laws and authority as in the formative years of the Anglo-Saxon states; rather the idea that kings and clergy are both included with those “in exalted positions of service to God” demonstrates that a form of the Carolingian *ministerium* had

²⁵³ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, xlvi: indeed, Kelly argues that the composite nature of *The Blickling Homilies* correlates with the practices of monastic churches in tenth-century England; Nancy M. Thompson, “The Carolingian *De festiuitatibus*,” in *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, ed. Aaron J. Kleist (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 97-119, at 97-103: Thompson has observed that the contents of *The Blickling Homilies* bears some resemblance to the Carolingian capitula *De festiuitatibus*, “which set out the special feasts of the year,” suggesting that perhaps *The Blickling Homilies* were in fact a compilation inspired by *De festiuitatibus*.

²⁵⁴ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 76-77: “Pæt we þurh pæt ealle Gode lician, swa hit eallum geleaffullum folcum beboden standeþ, næs na þam anum þe gode sylfum underþeodde syndon mid myclum hadum, biscopas, ond cyningas, ond mæssepreostas, ond heahdiaconas.”

infused Anglo-Saxon society, demanding that now the lay and ecclesiastical rulers work in tandem as God's servants.

Part of this responsibility was the instruction and maintenance of correct belief.²⁵⁵ A few lines below the veiled reference to *ministerium*, the speaker reminds the congregation of the importance of correct belief and asserts the authority of those who teach correct doctrine before explaining what such beliefs look like and how they impact the Christian life:

We must make our peace with God and humankind, and firmly establish the proper belief in our hearts, so that it may dwell, bloom and grow therein. We must confess true belief in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ, his begotten Son, and in the Holy Spirit, who is co-eternal with the Father. We must trust in God's holy Church, and in those that have true and correct faith. We must believe in the forgiveness of sins, and in the resurrection of the body on Doomsday.²⁵⁶ We must believe in the everlasting life, and in the heavenly kingdom that is promised to all that are now doers of what is good. Such is the true faith, which each man should preserve and perform; no worker may perform good works before God without love and belief. It is fundamental for us to consider and bear this in mind—and most diligently when we hear God's books explained and read to us, the Gospel proclaimed, and His glories made known to men.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁵ For a more passing reference to proper belief, see Kelly, "The Birth of John the Baptist" in *The Blickling Homilies*, 118-119: the call for "All folk of proper faith" to "rejoice at his [John's] advent and to bless him, since the Scripture said of him, 'That many should rejoice at his birth'" (Ond eal rihtgelyfed folc sceal gefeon on þone his tocyme ond hine bletsian, forþon the þæt gewrit swa be him cwæþ, "Þæt monige on þa his gebyrd gefeon sceoldan").

²⁵⁶ Cf. Aelfric of Eynsham, "The Seven Sleepers" in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, translated by Rev. Walter W. Skeat (1881, 1885; repr., London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 1:488-541, at 511: Aelfric condemns as heresy the belief that the human soul, without its mortal body, would rise up on doomsday; see also "The Maccabees," in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, translated by Skeat (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co., 1900), 2:66-125, at 99.

²⁵⁷ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 78-79: "Ac we sceolan us gearnian þa siblican wæra Godes ond manna, ond þone rihtan geleafan fæste staðelian on urum heortum þæt he ðær wunian mæge on mote, ond þær growan ond blowan. Ond we sceolan andettan þa sothan geleaffulnesse on urne Drihten Haelende Crist, ond on his þone ascendan Sunu, ond on ðone Halgan Gast, se is efnece Fæder on Sunu. Ond we sceolan gehyhtan on Godes þa gehalgodan cyricean, ond on ða rihtgelefedan. Ond we sceolan gelyfan synna forlætnessa ond lichoman æristes on Domesdaeg (MS domosdaeg). Ond we sceolan gelefan on þæt (fol. 67v) ece lif, ond on þæt heofonlice rice þæt is gehaten eallum the nu syndan godes wyrhtan. This is se rihta geleafa, the æghwylcum men gebyreþ þæt he wel gehealde ond gelæste, forðon the nan wyrhta ne mæg god weorc wyrcean for

“No worker may perform good works before God without love and belief.”²⁵⁸ It is easy to read *ministerium* into the meaning of this passage, as correct belief is not only espoused, but also deemed necessary for good works—though the tone is much softer than seen previously, or indeed later.

That said, other homiletic authors were less forgiving of their audience—for example, in the homily titled “The Third Sunday in Lent” wherein *ministerium* takes a central role and is applied with tough love. Though ostensibly composed to instruct on the purpose and need for tithes and lay offerings to the church, the teacher suddenly turns to address the duty of the clergy, waxing eloquent in a brimstone-tinged harangue that recalls all the vivid edification employed by God in Ezekiel. Book-ended by tithes and first fruits, the middle section of the homily admonishes the ecclesiastical audience to be fearless in their preaching and for confessors to ignore bribery and influence when dispensing judgments and penance according to the sin, on pain of God’s punishment. Careful scrutiny is commanded, and St. Paul cited as saying “for a man to hide his sins from his confessor is deemed as the devil’s treasure.”²⁵⁹ Adding to this, the speaker declares that “The priest who is very slow in driving out the devil from a man and in speedily ridding his soul from the adversary with oil and water will be condemned to the fiery river and the iron hook.”²⁶⁰ Such punishment is likened to that reserved for those who turn their

Gode buton lufon ond geleafan. Ond us is mycel nedþearf þæt we us sylfe geðencean ond gemunan, ond þonne geornost, þonne we gehyron Godes bec us beforan reccean ond rædan, ond godspell secgæan, ond his wuldorþrymmas mannum cyþan.”

²⁵⁸ Cf. 1 Corinthians 13.

²⁵⁹ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 28-29: “þæt biþ deofles goldhord, þæt mon his synna dyrne his scrifte.”

²⁶⁰ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 28-29: “Se mæssepreost se þe bið to læt þæt he thæt he hæf deofol of men adrife, ond tha sawle rathost mid ele ond mid wætere aet þon witherweardan ahredde, þonne bið he geteald to þære fyrenan ea ond to þæm isenan hocce.”

backs on “widows, orphans, or any of God’s needy.”²⁶¹ Here, the intense *ministerium* of the Carolingian world has directly infiltrated penitential practice in Anglo-Saxon England, as the roaring lioness described by Gildas turns on her cubs in righteous indignation.

In a striking parallel with Gregory’s enjoiner in *Pastoral Care*, the clergy is included in the responsibilities of the teachers: bishops are commanded to control their priests as well as their flock, actively preventing them from leading sinful lives, the reader adding for clarity, “Since the bishop is the servant of God, who does God remind of duty more but the bishop?”²⁶² Expanding on this thought, he then turns to kings and bishops together, calling them to “be shepherds of Christian people and direct them away from all unrighteousness. If they will be unable to convert them to what is right so that they may cease from their iniquities, then all will atone in proportion to their guilt.”²⁶³ In addition, bishops and mass-priests are encouraged to “minister daily to God’s people, or at least once a week sing mass for all Christian people who have been born since the beginning of the world because it is God’s will that they should intercede for them,” and in return receive intercession in heaven.²⁶⁴

This instruction then suddenly turns to formula in a diatribe that brings the absolute necessity of correct belief into harsh focus. The reader again cites St. Paul, this time in remarking upon the fear created in devils by the sign of “Christ’s Rood,” which must be performed seven

²⁶¹ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 29.

²⁶² Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 28-29: “Hwane manap God maran gafoles þonne þone biscop, forþon þe se biscop biþ godes gingra?”

²⁶³ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 30-31: “se cyning ond se biscop sceoldan beon Cristenra folca hydras, ond hi from eallum (fol. 26r) unrihtwisum ahweorfan. Ond gif mon þonne ne mihte hi to rihte gecyrron, þæt hi heora wohdæda geswican woldan, þonne sceal æghwyle man betan his wohdæda be his gyltes andefne.”

²⁶⁴ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 30-31: “þonne sceolan hi þegnian dæghwamlice Godes folce, oþþe huru embe seofon niht mæssan gesingan for eal Cristen folc, the æfre from frymthe middangeardes acenned wæs, ond Godes willa sy þæt hi foreþingian motan.”

times per day at set hours while the man “commend[s] himself to God.”²⁶⁵ Once again, the teaching of this vital knowledge is dependent upon the priest, and, per the standards of Ezekiel, his own salvation is dependent upon faithful instruction:

If the teachers will not impart this upon God’s people, they will be very guilty before God because God’s people ought to know how to protect themselves from devils. The teachers thereafter will be deserving of condemnation if they will not teach the people to cease from their sins and observe God’s commands. The bishop must lay a great injunction upon the priests, if they are to preserve themselves from the wrath of God, to tell God’s people that on Sundays and mass days they should earnestly visit God’s church, and joyfully hear God’s instruction there [...] The bishops and priests must diligently encourage men of all classes and command them appropriately to observe God’s decrees; the servants of God must attend to their divine services and their churches correctly, and to laity as properly befits them. But if anyone will not listen to him, the priest must punish him as it is here decreed. If the servant of God will not serve the Church correctly, let him receive together with the laity the severest punishment. The mass-priest must do this out of necessity, or else take upon himself the sins of God’s servant. He will then be like the angels of old who contended against God and were thrown into hell. The great teacher (St Paul) has stated this concerning those same (clergy) so that thereby they might teach other men; the bishop and the priest are then proven guiltless before God.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 30-31: “Huru he hine Gode be beode”; cf. Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 2:155: “Though a man wave about wonderfully with his hand, nevertheless it is not a blessing except he make the sign of the holy cross; and forthwith the fierce fiend will be terrified on account of the victorious token” (“Þeah the man wafige wundorlice mid handa ne bið hit þeah bletsung buta he wyrce tacn þære halgan rode and se reða feond biþ sona afyrht for ðam sige-fæstan tacne.”)

²⁶⁶ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 30-33: “Ond gif þa lareowas þis nellap fæstlice Godes folce bebeodan, þonne beoþ hi with God swyþe scyldige, forþon þæt Godes folc sceal witon hu hi hi sylfe scyldan sceolan with deoflu. One tha lareowas beoþ syþþan domes wyrþe, gif hi nellap þæt folc læron þæt hi heora synna geswicon, ond Godes bebodu healdan. Se biscop sceal beodan mid þon mæston bebode þæm mæssepreostum, gif he hi sylfe willon with Godes erre gehealdan, þæt hi secggaþ þæm Godes folce þæt hi Sunnandagum ond mæssedagum Godes cyrican georne secan, ond þær þa godcundan lare lustlice gehyran [...] Þonne sceolan tha biscopas ond þa mæssepreostas gehwylces hades men georne þreatigean, ond him bebeodan (fol. 27v) þæt hi Godes domas on riht healdan, ond þa læwedan swa him mid rihte tobelimpe. Gif him mon þonne hyran nelle, þonne mot se mæssepreost hit wrecan, swa hit her beboden is. Gif se Godes þeow nelle þære cyrican on riht þeowian, þæt he þonne mid laewedum mannum onfo þæs heardestan þeowdomes. Ond þis sceal se mæssepreost need bebeodan oþþe þæs Godes þeowes synna onfon. Ond he biþ þonne se oþþan þæm englum gelic, the geo Gode wiþsocan, ond þa wurdon on helle

Here there is an emphasis upon the fault of the priest if he allows others to go on sinning without adequate punishment. It appears that the spirit of Ezekiel remains intact, but the outcome is tied to actions rather than speech—the priest who merely warns the sinful will still be condemned unless he apply the appropriate punishments to the wayward sinner.

In the culture of Ezekiel, *ministerium*, and penance, the stock answer to such thunderous condemnation was repentance, examples of which are found in the sermons for Rogation Monday and Rogation Wednesday. There is some discrepancy in the nature of penitential rewards, since the text for Rogation Monday insists that each man is responsible for his own penance, while that of Rogation Wednesday allows for intercessory salvation through one's friends. Concerning rich and corrupt men, the reader for Monday cites Augustin's exhortation to visit their graves and see their corruption, then reminds the congregation that,

they must also comprehend that they will suffer eternal torment after these riches unless true penitence helps them. Let us, dearly beloved, truly repent and amend our sinfulness while we are in this life. Let us save our souls while we have life and worth at our command, for fear that death should come and we will immediately lose life and worth, and be led by our adversaries into eternal punishment. No man need think that another man may release him from eternal torments, if he himself will not turn to contrition of his sins before the end of his earthly life.²⁶⁷

The homily for Wednesday takes a radically different approach, the text summing up the reading

besencte. Þonne sæde þæt se aethela lareow be þæm ilcan, þæt hi other men be þon læron mihton, ond se bisceop ond se mæssepreost beoth þonne with God gehealdene." Cf. Ezekiel 3:18-21.

²⁶⁷ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 71: "þæt gyt mare is, þæt hie sceolan æfter þæm wlencum ece edwit þrowian, buton him seo soþe hreow gefultmige. Forðon, men ða leofestan, don we soþe hreowe ond bote ure synna, tha hwile (fol. 61v) the we on þyssum life syn. Alesan we ure saule, þa hwile the we þæt li fond þæt weorþ on urum gewealde habban, the læs se deaþ ær cume, ond we þonne æt somne forleosan þæt lif ond þæt weorþ, ond þonne syn hine oþer mon mæge from ecum witum alesan, gif he sylf nele his synna to bote gecyrran aer þæm ende his lifes."

with a story about a man who, while contemplating his friend's tomb, is warned by the occupant's bones to remember that he too will one day meet the same fate. The text does not specifically state whether or not the departed is condemned to torment, though the implication is that he certainly exists in such a state, which may be concluded from what follows:

Very sad and sorrowful, he [the friend yet living] then departed from the contemplation of dust, and turned himself away from all the affairs of this world. He began to know of God's love and profess it, and to love spiritual virtues; he thereby earned for himself the grace of the Holy Spirit. And he delivered also the other's soul from punishment and released him from suffering."²⁶⁸

Thus, the repentant man goes away to amend his life, and in so doing brings about the salvation of his friend. Furthermore, it may be inferred that, though admonishing his living friend to the point of conversion, the hitherto tormented soul was himself delivered (corporate salvation)—a bizarre, postmortem twist on the warnings in Ezekiel 3:20-21.

Despite the evident discrepancy in results between the two homilies, the purpose of repentance and the means of achieving it are clear: in the first instance, listeners are assured that only true repentance will see them to God's mercy; in the latter, the rejection of worldly things and repentance of all distraction from God and His work leads to corporate salvation. Sincere contrition and corporate salvation were key components of *ministerium* in the Carolingian Empire, and it would seem from at least this instance that the texts for "Rogation Monday" and "Rogation Wednesday" were operating under a similar premise.

Thus we see Gildas and Ezekiel making their way into the preaching texts in England.

²⁶⁸ Kelly, *The Blickling Homilies*, 81: "He þa swa geomor ond swa gnornge, gewat from þære dustsceawunga, ond hine tha onwende from ealre þisse worlde begangum. Ond he ongan Godes lof lornian ond þæt læran, ond þæt gastlice mægen lufian, ond þurh þæt gearnode him tha gife Haliges Gastes. (fol. 69v) Ond eac þæs others saule of witum generede, ond of tintregum alesde."

Kings and clergy were especially admonished to keep an eye on their subjects or face divine punishment for negligence. This seems to accord with the environment in Carolingian Frankia, where each man was responsible for monitoring his own conscience while also observing and admonishing within his circle of influence. Yet Ezekiel's newfound hold was likely tenuous, as subsequent monastic reform would demonstrate.

Aelfric

As the tenth century continued into its middle and later years, another author sought to uphold the penitential interpretation of Ezekiel in England. Aelfric was a monk of Cerne Abbey, later the abbot of Eynsham, and has been lauded as “probably the best-educated man in the England of his day” and “the voice of that great Church reform which is the most signal fact in the history of the latter half of the tenth century.”²⁶⁹ Aelfric was a prolific writer, producing numerous homilies and hagiographies that constitute “a remarkably extensive and well-informed commentary on the Christian story, on the individual's responsibility to society, and on ethics and morality.”²⁷⁰ Fortunately for the Anglo-Saxon church, Aelfric's productive life coincided with a time of renewed Viking aggression, and as such his use of Gildas' reading of Ezekiel reflects the writings of King Alfred, urging men to abstain from sin or face divine wrath as a purification for their iniquities.²⁷¹

²⁶⁹ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 31; Earle, *Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 219.

²⁷⁰ Jonathan Wilcox, “Aelfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care,” in *Pastoral Care in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2005) 52-63, at 52; Wilcox continues this thought by saying, “In broad terms, Aelfric's works are what survive of pastoral care in action in late Anglo-Saxon England.”

²⁷¹ Benjamin Thorpe, trans. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church. The First Part, Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Ælfric. In the Original Anglo-Saxon, with an English Version Vol.1* (London: Printed for the Ælfric Society by Richard and John E. Taylor, 1844), 7:

To fully appreciate the writings of Aelfric and his spiritual successor, Wulfstan, it is necessary to briefly review the renewed Viking assaults upon England. In the years after Alfred's death, much of Britain came under the sway of his heirs, producing for the first time a unified England following the battle of Brunanburh in 937. With the further defeat of Eric Bloodaxe at York in 954, all of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms became united under English rule.²⁷² Under the West Saxon kings, the lands in northern England long held by Viking colonists became known as the Danelaw, now populated by Christianized Danes.²⁷³ Aelfric grew up in a newly resurgent England where the reigns of Alfred's successors had transformed the kingdom into one prosperous and (comparatively) peaceful and saw the fruits of the monastic revival under Dunstan, Aethelwold, and Oswald.²⁷⁴ Aelfric's childhood coincided with the rule of King Edgar, who united England and firmly secured the Danelaw. His rule came to be considered a "golden age," looked back upon with longing by homilists like Aelfric and Wulfstan and by chroniclers.²⁷⁵

"God also permits that his chosen servants be cleansed from all sins through great persecutions, as gold is tried in fire." Peter Clemons, ed., *Aelfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 175: "God geðafað eac þ his gecorenan ðegenas beon aclænsade fram eallum synnum. ðurh ða ormætan ehtnyssa. swa swa gold bið on fyre afandod."

²⁷² Hurt, *Aelfric*, 12-13.

²⁷³ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 68-69: During this time the religious landscape significantly changed, as Christianity came to represent civilization, while the old pagan beliefs were seen as barbaric. To minimize friction, "[Viking c]olonists living in Christian communities accepted the Christian faith as virtually an essential condition of permanence. Viking leaders with ambitions to set up permanent dynasties found it increasingly expedient to profess adherence to Christianity."

²⁷⁴ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 14.

²⁷⁵ White, *Aelfric: A New Study*, 14; H.R. Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1977), 81-82; for an example of such reminiscence, see also "Saint Swithhun" in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:469, 471: "We have now spoken thus briefly of Swithhun, and we say of a truth that the time was blessed and winsome in England, when King Eadgar furthered Christianity, and built many monasteries, and his kingdom still continued in peace, so that no fleet was heard of, save that of the people themselves who held this land; and all the kings of the Cymry and Scots that were in this island, came to Eadgar once upon a day, being eight kings, and they all bowed themselves to Eadgar's rule." Note the reference to hostile fleets. Aelfric

However, the same cannot be said of Ethelred, Edgar's successor.

While Edgar came to be lionized "as a martyr and then as a saint," his son Ethelred was despised, one commentator coining the immortal epithet "*Un-raed* the no-counsel."²⁷⁶ Ethelred was unpopular, and suffered from the sort of disloyalty observed by the poet who composed *The Battle of Maldon*.²⁷⁷ This poem records in heroic fashion a battle in 991, where Viking raiders under the command of Olaf Tryggvasson, after a successful ravaging campaign in the south-east of England, scattered the English defenders and slew their leader, Ealdorman Brihtnoth.²⁷⁸ In the poem, a number of cowards abandon their ealdorman—one even stealing his horse and thus adding to the confusion as others mistakenly supposed that their leader had quit the field—and in so doing demonstrate a neglect of duty and ingratitude for the many gifts that Byrhtnoth had lavished upon them in the past.²⁷⁹ If such disloyalty was symptomatic of Ethelred's reign as well, then it might mean the doom of England, unless the people returned wholeheartedly to God.²⁸⁰

Not long after young Ethelred came to the English throne in 978, the Danes landed with a vengeance upon English shores. But rather than the heroics of Alfred's day, Ethelred and his councilors chose to offer Danegeld, a payment for good behavior that was predictably demanded

seems to equate enemies and outside affliction with the Vikings specifically; cf. Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 2:115: In defining wars, Aelfric says, "*Justum bellum* is just war against the cruel seamen or against other peoples who wish to destroy (our) land." For an interesting case-study of Aelfric's views of Vikings and ideas of humanity, see "St. Edmund, King and Martyr" in *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, vol 2.

²⁷⁶ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 82.

²⁷⁷ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 81-83.

²⁷⁸ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 83.

²⁷⁹ Crossley-Holland, *The Battle of Maldon*, 34, 36.

²⁸⁰ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 21: There is evidence to suggest that the English clergy itself had become corrupt. In particular, the reformer Aethelwold was enraged by the unscrupulous lives of the monks of at the Old Minster in Winchester, whom he allegedly found to be wanting in terms of piety; "many married, many given to gluttony and drunkenness."

again and again until six nationwide taxes had terribly weakened the English state.²⁸¹ Olaf Tryggvasson's return to England in 994 was happily stymied by his timely conversion to Christianity, but though he left England on friendly terms, his arrival had brought another, deadlier thorn to stick in Ethelred's side: Sweyn Forkbeard.²⁸² Sweyn continued his conquest after Olaf's departure, and was given the perfect excuse after a state-wide massacre of Danes in England on St. Brice's Day in 1002.²⁸³ It is evident that, despite Alfred's past efforts, the military measures that defeated the Vikings once before were now jeopardized.²⁸⁴

It was in this context that Aelfric matured, was educated, and produced his writings. Likely born in Wessex around 955, he was a product of the revival brought about by Dunstan, Athelwold, and Oswald; Dunstan knew of the reforms occurring on the Continent at Fleury, Ghent, and St. Omer, while Oswald invited Frankish scholars to England in the interest of spreading the reform.²⁸⁵ Having studied under Aethelwold at Winchester, Aelfric was sent to

²⁸¹ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 15; an alternative argument, see M.K. Lawson, *Cnut: The Danes in England in the Early Eleventh Century* (London: Longman, 1993), 47-48, 183: Lawson maintains that it was the failures of Ethelred, rather than the general weakening of the state that resulted in the eventual Danish conquest. Indeed, the strength of the English government is visible in the late-great successes of Edmund Ironside. Moreover, the robust kingdom, its poor leadership aside, was a worthy prize for a conqueror: it was English prosperity that enabled Cnut to tax heavily and thus maintain quality armies.

²⁸² Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 85: upon his conversion to Christianity (994-995) under the auspices of Ethelred, Olaf promised that he would not return with violence to England.

²⁸³ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 87.

²⁸⁴ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 88; Keynes and Lapidge, *Alfred the Great*, 24-25: among the measures taken by Alfred was the construction of fortifications across his lands, maintained by the locals and occupied by them in time of distress; Wallwyn P.B. Sheppard, "Further Notes on Land Taxation in England, Part II," *Journal of the Society of Comparative Legislation*, 12 no.1 (1911): 138-140, at 139: indeed, it was the duty of the fyrd, or freeman army, to provide regular upkeep of these defenses, this duty constituting a tax called "burh-bot."

²⁸⁵ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 21, 28-29; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 242-243, 252, 257, 261: Abbo of Fleury presents another possible connection to Gildas—by invitation of Dunstan and Oswald he visited the English abbey of Ramsey in 985-987; it is known that Abbo read the prose *De virginitate*. Aelfric likewise read the prose *De virginitate*, as well as works by Hrabanus Maurus,

Cerne Abbey to serve Ealdorman Aethelweard, at whose request Aelfric produced a great deal of his writings.²⁸⁶ Aelfric's appointment to the monastery in 987 may have been in accordance with the reformation practice of bringing scholars to a place in order to inculcate the Benedictine Rule.²⁸⁷ It was here that Aelfric produced most of his works, which "grew directly out of his teaching young boys in the monastic school, older monks the Rule and more advanced studies, and laymen in the parish church on Aethelmaer's estates."²⁸⁸ He remained at Cerne Abbey until 1005, when he left to take up the role of abbot of Eynsham, another monastery founded by Aethelmaer.²⁸⁹ After becoming abbot, Aelfric continued to work, producing new material and reworking old.²⁹⁰

Despite his fortunate circumstances, Aelfric was not blessed to live in a quiet world of religious and ecclesiastic pursuits. Between 991 and 994, while Aelfric was at work on his second series of homilies, the Viking assaults did much damage to England. The defeat at Maldon was followed by intensified raiding, to which the Anglo-Saxons responded by offering ultimately six different payments to forestall Viking aggression.²⁹¹ Yet Aelfric bravely continued with his projects, composing in the year 1005 a biography of Aethelwold even as Sweyn's

the past abbot of Fulda, and Candidus of Fulda—recall that the library there was home to copies of Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* and *De temporum ratione*, as well as Pseudo-Isodore, *De ordine creaturarum*, which possibly incorporates Aldhelm's prose *De virginitate*.

²⁸⁶ Earle, *Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 220; Hurt, *Aelfric*, 28-29: Hurt says that "sometime in the early 970s [Aelfric] entered the monastic school at Winchester" which had "become the intellectual center of the reform movement" under Aethelwold, who, despite his duties to the state and the reformed monasteries, "took particular pleasure in teaching personally the students at Winchester."

²⁸⁷ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 32.

²⁸⁸ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 32.

²⁸⁹ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 31-32; Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 142.

²⁹⁰ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 37-41.

²⁹¹ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 15.

“Danish army was burning towns and plundering the land not far from Eynsham.”²⁹² For Aelfric, the end of days had arrived and time was not to be wasted.

Aelfric’s writings share similar emphasis with those by Alfred, a man Aelfric greatly esteemed for his literary pursuits.²⁹³ As with Alfred, Aelfric prescribed education, and recommended that teachers be especially well-read, requiring that each priest should “own an impressive array of books: ‘a psalter and a book with the epistles, an evangeliary and a missal, songbooks and a manual, a computes and a passional, a penitential and a reading book’”; however, it stands to reason that few priests would own or be able to access a collection such as this.²⁹⁴ Perhaps as an answer to this dilemma, Aelfric produced a corpus of homilies for use throughout the liturgical year, the use of which would require only the understanding of letters and a good speaking voice, so that “[w]ithout access to a library or further learning, the priest could voice the homily, with both priest and community confident that this was legitimate wisdom delivered from a book.”²⁹⁵ As may well be expected, such texts provide ample evidence of *ministerium*.

Aelfric’s works that shall be here examined are the first series of *Catholic Homilies* and the two series of *Lives of Saints*.²⁹⁶ The former was composed between the late 980s and 995 for Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury, written so that both series could be read in the course of one

²⁹² White, *Aelfric: A New Study*, 65.

²⁹³ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 3, 5.

²⁹⁴ Wilcox, “Aelfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care,” 57-60.

²⁹⁵ Wilcox, “Aelfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care,” 59-60.

²⁹⁶ Skeat, ed. *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:v-vi: Aelfric’s collection of saints lives forms a natural “third series” following his Catholic Homilies—these are arranged in the manuscript Cotton Julius E. vii, as well as the Otho, B. x and Vitellius, D. xvii, the latter having unfortunately been partially burned; Skeat, ed. *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 2:xxvii: Aelfric wrote this work sometime between 996-997; Lapidge, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 305: that Aelfric was keenly aware of Ezekiel in addition to works that cite Gildas may be found in his reading of Gregory the Great’s *Hom. in Hiezechihelam* in his *Lives of Saints* (also cited by Bede).

or two liturgical years, and intended for delivery to laymen, as the end of the world was surely nigh and time for salvation was running out—indeed, the second series was produced shortly after the disaster at Maldon.²⁹⁷ In the Preface to the first series, Aelfric lays out his rationale for translation, his concern that ignorance in the preaching of England would result in incorrect belief:

Then it occurred to my mind, I trust through God's grace, that I would turn this book from the Latin language into the English tongue; not from confidence of great learning, but because I have seen and heard of much error in many English books, which unlearned men, through their simplicity, have esteemed as great wisdom: and I regretted that they knew not nor had not the evangelical doctrines among their writings, those men only excepted who knew Latin, and those books excepted which king Ælfred wisely turned from Latin into English, which are to be had [...] Everyone may the more easily withstand the future temptation, through God's support, if he is strengthened by book learning, for they shall be preserved who continue in faith to the end.²⁹⁸

Aelfric's audience varies, but seems to be principally laymen, and these “not especially

²⁹⁷ Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 129; Kelly, introduction to *The Blickling Homilies*, xxiv: Kelly maintains an initial completion date of c.989 and a final “publication” of 995. I have adopted Treharne's dating as it incorporates those estimations by the other sources.

²⁹⁸ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 3, 5; Clemoes, ed., *Aelfric's Catholic Homilies*, 174-175: “Ʒ a bearn me on mode ic truwiġe ðurh godes giƷe. Ʒ ic ðas boc of ledenum gereorde to engliscre spræce awende. na þurh gebylde micelre lare. ac for ðan ðe ic geseah 7 gehyrde mycel gedwyld on manegum engliscum bocum. ðe ungelærede men ðurh heora bilewitnyse to micclum wisdom tealdon. 7 me ofhreow þ hi ne cuðon ne næfdon ða godspellican lare on heora gewritum. buton ðam mannum anum ðe þ leden cuðon. 7 buton þam bocum ðe ælfred cyning snoterlice awende of ledene on englisc. ða synd to hæbbenne [...] Gehwa mæg the eaðelicor þa to|weardan costnunge acumen ðurh godes fultum. gif he bið þurh boclice lare getrymmed. for ðan ðe ða beoð gehealdene the oð ende on geleafan þurhwuniað.” See also Malcolm Godden, “Aelfric and the Vernacular Prose Tradition” in *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach and Bernard F. Huppé, 99-117 (State University of New York: Albany, 1978), 100-102: Godden suggests the possibility that Aelfric knew and wished to counter *The Blickling Homilies*, as well as the *Vercelli Homilies*. For the *Homilies'* stylistic impact on Aelfric, see James Hurt, *Aelfric* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1972), 64: the *Blickling Homilies* “are written in a heightened style, indebted to poetic practice; and they thus anticipate, in a general way, Aelfric's stylistic methods.”

pious.”²⁹⁹ Aelfric was greatly interested in reaching the common people at their own level— frequently turning aside from a given discourse to briefly explain that details have been omitted on account of his audience’s limited understanding—and desiring (as he explains in letters to Bishop Wulfsgie and Archbishop Wulfstan, and as evidenced by the translated homilies themselves) that priests should teach in the common language of the people, “tell[ing] the meaning of the gospel in English to the people on Sundays and mass-days.”³⁰⁰ Furthermore, “The teacher is blind if he does not know book-learning and so deceives lay people through his lack of learning,” a metaphor drawing upon Matt. 15:14 and exemplified in Aelfric’s account of his childhood teacher, a priest who did not perfectly understand the teachings in Genesis, an ignorance that he hopes his homilies will counteract.³⁰¹

Aelfric’s *Lives of Saints* was written between 990-1002, after his *Homilies*.³⁰² Aelfric wrote in the preface that his intention was to record the saints lives that the monks “honour by special services. I do not promise, however, to write very many in this tongue, because it is not fitting that many should be translated into our language, lest peradventure the pearls of Christ be had in disrespect.”³⁰³ Taking a line from Alfred, Aelfric continues, “Nor am I able, in this translation, to render everything word for word, but I have at any rate carefully endeavoured to give exact sense for sense, just as I find it in the holy writing, by means of such simple and

²⁹⁹ Wilcox, “Aelfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care,” 54.

³⁰⁰ Aelfric, “Letter for Wulfsgie,” quoted in Wilcox, “Aelfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care,” 55-56.

³⁰¹ Wilcox, “Aelfric in Dorset and the Landscape of Pastoral Care,” 55-56, 62: This work, according to Wilcox, is a liturgical masterpiece, intended for many audiences and “represents something quite revolutionary—the beginning of a form of mass communication that must have played a significant part in defining a sense of English identity at the turn of the millennium.”

³⁰² Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 142.

³⁰³ *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:2-3: “Nec tamen plura promitto me scripturum hac lingua, quia nec conuenit huic sermonicationi plura inserti; ne forte dispectui habeantur margarite christi.”

obvious language as may profit them that hear it.”³⁰⁴

Aelfric was a conscientious teacher, eager to educate his flock in the true doctrines of the church. In the homily titled “Of the Catholic Faith,” Aelfric opens with these lines: “Every christian man should by right know both his Pater noster and his Creed. With the Pater noster he should pray, with the Creed he should confirm his faith.”³⁰⁵ Yet while the bishop did want those under his care to be instructed in the basics of the faith, he desired each man’s belief to be personal, rather than rote knowledge. His *Exameron Anglice* demonstrates that he wished to emphasize God’s love for mankind through the examination of God’s sinless creation and His plan for redemption, saying, “We will, however, tell you something more profoundly in this true treatise concerning the works of God, in order that you may with more wisdom know your Creator with true faith, and attain to a knowledge of yourselves.”³⁰⁶ However, correct belief was paramount, as demonstrated in the sermon for Ash Wednesday, wherein Aelfric regales his congregation with tales of men who, refusing to agree to correct doctrine, were severely punished.³⁰⁷ Seeking a relationship with God was not to be confused with overstepping the bounds of human understanding, or attempting to impose worldly concepts on divine truths. Concerning the mystery of the Trinity, for example, in his *Exameron* Aelfric directly juxtaposes

³⁰⁴ *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:4-5: “Nec potuimus in ista translatione semper uerbum ex uerbo transferre, sed tamen sensum ex sensu, sicut inuenimus in sancta scriptura, diligenter curauimus uertere Simplici et aperta locutione quantus proficiat Audientibus.”

³⁰⁵ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 275.

³⁰⁶ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Exameron Anglice or The Old English Hexameron: Edited with an Introduction, a Collation of All the Manuscripts, A Modern English Translation, Parallel Passages from the Other Works of Aelfric and Notes on the Sources*, trans. and ed. S.J. Crawford (Hamburg: Verlag Von Henri Grand, 1921), 26, 34.

³⁰⁷ *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, vol 1, 265, 267: curiously, after telling of at least three men who were either killed or severely debilitated through their carelessness, Aelfric concludes, “Every man who eateth or drinketh untimely in the holy Lent, or on appointed fast-days, let him know in sooth that his soul shall sorely abyee it, though the body may here live sound.”

the two to show the audience that, while it is laudable to seek God, it is not man's duty to define who or what God is.³⁰⁸ Moreover, seeking those things which are beyond one's pay grade, so to speak, could result in destruction. A little after Aelfric's warning to take God at face value, he adds, "Thou shalt believe in the living God, and shalt not dispute beyond thy capacity concerning him, lest thou fall into error, as too many have done, who beyond their understanding made inquiry concerning that, without belief, and therefore perished."³⁰⁹ Thus it is correct belief that prevents such destructive behavior. Aelfric here calls for faith in God's revelation on the part of his audience in order to avoid undo speculation, and by so doing falling into error and spiritual death. This was not erudite vanity on Aelfric's part; he was simply following the dictates of Ezekiel.³¹⁰

This is where Aelfric's *ministerium* and self-conscious adherence to Ezekiel appears. If he was concerned about correct belief, then his self-imposed task was to provide the correct instruction of that belief. The preface to the first part of his homilies makes this conviction abundantly clear:

Our Lord commanded his disciples that they should instruct and teach all people the things which he had himself taught to them; but of those there are too few who will well teach and well exemplify. The Lord also cried, through his prophet Ezechiel, "If thou warnest not the unrighteous, and exhortest him not, so that he turn from his wickedness and live, then shall the wicked die in his iniquity, and I will require from thee his blood," that is, his perdition. "But if thou warnest the wicked, and he will not turn from his wickedness, thou shalt release thy soul with that admonition, and the wicked shall die in his unrighteousness." Again the Almighty spake to the prophet Isaiah, "Cry and cease thou not, raise thy voice as a trumpet, and declare to my people their crimes, and to the family of Jacob their sins." From such commands it appeared to me that I should not be guiltless before God, if I would not declare to other men, by tongue or by writings, the evangelical

³⁰⁸ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Exameron Anglice*, 37-39.

³⁰⁹ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Exameron Anglice*, 41.

³¹⁰ See Ezekiel 3:18-21.

truth, which he himself spake, and afterwards to holy teachers revealed. Very many I know in this country more learned than I am, but God manifests his wonders through whom he will..³¹¹

Here Gildas resurfaces, though unnamed, in Anglo-Saxon England, having originally cried out in warning some five hundred years earlier, and though Aelfric does not cite the Briton's invasion thesis explicitly, one must recall that Aelfric was watching the world unravel around him as the Viking raiders shattered all that Alfred and his heirs had worked to build. Thus, Aelfric wrote to his audience that correct practice and belief were his to extol in the name of God and Christ, and he drew upon Ezekiel to provide the authoritative backing necessary to enforce his desires. Finally, in a bid to avoid the pitfall of misinterpretation (a pervasive anxiety in Aelfric's mind) he turns to those who will come after:

Now I desire and beseech, in God's name, if anyone will transcribe this book, that he carefully correct it by the copy, lest we be blamed through careless writers. He does great evil who writes false, unless he correct it; it is as though he turn true doctrine to false error; therefore should everyone make that straight which he

³¹¹ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 6-9; Clemoes, *Aelfric's Catholic Homilies*, 176-177: "Ure drihten bebead his discipulum hí sceoldon læran. 7 tæcan eallum þeodum ða ðing þe he sylf him tæhte. ac ðæra is nu to lyt. ðe wile wel tæcan. 7 wel bysnian; Se ylca drihten clypode þurh his witegan ezechiel; Gif þu ne gestentst þone unrihtwisan 7 hine ne manast þ hé fram his arleasnyse gecyrrre. 7 lybbe. þonne swelt se arleasa on his unrihtwisnyse. 7 ic wylle ofgan æt ðe his blod þ is his lyre; Gif ðu ðonne þone arleasan gewarnast. 7 hé nele fram his arleasnyse gecyrran. þu alysdest þine sawle mid þære mynegunge. 7 se arleasa swylt on his unrihtwisnyse; Eft cwæð se ælmihtiga to þam witegan ISIAM; Clypa 7 ne geswic ðu. ahefe ðine stemne swa swa byme. 7 cyð minum folce heora leahtras. 7 Iacobes hirede heora synna; For swylcum bebodum wearð me geðuht þ ic nære unscyldig wið god. gif ic nolde oðrum mannum cyðan oððe þurh | gewritu ða godspellican soðfæstnyse þe he sylf gecwæð. 7 eft halgum lareowum onwreah; Forwel fela ic wat on ðisum eared. gelæredran þonne ic sy. ac god geswutelad his wundra ðurh ðone ðe he wile. swa swa ælmihtig wyrhta; He wyrçð his weorc þurh his gecorenan. na swylce he behofige ures fultumes. ac þ we gearnion þ ece lif þurh his weorces fremminge; Paulus se apostol cwæð; We sind godes gefylstan. 7 swa ðeah ne do we nan ðing to gode. buton godes fultume."

before bent crooked, if he will be guiltless at God's doom.³¹²

The preface offers a summary of Aelfric's view of *ministerium*: he begins by acknowledging God's commands that teachers teach, but then observes that not all thus called teach rightly. After making this observation, he turns to Ezekiel and Isaiah for God's admonition to teachers, and through this warning offers his humble attempt to follow the commands of Christ, though doubtless there are others more qualified. However, after briefly embellishing his unworthy authorship by further references to obedience to the divine call, he quickly asserts his own authority by gently demanding that any who copy his work do so with extreme care, lest through some error the true teaching be altered and Aelfric be damned as well as the careless scribe—a warning tempered with the promise that, should care be taken to correct any mistakes (though whether these are Aelfric's or those of the hypothetical scribe is unclear), that editor will surely enjoy a clean conscience.

The weighty responsibility of God's minister is reiterated in the homily for the second Sunday after Easter. In a lengthy passage, Aelfric elaborates on the metaphorical hired shepherd, who cannot be relied upon as the true shepherd. Having placed shepherds (bishops and "every teacher") in the fold, God expects them to fend off the wolf (devil) through correct teaching and intercession, saying, "the teacher will be guiltless, if he direct the people with doctrine, and mediate for them with God."³¹³ This duty is to be carried out unto death, a convenient segue into

³¹² Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 8-9: "Nu bidde ic and halsige on Godes naman, gif hwa þas boc awritan wylle, þæt he hí geornlice gerihte be þære bysene, þylæs þe we þurh gymelease writeras geleahtrode beon. Mycel yfel deð seðe leas writ, buton he hit gerihte, swylce he gebringe þa soðan lare to leasum gedwylde: forþi sceal gehwa gerihtlæcan þæt þæt he ær to woge gebigde, gif hé on Godes dome unscyldig beon wile."

³¹³ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 239, 240-241, 243: "se láreow bið unscyldig, gif he þæt folc mid lare gewissað, and him wið God geðingað."

addressing the hireling who flees from the wolf:

He is a hireling and not a shepherd, who is engaged in worldly things, and loves dignity and perishable rewards, and has no inward love for God's sheep. He takes heed of treasures, and rejoices in dignity, and has his reward in this life, and will be cut off from the everlasting reward [...] for the hireling is excited neither by care nor love, but flees, because he considers worldly advantages, and leaves unheeded the loss of the sheep. He flees not with body, but with mind. He flees because he saw iniquity and held silence. He flees because he is a hireling and not a shepherd, as though it were so said, He cannot stand against the perils of the sheep, who guardeth not the sheep with love, but provideth for himself; that is, he loves worldly gain, and not God's folk.³¹⁴

Of significant interest is the line reading, "He flees because he saw iniquity and held silence."

This is in perfect line with the precepts of Ezekiel, illustrating a case where a rapacious man, more interested in worldly gain, allows his flock to stray and fears to reprimand them. It is fitting, then, for Aelfric to close this thought with words from Ezekiel 34:

Ye shepherds, hear the word of God: My sheep are scattered through your heedlessness, and are devoured. Ye care for your own sustenance, and not for that of the sheep; therefore I will require the sheep at your hands, and I will cause you to depart from the fold, and I will deliver my flock from you.³¹⁵ I myself will gather my sheep that were scattered, and I will feed them in an abundant pasture: that which was lost I will seek and bring again; that which was maimed I will heal; the sick I will strengthen, and feed the strong, and I will pasture them in

³¹⁴ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 239-243: "Se is hyra and na hyrde, se ðe bið begripen on woruld-ðingum, and lufað þone wurðmynt and ða ateorigendlican edlean, and næfð inweardlice lufe to Godes sceapum. He cepð þæra sceatta, and blissað on ðam wurðmynte, and hæfð his mede for ðisum life, and bið bescyred þære ecan mede [...] Ac se hyra ne bið naðor ne mid ware ne mid lufe astyred, ac flyhð, forðan þe hé smeað embe ða worulldican hyðða, and læt to gymeleaste þære sceapa lyre. Ne flyhð he na mid lichaman, ac mid mode. He flyhð, forðan þe hé geseh unrihtwisnyse and suwade. Hé flyhð forðan ðe he is hyra, and ná hyrde, swilce hit swa gecweden sy, Ne mæg se standan ongean fræcednyssa þæra sceapa, se ðe ne gymð þæra sceapa mid lufe, ac tylað his sylfes; þæt is þæt hé lufað þa eorðlican gestreon, and na Godes folc."

³¹⁵ Cf. Matthew 25:14-30: the parable of the talents and the punishment of the lazy servant.

judgement and in righteousness.³¹⁶

This admonition to constantly instruct for the salvation of one's own soul was a daily anxiety for many conscientious teachers, as evidenced in a quotation taken from St. Augustine in Aelfric's homily "On Auguries." In a plea that was likely comforting to one such as Aelfric, Augustine begs his followers, once again, to renounce every ounce of their paganism, the continuing presence of such being an evident threat to the bishop's own salvation:

My brethren most beloved, often I have warned you, and with fatherly carefulness I lovingly exhorted you that, as for the odious witchcraft which unwise men observe, ye should altogether renounce [it], like faithful men, for except I warn you, and forbid you that mischief, I shall have to give an account to the righteous judge for my carefulness, and shall be condemned with you.³¹⁷

But lest he be found guilty at last, Augustine once again exhorts the people to abandon their multifarious auguries, qualifying this latest warning with the words, "Now I deliver myself as regards God."³¹⁸

Throughout his homilies and sermons, Aelfric makes much of the teacher's role in guarding and guiding those in his care, even unto death. In his sermon on *The Book of Maccabees*, Aelfric cites an old man, Eleazar, who prefers execution at the hands of Gentile rulers to eating pig's flesh, saying that he prefers to die as a good example to the young people

³¹⁶ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 242-243: "Ge hyrdas, gehyrað Godes word: Mine scép sint tostencte ðurh eowre gymeleaste, and sind abítene. Ge cariað embe eowerne bigleofan, and ná embe þæra sceapa; forði ic wille ofgán ða scép æt eowrum handum; and ic do þæt ge geswícað þære wícan, and ic wylle ahreddan mine eowde wið eow. Ic sylf wylle gadrian mine scép þe wæron tostencte, and ic wylle hi healdan on genihtsumere læse: þæt þæt losode þæt ic wylle sécan and ongean lædan; þæt þæt alefed wæs, þæt ic gehæle; þæt untrume ic wylle getrymman, and þæt strange gehealdan, and ic hí læswige on dome and on rihtwisnyse."

³¹⁷ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:369.

³¹⁸ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:369.

present.³¹⁹ This account may be compared to the story of the forty soldier-martyrs, in which one finally succumbs to his torture, but for this treachery is struck down by God—whereupon one of the executioners, moved by the sign and the ordeal of his victims, joins the martyrs. Of this, Aelfric explains, “If any unhappy man be disobedient to his Creator, and will not continue in well-doing unto the end, but forsaketh his faith and the dear Lord, then shall another be chosen for the crown which the other would not earn by labour.”³²⁰ The obedience of Eleazar is Aelfric’s ideal, as the old man, along with the saints in Aelfric’s various passion homilies, welcomed nigh-unbearable affliction as a means of purification. In “The Passion of St. Bartholomew the Apostle,” Aelfric describes God as “the true leech” who “cures the sins of his chosen with divers diseases; and though it be wearisome to the sufferer, yet will the good Leech cure him to everlasting health.”³²¹ This purification need not be physical, or even an affliction. Indeed, the very words of a teacher speaking the truth might act to purify their listeners, provided their own sins be first expunged. In examining the spiritual tongues of fire in his homily “On the Holy Day of Pentecost” Aelfric writes,

The Holy Ghost was seen as fiery tongues above the apostles; for he effected that they were burning in God's will, and preaching of God's kingdom. They had fiery tongues when with love they preached the greatness of God, that the hearts of the heathen men, which were cold through infidelity and fleshly desires, might be kindled to the heavenly commands. If the Holy Ghost teach not a man's mind within, in vain will be the words of the preacher proclaimed without. It is the nature of fire to consume whatsoever is near to it: so shall the teacher do, who is

³¹⁹ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 2:73.

³²⁰ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:255.

³²¹ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 473; cf. Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 7: “God also permits that his chosen servants be cleansed from all sins through great persecutions, as gold is tried in fire”; see also, Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 333: “I pray you, men most beloved, despise not God's poor, though they perpetrate anything reprehensible; because their misery cleanses that which a little superfluity corrupts.”

inspired by the Holy Ghost, first extinguish every sin in himself, and afterwards in those under his care.³²²

And so penance also reemerges in this tale. Similar to the *The Blickling Homilies*, this proactive extermination of sin was to be hands-on. As described above, penance was an ongoing process of purification and introspection, a tradition that was upheld in Aelfric's day.³²³ In his sermon for Ash Wednesday, Aelfric describes his understanding of the nature of penance:

Now every man is baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, and he may not be again baptized, that the invocation of the Holy Trinity be not contemned; but true contrition, and penance with abstaining from evil, washeth us again from the sins which we have committed after our baptism³²⁴ [...] Penance, with abstaining from evil, and almsdeeds, and holy prayers, and faith, and hope in God, and the true love of God and men, heal and cure our sins, if we diligently use those medicines. God said that He desired not the death of the sinful, but He willeth rather that he should turn from his sins and live.³²⁵

Aelfric goes on to urge his listeners to dutifully repent, adding, "Nor must any man delay to amend his sins, for God hath promised to every penitent the forgiveness of his sins, but He hath

³²² Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 321: "Se Halga Gast wæs gesewen on fyrenum tungum bufon ðam apostolon, forðan ðe hé dyde þæt hi wæron byrnende on Godes willan, and bodigende ymbe Godes rice. Fyrene tungan hí hæfdon, ðaða hí mid lufe Godes mærdða bodedon, þæt ðæra hæðenra manna heortan, ðe cealde wæron þurh geleafæste and flæsclice gewilnunga, mihton beon ontende to ðam heofenlicum bebodum. Gif se Halga Gast ne lærð þæs mannes mód wiðinnan, on idel beoð þæs bydeles word wiðutan geclypode. Fyres gecynd is þæt hit fornimð swa hwæt swa him gehende bið: swa sceal se lāreow dón, seðe bið mid þam Halgan Gaste onbryrd, ærest on him sylfum ælcne leahter adwæscan, and siððan on his underðeoddum."

³²³ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:148-169, at 167, 169: a vision alerts St. Maur to a coming plague, after which he turned to his monks and "earnestly exhorted them to be ready, and to wash their souls by true repentance from all sins, that they might journey to God's brightness with brotherly love."

³²⁴ See also, Thorpe, "Of the Catholic Faith" in *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 293: "Let everyone know also, that no man may be twice baptized; but if a man err after his baptism, we believe that he may be saved, if with weeping he repent of his sins, and, according to the teaching of his instructors, atone for them."

³²⁵ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:271, 273.

promised to no procrastinator certain life until to-morrow.”³²⁶

This call to penance is repeated throughout Aelfric’s homilies. Christ himself is cited in “Memory of the Saints” as saying “Work deeds of penance for your misdeeds, for behold the kingdom of Heaven is near.”³²⁷ And again in “The Prayer of Moses,” “A man can neither write, nor reckon in words, how often the Almighty God has awfully wreaked contempt of Himself upon guilty men, or how often He has pitied mankind in some way, those who with confession ceased from their evil.”³²⁸ And in “Item Alia: Ahitophel and Absalom,” a sub-homily attached to “The Passion of St. Alban,” Aelfric writes, “Would that at least the miserable man would bethink himself, and confess his sins with true contrition, at least when he is in bonds and is led to death, even as the thief did, who hung condemned with the Savior Christ.”³²⁹

As with most forms of penance—especially for those public sins—Aelfric considered the admonition of a confessor to be absolutely necessary.³³⁰ In the same sermon for Ash Wednesday, he concludes his harangue on penitential practice by vehemently reminding his audience of the extreme dangers of confessing in private devotion to God: “Let no man be ashamed to make known his sins to a teacher; for he who will not confess his sins in this world with true contrition, he shall be shamed before God Almighty [...] Verily, no man gets forgiveness of his sins from

³²⁶ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:273.

³²⁷ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:345, 347.

³²⁸ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:303, 305.

³²⁹ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:425.

³³⁰ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 157-158: “Aelfric often echoes issues which figured in the Frankish controversy about penance. Like Alcuin, he insisted on oral confession, criticizing those who believed that confession to God alone, coupled with sincere contrition, was sufficient for all sins. If this were so, he asks, why do we have priests? Hence, Aelfric endorsed the three forms of reconciliation accepted by the Franks: confession to God alone was permitted for minor sins; confession to the priest was preferred for both major and minor sins; sins of public consequence required public penance.” See also Aelfric’s “Homily for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany,” in Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 124-125, full quotation below.

God, unless he confess them to some man of God, and by his judgment make satisfaction.”³³¹

This authority is upheld in “The First Sunday After Easter,” where Aelfric writes, “Christ said to the apostles, ‘Those men's sins which ye forgive, they shall be forgiven; and those from whom ye withdraw forgiveness, from them it shall be withdrawn.’ This power Christ gave to the apostles and to all bishops, if they righteously hold it.”³³² Aelfric elaborates further, explaining that the bishop who is righteously motivated has great authority, and must hold all men accountable, forgiving and thereby freeing those who come truly to repentance, while refusing forgiveness to those he deems unrepentant. As a further proof of this authority, Aelfric turns to the raising of Lazarus, examining the symbolism of the wondrous episode:

Christ raised from death the stinking Lazarus, and when he was quickened, he said to his disciples, “Loose his bands, that he may go.” They loosed the bands of the requickened man, whom Christ had raised to life. Therefore should our teachers unbind from their sins those whom Christ quickens by stimulation. Every sinful man who conceals his sins, lies dead in the sepulchre; but if he confess his sins through stimulation, then he goes from the sepulchre, as Lazarus did, when Christ bade him arise: then shall the teacher unbind him from the eternal punishment, as the apostles bodily unbound Lazarus.³³³

³³¹ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:273, 275; see also, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:275, 279: in addition to confidence in a confessor, no man should lie about his confession, even to confess sins never committed, lest he destroy himself thereby.

³³² Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 232-233: “Crist cwæð to ðam apostolum, ‘Pæra manna synna þe ge forgyfað, þæra beoð forgifene; and ðam ðe ge ofteoð þa forgifenyse, ðam bið oftogen.’ Þisne anweald forgeaf Crist þam apostolum and eallum bisceopum, gif hí hit on riht healdað”; cf. De Jong, *The Penitential State*, 271: the bishops who accused Louis the Pious in 833 state in the opening lines of their *Relatio*, “It behoves those who belong to the Christian religion to know what is the ministry of the bishops, and how those who are evidently Christ’s vicars and hold the keys to the kingdom of heaven should be watchful for and concern themselves with the salvation of all. On them such a power is conferred by Christ that, ‘what they shall bind on earth, shall be bound also in heaven, and what they shall loose upon earth, shall be loosed also in heaven.’”

³³³ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 234-235: “Crist arærde of deaðe þone stincendan Lazarum, and þaþa hé cucu wæs, þa cwæð hé to his leorning-cnihtum, ‘Tolysað his bendas, þæt hé gán mæge.’ Þa alysdon hí þæs ge-educedan mannes bendas, þe Crist arærde to life. Forði sceolon ða láreowas ða unbindan fram heora synnum þa ðe Crist gelíffæst þurh

This is a fascinating parallel to the function of the penitentials, those books used to instruct the priests in their task as confessors. Herein the authority asserted in the penitentials is upheld, informing the audience, in all likelihood a mixed company of lay folk and churchmen, of their various roles: those who desire forgiveness, be they either ecclesiastical or lay, are to seek out the counsel of a confessor, whose duty it is to accurately identify their sin and prescribe a purgation whereby to readmit the wayward Christian. Forgiveness comes from the Lord, but it is the confessor who acts as God's agent on the earth, binding, loosing, and advising for the betterment of his flock. In a lengthy Scriptural allegory presented in "The Third Sunday After the Lord's Epiphany," Aelfric looks to Old Testament law regarding leprous men and the ceremony undergone by that man healed of his affliction:

The old law commanded that every leper should go to the priest, and that the priest should separate him from men, if he really were leprous. If he were not manifestly leprous, he should then, by his judgement, be accounted clean. If the priest accounted him leprous, and God's might afterwards healed him, that he should then, with a gift, thank God for his cleansing. So also should he, who is leprous within with deadly sins, go to God's priest, and open his secret to the ghostly leech, and, by his counsel and aid, heal by penance the wounds of his soul. Some men imagine that it will suffice for a complete cure, if, with compunction of heart, they confess their sins to God alone, and that they need not confess to any priest, if they cease from evil: but if their opinion were true, the Lord would not have sent him, whom he himself had healed, with any gift to the priest. For the same example he also sent Paul, whom he himself had spoken to from heaven, to the priest Ananias, thus saying, "Go into the city, and there shall be told thee what it befitteth thee to do." The priest made not the man leprous or unleprous, but he judged that he should be separated from the society of men, if his leprosy were growing worse, or should continue among men, if his leprosy were growing better. So should the ghostly priest do: he should cure God's people,

onbryrdnyse. Ælc synful man þe his synna bediglað, he lið dead on byrgene; ac gif he his synna geandett þurh onbryrdnyse, þonne gæð he of þære byrgene, swa swa Lazarus dyde, þaða Crist hine arisan het: þonne sceal se lareow hine unbindan fram ðam ecum wíte, swa swa ða apostoli lichamlice Lazarum alysdon."

and separate, and excommunicate from christian men him who is so leprous with sinful practices that he infects others with his wickedness; concerning which the apostle Paul said, “Remove the evil man from you, lest one unsound sheep infect all the flock.”³³⁴

Having identified the sinful—or leprous—man, the process of penance may begin. As emphasized above, penitential acts were frequently individual, the penitentials acting as guides rather than standardized catalogues of punishments. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that instances of penance in Aelfric’s writings are varied—and some especially colorful—while their structures remain recognizable.

Collectively, Aelfric’s homilies present the full scope of penitential practice. The first step in the penance ceremony was confession. In the homily “St. Mary of Egypt” the abbot Zosimus encounters an aged woman in the desert, who has spent many years bewailing her atrocious sins. When Mary tells Zosimus the story of her youthful lusts, he acts as a good confessor, encouraging Mary to fully disclose the whole story when she becomes taciturn,

³³⁴ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 125: “Seo ealde æ bebead þæt gehwile hreoflig man gecome to þam sacerde, and se sacerd sceolde hine fram mannum ascirian, gif hé soðlice hreoflig wære. Gif he nære swutelice hreoflig, wære ðonne be his dome clæne geteald. Gif se sacerd hine hreofligne tealde, and Godes miht hine syððan gehælde, þonne sceolde he mid lace his clænsunge Gode ðancian. Swa sceal eac se ðe mid heafod-leahtrum wiðinnan hreoflig bið cuman to Godes sacerde, and geopenian his digelnysse ðam gastlican læce, and be his ræde and fultume his sawle wunda dædbetende gelacnian. Sume men wenað þæt him genihtsumige to fulfremedum læcedome, gif hí heora synna mid onbryrdre heortan Gode ánum andettað, and ne ðurfon nanum sacerde geandettan, gif hí yfeles geswicað: ac gif heora wena soð wære, ðonne nolde Drihten asendan þone ðe he sylf gehælde to þam sacerde mid ænigre lace. For ðære ylcan gebisnunge eac hé asende Paulum, þone ðe he sylf of heofenum gespræc, to ðam sacerde Annanian, þus cweðende, ‘Ga inn to ðære ceastre, and ðær þe bið gesæd hwæt þe gedafenað to dónne.’ Ne gedyde se sacerd þone man hreofligne oððe unhreofligne, ac hé démde þæt he sceolde beon ascyred fram manna neawiste, gif his hreofla wysigende wære; oððe betwux mannum wunian, gif his hreofla godigende wære. Swa sceal don se gastlica sacerd: he sceal gerihtlæcan Godes folc, and ðone ascyrian, and amánsunian fram cristenum mannum, þe swa hreoflig bið on mánfullum ðeawum þæt he oðre mid his yfelnysses besmit; be ðam cwæð se apostol Paulus, ‘Afyrsiað þone yfelan fram eow, ðylæs ðe an wannhal scep ealle ða eowde besmite.’”

saying, “Ah, lady, do not leave anything that thou wilt not tell me, but disclose all things in due order,” whereupon the woman comes clean entirely.³³⁵ St. Mary did not have to undergo penance for Zosimus—indeed, of central importance to the narrative is Zosimus’ overwhelming and dramatic admiration of the ascetic woman—but there are other cases in Aelfric’s works wherein men are forced to atone for their sins at the behest of their confessor. After returning from exile on Patmos, St. John, in the course of his adventures in “St. John the Apostle,” discovers that two of his disciples covet the finery that they had previously forsworn. To teach them their error, John transforms wooden staves into gold bars, and stones into gems, saying that in exchange the boys have lost their salvation. In response they fall at his feet and beg pardon, whereat “The apostle then commanded the two brothers that they for thirty days in penitence should sacrifice to God by penance, and in that space should earnestly pray that the golden rods might be turned again to their former nature, and the gems to their worthlessness.” The exercise proves fruitless, so after the month’s ordeal they return without results, begging St. John, “Ever hast thou taught mercy, and that one should have mercy on another; and if one have mercy on another, how much more will God show mercy to and pity men, his handiwork! The sin which we have committed with covetous eyes, we now with weeping eyes repent.” To which the holy man answers with yet a further penitential chore, albeit a minor one: “Bear the rods to the wood, and the stones to the sea-strand: they shall be restored to their nature.” This task accomplished, “they again received God’s grace, so that they drove out devils, and healed the blind and the sick, and performed many miracles, in the Lord’s name, as they before had done.”³³⁶

³³⁵ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 2:37.

³³⁶ Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 69: “Se apostol þa bebead ðam twam gebroðrum þæt hi ðritig daga be hreowsunge dædbetende Gode geoffrodon, and on fæce geornlice bædon, þæt ða gylden an gyrda eft to þan ærran gecynde awendon, and þa gymstano to

This curious story outlines a mandatory penance, insofar as the contrite sinners are concerned with the soul's fate. Having identified wickedness in their hearts, the confessor not only confronts them with their sin, but also removes their salvation at a stroke, springing upon them a set of chores to perform in the interest of redeeming themselves. This extreme interpretation of divine justice in the hands of the priest does much to reinforce what Aelfric claims in the passage above about leprosy and the necessary role of the confessor—and also backs up the position of the bishops who tried and condemned Louis the Pious, binding and loosing on earth and heaven, and thus commanding the actions of kings. It may well be that they and Aelfric had much in common.

A further example of penance is to be found in the sermon “St. Basilius, Bishop,” and provides a fascinating example of the penitential act, wherein the penitent is enjoined to confession, then undergoes penance before returning to the church body to receive the elements. Besotted with unbecoming desire, a young man sells his soul to a devil in exchange for the girl of his dreams, thus committing apostasy. The girl falls for the young man through the devil's wiles and the father, though distraught, gives her up, thus becoming a partaker in the sin. However, upon discovering the her husband's apostasy, the girl flees to St. Basil and tells all, whereupon the bishop summoned the husband and gets the truth out of him. Basil then asks,

heora wacnyse. Æfter ðritigra daga fæce, þa þa hí ne mihton mid heora benum þæt gold and þa gymstanas to heora gecynde awendan, ða comon hi mid wope to þam apostole, þus cweðende, ‘Symle ðu tæhtest mildheortnyse, and þæt man oðrum miltsode; and gif man oðrum miltsað, hu micele swiðor wile God miltsian and arian mannum his hand-geweorce! Þæt þæt we mid gitsigendum eagum agylton, þæt we nu mid wependum eagum bereowsiað.’ Ða andwyrde se apostol, ‘Berað ða gyrda to wuda, and þa stanas to sǣ-strande: hi synd gecyrrede to heora gecynde.’ Þaða hi þis gedon hæfdon, ða underfengon hi eft Godes gife, swa þæt hi adræfdon deoflu, and blinde, and untrume gehældon, and fela tacna on Drihtnes naman gefremedon, swa swa hi ær dydon.”

“Wilt thou again submit to Christ?” The Apostate said, “I earnestly desire it, my lord; but I cannot though I wish, because I denied Christ, and confirmed in writing that I was the devil’s.” The holy man said to him, “Be not anxious about that, our Saviour is very benign, and will receive thee again, if thou with true repentance wilt turn again to Him.” Lo! then Basil blessed the youth, and locked him up apart in a certain secret place, and enjoined him penances, and prayed for him.³³⁷

This penance lasts a number of days, broken every so often by visits from Basil, who finds the young man recovering. At last, they return to the church for a final bout with the devil, after which the bishop “received the youth to communion, and committed him to the Saviour.”³³⁸

Yet not all penance to be found in Aelfric’s works is imposed on repentant men by their confessor; in some cases, contrite sinners request the opportunity. In a case of abusive charioteers in “St. Martin: Bishop and Confessor,” when the men beat St. Martin their chariot becomes fastened to the ground and, learning of their error, they rush after the man, “bestrewed with dust” and beg forgiveness, even offering to undergo terrible punishment for their crime.³³⁹ In the same sermon, it is said of St. Martin that he would drive out devils by undergoing himself a rather penance-like ceremony, where he “prostrated himself on the church-floor, clothed with hair-cloth and bestrewed with ashes, lying in his prayers with locked doors, and the devils afterward were immediately driven from the afflicted men with wonderful gesticulations.”³⁴⁰ As a final example of voluntary penance, in the “Passion of St. Edmund” a group of thieves are sent to execution by Theodred the bishop, which is contrary to churchmen’s authority. After discovering his error, Theodred “rued with lamentation that he had awarded such a cruel doom to these unhappy thieves, and ever deplored it to his life’s end; and earnestly prayed the people to

³³⁷ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:73, 75.

³³⁸ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 1:77.

³³⁹ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 2:281.

³⁴⁰ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 2:295.

fast with him fully three days, praying the Almighty that He would have pity upon him.”³⁴¹ In all three examples, those seeking forgiveness are willing to undergo self-imposed affliction for the sake of their salvation; in the case of St. Martin driving out devils through fasting, this recalls to mind the practice of surrogate penance described above.

Thus far between the *Blickling Homilies* and Aelfric there is a clear progression of the ideas behind *ministerium* and penance, whereby this interpretation of Ezekiel continued in use in England. Both Aelfric and the authors of the *Blickling Homilies* believed that it was critical to admonish the sinner, not only to the end that the sinner repent, but also as a means of protection for the watchman’s own immortal soul. Aelfric then prescribes penance as the choice means of purging sin from the contrite sinner, and in this way reconcile the soul with the Savior. If such spiritual medicine was indeed necessary for the purifying of the English and the driving out of their enemies, then these messages were timely—but time, as we shall see, had finally run out.

Wulfstan

Almost one hundred thirty years after Fulk commended his protégé Grimbold to God and the goodwill of King Alfred, Archbishop Wulfstan sat angrily writing another letter to the English—a letter ostensibly in the hand of a wolf. This *Sermo Lupi ad Angulos* was Wulfstan’s answer to a new wave of Viking attacks that threatened to undo all that Alfred and his successors had struggled to achieve. “Understand if you are able!” the archbishop declares as he lists a catalogue of sins past and present, lamenting in biblical fashion how the sins of the Anglo-Saxons outweigh even those of their foes, and for this they are punished with shame and defeat. What is more, Wulfstan ominously references Gildas’ words to the Britons 500 years earlier, thus

³⁴¹ Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric’s Lives of Saints*, 2:331.

returning self-consciously to Ezekiel's original message in nearly the same context as that of the fearless British preacher. Ironically, the *Sermo Lupi*'s author, Wulfstan, was an Anglo-Saxon, a descendant of the antagonists of whom Gildas spoke, yet he now turned to the words of a man he called "prophet" to show the Anglo-Saxons that just as they had been the wrath of God against the Britons, so now were the Vikings acting out God's justice upon the Anglo-Saxons. The only solution, declares the wolf, must be a complete and total return to right living and correct practice, an abhorrence of all sin, and penance aimed at receiving God's pardon. In this letter, Ezekiel's final warning to the English plays out in peels of thunder.

As in the days of Alfred, at the time of Wulfstan's composition, the Anglo-Saxons were again faring poorly in this battle with the Vikings. Wulfstan wrote his famous sermon in 1014, the year in which he says "the Danes persecuted [the English] most."³⁴² As did Aelfric, Wulfstan believed that the increasing chaos indicated that the world was coming to an end, a time when the acts of men would become worse and worse, and it is in light of this argument that his *Sermo lupi* demands of his audience penance and changed hearts.³⁴³ The situation certainly appeared dire: by 1012 all meaningful defenses had collapsed and in 1013 the Viking king Sweyn and his son Cnut subdued the country while Ethelred fled into exile in Normandy.³⁴⁴ Although Ethelred would achieve a brief comeback for the Anglo-Saxons, Cnut would be the ultimate victor in this conflict, yet in a bizarre twist he would emerge a Christian ruler governing a Christian people, his acts attuned to the needs of *ministerium* and the penance necessary for the continued peace of

³⁴² Wulfstan, "Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos*," in *Old and Middle English: c.890-c.1450, An Anthology*, 3rd ed., edited by Elaine Treharne (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 259-267, at 261.

³⁴³ Wulfstan, "Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos," in *Old and Middle English*, 259, 261.

³⁴⁴ Lawson, *Cnut*, 19.

any Christian realm. In this, Wulfstan would prove instrumental.

Wulfstan, the bishop of London and Worcester and later archbishop of York, was “a product of the second generation of Benedictine reformers” who authored many homilies and works of law.³⁴⁵ At Wulfstan’s request, Aelfric, who was Wulfstan’s neighbor, produced two letters, first in Latin and later translated into English for the instruction of Wulfstan’s clergymen.³⁴⁶ It is not hard to imagine an individual like Wulfstan, who went seeking after admonition for his clergy, in turn taking this admonition upon himself and addressing his concerns to the nation. But unlike Aelfric, Wulfstan is characterized by utilitarianism, producing “nothing of controversy, and little in the shape of argument: simply the assertion of Christian dogma and the enforcement of Christian duty.”³⁴⁷ This sort of rhetoric is employed to great effect in the *Sermo lupi*.³⁴⁸

There are numerous topics covered in the *Sermo lupi*, and much commentary on the societal state of Anglo-Saxon England as of the first decade of the eleventh century. Of central importance is the element of shame that permeates the sermon, as men are shamed in battle, shamed by the oppression of the Vikings, and shamed by their seemingly limitless sin, these miniature diatribes frequently punctuated with variations of the phrase, “understand this whoever is able to.”³⁴⁹ Shame in battle is characterized by the shakeup of societal norms to which Wulfstan bore witness. As with *The Battle of Maldon*, loyalty to one’s lord and observation (or

³⁴⁵ Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 259.

³⁴⁶ Hurt, *Aelfric*, 40.

³⁴⁷ Earle, *Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 222-224.

³⁴⁸ Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 259: “Wulfstan’s prose is pragmatic, addressing very contemporary concerns with an urgency reflected in the intensity of emotion behind the exhortation and admonition.”

³⁴⁹ Wulfstan, “*Sermo lupi ad Angulos*,” in *Old and Middle English*, 261; cf. Ezekiel 3:27 and Mark 4:9.

lack thereof) of proper societal norms figure prominently in the *Sermo lupi*. In Wulfstan's mind, the very structure of society was not simply at risk, but frequently being overturned, such as when runaway slaves, having joined the Vikings, return to fight and extort their former masters.³⁵⁰ Such could only be explained as the wrath of God. To compound the disgraces of the battlefield, the English honor their foes by paying them off.³⁵¹ The religious houses were impacted monetarily, for "public laws have declined all too greatly, and sanctuaries are too widely unprotected, and the houses of God are entirely despoiled of ancient rights and stripped of all that is decent inside."³⁵² "Through God's anger," Wulfstan declares, "very cowardly laws and

³⁵⁰ Wulfstan, "Sermo lupi ad Angulos," in *Old and Middle English*, 262-265: Wulfstan balks at the ignominy of disproportionate wergilds, for example, whereby an escaped slave-turned-Viking enjoys a significant wergild, while his former master merits none. Such incongruity is not to be tolerated, as "of all the treachery in the world to the lord the greatest is that a man should betray his lord's soul; and it is also a very great betrayal of one's lord in the world that a man should treacherously kill his lord or drive his lord living from the land" ("ealra mæst hlafordswice se byð on worolde þæt man his hlafordes saule beswice; and ful micel hlafordswice eac bið on worolde þæt man his hlaford of life forræda, oððon of lande lifiendne drife"). More horrifying yet, "often the slave binds fast the nobleman who was his lord previously, and makes him a slave because of God's anger" ("oft þræl þæne þegen þe ær wæs his hlaford cnyt swyþe fæste, and wycð him to þræle þurh Godes yrre"). Cf. "On Auguries" in Aelfric of Eynsham, *Aelfric's Lives of Saints*, 1:364-365: "Ill fareth it with the house where the bondsmaid is the ruler of the mistress and the mistress is in subjugation to the bondsmaid; so also will the life of man be ordered backward, if the flesh which is corruptible and mortal shall subdue the spirit, which is eternal and imperishable, to its base lusts, which will destroy them both, and bring them to everlasting torments" ("Þwyrlice færð æt ðam huse þær seo wyln bið þære hlæfdian wissigend and seo hlæfdige bið þære wylne underðeodd swa bið eac þæs mannes lif on hinder gefadod gif þæt flæsc þe is brosnigendlic and deadlic sceal gewyldan þone gast the is ece and unateorigendlic to his fracodum lustum the hi buta fordoð and to ecum tintregum gebringað").

³⁵¹ Wulfstan, "Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos," in *Old and Middle English*, 264-265: "But all this disgrace which we often suffer we repay with honour to those that injure us: we continually pay them, and they humiliate us daily; they ravage and they burn, plunder and rob, and carry it to their ships" ("Ac ealne þæne bysmor the we oft þoliað we gyldað mid weorðscipe þam þe us scendað: we him gyldað singallice, and hy us hynað dæghwamlice; hy hergiað and hy bærnað, rypað and reafiað, and to scipe lædað").

³⁵² Wulfstan, "Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos," in *Old and Middle English*, 260-261: "folclaga wýrsedan ealles to swyþe, and halignessa syndan to griðlease wide, and Godes hus syndan to clæn berypte ealdra gerihta and innan bestrypte ælcra gerisena"; Lawson, *Cnut*, 193-194: this

shameful forced payments are common among us, understand that if you are able.”³⁵³ These terrible disgraces were rooted in sin, and it was only through repentance that such misfortune could be turned about. But the question remained: did the Anglo-Saxons have the moral wherewithal to repent?

In Wulfstan’s ecclesiastical opinion, the situation was nigh beyond control. The moral decay playing out before his eyes was surely unprecedented, as the sins of the English were of a nature and volume to outweigh those of their worst predecessors.³⁵⁴ It is here that Wulfstan suddenly leaps back four hundred and fifty years to the originator of penitential-Ezekiel himself:

There was a historian in the time of the Britons called Gildas, who wrote about their misdeeds: how through their sins they angered God so very excessively that at last he allowed the army of the English to conquer their land and they destroyed the power of the Britons completely. [Their sins came about] through the idleness of bishops, and through the wicked cowardice of God’s preachers, who kept silent about the truth all too often and mumbled with their jaws where they should have called out.³⁵⁵

In an effort to avoid falling into that category himself, Wulfstan justifies his castigation of those men who have given little thought to how they might remedy the situation, saying that on account of this negligence “we have also experienced many injuries and insults, and, if we are to have any remedy, then we must earn it better from God than we have previously done [...]

statement correlates with the taxes levied by Ethelred to pay off the Vikings and the tributes imposed by Sweyn.

³⁵³ Wulfstan, “Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos,” in *Old and Middle English*, 263: “Ful earhlice laga and scandlice nydgyld þurh Godes yrre us syn gemæne, understand se þe cunne.”

³⁵⁴ Wulfstan, “Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos,” in *Old and Middle English*, 266-267.

³⁵⁵ Wulfstan, “Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos,” in *Old and Middle English*, 263-267: “An þeodwita wæs on Brytta tidum, Gildas hatte, se awrat be heora misdædum: hu hy mid heora synnum swa oferlice swyþe God gegræmedan þæt he let æt nyhstan Engla here heora eard gewinna and Brytta dugeþe fordon mid ealle [...] þurh biscopa asolcennesse, and þurh lyðre yrhðe Godes bydela, the soþes geswugedan ealles to gelome and clumedan mid ceafum þær hy scoldan clypian.”

Indeed, we know very well that a great violation requires a great remedy, and a great fire not a little water, if one is to extinguish that fire at all.”³⁵⁶ The first sacrifice to be made must be sinful pride; the list of heavy crimes provided throughout the sermon “is not shameful to us, yet we are too ashamed to begin the atonement such as the book teaches, and that is clearly visible in this wretched nation, ruined by sin.”³⁵⁷ Then begins a call to repentance:

[L]et each earnestly examine himself and not delay entirely for too long [...] it is absolutely essential that we reflect among ourselves and earnestly pray to God himself. And let us do what is necessary for us: bow to justice and to some extent abandon injustice, and atone very earnestly for what we violated before [...] And let us often consider the great judgement to which we all must come, and eagerly defend ourselves against the boiling fire of hell-torment, and earn for ourselves those glories and those joys that God has prepared for those who perform his will in the world. May God help us. Amen.³⁵⁸

Wulfstan first establishes a rationale for understanding the Viking invasions as the just punishment for the Anglo-Saxons’ sins. He then justifies his right to preach by pointing out the wickedness of lazy preacher, mumbling instead of shouting—and even draws upon the authority of Gildas’ with whom this thesis began, to back up his claim. In this way, Gildas, his invasion

³⁵⁶ Wulfstan, “Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos,” in *Old and Middle English*, 260-261: “we eac forþam habbað fela byrsta and bysmara gebiden, and, gif we ænige bote gebidan scylan, þonne mote we þæs to Gode ernian bet þonne we ær þysan dydan [...] La hwæt, we witan ful georne þæt to miclan Bryce sceal micel bot nyde, and to miclan bryne wæter unlytel, gif man þæt fyr sceal to ahte acwencan.”

³⁵⁷ Wulfstan, “Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos,” in *Old and Middle English*, 264-265: “þæs us ne scamað na, ac us scamað swyþe þæt we bote aginnan swa swa bec tæcan, and þæt is gesyne on þysse earman forsyngodan þeode.”

³⁵⁸ Wulfstan, “Sermo Lupi Ad Angulos,” in *Old and Middle English*, 264-267: “smeage huru georne gehwa hine sylfne and þæs no ne latige ealles to lange [...] And þy us is þearf micel þæt we us beþencan and with God sylfne þingian georne. And utan don swa us þearf is: gebugan to rihte, and be suman dæle unriht forlætan, and betan swyðe georne þæt we ær bræcan [...] And utan gelome understandan þone miclan dom þe we ealle to sculon, and beorgan us georne with þone weallendan bryne helle wites, and gearnian us þa mærpā and þa myrhða þe God hæfð gegearwod þam þe his willan on worolde gewyrcað. God ure help. Amen.”

thesis, and *ministerium* are joined together and expounded by none other than an Anglo-Saxon, for the admonition of his fellow Anglo-Saxons, should they have an ear to hear and the will to respond.

As one might expect of such a fiery adherent to the edicts of Ezekiel, Wulfstan was an ardent proponent of penance—and took the matter seriously in a hands-on manner, relying heavily upon the letters of Aelfric in order to educate clerical confessors.³⁵⁹ But he did not stop there. Tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon law codes made increasing use of penance, blending it with secular life: in the case of bloodshed, penance became necessary for admittance into the king’s presence (I Edmund), as well as to clear oath-breakers and adulterers for Christian burial (I Edmund and II Aethelstan).³⁶⁰ Wulfstan added to this tradition when he became advisor to Ethelred in 1008. Before the king’s exile, Wulfstan had the opportunity to greatly influence secular legislation, moving to enforce, rather than merely support, penitential practice: Ethelred’s 1008 law code “urged every Christian to ‘form the habit of frequent confession’ and to receive the Eucharist often,” while laws of 1009 “enforced a ‘general penance’ before Michaelmas, requiring the laity to come barefoot to the church and confess and authorizing the reeve in each village to witness penance and almsgiving.”³⁶¹ V Ethelred, ch.22 calls for all men to confess regularly, while ch.29 reinforces this, thus bearing resemblance to II Edmund, ch.4.³⁶² Indeed, “[t]he majority of references to penance, in fact, occur in the laws drafted by Wulfstan during the

³⁵⁹ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 143: the education of the clergy was “a task only implied by the handbooks and the orders for public penance.”

³⁶⁰ Carole Hough, “Penitential Literature and Secular Law in Anglo-Saxon England” (*Anglo-Saxon studies in archeology and history* 11, 2000): 133-141, at 135.

³⁶¹ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 146-147.

³⁶² Hough, “Penitential Literature and Secular Law in Anglo-Saxon England,” 136.

early eleventh century,” while Wulfstan’s homilies place great emphasis on penance as well.³⁶³ Having diagnosed the ills of the Anglo-Saxons and observed their apparent desire to avoid penance, Wulfstan clearly hoped that secular legislation might aid in the process whereby the nation might be saved by a corporate return to God.³⁶⁴ However, time had run out: the age of the Dane arrived, Ethelred fled into exile, and a Viking sat upon the English throne. For a brief time it seemed that the Anglo-Saxons might make a comeback, but instead they eventually found themselves in the unenviable position of Horace’s Greeks: compelled to conquer their rustic conquerors.³⁶⁵

Conclusion: the Penances of Cnut

This thesis concludes on a note of *déjà vu*, as heathen pirates invade, settle, and adopt the beliefs of their victims. Just as Gildas wrote of the Saxon menace only temporarily held off, so did Wulfstan (quoting Gildas) address the Anglo-Saxons’ fears regarding their enemies, the Vikings. In both cases, the words of Ezekiel were drawn upon to bolster the speaker’s argument, and in both cases it was the conquerors who eventually took the admonition to heart. For as shall briefly be demonstrated, Cnut not only became a Christian, he also took up penance and even engaged in a voluntary act of humiliation, whereby, like Louis the Pious, he subjected his pride to the Most High and emerged as powerful (if not more so) as before.

In February of 1014, Sweyn died. The English witan turned to the exiled Ethelred, who

³⁶³ Hough, “Penitential Literature and Secular Law in Anglo-Saxon England,” 136; Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 157-158. See also Aelfric’s Homily for the Third Sunday after the Epiphany, ed. Thorpe, *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church*, 124-125.

³⁶⁴ Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 162.

³⁶⁵ Horace *Epistulae* 2.1.156-157: “Graecia capta ferum uictorem cepit et artis intulit agresti Latio.”

with many genial promises returned to England and drove Cnut from his camp in Lincolnshire. Cnut abandoned his Lincolnshire allies in the process and, enraged, stopped off at Sandwich to leave (and mutilate) his hostages.³⁶⁶ However, barely a year passed before he returned to an England yet weakened by internal strife and turmoil.³⁶⁷ In September of 1015 he arrived again at Sandwich for over a year's worth of war with Edmund Ironside that raged until the end of 1016.³⁶⁸ For Cnut, it was a meteoric rise. At the time, he was a very young man, quite possibly yet in his teens.³⁶⁹ Five years after Sweyn's death in 1014, Cnut had come to inherit both his father's English conquests (1016 with the death of Edmund Ironside) and the throne of his homeland, Denmark (1019).³⁷⁰ Cnut proved to be a spectacularly successful commander and ruler, organizing his father's forces against the Anglo-Saxons (whose own abilities, though perhaps diminished, were not unformidable when in capable hands) and mercilessly putting down remaining foes once he had claimed the throne.³⁷¹

Cnut's ascendancy is made murky by an apparent schizophrenic public policy, one that alternately attempted to pacify and exult. It comes as no surprise that as Cnut sought political allies Wulfstan made his way into the king's inner circle, "[becoming] the most trusted adviser in legal matters."³⁷² Yet having such a firebrand for councilor meant also having to face the ire of a hellfire-preaching disciple of Ezekiel. If Wulfstan had expressed his aggravation with kings in

³⁶⁶ Lawson, *Cnut*, 19; Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 90.

³⁶⁷ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 90-91.

³⁶⁸ Lawson, *Cnut*, 19; Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 90-91.

³⁶⁹ Lawson, *Cnut*, 174: examines Ottar the Black's *Knutsdrapa* to come to this conclusion.

³⁷⁰ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 72.

³⁷¹ Lawson, *Cnut*, 16, 214, 215, 219: Ultimately, while his rule was not so drastic as the Conquest, it was yet more oppressive—"the price of defeat."

³⁷² Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 92; on Wulfstan's ascent to power, Loyn adds, "Experience as archbishop of Anglo-Scandinavian York in the early eleventh century (as in the late 9th) was no negligible political asset."

the past, one can be sure that he wished for this young ruler, fresh from his conquests, to heed the ordinances of God if he expected a blessed reign. Cnut certainly had much to atone for. Not only was the mutilation episode at Sandwich still in recent memory, upon taking the English throne the young king engaged in the usual bloodletting and exiling not uncommon to new royalty.³⁷³ Yet Cnut wisely did not wish to appear the barbarian conqueror, and he took steps, through the auspices of Wulfstan, to amend his past wrongs. Of crucial importance was Cnut's religion. Despite the newness of Christianity to the Danes and the violence Christians suffered at their hands, both Sweyn and Cnut dealt justly with them, and Cnut was fairly certainly a Christian, complete with Christian name (Lambert).³⁷⁴ As such, it was hardly any trouble for the king to take up the mantle of Christian ruler, at least in name.

In 1020, while away securing his holdings in Denmark, Cnut sent a *Letter to the English* that was intended to demonstrate this sudden change of heart. The overall tone of the letter is hopeful, unlike the *Sermo Lupi*, and Cnut announces a Christian *modus operandi*, and the admonition of the Pope to support the church and uphold justice. He then admits that the problems facing the Anglo-Saxons originated in Denmark, cleverly making as though he had not been a part of the problem, and promises to uphold sacred and mundane law with force if necessary—with an interesting note on the bishops' role in instructing evil-doers to repent.³⁷⁵ Cnut's letter promises the people, high and low, that the king will do whatever he can, “with

³⁷³ Lawson, *Cnut*, 83, 175; Florence of Worcester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester with the Two Continuations*, trans. Thomas Forester (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1854), 133-134: Florence claims that in 1017 alone, Cnut had executed Elwy the etheling, Edric Streona, and three sons of principal noblemen, while exiling the ethelings Edward and Edmund (whom he wished killed by a third party).

³⁷⁴ Lawson, *Cnut*, 129.

³⁷⁵ Cnut, “King Cnut's *Letter to the English*,” in *Old and Middle English*, 271.

God's help," to make amends for any injustice exercised in the past.³⁷⁶ But then he seems to quote the *Sermo Lupi* in listing evil-doers. Moreover, all men are to atone for their sins and seek to honor God and the saints—almost as though answering the *Sermo Lupi*, aiming to fix the problems through legislation.³⁷⁷ It is tempting to read Wulfstan's voice in the *Letter to the English*, as Cnut calls for returns to piety to absolve the nation of sins.³⁷⁸

In addition to verbalizing his claims to pious kingship, Cnut made sure to present himself accordingly—his “public image in England was consistently to represent the fervour of the convert, more Christian than the Christians, more true a representative of the Christian kingship of Edgar than Edgar's own blood descendants.”³⁷⁹ According to Florence of Worcester, upon being elected by the lords and clergy (“all who ranked as nobles in England”), Cnut “swore that, both as respected divine and secular affaires, he would be faithful to his duties as lord over them.”³⁸⁰ And should there be any doubt as to his sincerity, according to his *Letter to the English*, Cnut's trip to Rome was in part to redeem him of his sins.³⁸¹ With this letter Cnut cemented his own reputation and success as a devout, internationally-recognized king, no more the usurper.³⁸²

³⁷⁶ Treharne, *Living Through Conquest: The Politics of Early England, 1020-1220*. Oxford Textual Perspectives, 31.

³⁷⁷ Cnut, “King Cnut's *Letter to the English*,” in *Old and Middle English*, 273.

³⁷⁸ Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 26.

³⁷⁹ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 93; Encomiast, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, edited by Alistair Campbell (1949; repr., London: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5, 34-37: According to the Encomiast, the official biographer of Cnut's wife (and who comes across as overpoweringly unctuous despite his self-conscious protestations to absolute accuracy), Cnut “indeed became a friend and intimate of churchmen, to such a degree that he seemed to bishops to be a brother bishop for his maintenance of perfect religion, to monks also not a secular but a monk for the temperance of his life of most humble devotion” (“Amicus uero et familiaris factus est uiris ecclesiasticis, adeo ut episcopis uideretur coepiscopus pro exhibitione totius religionis, monachis quoque non secularis sed caenobialis pro continentia humillimae deuotionis”).

³⁸⁰ Florence of Worcester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, 127; Lawson, *Cnut*, 82.

³⁸¹ Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 30.

³⁸² Treharne, *Living Through Conquest*, 34.

An example of this sincere devotion to his new religion can be found in the *Encomium Emmae*, the laudatory *vita* of his royal wife (and former queen of Ethelred). The *Encomium* or *Gesta Cnutonis regis* was perhaps written by a monk of St. Bertin's (the home of Alfred's Grimbold) who met Cnut as the king passed through in 1026 during his pilgrimage to Rome, and also the queen during her later exile.³⁸³ In the *Encomium* is a verbose description of Cnut's piety when visiting the abbeys of St. Omer and St. Bertin:

When he had entered the monasteries, and had been received with great honour, he advanced humbly, and with complete concentration prayed for the intercession of the saints in a manner wonderfully reverent, fixing his eyes upon the ground, and freely pouring forth, so to speak, rivers of tears. But when the time came when he desired to heap the holy altars with royal offerings, how often did he first with tears press kisses on the pavement, how often did he pray that the heavenly mercy might not be displeas'd with him! At length, when he gave the sign, his offering was presented to him by his followers, not a mean one, nor such as might be shut in any bag, but a man brought it, huge as it was, in the ample folds of his cloak, and this the king himself placed on the altar with his own hand, a cheerful giver according to the apostolic exhortation. But why do I say on the altar, when I recall that I saw him going round every corner of the monasteries, and passing no altar, small though it might be, without giving gifts and pressing sweet kisses upon it?³⁸⁴

This extravagance does much to obscure Cnut's violent past, and implants in the pious reader's mind a sympathy for the unabashedly godly monarch, imminently worthy of his conquests, and

³⁸³ Grierson, "Relations between England and Flanders," 95, 107.

³⁸⁴ Encomiast, *Encomium Emmae Reginae*, 37: "Ingressus monasteria et susceptus cum magna honorificencia humiliter incedebat, et mira cum reuerentia in terram defixus lumina et ubertim fundens lacrimarum ut ita dicam flumina tota intentione sanctorum expetiit suffragia. At ubi ad hoc peruentum est, ut oblationibus regiis sacra uellet cumulare altaria, o quotiens primum pauimento lacrimosa infixit oscula, quotiens illud pectus uenerabile propria puniebant uerbera, qualia dabat suspiria, quotiens precabatur ut sibi non indignaretur superna clementia! Tandem a suis ei innuenti sua porrigebatur oblation, non mediocris, nec quae aliquot clauderetur in marsupio, sed ingens allata est palleati extento in gremio, quam ipse rex suis manibus altari imposuit, largitor hilaris monitu apostolico. 'Altari' autem cur dico, cum uidisse me meminerim, eum omnes angulos monasteriorum circuisse, nullumque altare licet exiguum preterisse, cui non munera daret et dulcia oscula infigeret?"

of universal honor. The *Encomiast* is not alone in this assessment: in an account by Goscelin, Cnut was saved from shipwreck by appealing to St. Augustine and holding aloft a plate, and having thus been proven the rightful king, “hurried to St. Augustine’s to offer them rich gifts”—likely including the plate.³⁸⁵ Cnut also appears in Goscelin’s account of the transfer of St. Mildred to St. Augustine’s Canterbury, when Cnut ordered the theft of Mildred’s relics (at Augustine’s behest) on account of being saved from shipwreck upon the return journey from Rome.³⁸⁶ Thus, at one level Cnut certainly appears to have fit—or caused himself to fit into—the mold for a good Christian monarch. But in more practical matters, he certainly seems to have made similar efforts.

One such expression of Cnut’s newfound piety is to be found in royal legislation. One of Cnut’s first royal acts was to create a law code, one explicitly Christian and English in nature. This code (“a deliberate act of reconciliation”) drew upon the laws of Edgar and Ethelred and in it the king’s councilors vowed “above all things they would honour one God and steadfastly hold one Christian faith, and would love King Cnut with due loyalty and zealously observe Edgar’s laws”—this statement combined with the Anglo-Saxon legal precedent indicates that Cnut at least wanted to appear eager to follow the church’s lead.³⁸⁷ To some extent that actually meant following Wulfstan’s lead. More laws were issued in the years from 1020 to 1023, and these bear the imprint of Wulfstan’s penitential authorship, “punish[ing] violations of the Lenten fast and require[ing] the church to hear the confession of a condemned man,” with punishments meted out according to one’s status and character, as per the penitentials.³⁸⁸ Wulfstan’s laws reflect his

³⁸⁵ Lawson, *Cnut*, 103.

³⁸⁶ Lawson, *Cnut*, 102.

³⁸⁷ Loyn, *The Vikings in Britain*, 92-93; Lert, “Fault in the Law,” 276.

³⁸⁸ Frantzen, *The Penitential Literature*, 146-147.

frustration with his kings, and ultimately argue that if kings cannot keep public order, then the “bishops should direct all affairs, both lay and ecclesiastical.”³⁸⁹ Wulfstan’s *Institutes of Polity* further defined Cnut’s duties, of which “protection of the church and promotion of Christianity, and the suppression of evildoers” was a part—this not only served the church’s interests, it also protected the king, who needed to uphold justice in order to establish a happy, secure reign.³⁹⁰ In some ways, Cnut proved himself a great ally of the church and correct belief: “In the Laws of Edward and Guthrum heathenism is denounced with penalties; in the Codes of Aethelred it is forbidden in a hortatory way; but the most explicit prohibition is that of Canute.”³⁹¹

However, none of this is intended to ignore Cnut’s mixed legacy. Despite the Encomiast’s enthusiasm, there is always the possibility that he was simply writing for Queen Emma’s aggrandizement alone, and thus sought to depict her royal husband in the best Christian light possible, whereas Cnut may not have truly been the Christian king in all the manifold ways that the Encomiast would have readers believe.³⁹² For one, although the laws of Cnut show that he wished to be associated with them, he may not have always acted upon them.³⁹³ In addition to this is Cnut’s complicated relationship to the churches and monasteries of England. Despite a clear desire to court ecclesiastical favor, including the construction (and consecration by Wulfstan) of a church at Ashingdon, Cnut still ruled as lord of the church, per his coronation promise.³⁹⁴ As such, royal taxation continued to plague the Anglo-Saxon church.³⁹⁵ As Lawson

³⁸⁹ Lawson, *Cnut*, 60-61.

³⁹⁰ Lawson, *Cnut*, 33.

³⁹¹ Earle, *Anglo-Saxon Literature*, 66.

³⁹² Lawson, *Cnut*, 56.

³⁹³ Lawson, *Cnut*, 210, 63: Consider that Cnut kept Aelfifu despite his own laws, II Cnut 54.1, which forbade “the keeping of a woman in addition to a wife.”

³⁹⁴ Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 269; Florence of Worcester, *The Chronicle of Florence of Worcester*, 134-135.

sums up, after Cnut's ascension to power, "in 1017 memories of the destructive wars of the previous three decades must still have been very fresh, among churchmen as well as their lay brethren. Moreover, there is much to suggest that Cnut's reign was itself a difficult time for some churches. Heavy taxation was a major factor here."³⁹⁶

Yet despite these interesting conflicts within his character, Cnut is best remembered for an episode introduced by the twelfth-century historian, Henry of Huntingdon. In a list of three remarkable acts performed by the king, Henry includes the famous bout with the waves:

[W]hen he was at the height of his ascendancy, he ordered his chair to be placed on the sea-shore as the tide was coming in. Then he said to the rising tide, 'You are subject to me, as the land on which I am sitting is mine, and no one has resisted my overlordship with impunity. I command you, therefore, not to rise on my land, nor to presume to wet the clothing or limbs of your master.' But the sea came up as usual, and disrespectfully drenched the king's feet and shins. So jumping back, the king cried, 'Let all the world know that the power of kings is empty and worthless, and there is no king worthy of the name save Him by whose will heaven, earth, and sea obey eternal laws.' Thereafter King Cnut never wore the golden crown, but placed it on the image of the crucified Lord, in eternal praise of God the great king.³⁹⁷

The penitential aspects of this episode are intriguing: what prompted Cnut to undergo this ordeal? Did he honestly believe that he could stop the incoming tide, or did he wish to demonstrate his human limitations to unctuous courtiers? Could this exercise have been in response to some admonition regarding kingly pride? The ramifications of this tale are interesting in and of themselves: thanks to this small but interesting bit of piety, Cnut's larger doings have since been obscured. In the end, Cnut's Christianity contributed to his being

³⁹⁵ Lawson, *Cnut*, 160.

³⁹⁶ Lawson, *Cnut*, 126.

³⁹⁷ Henry of Huntingdon, *The History of the English People 1000-1154*, trans. Diana Greenway (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 17-18.

forgotten, and remembered principally through a story about trying to stop the waves.³⁹⁸ Cnut's battle against the waves as an act of penance and humiliation makes for an interesting juxtaposition against the deposition of Louis the Pious two hundred years earlier: both were humiliated, both came out either weaker or made more strong. Yet Cnut's was voluntary, where Louis' was not.

FIN

³⁹⁸ Lawson, *Cnut*, 222.

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