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Hagiographic Rhetoric in Medieval English Devotional Texts:

Ælfric of Eynsham, Thomas of Monmouth, and John Mirk

by

Jacob L. Thomas

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Committee Approval

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of JACOB L. THOMAS find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

Thomas Klein, Dissertation Chair

Jessica Winston, Committee Member

Curtis Whitaker, Committee Member

Justin Stover, Graduate Faculty Representative

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“I elucidate everything precisely, citing more than twenty-five authors, and so your grace can see that I have done good work and that the book will be very useful to everyone.”

—Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*, translated by Edith Grossman

“Ond nu ic þe bidde, duguþa Hælend, þæt þu me milde forgife swetlice drincan þa word þines wisdomes, ðæt þu eac fremsumlice forgife, þæt ic æt nihstan to ðe þam willan ealles wisdomes becuman mote ond symle ætywan beforan þinum ansyne.”

—Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

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*Jacob L. Thomas
Ephraim, Utah
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Hagiographic Rhetoric in Medieval Devotional Texts:
Ælfric of Eynsham, Thomas of Monmouth, and John Mirk
Dissertation Abstract—Idaho State University (2019)

In this dissertation I introduce a new critical term, hagiographic rhetoric, which describes how medieval English authors deployed the legacies of saints for additional purposes beyond promoting piety or encouraging devotion to a particular saint. I further explain this term in my introduction and note how subtexts have always pervaded the hagiographic genre, whether these were written for political, social, economic, or ecclesiastical purposes.

The subsequent chapters examine how hagiographic rhetoric was applied by three monks from different eras of medieval English history. I first examine Ælfric of Eynsham, who in his late tenth-century homiletic work *The Lives of the Saints* deployed the narratives of a variety of saints to create national solidarity among England's Christians in the face of the Danish Viking invasions.

Secondly, I explore the late twelfth-century work of Thomas of Monmouth, who with the blessing of his monastic superiors, created a vita for a recently murdered boy, William of Norwich, whose death was blamed on local Jews. While this text has traditionally been understood principally as an antisemitic work, I show that there is strong evidence suggesting that Thomas's primary purpose in creating *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich* was to generate pilgrim interest in the fledgling Norwich Cathedral.

In the third chapter, I examine the late fourteenth century work of John Mirk, who refuted heretical Lollard ideas both directly and obliquely in his *Festial* collection of

homilies to reinforce orthodoxy in the minds of his parishioners. His inclusion of saints' tales in his sermons were specifically adapted to show that Lollard notions against the efficacy of the cult of the saints and all its attendant practices were refuted by true accounts of saintly intervention and miracles in specific holy spaces.

The final chapter of this dissertation discusses the pedagogical implications of teaching hagiography in the college classroom, and provides a tiered methodology for improving hagiographical literacy among students before introducing concepts of hagiographic rhetoric. An appendix shows how unfamiliarity and potential resistance from Latter-day Saint students about medieval concepts can be addressed to increase textual understanding of ideas about saints and hagiography.

Key Words: hagiography, rhetoric, hagiographic rhetoric, saints, saint-veneration

Introduction: Hagiography & Hagiographic Rhetoric

The meeting of Pope Francis and Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, on October 5, 2016, was full of symbolism. The pair, though they had met twice before, now met in Rome at the Chapel of Saint Gregory the Great, where together they commissioned thirty-eight lower episcopates of both the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England to go out and work together on a mission of “joint prayer, joint proclamation of the Gospel, and . . . joint works of charity and justice.” The commission symbolized not only Christ’s own sending-forth of the twelve apostles and the other seventy ministers in ancient Palestine, but also Saint Gregory’s late-sixth-century deputation of Saint Augustine (later the first Archbishop of Canterbury) and his fellow Benedictines to reclaim England from Anglo-Saxon paganism. To cap off the event, Francis presented Welby with a replica of the head of Saint Gregory’s staff, or crozier; the original, ivory-tipped and decorated with a sheep, is located in the same church in which the two successors of Gregory and Augustine were meeting (“Give Voice”).

The centuries-long rift between the Anglican and Roman Catholic communions has been healing since the 1960s, and this recent meeting of the two ecclesiastical primates was simply the most recent stitch in the mending of the centuries-long breach (“Archbishop and Pope”). But the fact that the meeting took place in the name, church, and tradition of Saint Gregory—complete with the transfer of a replica of the saint’s own crozier—demonstrates the power of the hagiographic tradition in the Christian world, the tradition of the saints. Indeed, the symbolic use of the saintly legacies in this context stands as a significant rhetorical maneuver for the purpose of creating Christian unity—all of which rests on the narratives (or hagiographies) of Gregory and Augustine.

This intentional deployment of saintly vitae as a form of rhetoric is not new, and has been at work in Christian thought since the first century. The vast *legendaria* of saints and martyrs, from Saints Stephen and James in the Book of Acts to Pope John Paul II (who is among the most recently notable canonized persons in the western Church), are testaments to the importance of holy individuals in this tradition. These stories of the saints are not passive, but have been and continue to be actively used or deployed by authors and orators to create dogma or reinforce a theological principle; to encourage action, obeisance, or imitation; to justify personal behavior; and even, on perhaps less pious occasions, to manipulate cultural mindsets. Through this deployment, the saint-legends become not just stories, but “disclosure[s] of truth” filled with influence and power (Monge 8). This maneuver is what I call *hagiographic rhetoric*, or the tactical deployment of existing hagiographic material to accomplish a specific aim beyond promoting piety or loyalty to a particular saint.

The Rise of Hagiography

In a Christian, generic sense, hagiography began with the martyrdom of Stephen, credited to have been a year or so after the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus and most notably recorded by Luke in the Book of Acts (Farmer 403). As such, Stephen is considered to be the first of thousands or perhaps millions of martyrs who perished for their witness of Christ (Heffernan 80-1). For the next three hundred years after Stephen, Christians throughout the Mediterranean and European worlds were killed for their beliefs. Many were tortured; some were fed to lions in arenas for public spectacle. Surrendering life for the Lord Jesus was the ultimate act of spiritual consecration (Bremmer 118), therefore

making the souls of the slain holy and worthy of veneration (Heffernan 218-9). Monuments sprang up to the deceased, their tombs were consecrated, and even their bones and other remains were sanctified (Brown 3). But the most enduring aspect of these holy individuals were the stories that survived about their lives and especially their deaths, many of which involved miracles.

These stories were eventually written down, collected, and transmitted as “lives,” or *vitae* in Latin, for preservation. Later scholars gave this genre its Greek name, *hagiography*, which means “holy writing.”¹ The principal purpose of hagiography was to instruct and edify the faithful, who were to pattern their own worship after the saints (Herman, Jahn, and Ryan 210). The genre grew in influence and importance throughout the Roman era, and exploded into new heights of popularity throughout the Middle Ages (Breisach 98). And as I have shown above, hagiography is still a vital force in Christian thinking today,

Piety is the name of the game here, and hagiography’s goal is to increase piety among the faithful (Boffey 619). The saints’ tales are filled with examples—thus the lives are often called *exempla*—of Christians undergoing incredible persecution, horrendous personal difficulty, and dramatic death (Powell 172). Pope emeritus Benedict XVI referred to the saints as “the true interpreters of Holy Scripture,” as “[t]he meaning of a given passage of the Bible becomes most intelligible in those human beings who have been totally transfixed by it and have lived it out” (Ratzinger 77). Living Christians are thus

¹ The term may also be descended from the Greco-Judaic *hagiographa*, or the third component of writings found in the Old Testament: Job, Proverbs, Psalms, and others, distinguished from the “Law” (Exodus, Leviticus, etc.) and the “Prophets” (Jeremiah, Malachi, etc.) (Hirsch and Ryssel).

encouraged to adopt the faithfulness of these saints, if not in such extreme ways then certainly in their own spheres of influence.

The most famous hagiographic work in medieval western Christendom was compiled by a Genoese monk named Jacobus de Voragine, who wrote a collection of saints' lives known as *Legenda Aurea* or *The Golden Legend*, first appearing in 1298 and later published in English for the first time in 1438 (Boffey 624). This influential tome contains dozens of stories of apostles, ascetics, confessors, martyrs, virgins, and more, all pious examples of faith in the redemption of their Lord.

For instance, Jacobus relates the story of Saint Lucy, a young woman from Syracuse who lived during the persecution of Christians by the Roman Emperor Diocletian. Lucy felt inspired to give away all of her possessions to the poor, an action perceived by Jacobus's Romans as being uniquely Christian, and her fiancé ("a stupid fellow," the story notes), turned her in to the consul, who had buckets of urine and cauldrons of hot oil dumped on her. She was protected by God and perished only when a dagger was thrust into her throat. As a result, she was glorified in heaven, and remains the "mediatrix" or patron saint of Syracuse to this day (Voragine 27-9). Then there's Saint Anthony the Great, who gave away all of his goods and became an ascetic recluse in the deserts of his native Egypt—though he made sure to teach the word of God to any who came to visit him. He is noted for his battles with demons who would tear his flesh with savagery (93). His spiritual legacy remains the greatest of all these original "desert fathers," though he became "exceedingly sad" at not having the opportunity to be martyred (94), dying a "confessor" instead at age 105 (96).

Many stories go further than just reviewing the life (and often death) of the particular saint, but also describe the saint's posthumous activity. In the legend of Saint Mark the Evangelist, Jacobus goes through the normal narrative tropes of Christian conversion, the performance of "prodigious miracles" (243), great physical trials, and eventual martyrdom: in Mark's case, being dragged to death by horses (244). But Mark's ministry and miracles do not end there: the hagiographer records how the saint's body continued to perform incredible feats *sans esprit*, including, during the body's translation from one tomb to another, the permeation of a sweet smell throughout the city of Alexandria (245). Saint Mark also appeared in vision to many people, mostly those who had petitioned him for help or who had shown strong devotion to his cult and had fallen into some kind of extremity—the most recent of these (for Jacobus) being an appearance to a dying Pavian friar in 1212 A.D. (247-8).

These examples show just a fraction of the saintly legends available in the *Legenda Aurea* and other hagiographical collections, but through them, the twofold purpose becomes clear. First, as noted above, the primary purpose of hagiography is to increase piety among the faithful. The saints endured extreme deprivation for the name of Christ and remained faithful to him even amidst torture and death; thus, the average layperson should be self-denying and faithful to God, like these exemplars, in the face of their own physical and spiritual trials. And second, hagiography aims also to testify to the efficacy of these holy individuals. Countless instances are provided of a saint's remains healing or offering spiritual protection to devotees and petitioners; likewise innumerable are the examples of the saints themselves appearing in their spiritual essence to grant aid to

Christians, call them to repentance, or vex their persecutors. In other words, hagiography is designed to prove that saints are worthy not just of admiration, but veneration, too.

Hagiography and the “Mythmaking Mechanism”

There are obvious patterns in saint-tales which medieval hagiographers would have been familiar with, which is why similar elements within individual tales have been repeated throughout the centuries (Powell 171). Matthew W. Dickie describes these as “hagiographic motifs” (90) and reviews particularly the suppression of devil-inspired sorcery (87) and miraculous healing following a renunciation of sin (96). There are countless others: the pagan ruler forcing a Christian to sacrifice to idols, which the man or woman refuses to do; the failure of persecutors to kill saints with extreme means, such as dumping boiling oil on them, but finding success with more conventional methods (like a beheading); sexual temptation and resistance; miraculous healings associated with a commitment to Christ or contact with saintly relics; the pleasant fragrance emitted from the saint’s corpse; the destruction of idols in extraordinary ways, such as earthquakes and lightning; the converted Jew who prior to confessing Christ denied or desecrated the transubstantiated reality of the Eucharist; the “contest” determining which god responds to its adherents and grants miracles, à la Elijah; and many, many more. Clearly, as Dickie notes, these medieval vitae shared a “formulaic character of . . . language and a “reliance on stereotypical story-patterns” (98), and in some cases may even “have shared a common source” in order to facilitate this kind of systematic conservation (97).

However—and this is a material point—there was plenty of variation in the transmission of these folktales, too. Dickie further notes that the variation in the legends is

primarily dependent on the fact that vitae were considered to be “*living texts*, subject to constant reworkings and additions” (98, emphasis added). These variations or “artistic reworking[s]” of saint-narratives were designed “to fit . . . [certain] patterns” (85), and were adapted primarily “to fit the special circumstances” of the hagiographer’s context (88).

The hagiographer, like any storyteller or author, has profound agency in the retelling of a saint’s legend. As an author, a “redactor” of saintly legends (H. Powell 182), the hagiographer deploys a rhetoric to uphold whatever principle he or she is trying to establish, and thus deploys that saintly story in writing for a purpose informed by both cultural and personal pressures and sensibilities. As a result of this, in hagiographic history the tales were continuously adapted to fit the ever-changing rhetorical contexts in which they existed (179). Their composition or transmission was “fluid, swing[ing] back and forth between oral and written expression,” a process that follows ideological natural selection in which some elements are static and others dynamic (180).

As such, folklorist Hilary Powell calls the hagiographer a “rebrander” (179), “an artist who selects, shapes, and transmits his tale according to his [own] . . . sensibilities” (177). She adds that in hagiography, as in any kind of folklore and folkloric transmission, there is both conservation and variation, and the individual hagiographer chooses what is retained, omitted, added, or reworked (171-2). Faithful replication is the province of a transcriber or copyist, not an “author”;² thus in the production of hagiography, the author in the act of transmitting a saint’s tale is not passive, but active. Even if the author bases her work off of source materials, if there is any act of variation in the translation or transmission, the variation serves as an act of creation, however major or minor it may be.

² I define authorship here in the modern sense, “as a self-expressive individual and . . . creator.” The medieval definition of authorship, *auctoritas*, may or may not equally apply (Summit 93).

Medieval hagiographers did this freely, using vitae as “living documents,” the “text[s] and presentation[s]” of which “changed in accord with views and preferences of the changing periods” (Breisach 99). Yes, there were some parts preserved from older material and older traditions, but there was plenty of variation, too. The eminent hagiography scholars Donald Weinstein and Rudolph M. Bell put it this way:

More often than not, even before he [the hagiographer] had begun to write the story of the saint, fact was already being transmuted into legend; the holy life was being recreated by the imagination and the needs of the faithful. The hagiographer’s main contribution was to shape the received material according to the current, partly implicit, pressures of the saint-making process, including the tastes of his bishop, the interests of his house or order, political interests, and, not least, the expectations of local devotees, both clerical and lay. In short . . . the hagiographer was not a biographer, at least in the modern sense. He was an *agent* of a mythmaking mechanism that served a variety of publics.” (12-3, emphasis added)

Rather than being an objective narrative of the life of a person, hagiography is anything but impartial. Each vita has a purpose and a lesson to be shared as the result of retelling the person’s life, and that purpose is subjective according to the desires of and “pressures” on the hagiographer.³ Audiences, too, whether readers or hearers of a hagiographic work, would also have been “familiar with certain distinctive turns of phrase and . . . characteristic narrative sequences,” which would also put pressure on the redactor to write in a certain form (Dickie 98).

Cynthia Turner Camp sums up this position by suggesting that saints’ lives throughout history have had utilitarian purposes. Vitae “were uniquely useful for constructing nuanced historical narratives,” or what she defines as “the refashioning of the

³ Heffernan, and Herman, et al. differ from Weinstein and Bell in their use of the term “biography” to describe hagiographic accounts—Heffernan even calls it “sacred biography.” The difference between the use of the terms is semantic. The former scholars see hagiography as a type of biography, where the latter see it as a related genre but ultimately separate. I prefer the framework forwarded by Ernst Breisach, who sees hagiography as pertaining to religious saints and biography pertaining to “secular persons.” He adds that the more intertwined the religious and secular spheres became, the fewer distinctions between the two writing modes (99).

past into a form comprehensible and usable by the present” (2). These writings were therefore “*institutional* and *historiographic* productions, crafted by professed religious writers” in order “to bolster” a particular social narrative and create “spiritual legitimacy” to some person, place, or idea (3). This complex weaving of original material, source material, translation, and adaptation in hagiography was a confluence of intertextual narrative strategies that “depended as much on references to written sources as on authors for their legitimacy, and scribes could alter the composition of a narrative to reflect different approaches” (Herman, et al. 297).

Such “agency” and adaptation should not suggest that hagiographers as a rule were unscrupulous fabricators. Many, possibly most medieval hagiographers, strove to keep the integrity of the tales as they knew it—borrowing from other credible texts, gathering information from eyewitnesses, asking questions from experts on the saint in question, etc., a process which Powell notes was generally quite “tedious” (171), a lengthy “threefold” process of collation, revision, and interpretation (Lotha). For instance, the hagiographers Bede and Ælfric of Eynsham (both of whom I examine in the first chapter), go to great lengths to make sure that their sources are authoritative. Certainly *some* hagiographers invented stories for manipulative purposes. Of the three texts I will examine, Thomas of Monmouth comes the closest to “unethical” hagiographic rhetoric in his linking of Jews to the martyrdom of William of Norwich, though even he is careful to corroborate his claims with personal investigations and eyewitness accounts. Doubtless, because of authorial agency and its legendary subject matter, hagiography is rightly described as a “‘risky’ genre,” as even “the impact of a refashioned work” becomes difficult to predict the more a vita is rebranded (Von Contzen 6).

There are countless examples of this “mythmaking” rhetoric at work. The 2016 meeting of the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury is one: the two church heads using the Gregorian legend to solidify Christian unity between Rome and Canterbury. But another perhaps more familiar example of this kind of rhetoric in action may also help set the stage for a better understanding of its function in medieval literature: England’s historical appropriation of the myth of Saint George. George is supposed to have slain a dragon at the request of a terrorized Palestinian town which promised all of its citizens to Christian baptism if the threat was eliminated (Farmer 181). Interestingly, in the original Georgian legend (including the one recorded in northern England by Bede), there is no dragon. George is a simple follower of Christ, persecuted by Diocletian, who refuses to denounce his faith and is subsequently killed (Riches). The dragon element, which precedes the martyrdom, seems to have been added to George’s legend centuries later, perhaps as a collusion of a Levantine myth picked up during the Crusades (Sussex Archaeological Society 98), and became established enough in time to be included in George’s vita (Voragine 238-40). Something about a holy warrior was apparently more romantic or inspiring for the English mindset than a weaponless martyr, leading to the conflation of these two narratives.

In any case, the saint’s dragon-slaying heroics—which naturally includes his rescue of a fair damsel—associated George as “the personification of the ideals of Christian chivalry.” As a result, English monarchs “invoked” his name in seasons of war, and Edward III even named him the patron of the knightly Order of the Garter (Farmer 181). Although *the Oxford Dictionary of Saints* rightly suggests the somewhat problematic use of a Palestinian saint as “a symbol of English nationalism and prowess in war” (182), such

specific invocations are no accidents. They are intentional deployments of George's mythos for the purpose of reinforcing English national spirit and chivalric ideals.

The appropriation and deployment of the legends of Saints Gregory and George demonstrate that saintly vitae can be and have been used by individual hagiographers for purposes *in addition to* or *instead of* the standard purpose of enhancing piety, "as vehicles for prefiguring, configuring, and refiguring religious, social, and cultural life" (Monge, et al. 1). These additional purposes become manifest through the hagiographer's variations of these tales. It is this variation that I investigate in this dissertation: how certain hagiographers changed, reorganized, emphasized, or added to saint's tales, and more importantly, for what purposes they wrote or reformulated these stories and why they may have chosen to do so—their hagiographic rhetoric.

The Functions of Hagiographic Rhetoric in Medieval Narrative

The non-verifiability of saintly vitae caused problems in the scholarship of previous centuries (Breisach 99), the stories being seen, as previously noted, as patchworks of a vast "mythmaking mechanism" from ahistorical and untruthful sources that were "modest" and "nonclerical" (Weinstein and Bell 12-3). Among the most plainspoken objections to hagiography was the criticism by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*, who dismissed such stories as the "silly lives of Catholic saints." Even Augustus Jessopp, a late-Victorian Anglican cleric, in concert with the noted Cambridge folklorist M. R. James, suggested that any academic appreciation of hagiography could only come after "get[ting] over the long lists of miracles . . . [and] their nauseous details." However, they add that once this is accomplished, and "the general reader of the nineteenth century"

has pinched his nose long enough to sift through the inane, “there still remains a very valuable element of social history imbedded [sic] in the most extravagant lives of saints that have come down to us” (xv).

Many scholars today continue to see the historical value offered by hagiography, as any “medieval saint’s life tells us more about its contemporary audience than about a given saint.” This is because, as Alison Gulley notes,

Stories about the saints . . . can act on several levels both as an official ecclesiastical articulation and as an unofficial general statement about society, to draw together their audiences into a community and reinforce . . . their behavior, communal needs, and expectations.” (4, 33)

Additionally, modern scholarship has also emphasized the great value in the abstractions of the legends—that is, what truths or “verities” the tales themselves represent (Powell 171). Such stories, David Shenk writes, “do not exist to tell the facts, but to convey the truth” (ch. 1).⁴ As such, the critical “dismissal” of hagiographic accounts

as mere myth or legend has seriously limited our understanding of the ways in which hagiography functions as a genuine receptacle of the past that guides individual adherents, religious communities, and societies. . . . Drawing upon the thought of Paul Ricoeur, this means that the understanding of ‘truth as verification,’ which dominates the sciences and modern approaches to historiography, is distinct from ‘truth as manifestation,’ which manifests or reveals its truth in a discourse akin to that of poetry. Thus . . . exploring how hagiography functions . . . illustrates how various modes of hagiography articulate religious ideas and represent conceptions of sanctity. (Monge, et al. 2)

This process of reading vitae for manifested truth has led to what Sarah Salih calls the “rehabilitation” of hagiography, and her declaration that the genre has now successfully “joined the critical mainstream” (20). Countless scholars have now mined hagiographic

⁴ Shenk continues: “Each . . . myth conveys a thousand truths about a particular moment in time where a society longed to understand something difficult about its own past—the source of some idea or tool or tradition. Taken together, they document [humanity’s] quest to understand—and explain—abstraction and complexity in the world around us” (ch. 1).

collections for “evidence of mentalities, and discovered [them] to be . . . excellent source[s] for social and cultural histories” (21). I propose to do this kind of historiographic reading of saint-legends in this dissertation through the lens of hagiographic rhetoric.

Hagiographic rhetoric refers to the use of saintly vitae for a particular purpose in an argument. That purpose, as I have explained, is principally evangelistic—to increase piety and devotion to Christ and to particular saints. But as I have also shown, this is not all. Many saint-legends in the Middle Ages were used by authors to further ideas that run alongside or which serve as appendages to Christian spirituality, and therefore show the “multi-functionality” of the saints themselves (Salih 22). My objective here is to analyze the works of three medieval English authors—Ælfric of Eynsham, Thomas of Monmouth, and John Mirk—and explore their deployments of saint-legends for varying purposes. I consider how and for what reasons and audiences saintly traditions and vitae are rhetorically used by these authors. Their use of the saintly legends for particular rhetorical ends suggests just how deeply rooted vitae rest in their cultural mindset, and how powerfully they can be deployed for specific purposes.

As the writing of saintly vitae is greatly informed by authorial context, I further examine which influences and pressures dictate the hagiographer’s choices of content and emphasis. Why include a certain saint in this work? Why emphasize this particular part of her narrative? Why eliminate or add this specific detail? Why add this specific commentary on the saint’s actions? Why mention this particular miracle? Why include eyewitness accounts? Why reference a contemporary event in the midst of the narrative? All of these questions (and more) are part of my methodology in this dissertation—analyzing the

influences on the hagiographic rhetoric at work in a given text through the author's deployment of specific saints and their legends.

I begin with this process in Chapter 1: "Ælfric and a Christian England: Socioreligious Solidarity in the *Lives of the Saints*," which examines how the Eynsham monk deployed saintly vitae in his collection of homilies to reinforce his opinion that English Christianity would only survive Viking pagan onslaughts at the dawn of the new millennium (1000 A.D.) if *all* of its people and especially its nobility were unwaveringly devoted to Christ. My analysis examines how hagiographic rhetoric was deployed to support nationalistic ideals.

Chapter 2 concerns a work that is not a collection of homilies, as the other chapters do, but which focuses solely on the vita of one saint alone. This chapter, "Hagiographic Rhetoric in Thomas of Monmouth's *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*," turns to the twelfth-century writings of Thomas of Monmouth, a Norwich monk who seized a preexisting myth about a local boy supposedly murdered by Jews, creating a vita to both stir-up animosity towards the Jews but more importantly to place Norwich Cathedral on the competitive hagiographical map of East Anglia. My analysis discusses how hagiographic rhetoric was used to stoke prejudice as well as establish the ethos of a given place.

Chapter 3, "Challenging Lollardy with Hagiographic Rhetoric: John Mirk's *Festial Sermons*," examines a collection of homilies by John Mirk, a fourteenth-century priest from Lilleshall who directly and obliquely challenged the unorthodox teachings of the heretical Lollards. His sermon collection, the *Festial*, uses elements from saintly vitae to celebrate the feast day when the sermons would be given and to encourage devotion to

these particular saints, but more significantly to also address certain Lollard heresies. His hagiographic rhetoric often reinforces orthodox church teachings, and is carefully crafted to reject Lollard notions about the efficacy of the communion of saints and support ecclesiastical tradition. My analysis thus discusses how hagiographic rhetoric was used to respond to heresy and religious dissent.

Chapter 4, “Pedagogical Implications: Teaching Hagiographic Literature and Rhetoric,” provides a methodology for helping college students understand the hagiographic genre and to equip them with the critical tools to analyze hagiographic rhetoric in medieval vitae. This process, tested in some of my own teaching experiences, helps make the study of hagiography in the classroom more meaningful, and also helps students make connections to specific periods of medieval history with modern cultural and religious mindsets.

My research introduces a new critical term, hagiographic rhetoric, as a tool for analyzing and understanding the deployment of saints in medieval texts that are not directly related to piety. This critical tool or method of inquiry adds depth to the study of hagiography as a whole—as scholars have been saying for some time now, hagiography as a genre is active, and the tales and legacies of its saints are powerful media for making a point or creating an influential narrative. This term then helps scholars identify those uses with added precision.

My term is heavily indebted to hagiographic discourse, a crucial term in modern hagiographical scholarship. Because of hagiography’s origins in Christian textuality, many scholars feel that applying the term to works or ideas that are not specifically Christian or not specifically textual is inappropriate (Smith 23-4). The French humanist Marc van

Uytfanghe offered the term “hagiographic discourse” to allow scholars to more accurately describe these non-Christian or non-textual “typologies” surrounding venerated individuals of all creeds and societies (Monge, et al. 1). As a result, phenomena such as “liturgy, . . . hymnography, pilgrimage, and sacred space” can become more correctly included in such hagiographical discussions (2). The term itself has also facilitated the expansion of the field at large, and hagiographic studies have even begun to accommodate secular legends and the veneration of notable and sometimes fictional figures from a non-religious perspective, ie. historical leaders, celebrities, authors, literary characters, etc. (Margry 13-5). Even though these persons are not actually saints per se, many of the motifs, language, and venerating practices are similar, like traveling to Oxford and leaving a memorial object or “votive offering” at the grave of J.R.R. Tolkien, or going to Westminster to recreate the Beatles’ iconic crossing of Abbey Road. Hagiographic discourse thus incorporates these ideas and performances into a more accurate framework; hagiographic rhetoric, as a spinoff of van Uytfanghe’s term, can be similarly applied.

A study of hagiographic rhetoric also has valuable implications for analyses of medieval literature, and provide new or “deepened” readings of the three texts under investigation in this work. Thus the homilies of Ælfric and John Mirk become much more than simple sermons encouraging piety through saintly exempla, but powerful political and ecclesiastical works in rather threatening times. Similarly, Thomas of Monmouth’s work on the legend of William of Norwich serves as more than another medieval antisemitic work, but a concentrated effort towards ecclesiastical prominence. And above all, hagiography itself becomes far more than the “silly lives of saints,” but a window into the medieval period and a mirror into our own time.

Definition of Critical Terms

I use the following critical terms in my dissertation to analyze this phenomenon in medieval literature, largely patterned after the definitions provided by Donald Weinstein and Rudolph Bell in their seminal work *Saints and Society* (1982). First, the term *hagiography* refers to the genre of writing the lives of the saints and the “practice” of doing so. *Vita* (life) and *vitae* (lives) refer to the “product” of that practice, meaning “the actual texts” themselves, physically present in manuscripts, books, etc. (14). I also refer to these accounts more broadly as “stories” or “tales,” though these too refer to the product. Similarly, *hagiographer* refers to individual authors who write these vitae, specifically those who reformulated saints’ tales rather than just copied or transcribed them. *Hagiographic rhetoric* again is my own term, used to discuss the deployment of saintly figures in literature (including hagiography) by a specific author to a specific audience for a specific rhetorical purpose.

Other critical terms are used more loosely. In this I again follow the practice of Weinstein and Bell, who in *Saints and Society* gave themselves wide berth when discussing “saints,” “holy individuals,” and the terminology defining historical periods (14-5). As such, I use the word “saint” to encompass all those individuals who at some point were venerated by Christians for their perceived holiness. This includes persons who were both officially canonized saints and unofficial saints, and does not “imply that the individual in question was consciously or actively promoting a reputation for sanctity” (14). The Middle Ages themselves, characterized by the term “medieval,” I take to be from the year 500 A.D.

to the year 1500 A.D. (“Middle Ages”). Other more circumstantial terms are defined as needed.

Project Limitations & Editorial Procedure

Although the term “hagiographic rhetoric” can be universally applied, my study here is not comprehensive by any means. My purpose in this dissertation is not to trace the history of hagiography, nor is it designed to explore the multifaceted implementations of it throughout human cultures. Such exhaustive treatments are found in many other texts, some of which are referenced within. As such, this project is limited in terms of scope, as three texts alone (in spite of their differences) cannot account for every variation of this theme.

I freely admit that my focus on written texts is also limiting—in other words, that focusing on textual hagiography precludes an in-depth discussion of other manifestations of hagiographic discourse. Samantha Riches, in her article “Hagiography in Context,” reminds us that in venerating saints, “written hagiographies formed just *one part* of the means of glorifying them and seeking their intervention, and worked alongside relics, visual imagery, and many forms of performance to praise and invoke the saint” (45, emphasis added). Sarah Salih further reminds us that hagiography and cultic activity do not necessarily go hand-in-hand: “several contemporary figures were culted, without . . . ever being the subject of vernacular hagiography, while literary renditions of the lives of the saints . . . might be unconnected to any known cult sites or activities” (5). With this in mind, I make sure in this dissertation to acknowledge the multifaceted influences of a saintly mythos when needed.

I am also limited in access to source material. In an ideal world I would have ready access to original manuscripts, a helpful curator, and several pairs of latex gloves. In my case, I cite only from transcriptions reprinted through the valuable auspices of The Early English Text Society and other modern presses. As such, I recognize that the versions of these texts that I use here have been passed through the hands of modern “redactors” as much as medieval ones, and that the printed version I have access to may or may not account for all scribal variations.

Nevertheless, I have a great respect for the original writing of the author (or at least as originally as it is represented in my sources), and make sure to use the original language in a footnote if not within the text itself. This usually means Old and Middle English, but also Latin on occasion. I always provide a modern translation of any original language wherever it is necessary, usually from official translators but occasionally by myself. If the work has been rendered in verse, such as Ælfric’s *Lives of the Saints*, which is rendered by William W. Skeat and his associates alliteratively, I use the traditional forward-slash mark (/) to indicate any line-breaks. Ellipses represent words or passages omitted and brackets indicate words altered or added, both for editorial clarification.

Chapter 1: Ælfric and a Christian England:
Socioreligious Solidarity in *The Lives of the Saints*

It was 996 A.D., just a few years before the dawn of a new millennium. Some voices believed that the world had become fully ripe in its wickedness and that the Second Coming of Christ and the end of days was thus near at hand. Ælfric of Eynsham,⁵ a veteran monk and author of a set of homiletic works written for sermonizing preachers, shared some of these sentiments. “This is the last time, and the end of this world,” he wrote in another homily that year, “and men are made unjust among themselves . . . / to their own destruction” (13.294-5, 297).⁶

Injustice was just a symptom, however, of a greater spiritual problem. Ælfric believed that the English people had become spiritually lax, generally dishonoring the clergy as well as the sacred ordinances of the Church. This lethargy extended into the political realm, too, so much so that the nobility were neglecting their roles as protectors of the holy houses and sites of English Christendom. This overall negligence, rooted in spiritual heedlessness, had invited powerful judgments by God on the English people: plague, poverty, and invasion. Ælfric lamented:

[T]hink how well it fared with us
when this island was dwelling in peace,
and the monastic orders were held in honour,
and the laity were ready against their foes,
so that our report spread widely over the earth.
How was it then afterward when man rejected monastic life
and held God’s services in contempt,
but that pestilence and hunger came to us
and afterward the heathen army held us in reproach? (13.147-55)⁷

⁵ Ælfric was first of the monastery at Cerne, and later abbot of the monastery at Eynsham. Scholars almost always identify him as “of Eynsham,” where his most influential works were written (Tinti 249).

⁶ “Þes tima is ende-next and ende þyssere worulde / and menn beoð geworhte wolice him betwynan . . . / to bealwe him sylfum.”

⁷ “Wel we magon geðencan hu wel hit ferde mid ūs / þaða þis igland wæs wunigende on sibbe / and munuc-lif wæron mid wurð-scipe gehealdene / and ða world-menn wæron wære wið heora fynd / swa þæt ure word

He followed this short jeremiad by appealing to Leviticus: ⁸

If ye walk in my statutes and keep my commandments,
then will I alway[s] send you rain-showers in due time,
and the earth shall yield you her fruits,
and I will give you peace and reconciliation,
that ye may enjoy your land without fear
[But] if ye then despise me, and cast away my laws,
I will also very speedily wreak it upon you;
I will cause that the heaven shall be to you as hard as iron,
and the earth underneath it as if it were brass.
Then shall ye labour in vain, if ye sow your land,
then the earth shall yield you no fruits;
and if ye even then will not turn to Me,
I will send the sword to you, and your enemies shall slay you,
and they shall cruelly lay waste your land,
and your cities shall be broken down and wasted.
I will also send cowardice into your hearts,
so that none of you dare withstand your enemies. (13.157-161, 163-74)

This, Ælfric believed, was coming to pass in his own land.

The curse of destructive enemies was particularly on Ælfric's mind in those last years of the first millennium. From the eighth century, Britain's greatest antagonists were the hodgepodge of Scandinavian invaders we now know as the Vikings (Ælfric calls them "Danes") who had begun by pillaging and sacking towns and monasteries along the island's northeastern coast and then moved to full-scale invasion (Higham and Ryan 259). Though like all invaders the Vikings brought threats of murder, ravishment, and destruction, their greatest menace in Ælfric's mind came in the form of religion: many of these invaders were pagans (256-7). Their plundering of holy sites, which often held great treasures and gilded ornaments, brought far more than a loss of sacred property, but "the termination or

sprang wide geond þas eorðan. / Hu wæs it ða siððan ða þa man towearp munuc-lif / and godes biggengas to bysmore hæfde / buton þæt us com to cwealm and hunger / and siððan hæðen here us hæfde to bysmre."

⁸ Ælfric's Biblical abridgement here comes from selections of Leviticus 26, and roughly corresponds to verses 3-6, 15, 19-20, 33, and 36. The Biblical chapter as a whole is far more detailed in its description of punishments, especially regarding the onslaught of enemies.

interruption of religious life” (286). Territorial claims exacerbated this threat, and some Christians wondered whether the English Church would be diminished or even ultimately extinguished if the progress of the Vikings went unchecked (Black 131). John Moorman writes that on occasion in the late tenth century “it seemed as if the Lord had deserted his people, and if Church and State must inevitably relapse into barbarism and heathendom” (5.2).⁹

These fears were very present and real for Ælfric, and he addressed them “both implicitly and explicitly” within his written works (Higham and Ryan 355). He saw the invasion of the Vikings—along with the ensuing plagues and poverty of famine—as punishment from God for England’s spiritual carelessness (Gretsch ch. 5). The English had grown lax in their faith, disrespecting holy offices and officers, and thus brought divine condemnation upon their own heads; this was true of everyone from clergymen to all degrees of the laity. For Ælfric, “steadfast faith [was] essential not only to personal salvation but [also] to national security” (Upchurch 202). England’s only remedy, both politically and spiritually, was the same as it had been for the ancient Israelites: they must worship God in truth and more fully honor his Church and its holy orders.

To address these problems, Ælfric used hagiographic rhetoric throughout his homiletic writings as a method of persuasion: he deployed the stories of the saints to increase piety among all the faithful, warn about the dangers of paganism, and to drum-up support among the laity for armed resistance to the Vikings. By using *vitae* as for this

⁹ “Much of the damage caused by Viking raids was temporary,” one source notes, “but their attacks on monasteries were devastating for cultural life: works of art and literature were destroyed, and the communities of learned monks were dispersed. In England, monasticism made a strong recovery in the 10th century, but the brilliant monastic civilization of early Christian Ireland, which had produced masterpieces like the Book of Kells, never recovered from the Viking raids” (“The Scourge”). This was exactly the fate that Ælfric hoped England would avoid.

purpose, he hoped England would regain the grace of God, retain the Christianity of England, and establish peace—a social and religious solidarity to invoke the blessings of heaven on their war-torn land.

It was in this context of Viking invasion and settlements that he wrote the *Lives of the Saints* in 996. Earlier he had written the *Catholic Homilies*, a two-volume work directed towards the clergy that mainly contained material for preachers to read during liturgical services.¹⁰ Although the *Homilies* are arguably his most influential and certainly his longest work,¹¹ *Lives of the Saints* is more hagiographical; that is, it has a greater “focus” on the saints (Hill 11).¹² Beyond that, though, the *Lives* has powerful cultural and historical resonance through Ælfric’s deployment of saints through hagiographic rhetoric. His particular selection of saints speaks to the “implicit and explicit” references to what he perceived to be the unsteady footing of the English Church during the Viking incursions. Through a close reading of the individual vitae, it becomes clear that Ælfric is carefully selecting specific saints to resonate with his English audiences in order to increase piety as well as to encourage spiritual and physical resistance to the pagan threat.

Critical Basis for Ælfric’s Hagiographic Rhetoric

Scholars have analyzed vitae from the *Lives of the Saints* for more than a century, though very few have analyzed the individual tales as a corpus. They have tended to

¹⁰ Ælfric also unintentionally played a part in the reconstruction of Old English linguistics in modern scholarship: a surviving copy of his *Colloquy*, a text that trained medieval English-speaking monks to speak in Latin, was fortunately glossed in Old English by another medieval scribe; the surviving manuscript has been instrumental in preserving Old English grammar forms (McGillivray 153–4).

¹¹ Some scholars consider Ælfric as “the homiletic voice of pastoral care in Anglo-Saxon England”; a remarkable feat, given that his monastic bases of operations were small (Tinti 246).

¹² Gretsich notes that the differences between the two works are not “clear-cut,” but that consensus among commentators agrees with the notion that the *Homilies* are designed more for a religious audience, and the *Lives* more for the laity (ch. 5).

narrow their analyses of the vitae into categories, such as discussing only Ælfric's English saints, the virgins, the kings or warriors, etc., without venturing into the ideas expressed in other groups. For instance, Robert K. Upchurch and Alison Gulley draw attention to Ælfric's handful of virgin narratives. Similarly, Heide Estes and Samantha Zacher focus on Ælfric's representation of Jews. Loredana Lazzari, et al. focus on the warrior saints, and others, like Mechthild Gretsch, analyze the English saints. Those scholars who do view the *Lives of the Saints* as a complete work are usually historians, such as Anne Elizabeth Redgate or Nicholas J. Higham and Martin J. Ryan; in those cases, their goal is more to summarize larger historical trends rather than expostulate the literary significance of the work in-depth.

Part of this literary critical trend probably comes from the fact that the individual vitae in Ælfric's work are homiletic, meaning that they are meant to be read by priests during liturgical services one at a time and ideally on a corresponding feast or holy day. As such, scholars understandably treat them each as individual works, as the vitae would likely not have reached their audiences all at once. There is value in this narrowed approach, and I cite these authors throughout my own analysis, but for a complete view of Ælfric's hagiographic rhetoric, I feel that it's important to look at the entire collection to get a more holistic picture. One author who does look at the *Lives* holistically is Jacqueline G. Elkouz in her dissertation, "Ælfric and the Orient," and discusses Ælfric's awareness of his audiences; however, she pays little attention to the rhetorical deployment of saints within the homilies themselves. Similarly, those critics who deal with Ælfric's attitude towards the Vikings is limited to explicit references, and not the implicit allusions in the virgin or martyr legends.

On the other hand, I suggest that the *vitae*, though independent on a liturgical level, are not independent in theme: each of them points toward the contemporary events of the late tenth century and the situation of the English Church and nation, at least as expressed by one of the period's foremost religious writers. In this I agree with Lazzari's surmise, when she notes that because Ælfric's "hagiographies are not mere transpositions," that "a great deal remains to be done to render *their special function* fully evident on the basis of their . . . historical, cultural, and hagiographical context" (60, emphasis added). This is exactly what I propose to do in this chapter, again from the holistic perspective Lazzari advocates.

Bede & the Anglo-Saxons: Foundations for Ælfric's Text

Ælfric's hagiographies were shaped and guided by the literature of his time and the socioreligious background of Anglo-Saxon England. To better understand Ælfric and the significance of his saints, then, I will next review the origins of the hagiographic tradition and its symbiotic relationship with England's "home culture." First, I will analyze the genesis of hagiography in England and its progenitor, Bede. I will then consider how Anglo-Saxon culture, and particularly its warrior-culture, influenced Church discourse and the legends of the saints. These two elements provide a historical and hagiographical foundation for a thorough analysis of Ælfric's own saintly rhetoric in his writings.

Bede, like Ælfric, was a monk. He lived from the late 600's to the mid-700's, and was a prolific religious writer; most of his works are in Latin. He resided in Northumbria, one of the northernmost Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, and near the end of his life embarked on writing an "ambitious" history of the Church in Britain, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis*

Anglorum, or the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Galloway 265). It is among the most important works of its time, and contains, along with historical narrative, exegesis and hagiography. The influence of his history spread throughout England and the Continent (Higham and Ryan 166-7).

The most influential ideology that Ælfric would have gleaned from the *Ecclesiastical History* is its socioreligious perspective that history turns on a single religious binary: Christ versus chaos. Where Christ is absent, there is disorder and trouble; where Christ exists, there is order and unity (Partner 14). This perspective plays out through Bede's entire work. For him, the history of England and its kingdoms is based on how well its people and particularly its rulers adhere to Christian principles. If a kingdom serves Christ, it is unified and prospers; when it denies His divinity, its political consensus and structures fail. Thus in Bede's mind, English history is shaped according to divine justice which responds to human actions or attitudes.

This outlook in eighth-century England was not new or unique to Bede: all societies up to and even within our modern era arguably framed history within a "didactic, explanatory . . . narrative order" (Wilcox 169). The gods have always responded to human activity with either blessings or curses, and in a like manner Bede framed events within "reciprocal models [in order] to explain events as the just punishment or reward of a personal God" (174). Such an interpretation deemphasizes other historical considerations like political error or miscalculation, as well as simple fate or chance, and insists that "divine intervention" is the major basis for "the pattern of history" (172). The father of this narrative mode was the fourth-century Roman Eusebius of Caesarea, who constructed historical events as "explicit illustration[s] of God's punishment or reward" (175). Bede

borrowed heavily from Eusebius—even the name of his most prominent book is borrowed from the Roman’s own *Historia ecclesiastica* (Higham and Ryan 172)—and accordingly saw England’s history existing entirely on this kind of spiritual axis.

Bede’s Eusebian notion of divine “retributive history” is very apparent in his religious narrative. Turning to the fourth-century withdrawal of Roman troops from Britain and the subsequent invasion of Germanic tribes—Angles, Saxons, Jutes, and Frisians, known collectively today as “Anglo-Saxons”¹³—Bede recounts the near-extinguishing of Christianity from the island among its native Britons as a result of the pagan onslaught. The invaders plundered churches, destroyed holy sites, and killed monks, priests, and all Christians without mercy (53.33-55).¹⁴ By the end of the seventh century, Christian Britain had been driven to modern-day Wales and the coast of modern-day France (“Brittany”), and their former habitations, once suffused with Christians, had then given way to the rise of the various clans and kingdoms of a pagan “Angleland” (Higham and Ryan 10).

Bede ascribes this devastation to spiritual lethargy among the Britons (Wilcox 182). He writes that the invasion “was so arranged by the divine power [in order] . . . that heavy vengeance should come” on the Britons for their laxity (Bede 51.14-5). But he does not spare rebuke for the Christians of his own time, both clerical and lay, with “numerous episodes in the text emphasi[zing] the message that peace and prosperity result when kings and the Church . . . act in harmony and in accordance with God’s laws” (Higham and Ryan 171). Bede provides examples of this through hagiographic rhetoric, deploying the legends

¹³ Cohen notes that this characterization of Anglo-Saxons in part originated with Bede; Cohen calls the maneuver a political “reduction” to more easily “invent a unifying identity out of their own ethnic variousness,” a feat which again had to be accomplished again after the Norman Conquest of 1066.

¹⁴ Citations are ordered by page number and lines in the first volume of Miller’s edition of Bede’s *EH*.

of two saints-kings of Northumbria, Edwin and Oswald, as illustrations of what happens in a Christ-centered kingdom.

Northumbria, then the occasionally unified realms of Deira and Bernicia, received the Gospel from the evangelism of a Bishop Paulinus circa 627 (119.30-2). The king of this northern realm at the time was Edwin (Eadwine), who as a young exile in East Anglia received a vision that if he promised to accept Christ at some future date, would be blessed with the throne of his homeland. His acquiescence to this covenant allowed him, by the grace of God, to rout his political enemies and take the kingship as promised. When Paulinus arrived, he reminded Edwin of his earlier pledge, which had been revealed to the bishop by God (133.13-27), and the king and all of his nobles quickly accepted baptism (139.16-8).

Northumbria then entered a period of spiritual and political affluence, what one scholar calls a “*pax Christiana*” (Lazzari 42). The Roman influence on Bede’s description is clear: peace was so pervasive that Bede claimed that women traveling alone were unmolested and that goods and valuables left on the waysides remained untouched (145.20-9). Not only that, but Edwin, again through God’s grace, took power over what Bede writes was “the whole extent of Britain” (121.2-5), or at least as far south as what is now central England (Mercia) and East Anglia (Higham and Ryan 74). An influential episcopal see was also established in modern-day York, in the Northumbrian realm, which served (and still serves) as the northern counterpart to Canterbury. God’s justice is apparent: Edwin’s righteousness has facilitated the blessing of the land.

Edwin stands as the first of Bede’s saint-kings, a beatified order in the monk’s history that also accommodates Edwin’s nephew Oswald. The latter’s conflict came not

from pagans, but from lapsed British Christians, which Oswald drove out “with a small army . . . strengthened with the faith of Christ” (155.13-7). His dramatic victory, on a plain later known as “Heavenfield,” was also attributed to Oswald’s rearing of a large cross on the scene of battle, a “holy ensign” symbolizing his commitment to Christ (155.19). Bede noted that the fruit of Oswald’s victory was earned exclusively by the level of his great faith (157.2-3). A similar *pax Christiana* ensued as the one facilitated by his uncle, though Oswald’s dominion was even greater, “beyond any of his forefathers, . . . as all the race[s] and tribes of Britain . . . passed under his authority” (165.18-25).

Both of these kings were revered as saints and eventually canonized. Oswald’s battle-rood, his bones, and even the soil on which he was slain were all sanctified by contact with him—each became associated with miracles, including the healing of sick persons who approached the venerated locations and relics (157.3-14; 183.16-20). Bede explained that the reason why Oswald’s earthly relics contained such virtuous influence is because of his spiritual mastery over his temporal concerns: he was more eager to receive the kingdom of heaven than to expand his kingdom on earth; because of his correct prioritization, he won both (189.1-5; Partner 48). Oswald’s influence as both a saint and a king was then not only felt in England, the monk reported, but also throughout western Europe (193.1-8).

Bede’s audience for the *Ecclesiastical History* was not limited to one person or group. The work is nominally dedicated, however, to the then-Northumbrian king, Ceolwulf—the only one of his works not dedicated to a prelate or divine (Higham and Ryan 171). Knowing this, it’s somewhat easier to see why saintly kings played a role in Bede’s English narrative: a king is duty-bound not only to his people, but also to his God.

The history then becomes a “message” to his patron which, Higham and Ryan note, offers “an all-encompassing vision of the reform of Christian society,” emphasizing “that peace and prosperity result when kings and the Church . . . act in harmony and in accordance with God’s laws.” Again, this message is very timely, as the eighth century had witnessed considerable political and dynastic upheaval in Northumbria and “Ceolwulf was deposed, albeit briefly, in 731,” the year Bede completed his work (171). Thus, Bede’s concern rests on the bond between king and church: if the king fails in religious matters, then Northumbria will fall with him.

History and hagiography were not distinct narrative modes at this period, and Bede’s intertwining of saints and political figures was part of a larger hagiographic trend in the Middle Ages when, as Ernst Breisach writes, “most of the saints were no longer hermits,” as in earlier vitae, “but persons who *acted* in the world on behalf of the Church” (emphasis added). Breisach further traces this idea to the general merger of secular and religious society in the period, and writes that “the more the Church linked up with secular society the less the lives of its heroes were given exclusively to contemplation and the smaller the distance became between saints’ lives and biographies of secular persons” (99).

This trend, so prominent in Bede, seems to have emerged in part from Anglo-Saxon culture. Eighth-century England, full to the brim with the “sacrament” of the blood of warriors as well as the sacrament of the blood of Christ, was a natural breeding-ground for saintly kings and other forms of socioreligious hybridization. The idea of “royal holiness,” Loredana Lazzari writes, “appeared as a typically Anglo-Saxon characteristic that blended the Germanic ideal of the king endowed with divine powers with that of the Christian holy king,” and as a natural result of this merger, war in certain circumstances could be

appropriately sanctified (35). Breisach offers a further reminder: many traditionally “kingly” attributes such as warfare and domination “fit ill with the image of . . . the saint, unless one remembers and accepts the contemporary Anglo-Saxon ideal of kingship with its mixture of Germanic and Christian traits in which one person could be warrior, ruler, *and saint*” (99, emphasis added). With the veneration of certain kings, too, and their kingdom’s ability to preserve Christian worship in a given territory, national or social myth could also be created and defended in regional hagiographic adaptations.

Cynewulf and Other Anglo-Saxon Christian Poets

This Christian-Germanic blending of holy figures finds itself a century or two after Bede in the poetry of Cynewulf, a ninth-century Anglo-Saxon who—like Ælfric in the next century—used this motif of Christian kings and warriors in several retellings of hagiographic material.¹⁵ In his version of Christ’s Ascension, Cynewulf adds some very telling details to the Lord’s final injunction to his apostles. In addition to going into all the world to “preach and proclaim the bright faith, / and baptize people” (“Christ II: The Ascension,” 483-4), Christ tells them to rout paganism with violence: “smash their idols, / lay them low and hate them, extinguish deviltry, / [and thus] sow peace” (485-8). This is not only an obvious addition to the first chapter of the Book of Acts, but a reminder that in Anglo-Saxon Christianity, the world could be converted through violence as much as preaching.

This theme continues in “The Fates of the Apostles,” which casts the Twelve as Christ’s faithful warrior-retainers:

¹⁵ Cynewulf may have been the pseudonym of one poet or of several others (Bjork x). I refer to the Cynewulf entity singularly and in the masculine for ease of reference.

There were twelve,
renowned in deeds, chosen by the Lord,
dear to him in life. Their glory spread widely,
the might and fame of the prince's disciples,
no small majesty across the earth (3-8).

The tones of Germanic *comitatus* here are quite evident. As retainers, the Apostles are given “glory,” “might,” “fame,” and “majesty,” and those not in heaven only, but “across the earth.”

Cynewulf's “The Finding of the True Cross” also has a striking blend of Christian and Anglo-Saxon motifs. It recounts the finding of the True Cross by Saint Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine. The lengthy narrative begins by praising the emperor as a “courageous warrior” (11), “honorable to men” (12), “a true king” (13) and “confirmed” in his imperial station by God himself (14). Constantine, like other rulers in Cynewulf's poems, is described in Anglo-Saxon terms: “the protector of princes, / the ring-giver of men, the glorious king, Constantine” (99-100). He is also cast as the leader of righteous forces against pagan enemies, Germanic and Mongol (18-21). Constantine's famous vision of the cross on the battlefield—an experience that prompted his conversion and changed the course of European history—enables the emperor to win the day: “Then it was seen that the king almighty [Christ] gave victory to Constantine / for that day's work, honor, [and] power / under the skies, through his cross” (144-7). Christ is the true king, but gives Constantine his own reward for being, in effect, a worthy retainer.

Similarly, Helena's journey to Jerusalem is cast in the vein of an invasion force of Anglo-Saxon warriors, like Beowulf's Geats landing on the Danish shores, “with coats of mail, with shields and spears, / with warriors” (235-6) wearing “linked coats of mail and the tried sword, / the magnificent war vestment, [and] many a visored helmet” (256-7).

Helena herself has the determination of a war-captain: “The blessed Elene, bold in thought,
/ eager in spirit, was mindful of the / will of the prince [Constantine] that she should seek
over / battlefields with her tried troop / of shield-warriors, her band of men, / the land of
the Jews” (266-71). In Jerusalem, when she presides over an assembly of Jewish elders to
coerce them to tell her where they’ve been hiding Christ’s cross for 300 years, she is
described as sitting “in glory on a royal / throne, the magnificent battle-queen adorned with
gold” (329-31).

The location of the True Cross is revealed to a Jewish convert, and so is the location
of the nails driven into the Lord’s hands and feet (1044-62). Helena locks the cross in a
silver, gem-studded reliquary to stand as a memorial in Jerusalem for all time (1022-8), but
takes the nails back to Europe as a gift to her son. She is told through revelation that if
Constantine “put[s] those nails on his bridle / as a bit for his horse,” the power of the relics
will ensure victory for him on every battlefield (1174-88) and will serve as “an invincible
weapon against distress / in combat” (1187-8). Cynewulf’s inclusion of queenly and kingly
imagery and the martial virtue of Christian relics demonstrates his hagiographic rhetoric:
Constantine and Helena, both well-established saints by the poet’s day, are cast as Christian
warriors who at the heads of armies defend Christ’s most sacred objects. His worldview is
not nationalistic in nature, but is certainly religiously patriotic—the empire of Christ, the
whole of Christendom, rather than a specific nation, is advanced by the valorous deeds of
these two saints.

Other anonymous Anglo-Saxon poems make similar rhetorical moves, appearing
in parts of the Exeter and Vercelli Books, as well as the Junius Manuscript and other extant
sources (Clayton vii). A retelling of Christ’s harrowing of hell posits Christ in the vein of

an Anglo-Saxon prince, charging through the enemy's gates to rescue his faithful retainers who died before his victory over sin was complete—John the Baptist foremost among them (Clayton, “The Descent into Hell”). Another anonymous work, a vita of Saint Andrew the Apostle, readily invokes Beowulfian motifs, especially in the sea voyage Andrew undertakes to rescue his fellow disciple Matthew from pagan Greeks (xvi-xviii). The landscape of the story both politically and geographically resembles Anglo-Saxon England, and the unity of Andrew and his warriors “draws freely on the heroic ethos” typical of Anglo-Saxon values and heroic narratives (xvii). “Christ and Satan,” another poem, includes the lament of the fallen angels (anticipating Milton by some 800 years) expressed “in language reminiscent of the Old English elegies” (xxiii). These poets deploy traditional Christian motifs but recontextualize them from an Anglo-Saxon perspective.

Perhaps the most widely known manifestation of Anglo-Saxon culture in the retelling of Christian legend is the “Dream of the Rood,” a poem preserved in the Vercelli Book as well as being partially inscribed on the eighth-century Ruthwell Cross, in which Christ manfully approaches the death-instrument as something to conquer, not to be conquered by (Clayton 175-7). Professors of early British literature frequently use this image of the warrior-Christ in opposition to later images depicting a shriveled and suffering Christ still prevalent in Christian iconography, and to point out the profound difference in Anglo-Saxon and later Mediterranean notions of saintliness: the victorious warrior versus the suffering lamb (Greenblatt, et al. 32). A similar distich also appears on the Brussels Cross bearing an Old English inscription:

Rod is min nama. Geo ic ricne cyning
bær byfigynde, blode besemed.

Cross is my name. Once I [a] mighty king
bore trembling, blood-soaked.¹⁶

¹⁶ Clayton's rendering is “Cross is my name. I carried a powerful king, / soaked with blood” (180-1).

Clearly, Christian Anglo-Saxons saw their God and his saints through their unique English sociocultural context. And as Rolf H. Bremmer writes, it's this "interaction between . . . two worlds and their values [which] makes up one of the constituents that give [Anglo-Saxon] saints' lives their special attraction" (120)—a tradition which Bede seems to have initiated and furthered in his *Ecclesiastical History* and from which Ælfric borrowed heavily in his homilies.

Modern historians have been right to critically analyze the historicity of various aspects of Bede's narrative. Like Ælfric and others would later do, Bede simplifies the English story, ignoring some "chronological relation[s]" (Wilcox 184) and favoring an "overly optimistic" trajectory of the ascendance of true Christianity over paganism by the grace of God (Higham and Ryan 126). This is common to any historian, who by the fact of being human "cannot [fully] avoid working with the assumptions and presuppositions that make up their particular worldview" (Hardcastle 447). But whatever his historical inaccuracies, Bede influenced virtually every English historian who followed him, including the later authors of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* (Higham and Ryan 167).

Again, Bede did not come up with this fusion of politics and Christianity on his own (which can arguably be traced to Roman influence). He drew on the scholarship available to him and on the culture in which he lived. However, his great contribution was his inclusion of a new kind of hagiographic rhetoric in the personages depicted in his writing: Oswald and Edmund, noblemen who were both historically important to England and hagiographically important to the survival of Christianity throughout Britain. This set a new precedent for future English historian-hagiographers like Ælfric, one in which

“political and ecclesiastical history [were] inseparable” (Heffernan 27). As a result, hagiography could now justifiably play a part in England’s emerging political discourse.

Ælfric’s Audience and Methodology of Adaptation in *The Lives of the Saints*

Like Bede writing for his lord Ceolwulf, the principal audience for Ælfric’s hagiography in the *Lives of the Saints* was an Anglo-Saxon nobleman named Æthelweard (0.36).¹⁷ This man was familiar with Ælfric’s previous work and had commissioned the monk, by then an abbot, to write a collection of vitae in order that he might have more ready access to the sacred lives of the saints. Because Æthelweard knew little to no Latin, Ælfric accordingly wrote these saints’ lives in their native English, what we today call Anglo-Saxon or “Old” English. But typical of medieval authors who were known to essentialize their purposes for writing, and since the sermons were homiletic in nature, it is clear that Ælfric intended the *Lives* for more audiences than one (Hill, “The Context” 2-3). He made his intention clear by stating his desire that the work would “profit others by edifying them in faith whenever they read this relation, as many . . . as are pleased to study this work, either by reading it or *hearing it read*” (0.2-4, emphasis added).¹⁸ This seems to be an allusion to Ælfric’s hope that these vitae would be read aloud to the laity in church as part of a homily or elsewhere—the homilies themselves arranged according to the typical saints’ calendar pattern. He further believed “that those things which I am going to

¹⁷ All of my citations from the *Lives of the Saints* are taken from William W. Skeat’s two-volume transcription and translation for the Early English Text Society. The first number refers to the chapter, and subsequent numbers to the lines, quoted or referred to from the text. Thus 14.6-8 would refer to Chapter 14, lines 6 through 8. All modern translations are by Skeat and his two assistants (identified only as Miss Gunning and Miss Wilkinson) unless otherwise noted. For a complete discussion of the sexist dilemma of the translation and attribution of these volumes, see Kathryn Maude, “Citation and Marginalization: The Ethics of Feminism in Medieval Studies,” p. 254.

¹⁸ “[S]tudentes aliis prodesse edificando ad fidem lectione huius narrationis quibus-cumque placuerit huic operi operam dare, siue legendo, seu Audiendo.”

write will not at all offend the hearers, but will rather refresh by their exhortations such as are slothful in the faith, since the Passions of the Martyrs greatly revive a failing faith” (0.14-7).¹⁹

Ælfric defended his vernacular translations of saints’ lives in a Latin preface to his fellow monks, and characterized his choice in terms of evangelism.²⁰ He rendered these vitae into English, he explained, to increase piety among those who could not understand Latin. He particularly desired that this vernacular collection of vitae would be of use to Æthelweard, who was then defending a Christian province from Vikings. As such, his adaptation of “sacred narrative into our own tongue” was warranted for its potential to spiritually edify these men “who most highly honour my translations by their perusal of them” (29-32). He also admitted in his Latin preface to having taken some liberties in his translation, as all medieval translators arguably did, and confessed that his finished version is more an adaptation than a “*verbum ex verbo transferre*,” or word-for-word translation (22-3); but he again assured his monastic audience that he’d done his best to provide *sensum ex sensu*, “sense for sense,” and that “by means of such simple and obvious language as may profit them that hear it” (23-5).²¹ All of this points toward his overall intent: to make his text as accessible as possible for his secular audience, which Ælfric intended to have “larger circulation” beyond simply this one nobleman (Hill 2-3).

¹⁹ “Illa vero que scripturus sum suspicor non offendere audientes, sed magis fide torpentes recreare hortationibus, quia martyrum passiones nimium fidem erigant languentam.”

²⁰ Rosalind Field writes that “Anglo-Saxon England . . . gave peculiar weight to vernacular writing,” which influenced the production of later Anglo-Norman Romantic genres (153-4).

²¹ Nec potuimus in ista translationis semper uerbum ex uerbo trans ferre, sed tamen sensum ex sensu, sicut inuenimus in sancta scriptura, diligenter curauimus uertere Simplici et aperta locutione quatinus proficiat Audientibus” (21-25).

His preface then turned poetic, literally and alliteratively so, and he used these verses to explain the origins of the saints' tales and to emphasize their importance.²² He wrote that these "memorial[s]" were recorded "to confirm the faith of future generations" (51-2). For just as a king is magnified by his retainers, and his benevolence and power are manifested through their deeds, so God himself is magnified through his saints. Though it would be impossible to record *all* their miraculous works, both the writer and the reader of their narratives will be blessed for "mak[ing] known" their holy stories (59-73).

Ælfric's cultural analogy here, characterizing saints as the servants of God just as knights serve a king, reveals his medieval understanding of the world, the world in which Æthelweard operated. The word he uses is *pegnas*, "thanes" (59), a common Old English word to represent knights, noblemen, lords, and so forth.²³ By making the saints essentially knights or warriors of God, his retainers, Ælfric casts the entire order of heaven into an Anglo-Saxon framework: a king has retainers who bring him glory; God has retainers who do the same, and these retainers are called "saints"—*halige*, "holy ones," in Old English. This perspective did not originate with Ælfric, of course, as Bede and other Anglo-Saxon writers made frequent references to the saint-as-knight motif. But from the very beginning, Ælfric's worldview is manifest, and he uses the idea for Æthelweard (himself a retainer to King Æthelred) to understand how glory can be given to God by honoring his retainers, just as a lord receives glory from the honorable deeds of his own loyal knights.

²² The Skeat et al. edition of Ælfric's text is divided into verse where appropriate; his methodology for following line-breaks adheres to scribal notations in the original manuscript (vi-vii). The lines themselves are often alliterative, a characteristic of much Anglo-Saxon poetry, though Skeat admits that Ælfric's alliteration is rather "loose" (vii). See also "Ælfric."

²³ I feel that for this reason Skeat et al.'s translation of *pegna* as "servants" is inadequate, and conjures an image more of waiting-servants than of powerful overlord-knights of the king's territorial holdings.

Many of Ælfric's sources were also homiletic, and Ælfric imitated these earlier authors by using homilies as "a set of verbal glosses that clarify the meaning of the . . . [particular] text rather than a methodical treatment of each line of the text," or in other words, "the exposition of a general theme extracted from the whole of the . . . [original] passage" (Olsen 68).²⁴ Like the hagiographic redactors before him, Ælfric avoided transliteration in order to mold the vitae to suit his explicit or implicit rhetorical purposes. There is no reason to see this work as anything but original and unique, an Anglo-Saxon masterpiece standing independent from previous texts while drawing on a similar tradition. Though he may have relied on translation for the *substance* of his material and in turn scrupulously identified his sources,²⁵ his working of the homiletic vitae into alliterative Old English a profound and original work.

In this late-tenth-century context, Ælfric seems to have had one central question: How do the saints as *exempla* teach English Christians to resist and repel the pagan threat, as well as call down God's power and blessings? Though the general answer would of course be greater piety on everyone's part (as he made clear in the passages quoted above), the specific mode of piety would vary from person to person depending on his or her social estate. Like his contemporaries, Ælfric subscribed to the "estates" framework, that all societies were divided into three stations:

²⁴ This is typical of many hagiographic collections throughout the Middle Ages, including the *Legenda Aurea* (Lewis, "Male Saints" 112); saintly vitae which originally appeared in sermons or homilies were later recorded in hagiographic compendia.

²⁵ "[A]lthough medieval writers often made false claims, Ælfric did not habitually do so; on the contrary, he was very conscious of his relationship to authoritative sources and, when he named an authority, his claims were usually as reliable as contemporary traditions allowed" (Hill, "Ælfric and Smaragdus" 203).

Labourers are they who obtain with toil our subsistence;
Beadsmen are they who intercede with God for us;
Soldiers are they who protect our towns,
and defend our soil from an invading army. (25.815-8)²⁶

This characterization corresponds roughly to the traditional triple-estates notion of clergy, peasantry, and nobility present in medieval religious discourse: clergymen who pray (beadsmen), peasants who provide food and wares (laborers), and noblemen who defend (through their soldiery) by force of arms. These three estates were to be kept in careful balance, as each relied on the others for something they themselves could not provide: the clergy for salvation, the peasants for material goods, and the nobility for martial protection (“Estates Satire”). It was by keeping this balance, Ælfric wrote, that Christianity could be successfully defended and enhanced in England:

Now toils the field-labourer for our subsistence,
and the worldly warrior must fight against our enemies,
and the servant of God must always pray for us,
and fight spiritually against invisible enemies. (25.819-22)²⁷

Note that each estate had an *active* role to play in resisting paganism, and the various situations of Ælfric’s selection of saints corresponds to the duties of each. All were to be virtuous, all were to be pious, all were to be humble followers of Christ, but specific actions or behaviors depended on the individual’s social context.

This appeal to the three estates through specific *vitae* demonstrates Ælfric’s rhetorical effectiveness. By appealing to each estate via a specific saint in an individual homily, the *Lives of the Saints* as a corpus could be directed, at the preacher’s discretion, to the audience then present. The preacher could also then select (either on a given feast-

²⁶ “[L]aboratores synd þa þe urne bigleafan beswincað / *oratores* synd þa ðe us to gode geðingiað / *bellatores* synd þa ðe ure burga healdað / and urne eard be-weriadð wið onwinnendne here.”

²⁷ “Nu swincð se yrðlingc embe urne bigleofan / and se woruld-cempa sceall winnan wið onwinnende here / and se godes þeowa sceall symle for us gebiddan / and feohtan gastlice wið þa ungesewenlican fynd.”

day or at another time) a particular saint's life to encourage some estate-specific response. With this in mind, Ælfric carefully adapted each vita to meet the specific understanding of any of these three particular audiences and their respective "interpretive abilities."²⁸ This is where his hagiographic rhetoric is most conspicuously at work, providing appeals and invitations through saintly *exempla* for English Christians to respond to the pagan threats. Indeed, the entire work was "designed to comfort the faithful and goad the lax." As such,

Ælfric reshape[d] the legend[s] into a compelling dramatization of the spiritual warfare he discusses in the homil[ies]. Of course, for him Christian life is one in which the believer's *clænnys* [cleanness] is constantly under siege by internal and external forces, but this must have seemed especially true in late-tenth-century England . . . as the Danes arrived more and more frequently and as the year 1000 approached. It is little wonder then that Ælfric chose [his saints] . . . to bolster the faith of the English, considering that the legend[s] provide[d] . . . Anglo-Saxon Christians with an opportunity to see themselves, or what they might become, reflected in the image of their saintly predecessors, rewarded for their asceticism and orthodoxy, [and] rejoicing forever together for their faithfulness to God. (Upchurch 216-7).²⁹

Again, a close reading of Ælfric's text shows that there is a purposeful design, a hagiographic rhetoric, to bolster spiritual and political support for a truly Christian England: showing the fortitude of the saints is the only way to stand fast against Viking influence. I will now examine the specific instances where these allusions and statements appear within his saintly vitae themselves.

Saintly Clergy: Resisting the Pagan Threat through Faithfulness and Nonviolence

Ælfric includes several vitae of saints who were engaged in holy orders in *The Lives of the Saints*. These vitae featured exemplary accounts of the saints resisting pagan

²⁸ Kinane notes that Ælfric was "acutely aware of the range and limitations of his audiences' interpretive abilities" and adapted his homilies accordingly to meet their level of understanding (qtd. in Johnson 101).

²⁹ Upchurch is specifically referring to Ælfric's vita of Saints Julian and Basilissa here, but his analysis applies equally to all of the vitae in *Lives of the Saints*.

authorities, particularly in the early Christian era, by their spiritual fortitude rather than through physical combat. Most of these saints seem to have been deployed as an appeal to people belonging to the religious estate, Ælfric's fellow monks as well as nuns and clerics, or those doing the work of God and who by virtue of their holy vows should never engage in acts of war, at least in a martial sense. All but a few of these saints depicted in the *vitae* are monks, and those few with military backgrounds have relinquished violence. However, for Ælfric this does not mean that there cannot be some form of resistance to pagan authority among the avowed. Although soldiers and the nobility who command them are required to fight, the clergymen must never do so—even if compelled to by a secular leader (25.827-45). Ælfric wrote:

[I]t will profit them [the churchmen] more that the invisible enemies
may be overcome than the visible ones;
and it will be very harmful that they leave their service of the Lord,
and incline to the worldly struggle, that in no way concerns them. (829-32)³⁰

He does not mean here that pagan aggressiveness does not affect the laborers in the Lord's vineyard, just that he and his fellow divines should resist it in a metaphysical rather than a physical manner and stick to waging *spiritual* warfare while leaving martial combat to others:

Now the monk that submits to Benedict's rule,
and leaves all worldly things, why will he again return
to worldly weapons, and cast aside his struggle
against the invisible enemies, to vex his Creator?
The servant of God may not fight along with worldly men
if he is to have success in the spiritual combat. (851-6)³¹

³⁰ “[H]it bið swyðe derigendlic þæt hi drihtnes þeowdom forlætan / and to woruld-gewinne bugan þe him naht to ne gebyriað.”

³¹ “Nu se munuc þe bihð to benedictes regole / and forlæt ealle woruld-ðinge hwi wile he eft gecyrran / to woruldlīcum wæpnum and awurpan his gewinn / wið þa ungesewenlican fynd his scyppende to teonan[?] / Se godes þeowa ne mæg mid woruld-mannum feohtan / gif he on þam gastlican gefeohte forð-gang habban sceall.”

This is to be done in the manner of Moses, who when the Israelites were fighting Amalek by the commandment of God, held up his staff in prayer, which caused the Israelites to win, though Moses himself never participated in battles (8.11-46).

For Ælfric, this kind of spiritual fighting is not impotent by any means. Though the saints who in effect engage in nonviolent resistance are often tortured and killed, the power given to them through Christ allows them to endure torment and, after they are killed, to be received into exaltation. It is such with all these saints, who are protected by their faith and by their obedience to God's requirements for righteousness—chastity most of all. Thus his hagiographic rhetoric is far more than a standard promotion of piety, but powerful principles with promises attached. The righteous Christian (whether through refusing to accommodate pagan religion into their lives, or warning others against its evils, or refusing to bed with wanton individuals) will be blessed by God in the same manner as the saints before them—given power to fight Satanic forces, physical or spiritual, and his or her good works will redound to the glory of God's Church:

For there was no holy servant of God after the Saviour's passion,
that would ever defile his hands with fighting,
but they bore the persecution of impious tormentors,
and gave up their lives with harmlessness
for God's belief, and they now live with God,
because they would not even put to death a bird. (25.857-62)³²

This idea is fundamentally Pauline. The apostle wrote: "[W]e do not walk after the flesh: (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds)" (2 Cor. 10.3-4). Ælfric believed that the individual churchman especially,

³² "Næs nan halig godes þeowa æfter þæs hælendes þrowunga / þe æfre on gefeohte his handa wolde afylan / ac hi for-bæron ehtnysse arleasra cwellera / and heora lif sealdon mid unscæppignysse / for godes geleafan and hi mid gode nu lybbað / forðan þe hī furþon noldon ænne fugel acwellan."

through his constant prayers, would be given power to battle invisible forces while laymen battle visible ones, and that the former task is even more important than the latter:

[g]reater therefore is now the struggle of the monks
against the invisible devils that lay snares around us,
than may be that of the worldly men that struggles against fleshly (foes),
and visibly fight against the visible (enemies). (823-26)³³

For Ælfric, to be such a prayerful and steadfast saint is no mean or weak thing, and he characterizes this sentiment throughout his selected vitae via hagiographic rhetoric, including in his adaptation of the life of Saint Eugenia.

Saint Eugenia and the Evils of Paganism

The first vita Ælfric recounted is Saint Eugenia (Eugenie), the daughter of a pagan governor of Alexandria.³⁴ Eugenia lived in the late second century while Rome was still ruled by pagan emperors, or as Ælfric wrote, when “Christianity was not yet known everywhere, / and the cruel persecution was not yet stilled” (2.13-4).³⁵ During his tenure, Eugenia’s father had persecuted the Christians and had driven “all of them” out from his city (33-4). Bad luck for him then when his only daughter encounters Christian writings at school and then runs away to join a camp of Christian exiles (24-36). There Eugenia abandons the religion of Rome and sings with the Christian company: “‘All the gods of the heathen are devils, / and verily the Lord created the heavens’” (39-40).³⁶ To protect herself from her father’s ire, she—with the permission of a bishop—disguises herself as a man and

³³ “Is nu for-by mare þæra muneca gewinn / wið þa ungesewenlican deofla þe syrwiað embe us / þonne sy þæra woruld-manna þe winnað wiþ ða flæsclican / and wið þa gesewenlican feohtað.”

³⁴ “*Eodum Die Natale Sancte Eugenie Virginis*” is not the first homily in the *Lives*, and is preceded by an introductory homily designed to be given on Christmas Day (which also happens to be Eugenia’s saint’s day). This first homily is not a “life,” however, and thus Eugenia’s vita stands as Ælfric’s first in this work.

³⁵ “[P]e cristendōm næs þagyt geond eall cuð / and seo reþe æhtnyss þægýt næs gestylled.”

³⁶ “Ealle þære hæðenra godas syndon deofla, / and dryhten soðlice heofonas geworhte.”

lives in a monastery among holy brethren (77-97). Ælfric's description of her conversion is telling: "She increased in the doctrine of true faith, / . . . and was changed (as it were) from a wolf to a sheep" (98-100).³⁷

Within the first hundred lines of his first vita, then, Ælfric's opinion about paganism becomes clear: it is a religion of devils populated by wolves. In another vita, he writes of the Viking/Danes Hingwar and Hubba, who invaded Northumbria 300 years before Ælfric's day, and names them as being explicitly "associated [with] the devil" (32.30), sent by Satan as agents of hell to torment *þa bilewitan cristenan*, "the innocent Christians" (42).³⁸ This is an important point to understand: there's no middle ground when it comes to religious worship in Ælfric's mind, a perspective common in medieval Christianity. Either a person believes in God or believes in devils mistakenly revered by men as gods—devils who take upon themselves the forms of idolatrous deities in order to be worshipped.³⁹ Ælfric later furthered this duality in his vita of Saint Martin by suggesting that devils reveal themselves "visible in diverse phantasms" and

. . . in the appearance of the gods of the heathen;
sometimes in Jove's form, who is called Thor,
sometimes in Mercury's, who is called Odin,
sometimes in that of Venus, the foul goddess
whom men call Frig [Frigga/Freya]; and into many other shapes
the devil[s] transformed . . . (31.712-18)⁴⁰

³⁷ "Heo þeah on lare þæs rihtan geleafan / . . . and wearð awend of wulfe to sceaþe."

³⁸ Skeat et al. translate *geanlæhte þurh deofol* as "associated by," though I prefer the more contextually accurate "associated *with*."

³⁹ This sentiment is echoed in *Paradise Lost*, where Milton writes of the devil and his fallen angels: "By falsities and lies the greatest part / Of mankind they corrupted to forsake / God their Creator . . . / to transform / Oft to the image of a brute, adorned / With gay religions full of pomp and gold, / And devils to adore for deities: / Then were they known to men by various names, / And various idols through the heathen world" (1.367-75).

⁴⁰ "[H]ine ge-sewen-licne on manegum scin-hiwum / þam halgan æteowde on þæra hæþenra goda hiwe / hwilon on ioues hiwe þe is ge-haten þōr / hwilon on mercuries þe men hatað oþon / hwilon on veneris þære fulan gyden / þe men hatað fricg / and on manegum oþrum hiwum / hine bræd se deofol." Ælfric's clarification of the pagan gods' names speaks to his awareness of his Anglo-Saxon audience, who may not have known who Jupiter, Mercury, and Venus were, but who would have been familiar with the Norse-

And if they are not devils, Ælfric elsewhere suggested, then they are corrupt men revered as gods. Saint Sebastian, who when at a trial for his life for being outed as a Christian, listed these men's gross offenses, from murder to incest, and declared:

The gods whom ye worship were wicked men,
evilly born, and infamous in life,
filled with crime, and died miserably
Look whether or no thou errest, who believest in this deceit,
and honourest these wicked men as gods,
[and] . . . forsaketh the Almighty God who dwelleth in Heaven,
and sayest to the stone, "Thou art my god."⁴¹

Again, this is part of Ælfric's worldview and influences his sociocultural perspective. And whether the pagan gods were devils or devil-inspired men or both, religious coexistence and peaceful pluralism were impossibilities. Even with violence and looting aside, accommodating a pagan society and its pagan gods are the same as making room for Satan. Darkness cannot exist when light is present—how much more truth with falsehood? Ælfric, ever the student of Paul, would likely agree with the apostle when Paul had written:

"[F]or what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? . . . Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord" (2 Cor. 6.14-17).

Ælfric continued this Pauline theme throughout the *Eugenia* tale. The maiden is not discovered to be female for several years, during which time she displays a gift for miraculous healings of afflicted persons and rebuking demons; she also resists several

Germanic Thor, Odin, and Freya. His equation of these various gods is not entirely accurate, but shows a desire to inform his audience so that they understand his point.

⁴¹ "Þa godas þe ge wurðiað wæron arlease menn / yfele geborene and bysmore-fulle on life / mid facne afyllede and forð-ferdon earmlice . . . / La hū ne dwælast ðu þe on þysum gedwylde gelyfst / and þas arleasan menn arwurðast for godas / þu for-lætst þone ælmihtigan god þe eardað on heofonum / and cwæðst to þam stane ðu eart min god."

attempted seductions both from within and without the minster and from both men and women, and even at one point becomes the abbot (2.116-32). But when a wealthy widow named Melantia (whom Eugenia has healed and who mistakes her for a handsome young man) tries to seduce her with both treasure and other favors, Eugenia rebukes the woman handily and sends her away (171-80).

Melantia, in the manner of the wife of Potiphar, then goes to the governor (Eugenia's father) and falsely accuses the abbot of having pretended to be a physician in order to sexually assault her (2.181-7). When the governor arrests Eugenia to answer the charges, she reveals herself to her father—quite literally, by exposing her bosom—as his long-lost daughter (223-41). Not only is Eugenia cleared (for a woman could not possibly try to assault another woman) and Melantia's house and possessions destroyed by a flame from heaven (247-63), but Eugenia's father and all her family members are baptized. Through the governor's influence with Rome, these Christians are also freed from persecution, and courtesy Eugenia's miracles,

Alexandria city was soon filled
with much Christian people, and many churches;
and in every town the Christians rejoiced,
and with due worship honoured God,
as well as for this cause, that Egyptian folk,
having forsaken their error, believed in the Lord. (278-81)⁴²

Ælfric's implied point is clear: when light (Christianity) emerges, it drives out darkness (pagan devil-worship). This resurgence of Christianity is due not to accommodation with the enemies of Christ, but by steadfastness—even in the face of peril. Staunchness becomes especially pertinent when Eugenia, later a leader of a convent of

⁴² “[A]lexandria seo burh sona wearð afylled / mid mycelum cristen-dome and manegum cyrcum / and ðn ge-hwylcum burgum blissoden þā cristenan / and mid wurðfulnysse god wurðodon / eac for þysum intingan þæt ægyptisce folc / for-lætenum gedwylde gelyfde ðn drihten.”

nuns in Rome (for now that her gender has been discovered, she can no longer serve as an abbot), is “dragged, with threatening, to the heathen temple, / that she might offer the worship, due to God, to the [virgin] goddess Diana” (383-5). She prays to “the Almighty God” instead, who destroys “the temple of the devil” and which falls “utterly to the ground, / and [sinks] into the earth, / with all its idols” (386-8).⁴³ For this she is executed by steel (though only after drowning, burning, and starvation fail to kill her), whereupon she finally ascends to heaven as one of Christ’s “bliss[ful] saints” (389-422).⁴⁴

The life of Saint Eugenia, like most medieval vitae, certainly has some strange and lurid moments, such as why a narrative extolling virginity includes some descriptive sexual scenes (most do). But the framework Ælfric used to present the Christians- versus-pagans dynamic reveals his belief in the preeminence of his faith and the irreconcilability of the Church of God with the “church” of the devil. Compromise is not in Eugenia’s mind: she does not join the Dianic priestesses or set aside her faith in order to be left alone. Like her Israelite and Christian forbearers, she remains true to the one God, and is rewarded in heaven for her non-compliance to pagan authorities. The rhetoric Ælfric employed here has crucial relevance to the seemingly dire situation Christian England faced near the end of the first millennium.

⁴³ “Ðā gebæd eugenia hi to ðam ælmihtigan gode / and þæt deofles tempel grund-lunga to-feoll / and on eorðan besanc mid eallum his anlicnyssum.”

⁴⁴ “[M]e hæfð gebroht / min hælend crist to his halgena blysse” (419-20).

Ælfric and the Monks

Eugenia's vita, along with a nearly identical vita of Eufrasia,⁴⁵ are the only two female saint-tales which operate in a churchly role—the other women he writes about in *Lives of the Saints* are all part of the laity. But he has much to say to the *men* in his religious discourse community in his homiletic vitae of monks and clergymen. In his vitae of Saint Maur (Mauri or Maurus), he particularly emphasized the necessity for monks to adhere to the Benedictine Rule; if they would keep the vows they'd made to God, then the Almighty's grace would empower them to perform miraculous works, after the manner of Saint Benedict himself:

[Maur] throve well in learning, and was very obedient
and served God Almighty in all goodness,
and gave moreover a good example to his brethren
in all holy observances, and therefore was he dear
to his master Benedict[.] (6.4-9)

Indeed, Maur's faithfulness to Benedict's teachings enabled him to stand as "the principal monk next to the great Benedict" and "the great Benedict's successor / in miracles" (182-3), and who as abbot "governed the monastery as Benedict shewed him" (51-2). Because of his deep devotion to his master and to "Benedict's design" or rule (59), he along with his master "worked miracles" not a few (49-50): healing sicknesses, rebuking demons, and raising people from the dead. "These miracles are wrought by the holy man / to the praise of God," Ælfric concluded, ". . . who rewards His saints with glory in eternity" (355-6, 369).

⁴⁵ Like Eugenia, Eufrasia disguises herself as a male monk to avoid persecution and suffers some indecencies from her fellow monks. On her deathbed, she confesses to her father—also a pagan administrator—that she is ready to die *werlice*, or "manfully" (33.286-7).

Ælfric's advocacy of living the Benedictine Rule is characteristic of his writings (Hill 22). He was a product of the tenth-century Benedictine Reform, a "renaissance" in monasticism which reestablished firm rules governing the lifestyles of monks and redefined the extent of their vows ("Ælfric, c. 955-1010"). His passion for these vows and their attendant spiritual blessings are clear in the Maur vita, where a monk's influence is dependent on strict devotion to the Rule. Ælfric implied through Maur's example that monks should follow the rule and in turn that abbots should "establish" it (6.58). There are no direct references to Vikings or pagans in this vita, as Ælfric's emphasis seems to be on the ability to act with spiritual power from God through consecrated monastic living.

This obedience to monastic rule, as evidenced by the life of Saint Maur, not only gives a monk or abbot power to act in the name of Christ as he ministers to his brothers or to the laity, but also to the nobility, who will hear of their good works and patronize future monastic establishments.⁴⁶ Ælfric recorded further narratives of Maur's legacy as the saint notably yet humbly interacted with Frankish noblemen, including one Florus, who

established, in his own land,
a monastery and monastic discipline, as Maurus directed him,
and with great favour he benefited the monastery,
and assigned privileges to it in clear testimony (thereof),
and altogether made over the monastery to Maurus
with full liberty, for his [Florus's] soul's profit. (6.145-50)

Not only did Florus provide material assistance to the monks, but through his example and Maur's further miracles, the number of men devoting their lives to God in the monastery greatly increased, so much so that Maur had to place a cap on the number of monks who

⁴⁶ This concept is called "monastic advocacy," which concerns the need of aristocratic patrons to "protect [church] lands" and advocate "for the exercise of justice" in behalf of monastic interests (West 372).

could serve under his direction and assign others to establish new monasteries elsewhere (260-9).

This idea of monastic recruitment, as it were, was important to Ælfric; what with monastic enrollment dropping and pagans killing priests and ransacking churches, the ability to expand the church throughout a given realm would understandably have been a high priority for him. Ælfric knew that only through the works of monks and clergymen could Christianity be enhanced, and if the nobility had a sour opinion of monks who consistently failed to live up to their holy vows, or if there were only few holy men to guide them, this would in turn affect their patronage, and further hamper the work of the Lord—a thought to be perished, especially with many imminent pagan threats from abroad.

Ælfric adapted as another appeal to the power of a consecrated life the “Passion of Saint Julian (Juliani) and His Wife Basilissa (Basilisse),” a fourth-century married couple of Antioch who, he related, forswore marital sex in favor of strict devotion to God (4.75-7). When they inherited a significant estate from Julian’s parents, they immediately converted the grounds into a combination monastery and nunnery, with the couple as abbot and prioress respectively (78-87).⁴⁷ Persecution soon followed under the governorship of the pagan Martianus, himself following orders from Emperor Diocletian. To preserve their holiness, the Lord took Basilissa and all of her sister-nuns to himself by causing their deaths, leaving Julian and the male monks to deal with the *towerdan gecampe* or “impending conflict” (103).⁴⁸

⁴⁷ The word Ælfric uses for monks is *muneca* (4.84), and for nuns, *myneceana* (85), literally “female-monks.”

⁴⁸ Skeat’s translators use “future conflict,” but since the contest between the servants of the true God and the pagans is known to these holy ones, I prefer the more powerful term “impending.”

And it was war. When Julian's company refused orders to sacrifice to the Roman gods, Martianus arrested, tortured, and burned them (4.119-22). When Julian himself came before the governor, the two adversaries engaged in an Elijah-like contest of gods to see which divinity could heal a man blinded by a broken staff while the abbot was beaten. Of course, Julian's God (Christ) won, but the event had a far greater purpose: many people who witnessed the event, including Martianus's wife and son, were converted to the true faith, and the church in Antioch was strengthened in the face of intense Roman persecution (408-16). Julian's death too was marked by powerful vengeance on the heathen. As soon as he and some of his companions "were slain," a

great lightning-flash fell upon the wicked heathen,
and a mighty earthquake, and terrible thunder,
so that of the wicked ones a great many perished,
and no place remained standing with the gods of stone,
nor did the hail leave any heathen place of worship.
Then fled Martianus, very nearly slain,
and he was consumed (with disease) after a few days,
so that worms crept alive out of his body,
and the impious one departed, with torture to hell. (422-31)⁴⁹

This victory was accomplished without the followers of Christ raising a single blade, yet Julian particularly was given great spiritual power to defeat their enemies. Julian had the faith and God took care of the rest. Ælfric likely wondered why it could not be so in his day, too, if there were monks willing to stand up to enemies as did Julian. Even powerful governors and seemingly indestructible temples of stone could be taken down at a stroke if saintly monks were yet to be found in England.

⁴⁹ "Hit gelamp þa sona swa hī ofslagene wæron / þæt mycel ligēt cōm ofer þa manfullan hæðenan / and swiðlic eorð-styrung and egeslic þunor / swa þæt þæra manfulra mycel dæl for-wearð / and nan stow ne æt-stōd mid þam stænum godum / ne nan hæðen-gyld se hagol ne belæfde. / Þa fleah martianus for nean adyd / and he wearð fornumen / æfter feawum dagum / swa þæt wurmas crupon cuce of his lice / and se arleasa ge-wāt mid wite to helle."

Ælfric and the Clergy

Monks were not alone in this effort, though. In addition to avowed unmarried women like Eugenia, who helped increase and build the kingdom of God within a kingdom of mankind, Ælfric suggested that clergymen and bishops could also play a significant role in the enhancement of the church within a secular realm, even among the heathen. Saint Denis (his later English name, though called by the Greek “Dionysius” or Latin “Dionisii” in Ælfric’s text) had marked connection with evangelism to heathens—he himself having been one, until converted by Paul after the apostle’s famous speech on Mars Hill (29.1-8).⁵⁰ After some missionary tours, Paul

consecrated him as bishop
of the Athenian city where he was born,
and bade him preach boldly the faith,
and the holy gospel to the heathen nations . . .
[and them] to whom he was before a leader in their unbelief. (77-80, 84)⁵¹

Denis’s evangelism continued, Ælfric wrote, under the direction of Pope Clement, who sent the bishop to the barbarian Franks as *cristes cempa mid cenum geleafan*, “Christ’s champion with bold faith” (132-3). The bishop’s first act in France was to found a church in Paris and to ordain more churchmen “that they might serve / the heavenly God in monastic life” (151-3) to carry forth the work.⁵² The results were instantaneous:

Then Dionysius daily converted
many to the faith by his fair lore,
and subjected to his Lord those whom he snatched from the devil,
and men sought the church eagerly with faith.
So many wonders wrought the all[-]wielding God

⁵⁰ Cf. Acts 17.34: “Howbeit certain men clave unto [Paul], and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite.”

⁵¹ “[H]ine gehadode to bisceope / to þære atheniscan byrig þær he geboren wæs / and het hine bodian bealdlice geleafan / and þæt halige godspel þam hæðenum leodum / . . . þe he ær wæs lareow on heora geleaf-leaste.”

⁵² “[H]e ham heofonlican gode / heowian mihton on mynsterlicre drohtnunge.”

by the holy man, that the wonders converted
the opposing heathen to the Saviour's faith
quite as much as his preaching[.] (154-61)⁵³

His martyrdom, as is often the case in saint's tales, also brought mass conversion. After his beheading, Denis's body stood, picked up his severed head, and went from the chopping-block to a more suitable burial-spot, singing—yes, through his severed head—all the way. Those Franks who witnessed this remarkable event were quickly converted (285-312). This vita along with the stories of other martyrs make good on Ælfric's statement elsewhere in *The Lives of the Saints* "the more men [slain]" by the devil, "the more [other people] believed, / through the mighty wonders which the martyrs wrought" (16.201-2).⁵⁴

The actions of Denis towards the pagan Franks provides ready insight into Ælfric's perspective and the development of his hagiographic rhetoric. The church can and will be strengthened if there are monks and priests worthy enough to channel great spiritual power; not only that, but it can all be accomplished without worldly weapons. That's not to say, though, that Ælfric believed that heathen peoples such as the Danes should be accommodated, as I earlier discussed. Rather his vitae suggest that when pagans do indeed start to clash with Christians, seeking to destroy them, that then is the time for the Christians to step up, emulate the saints, and throw if not the pagan *people* out of the land, then certainly their devilish ideologies and practices.

As previously discussed, paganism for a medieval Christian was not merely another religion with a different set of beliefs, but a practice which set forth a set of false gods, deities who were in fact devils opposed to the true God, Christ. All pagans were therefore

⁵³ "Hwæt þa dionisius dæghwamllice gebigde / fela to geleafan mid his fægeran lare / and his drihtne geþeodde þam þe he þam deofle æt-bræd / and menn sohton þa cyrcan swiðe mid geleafan."

⁵⁴ "[A]c swa man mā ofslōh swa þær mā gelyfdon / ðurh þa micclan wundra þe ða martyras gefremedon."

devil-worshippers. This was another key point for Ælfric, which he hammered over and over again throughout his vitae. In his homily of Saint Maurice, Ælfric wrote of pagan sacrifices offered “to the devilish gods, to the dishonour of God Almighty” (28.29);⁵⁵ he also called the Roman Emperor Maximian *se deofles biggenga*, “the devil’s worshipper” (77). Saint Thomas the Apostle too was martyred in India for causing the demons that reside within the idols to withdraw and then smash the images on their way out (36.400-10), an act the *hæpen-gildan*, the “idolaters,” did not appreciate (411-4). The punishment for pagans was also clear. Through the mouth of Saint Sebastian, Ælfric wrote that the heathen would face

fierce torments in the vast fire,
 where dragons and adders with devilish teeth
 horribly chew the breasts of the heathen;
 there is weeping and wailing, and of this will be no end. (5.74-7)⁵⁶

There was no way to mince words about the state of the heathen before God: they were as far removed from him as if they were in hell already.

In his homily against Auguries, included in *Lives of the Saints* though not a vita, Ælfric further defined idolatry as when “a man forsake[s] his Lord and his Christianity, / and yield[s] to *diabolical* heathenism, dishonouring his Creator” (17.47-8, emphasis added).⁵⁷ Tellingly, the Old English word for idolatry is *deofol-gild*, literally “devil-worship” (47). “Some men are so blinded,” he added, quoting Saint Augustine of Hippo,

that they bring their offerings
 to an earth-fast stone, and eke [also] to trees,
 and to well-springs, even as witches teach,
 and will not understand how foolishly they act,

⁵⁵ “[A]nd mid him ge-offrodon ealle heora lāc / þam deoflicum godum gode ælmihtigan to teonan.”

⁵⁶ “[O]n reðum witum on þam widgyllan fyre / þær dracon and næddran mid deofollicum toðum / þæra hæðenra breost biterlice ceowað. / Þær is wōp and wanung and þæs ne wurð nan ende.”

⁵⁷ “Deofol-gild bið þæt man his drihten forlæte and his cristendōm / and to deofollicum hæðenscype gebuge bysmrigende his scyppend.”

or how the dead stone or the dumb tree
can help them, or give them health,
when they themselves never stir from the place. (129-35)⁵⁸

Again, there is much more than simple alternative worship in pagan rites; through these statements Ælfric suggests, common to the ideology of his time, that to follow some path other than Christianity is no less than the devil's road to hell.

The threat of religious oppression is not exclusive to pagans, however, but also includes lapsed Christians ("heretics") as well as those persistent antagonists of Christ, the Jews. In fact, the two were equated by Ælfric in the Basil vita, when he wrote of the saint's conversion of a "leech" (physician) who was both *hæðen and Iudeisc*, "heathen and Jewish" (3.566). In this framework, only Christianity can be a true religion—anything else is devil-inspired heathenism, including Judaism. Elsewhere, in a comparison of which religion follows God's true path more accurately, he wrote that "the Jews who despise our Lord, and have in contempt his Gospel-preaching, are unclean, and to Christ repugnant" (25.69-71).⁵⁹ Though they once obeyed God's laws, because they rejected Christ, they will be forever punished for their pervasive blasphemy (520-9).

Ælfric's antisemitic rhetoric here and elsewhere added another brick in his creation of "otherness" to help unify Anglo-Saxon Christians (Estes 279).⁶⁰ Even though Ælfric is unlikely to have known any Jews personally, the Jews as an entity "served as a powerful

⁵⁸ "Sume men synd swa ablende þæt hi bringað heora lāc / to eorðfæstum stane and eac to treowum / and to wylspringum swa swa wiccan tæcað / and nellað under-standan hu stuntlice hi doð / oððe hu se deada stān oððe þæt dumbe treow / him mæge gehelpen oððe hæle forgifan / þone hi sylfe ne astyriað of ðære stowe næfre."

⁵⁹ "Swa swa ða iudeiscan þe urne drihten forseoð / and his godspel bodunge to bysmre habbað / syndon unclæne and criste andsæte." Skeat's translators render *andsæte* as "odious" (71), but I prefer "repugnant."

⁶⁰ For a full treatment of the depiction of Jews in this period, see Samantha Zacher, *Imagining the Jew in Anglo-Saxon Literature and Culture* (2016). Allen J. Frantzen in *Bloody Good: Chivalry, Sacrifice, and the Great War* (2004) similarly analyzes Ælfric's stance towards the Jews, and believes that Ælfric saw them as even more threatening to Anglo-Saxon Christianity than the Danes (63).

metaphor” for the consequences of a nation who denied Christ (Black et al. 131). Heresy, too, was essentially heathenism disguised as Christianity (Elkouz 140-1), a concept Ælfric borrowed from Eusebius and Bede (Hayward 16). Although there would be some measure of redemption in limbo for righteous pre-Christians such as the prominent male Maccabees (25.739-40), anything non-Christian—Jewish or heretical or pagan or whatever else—threatened to unbind Christian national consensus in the kingdom, and therefore threatened the survival of “England” as Ælfric and then knew it.

The Role of Priests in Combating Heresy and Paganism

Monks and clerics therefore had an important role to play in rooting-out idolatrous and heretical practices from among their flocks. This could be partly done by teaching every man of the laity “his Pater-Noster, and his Creed . . . that they may know what they ask of God, / and how they are to believe in God” (12.261-7).⁶¹ In a more homiletic than hagiographic style, Ælfric sets the tone that his fellow churchmen should follow. He began his vita of Saint George by unequivocally stating his intent to undo the *gedwyld*, “falsehoods,” written about the saint by *gedwolmen*, literally “false-men” and translated as “heretics” (14.1-3). He also in the “Passion of Saint Mark [the] Evangelist” decried any pseudo-gospels outside of the foundational four. Repeating Jesus’s wolves-in-sheep’s-clothing motif, Ælfric averred to the beadsmen that

[In] the orthodox church, which is established in Christ,
and fastened in Him, even as in sure stone,
receiveth not the writings [which] such heretics
wrote of themselves without truth
God revealed the true Evangelists . . .

⁶¹ “Ælc cristen man sceal cunnan his pater-noster and his credan . . . / Se lareow sceal secgan þam læwedum mannum / þæt andgyt to þam pater-nostre and to ðam credan / þæt hi witon hwæs hi biddað æt gode / and hu hi sceolon on god gelyfan.”

and these four only are to be received
in the orthodox church, and the others to be rejected,
who wrote false writings, by themselves (only),
not by the Holy Ghost, nor by the Saviour's choosing. (15.123-6, 220, 222-5)⁶²

Ælfric's repeated use of the word *geleaffulre*, literally "full of belief" or "faithfully" and translated "orthodox," shows just how important adherence to a conservative doctrine was for him, especially in view of the presence of radical heresies among the English Church.

Heresy in fact was the second prong of the devil's weaponry against Christians after pagan persecution. When the Church as a whole finally overcame the attacks of the Roman government through God's grace and the conversion of Emperor Constantine, "then desired the devil to mar the true faith by heresy, / and sowed heresy in presumptuous men." The only group that could stop such heresy from taking root was the holy men of the church, just like the saintly holy fathers who "quenched their evil, / and formulated the true faith by God's help" (16.203-10).⁶³ Here he probably referred to Saints Augustine, Jerome, Anthony of Egypt, and others whose written tracts established longstanding theology; but his suggestion, more importantly, of churchmen standing as the last resort against any approach of heathens or heathenism was pertinent to his clerical audience, and would have reinforced his energetic appeal—through hagiographic rhetoric—for a united front against any of the devil's maneuverings against the Church of God.

⁶² "Ac seo geleaffulle gelaðung þe is gelogod on criste / and on him gefæstnod swa swa on fæstum stane / ne under-fehð þagesetnyssa þe swilce gedwolan / ðurh hi sylfe gesetton buton soðfæstnyssse . . . / [G]od geswutelode þa soðfæstan godspelleras . . . / and þes feower ana syndon to under-fonne / on geleaffulre gelaðunge and forlætan þa oðre / þe lease gesetnyssse gesetton ðurh hi sylfe / na þurh þone halgan gast ne ðurh ðæs hælendes gecorennysse."

⁶³ "Eft ðaða god sealde sibbe his gelaðunge / þa wolde se deofol mid gedwylde amyrran þone soðan geleafan / and seow ða gedwylde on dyrstigum mannum . . . / Manega wæron eac þe myslice dwelodon / oð þæt þa halgan fæderas heora yfel adwæscton / and þone soðan geleafan gesetton ðurh god."

Saintly Peasants: Resisting the Pagan Threat through Righteous Living

The peasant estate or laborers of society, though not under oath like the clergy, still had an important commitment to Christ that could not be reneged on, and thus an important role to play in defense of a Christian realm. Ælfric deployed several tales of saints who were themselves laypersons but marked by their strict devotion to God. These vitae follow two themes, though there is greater emphasis on the second: first, refusal to give into pagan overlords; and second, adherence to strict chastity. Each theme is based on hagiographic rhetoric designed to encourage the laity to stand fast in Christ at all times, which in turn reflects on a national allegory of faithfulness. I will review both of these in turn.

Resisting the Sacrilegious Demands of Pagan Masters

Living under the rule of a pagan or heretical masters was an imminent possibility for the English laity, especially if the land was overrun by Vikings. Saint Sebastian was therefore an apt exemplar for what to do in such situations. Ælfric did not have a problem with a Christian working or serving a pagan lord, per se: the problem was that pagan masters, at least according to hagiographical stereotype, often demanded that the subservient Christian become idolatrous or at least make obeisance to gods made with human hands. If that ever came to pass, Ælfric's opinion was then unequivocal: the Christian man or woman should firmly resist such entreaties or commands, no matter what threat or punishment ensued.

Ælfric recounts that Sebastian himself was a high-ranking Roman prefect and steward of Diocletian, the emperor, one of the greatest persecutors of Christianity before the redeeming time of Constantine. Sebastian had been secretly baptized and remained in

the emperor's household so that he might be in a position to "encourage those whom the heathen emperor / daily killed for their faith in Christ" (5.19-20).⁶⁴ He was quite good at bolstering the faith of condemned Christians who wavered in their commitment to Christ at the thought "of the exceeding tortures[,] / and strengthened their minds in the faith of Jesus," paving the way for their martyrdoms into salvation rather than their descent into hell (22-4).⁶⁵ Even when family members encouraged their imprisoned fathers and husbands to recant their faith in order to be spared, Sebastian would remind them to

[c]ast not away . . . your glorious victory
for wives' caresses, or for children's tears.
Raise your standard of victory above earthly desires,
and begin your fight against the invisible fiend. (57-60)⁶⁶

If this seemed harsh counsel, he further reminded the prisoners that

Those who here now weep, would rejoice with you,
if they assuredly knew that which ye now know
this life is so false that it ever deceiveth
those that most love it, and have trust in it. (61-2, 65-6)⁶⁷

This was important for Ælfric's lay audience, some of whom may very well have had pagan friends or family who could pressure them to resign themselves again to a non-Christian lifestyle for their (the family's) sake. But as Jesus had said, "There is no man that hath left house, . . . or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now . . . and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark 10.29-30). Sebastian understood this, and gave the hearts of the destined martyrs the courage necessary to see their torments through with faith in God's assurances.

⁶⁴ "[H]e wolde gehyrten he se hæðena casere / dæghwamlice acwealde for cristes geleafan."

⁶⁵ "Ða geseah sebastianus hu sume þa cristenan / woldon awacian for ðam ormætum witum / and gehyrte heore mod to þæs hælendes geleafan."

⁶⁶ "Ne awurpe ge . . . eowerne beorhtan sige / for wifa swæsnyssum oððe for cyldra tearum. / Arærað eower sige-becn fram eorð-licum ge-wilnungum / and onginnað eower gefeoht on gearum ða unge-sewenlican fynd."

⁶⁷ "Ðas þe hēr wepað woldon mid eow blissian / gif hi geara wiston þæt þæt ge nu witon . . . / Ðis lif is swa swicol þæt hit symble bepæcð / þa ðe hit swiþost lufiaþ and geleafan him to habbað."

Sebastian could drink his own medicine, and soon proved his willingness to suffer and die for his conviction. When at the investigation of the emperor the soon-to-be saint confesses Christ, he was tied to a tree and shot with arrows “as thickly on every side as a hedgehog’s bristles” (5.428)⁶⁸—an event repeatedly depicted in medieval and early modern art. He survived this with the help of a Christian widow, and completely healed, was able to stand before the emperor once more to testify, and then finally beaten to death at his former lord’s command (454-5). Ælfric offered no guarantee that such miraculous survival would always happen in duress, but was sure of such a person’s salvation. But the fact that Sebastian was not a monk or a priest emphasized that even the laity could witness of Christ through their martyrdoms, just as this saint had done.

In addition to remaining faithful to Christ, never recanting one’s faith, and demonstrating a willingness to die for his beliefs, Ælfric inferred throughout the *vitae* that the layman had other requirements. One important role he could play was to pray for one’s enemies, as Sebastian noted the Christians of Rome had done for their pagan overlords: “[y]our kingdom prospereth through their good merits,” he told Diocletian of the Christians, “because they pray for the Roman people / and for your dominion, without ceasing” (5.444-6).⁶⁹ Similarly, there was to be no physical resistance. Nowhere is Sebastian or any other layperson shown in Ælfric’s *vitae* to react with anger or with violence. Both of these requirements fulfilled the Lord’s injunction to “pray for your enemies” and “turn the other cheek” in his Sermon on the Mount. If push came to shove, the Christian was not to shove back, but receive the punishment as an opportunity to glorify

⁶⁸ “[S]wa þicce on ælce healfe hwylce iles byrsta.”

⁶⁹ “[E]ower kynedōm godað þurh heora godan ge-earnunga / forþan þe hi gebiddað for romaniscre leode / and for eowrum anwealde unablinndlice.”

God as did Sebastian. Ælfric's hagiographic rhetoric is thus intimately tied into Christian rhetoric as a whole.

Remaining Chaste: The Peasant Virgin Saints

Though the individual Christian should willingly submit one's body to torment and one's life to death, they must under no circumstances surrender their virtue. Even if a Christian was about to be sexually assaulted, Ælfric suggested that such victims would be protected and/or glorified by God. Ælfric had faith that God had prepared a way for Christians (particularly women) to be protected from such evils: their virginity would endow them with great power. Strict chastity therefore was essential for everyone, but particularly the layperson, who with the right to marry and with more opportunity for licentiousness than a prelate, seemed to be particularly vulnerable to this temptation. But more than this, Christians were to be especially guarded against pagans, who often under the direction of their demon and/or unvirtuous gods, would very likely test Christ's followers by inviting them to commit this sin or forcing it upon them if they refused.

Remaining an unmarried virgin was the best thing that a layperson could do to protect his—though usually *her*—chastity (Schulenburg). Saints Eugenia and Eufrosia provided the necessary models for women to follow, but they were monks *incognita* and dedicated to God's especial service. Four laywomen, however, offered further, strikingly similar examples: Saints Agnes, Agatha, and Lucy, who provided a hagiographic rhetoric of virtue through virginity.

Like all of Ælfric's vitae, the Agnes vita too emphasizes the signs that accompany true religion. Agnes was a thirteen-year-old, early fourth-century Roman Christian, lusted

after by the young son of the pagan prefect. She of course refused his enticements, stating her betrothal to Christ and the incumbent decision to remain a virgin (7.5-62). When the prefect got word of this refusal and her revelation of her forbidden religion, he gave her three options: (1) recant her faith and marry his son; (2) if she desires so much to remain a virgin, she must renounce Christ and serve Vesta, the Roman goddess of virginity; or (3) if she refuses either of these, then she will be forced into prostitution (73-121). Agnes again refused the demands, and as a result was stripped of her clothes and forced into a brothel where anyone would be able to see her shame and compromise her virtue. God shielded her nakedness, however, by making Agnes's hair grow long as a covering, and then also granting her a brilliant garment as clothing. The house of ill repute was then filled with light, and people came there from all around to praise the true God. The prefect and his son went to reclaim the would-be bride, but the "impious" boy was struck dead; Agnes raises him from death, after which he immediately proclaims Christ, and his father, stunned, withdraws (141-206). The deputy prefect then tries to kill Agnes, failing at first to kill her by fire, but later succeeding with the sword (216-45). Agnes's body is buried in her parents' house, which over time becomes a place of pilgrimage and healing—even Constantia, daughter of the Emperor Constantine, is healed there of leprosy, an event that contributes to her conversion and that of her family (261-86).

"Sancte Agnetis Virginis" is a very typical virgin-vita, but is remarkable for its inclusion of several passages written in condemnation of the old Roman state under paganism and praise for the conversion of the Empire under Constantine. Agnes's reputation for maintaining her belief in Christ (and her virginity) leads to Constantia's petition at Agnes's tomb and her miraculous healing. From that point, "heathenism waned

and God's faith waxed" (7.282),⁷⁰ and the imperial family was baptized (283), events which led, the reader can assume, to the entire Christianization of the West. (Nothing is said in this vita of Constantine's battlefield vision of the cross, nor of his near-deathbed baptism, but infer that the emperor was baptized at this time instead).

Ælfric also relates the tale of Agatha, who faces a similar fate. A righteous Sicilian, the young woman refuses the advances of the pagan governor Quintianus—who is elsewhere called Christ's *wiðer-winna*, or "adversary" (8.207)—even after being promised treasures and prominence. Ælfric notes that Agatha "despised them all / even as dung which lieth under foot" (37-8).⁷¹ The maid is resolute in defying the governor's so-called gods, which she calls, true to form, *gramlicra deofla*, or "cruel devils" (59). Because of her refusal of both him and his gods, Quintianus puts her on the rack and one of her breasts is excised (122-3). She is then cast into prison, where Saint Peter miraculously attends her in the night and restores her breast through the power of Christ (144-6). Before more tortures resume the next day, an earthquake destroys a wall in the prison where she is kept, killing her guards (171-3). Agatha then prays for her soul to be taken up to heaven, and she dies (183-96). She is buried and her burial spot is venerated by both men and angels. A year after her death, Mount Etna explodes, and the heathen Sicilians, to protect themselves, hold one of her relics, a veil, against the descending lava, and the flames are quenched (217-32). Ælfric records that the city is saved "from the peril of fire by Agatha's intercession, / to the

⁷⁰ "[S]e hæðenscipe wanode and godes geleafa weox." This contrasts with the vita of Saint Apollinaris, which chronicles the conversion of Ravenna: "[G]odes geleafa ðær weox and wanode se hæðenscipe."

⁷¹ "[H]eo þæt eall forseah / on meoxes gelicnysse þe lið under fotum."

praise of the Saviour, who thus honoureth His Saints” (233-4),⁷² and ostensibly resulted in mass conversion.

Agatha’s works continue into the vita of Saint Lucy, a young girl who lives in post-Constantinian Syracuse. Her mother, like the woman in the Synoptic Gospels, is vexed with an issue of blood. The pair pray together in the church of Saint Agatha, hoping for the same miracle as the one recorded in the New Testament. Lucy falls asleep while they are praying for Agatha’s intercession; while she sleeps, Agatha appears to Lucy in a dream, calls her *min swustor lucia*, “[m]y sister Lucy” (9.26); says that her mother has been healed through her own (Lucy’s) merits; and prophesies that Lucy will be venerated for her Christian works in Syracuse forevermore. “Why do you pray of me that which you could grant yourself?” (27).⁷³ With her mother thus fully healed, Lucy then consecrates herself to Christ (though not as a nun). Once she takes the step, the obvious trial follows: she is courted by a lustful pagan youth, who if she does not sacrifice to idols and sleep with him, threatens to drag her away to a brothel (like Agnes was) to dishonor her. But Lucy cannot be moved even by hundreds of men and teams of oxen (100-10). They attempt to burn her, but that does not work, either. They are finally able to disembowel her, yet she still lives, unmoving from the spot onto which she fell, until venerable monks pray for her soul to depart in peace (146-151).

Ælfric’s narrative clearly points out that Lucy’s spiritual power—and the power of Agnes and Agatha—stems directly from her virginity. During Agatha’s visitation to Lucy, Agatha pointedly remarks that the girl’s ability to heal her mother through her especial

⁷² “[S]eo ceastre wearð ahrēd / fram þæs fres frecednysse þurh agathen foreþingunge / þam hælende to lofe þe his halgan swa wurðað.”

⁷³ “[H]wi bitst þu æt me þæs þe ðu miht sylf getiðian[?]”

access to Christ's grace comes from the fact that she is *soð godes mæden*, "God's true virgin" (9.26). And just as she had preserved her spiritual maidenhead by not worshipping pagan idols, so Christ preserved her body from being physically defiled by forcible intercourse.⁷⁴ The power of their virtue is manifest in the miracles associated with their tortures, deaths, posthumous activity, resulting conversions, and heavenly glorification. In the words of Ruth Evans, the hagiographical virgin's tale is a "revelation of . . . true (Christian) self: unchangeable, indestructible, and incorruptible" (31).

And what of those who were legitimately married? Ælfric does not have much to say about those who engaged in lawful conjugality, but in several narratives he praises those men and women who though due to social pressures had gotten married, but who then lived "chastely," meaning they did not have sex despite their sanctioned union.⁷⁵ He uses the examples of Julian and Basilissa, Chrysanthus and Daria, Æthelthryth, and Cecilia to extol the power manifest in the lives of married virgins, all of whom endure similar persecutions at the hands of pagans as the unmarried. Æthelthryth in particular had been married twice to East Anglian nobleman, but in both marriages refused "cohabitation" with her husbands (20.2-3). Her example as an *ungewemmed mæden* or "unpolluted maiden" (16) from fairly recent British history (300 years or so before Ælfric) allowed Ælfric to comment that yes, it's true, a faithful Christian can remain a virgin and have a chaste marriage "even now in our days" (26).⁷⁶ His concluding testimony to this vita is also telling:

Many examples of such are there in books,
how oftentimes men and their wives have lived wondrously,

⁷⁴ Ruth Evans notes that medieval writings in general "bear witness to a cultural preoccupation with the intact female body," ie. the integrity of the hymen (24), though she also affirms the medieval belief that "[b]odily intactness is less important than the will to remain chaste" (27). She deconstructs this idea throughout her essay.

⁷⁵ Evans writes: "To be a chaste [spouse] is good, to be a chaste widow [or widower] is better, but to be a virgin is best" (25).

⁷⁶ "[N]u on urum dagum."

and dwelt in chastity, to the glory of Jesus,
who consecrated virginity, even Christ our Saviour. (131-4)⁷⁷

His longest aside on the subject is in his homily on the “Chair [or Holy Office] of Saint Peter,” which actually retells the vita of Peter’s daughter, Petronilla. In order to justify the celibacy of bishops, of which Peter was the greatest, Ælfric notes that Peter had indeed been married like many Mosaic priests before him; however, once Christ gave his body for all, men and women were obligated to give their bodies to Christ, including in controlling their sexuality (10.213-30), and Peter accordingly “renounced / worldly desires, and conjugal intercourse [wife’s-nearness], / because Christ ordained chastity in the world” (203-5).⁷⁸ Again, more spiritual power is available to those who remain virginal than those who, even married by a minister of God, indulge in such fleshly desires. There is of course a marked bias towards female virginity, which scholars discuss at length, as well as the problematic nature of explicit descriptions of young women’s bodies by male hagiographers (Evans 24). But again the question for medieval hagiographers is what is best for English Christian survival in a pagan-threatened world.

This is where virginity connects with the Viking raids and invasion of England in the late tenth century. Evans explained that virginity is a unifying rhetorical “force,” a “fantasy” or myth for a community, providing a sense of “wholeness that [bound] together late medieval Christian [society]” (31). She adds that “[v]irginities were symbolic memory-places upon which the emerging nation of ‘England’ was fostered” (35), used by hagiographers to preserve the idea of ““monastic and national purity”” (qtd. in 35).

⁷⁷ “Manega bysna synd on bocum be swylcum / hu oft weras and wīf wundorlice drohtnodon / and on clānysse wunodon to wuldre þam hælende / þe þa clānysse astealde crist ure hælend.”

⁷⁸ “[H]e wiþ-cwæð siððan / woruldlīcum gewilnungum and wifes neawiste / forþan þe crist astealde clānysse on worulde.”

Christian solidarity in England retained the virginity and purity of the land; the penetration of foreign pagans polluted the body politic. If the nation was truly married to Christ, as all virgins were, it would not suffer itself to be led into adultery with seductive pagan deities.

This allegory of spiritual marriage with God reflected the terms of the Book of Hosea in the Old Testament, which speaks plainly of how the Almighty dealt with deceitful spouses in relation to the faithfulness of the children of Israel:

I will . . . cause all her mirth to cease . . . I will destroy her vines and her fig trees, whereof she hath said, These are my rewards that my lovers have given me: and I will make them a forest, and the beasts of the field shall eat them. And I will visit her in the days of Baalim, wherein she burned incense to them [the foreign gods], and she decked herself with her earrings and jewels, and she went after her lovers, and forgot me, saith the Lord. (2.11-3)

Though individual chastity was essential, the virtue of the nation was even more important: if England remembered Christ, they would be given power; if they forgot Him, they would be abandoned and destroyed. The virgin saints thus serve as vehicles for the deployment of Ælfric's hagiographic rhetoric: they represent the good that can come to an England pure and undefiled before the Lord.

The Noncombatants and Violence: The Lord Will Fight Their Battles

Even if monks, priests, and the laity are forbidden from striking back at a pagan oppressor, God is not, and He takes vengeance on those who oppress the saints and still afterwards refuse to convert. (Evans notes that in the virgin narratives, "pagan opponents are [always] converted or destroyed" [31]). This is echoed in Ælfric's addendum to Agnes's tale, a story of Gallicanus, a Roman military leader who converted to Christ through the auspices of the Constantinian family. The holy man is exiled to Egypt by Constantine's successor Julian (not to be confused with Saint Julian), a Christian by birth

who reneges on his faith. For his great evil to Gallicanus and to Christians throughout the empire, Emperor Julian is “slain at Saint Mary’s [be]hest” (419-20) in order that the Christian faith will thrive again as it did under Constantine; as a result, Ælfric wrote, *cristen-dom wæs þeonde*: “Christianity flourished” (421).

The Virgin Mary’s involvement in the deposition of Emperor Julian is important enough to Ælfric that he mentions it twice, here and also in the vita of Saint Basil, Agnes and Constantia’s contemporary, though the Basil version is much more detailed. Basil and his priestly associates have been praying for intervention from heaven to “defeat the bloodthirsty [Julian’s] purpose, / and deliver them from the cruel emperor” (3.239-40).⁷⁹ In answer to their prayers, they see the Virgin in vision, commissioning a martyr-saint named Mercurius to take up his holy weapons in defense of the Church and to slay the unholy emperor. Basil knows this miracle has been accomplished when he visits the relics of Mercurius in a nearby church, and finds the saint’s former “javelin there, foully stained / with Julian’s blood” (266-7). This event is afterwards described as having happened on a battlefield, when “a warrior unknown to . . . all / . . . pierced [Julian] through / with awful assault” (272-3).⁸⁰ Mercurius, clearly. Christ, through His saints, seems more than willing to fight on behalf of His followers: “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord” (Romans 12.19).

⁷⁹ “[H]i æt þære halgan stowe þone hælend bædon / þæt he hraðe to-wurpe þæs wæl-reowan andgyt / and hi ahrædde wiþ ðone reðan casere.”

⁸⁰ “Ða stōd his franca þær fula be-gleddod / mid Iulianes blode (266-7). “[P]a com sum cempa uncuþ us eallum / . . . and hyne sona þurh-þyde” (272-3).

Saintly Kings: Resisting the Pagan Threat through Force of Arms

With the concept of nonviolent and spiritual resistance firmly established, Ælfric further discussed martial resistance to the pagan forces by those who by virtue of their station in life “are they who protect our towns, / and defend our soil against an invading army”—the soldier estate of English society (25.817-8).⁸¹ This is where his hagiographic rhetoric becomes even more intertwined with England’s political situation in the tenth century. Ælfric deploys a number of militaristic saints, including some English ones, to represent the necessity of martial resistance as part of his hagiographic rhetoric. These vitae are specifically geared towards his aristocratic audience, particularly Æthelweard and his brother Æthelmaer, all of whom were in a social position to forcefully resist pagan onslaughts and to defend England and English Christianity by the sword. He chose his saintly lineup carefully, winnowing-out kings and generals and other figures who renounced violence and then joined holy orders. For Ælfric the most important role that the aristocracy played was fighting back with the sword (when necessary) *in addition to* fighting back with their faith. Elizabeth Redgate points out that Ælfric left out in *Lives of the Saints* the very popular vita of Saint Guthlac, a Mercian prince who “as a warrior who withdrew from the world, . . . did not seem to Ælfric an appropriate model to offer *his* lay audience” (245, emphasis added). This and other militaristic vitae

showed not only that war was acceptable to God, but also that warriors could [even] become saints. Ælfric was concerned not only about ecclesiastics wrongly thinking that it was right for ecclesiastics to fight, but [also] about laymen wrongly thinking that it was wrong to do so themselves. (245)

⁸¹ “[p]a þe ure burga healdað / and urne eard be-weriað wið onwinnende here.”

Old Testament Models for Righteous Warfare

In this Ælfric was a pragmatist, understanding that military threats could not be turned away solely through prayer and virginity—there had to be martial defense as well. Much of his rhetoric to this noble audience is based in Old Testament exempla; although these were “pre-Christian” models, they were still scriptural, and each could be used to bolster support against a pagan invasion. The stakes were the same for England as they were for these Israelite predecessors: pagan invasion, pagan burdens, and the rise of warriors who could repel the enemy from their god-fearing lands.

Ælfric offers a general warning to the aristocracy in “The Prayer of Moses,” by writing that “[i]f the head-men [lords]. . . / think of worldly things, / and care neither for God’s commands nor for His worship,” then they will suffer “either by hunger or by pestilence, that they may acknowledge / that the Almighty Ruler thus wreaketh contempt of Himself,” to say nothing of the eternal punishment that would await them after their deaths (13.139-47).⁸² He later collated essential elements from the Books of Kings to relate the episodes of the monarchs of Judah and Israel to the stations of contemporary English rulers, and reviews in “epitome” the kingships of “Saul, David, Ahab, Jehu, Hezekiah, Manasses, and Josiah” (Skeat et al. 551). (The reign of Ahab notably includes the very violent response to paganism in Israel by the prophet Elijah). Ælfric admitted that he could not of course abridge *all* the episodes of Jewish kings in this homily (18.473-5), but summed up his retinue of exempla by writing:

[B]ut we say in truth, that he who obeys sins
and despises God’s commands, now in the gospel’s age,

⁸² “Gif ðonne þa heafod-menn . . . / his biggencga ne gumað / þonne wile god geswutelian his forsewennysse on him / oððe mid hungre oððe mid cwealme / þæt hī tocnawan magon / þæt se ælmihtiga wealdend wrycð his forsewennysse swā / and hi ðær-to-ecan sceolan on þam oþrum life þrowian / lange oðþe æfre for heora lifes gymeleaste.”

is like the [old] kings who choose idolatry,
and despised their Creator. (18.476-9)⁸³

While Solomon and some of the others were poor examples of living God's truth, Judas Maccabeus was the foremost example deployed by Ælfric of a military leader who fought valiantly in defense of a covenant realm (Judah) from the religious corruption courtesy pagan occupation (Greeks). In one statement Ælfric makes clear the central problem: "[a]nd many [Jews] bowed down to the wicked idol[s]" (25.27).⁸⁴ With the invasion of the Greeks and the infiltration of Hellenic gods and customs, Ælfric writes, Judah was turning from its Abrahamic promises to sure destruction. Not everyone was content to bow idly to the dumb idols, however—members of the powerful Maccabean family rose up and routed their enemies to preserve not only Jewish culture, but more importantly their Yahweh-worshipping religion. Most prominent among these was the aforementioned Judas, his very name a symbol for his patriotic cause, who after taking up arms caused "fear . . . over all the heathen" (25.324), and bravely cried "it is better for us, that we should die in battle / than see this misery upon our kindred thus, / and upon our [holy] sanctuary" (342-4).⁸⁵ In their "zeal" and "[a]gainst all probability" (Wright 40), Judas and his men drove the occupiers away "like beasts to the wood" (25.356), cleansed the temple of heathen idols and sacrifices, and restored the sacred edifice to God (378-82).

There is much Anglo-Saxon-type imagery here, and scholars have noted just how much Ælfric's text resembles the language of *Beowulf* (Halbrooks 263). But more pertinently, his very long historical homily here has a very pointed nationalistic tone. For

⁸³ "[A]c we cweðað to soðum se þe synnum gehyrsumað / and godes beboda forsyhð nu on þæs gospels timan / þæt he bið cynincgum gelic ðe gecuron deofolgild / and heora scyppend forsawon."

⁸⁴ "And manega gebugon to ðam manfullan hæðengilde."

⁸⁵ "[P]e is us selre þæt we swelton on gefeohte / þonne þas yrmðe geseon on urum cynne ðus / and on urum halig-dome." I have added "holy" as an adjective before *country*, which Skeat et al. omit; the word *halig-dome* in the original is telling, and should be rendered "holy country," in my opinion.

instance, Ælfric—in his English adaptation of his Latin sources—notes how “the heathen came against them on all sides, / and desired to overwhelm them, and destroy their holy country” (25.395-6). While the word “country,” translated from Ælfric’s *eard*,⁸⁶ can be taken to mean a region or a house as well as a political entity, there’s no doubt that the Jews (here from Galilee) saw a specific territory as being *their* country, *heora eard*, and that this land which they possessed was threatened. And though “patriotism” in our modern sense is not the most accurate word to suggest this kind of sociocultural feeling, if it does mean a loyalty or adherence to the land of one’s fathers, then it becomes clear that Ælfric is very much emphasizing Judas’s fervor for his landed aristocratic audience.⁸⁷ The Anglo-Saxon lords could be “patriots” for England as much as Judas Maccabeus was a “patriot” for Judah.

The violent content in the legend is more than Ælfric usually writes. In one part, Ælfric includes details of Judas’s campaign across the Levant, a Sherman’s March-like episode of people of all ages and both sexes slain, innocents as well as combatants killed, entire cities razed and burned, and all of it done in the name of God (cf. 25.442-53). John Halbrooks notes that the Maccabean “material is uncharacteristically martial in tone and subject matter, both for Ælfric and for hagiographical texts in general” (265). This coupled with the very pointed Germanic warrior motifs à la *Beowulf* makes for a very unusual and rather “unchristian” narrative. Importantly, Ælfric goes to great lengths to apologize for this militaristic tone. He writes that although Old Testament figures were “permitted to

⁸⁶*The Dictionary of Old English* defines *eard* as a “dwelling-place” (1) or a “country, region, [or] native land” (1a), possibly one “circumscribed” into an official “district” (2a).

⁸⁷ I may be splitting hairs here, but I’m sensitive to the fact that concepts of “nationalism” and “nationhood” did not develop in our modern sense until the colonial era (cf. Moorman 43). In any case, I believe that Ælfric had a sense of both an “England” and a “Christian England” that strongly parallels the concept of patriotic nationalism.

defeat . . . enemies, / and especially the heathen” (25.684-5), and the fact that the scriptural record proved Judas Maccabeus to be “God’s thane” (686), since the coming of Christ men have generally been instructed to make spiritual and not physical warfare against the devil and his agents (688-704). Nevertheless, there is such a thing as “just war,” which he outlines as follows: “*Justum bellum* is just war against the cruel seamen, / or against other peoples that wish to destroy (our) land” (708-9).⁸⁸ Commentators such as Skeat, Lazzari, and Halbrooks have no doubt that Ælfric’s use of the term *ða reðan flot-menn* (float-men) is an explicit reference to the Vikings (see, for example, Halbrooks 282).

This is essential to Ælfric’s hagiographic rhetoric in *Lives of the Saints*. In essence, he indicates that although he privileges spiritual warfare above physical combat, that he recognizes that the latter was and is sometimes necessary when a particular territory (though really its Christian identity) was threatened by heathens. Clergy, monks, and non-conscripted laborers were exempted from this, but the medieval aristocracy was not, and had an explicit duty to protect its tenants, its prelates, and its religion from heathen invaders.

The deployment of a Jewish “saint” too is unique for a Christian hagiographical account, but this again is part of Ælfric’s hagiographic rhetoric, and related to a tradition he inherited from early Christian interpretation of the apocryphal books of the Maccabees (four in total, though only the first two are included in the medieval Biblical canon). The horrifying murder by the pagan Greek leader of an unnamed Jewish mother and her seven sons, just prior to the Maccabean period, for refusing to eat unclean meat, shares a nearly identical pattern with Christian hagiography; the story itself is believed to have set up the

⁸⁸ “*Iustum bellum* is rihtlic gefeoht wið ða reða flot-menn / oþþe wið oðra þeoda þe eard willað fordōn.”

framework for the martyr stories of early Christianity (Halsall). Their martyrdom had a hand in Judas's revolt, and thus the event became known as the martyrdom of the "Holy" Maccabees. While this may be cultural appropriation, to Ælfric it was scriptural truth, and he was confident that some of the early Hebrews and patriarchs would be allowed to live in eternal bliss for their service to God before the coming of Christ (25.739-40).⁸⁹ He drove home the importance of this violent pre-Christian episode by reminding his audience of his overall purpose in including the Maccabean legend, and indeed in his entire collection of homilies:

Oft it is manifested that God protected the people
 against their opponents, if they worshipped him;
 and as often as they bent aside from His worship in any wise,
 then were they put to shame, and greatly punished. (25.806-9)⁹⁰

European Models for Righteous Warfare

As an example of righteous warfare in the name of God, Ælfric deployed other martial figures as well, both from continental Roman history as well as from post-Roman Britain: figures that many English laymen would have recognized. The first chronological warrior-king figure for Ælfric after the coming of Christ was Constantine, whose conversion paved the way for Christ "to rule over all the other Gods of the [Western] world" (Graves 392-3). In the legend of "The Seven Sleepers," Ælfric—using source material dialogue—likens Constantine to a lantern, and calls him "Constantinus, the noble one, and [God's] chosen one, [as] we believe" (23.843-5).⁹¹ In the vita of Saint Apollinaris,

⁸⁹ This was not the case for *all* Jews, just the ones who were prototypically Christian. Ælfric believed in the ultimate salvation of the Jews as a race—"the first shall be last" idea—but recognized that many Jewish souls would be lost in the meantime for their *heard-heortnysse*, or "hardheartedness against the heavenly Savior" (25.527-9). Antisemitism is a common reoccurrence in the works of medieval Christian writers.

⁹⁰ "Oft is geswutelod hu god gescylde þæt folc / wið heora wiper-sacan gif hi wurðodon hine / and swa of swa hi gebugon fram his biggengcum ahwar / þonne wurdon hi gescynde and swyðe gewitnode."

⁹¹ "Constantinus þæs æðelan and þæs we gelyfað leof þines ge-corenan" (811-812).

Ælfric similarly adds a prophecy given by the saint just prior to his martyrdom, in which the Church of Christ is free from persecution:

the emperors [themselves] shall bow . . . to the faith of Christ,
and all heathen worship shall be utterly destroyed,
so that men may freely worship the Almighty God
throughout all the earth” (22.240-2).⁹²

Though Constantine is not named, it’s evident that the saint is referring to the spread of Christianity throughout Europe that began with Constantine. If a king truly serves Christ and puts down pagan worship, then there’s no doubt that God’s faith will wax while heathenism wanes (66).

Oswald, the Perfect English Saint-King

Like his inspirational figure Bede, Ælfric utilized the “preconquest English . . . for their power to unify the nation beneath the authority of the king, since they served as ‘nodes and links in a network which connected royal power to local piety over most of England’” (qtd. in Cohen 45). King Oswald, among the favorite saints of Bede, fit the models of Maccabean and Constantinian kingship well; in *Lives of the Saints*, as in Bede, Ælfric views Oswald not only as pious, beneficent, and wise, but also—and this is key to his theme—unafraid to fight pagan invaders. His holiness is as manifest on the battlefield as much as in his good works and sponsorship of the Northumbrian Church, which also mark him as among the few great holy ones of which early England “could [then] boast” (Bassi 535).

⁹² “[Ð]a caseras bugað to cristes geleafan / and aelc deofolgild bið adilegod mid ealle / swa þæt man freolice mot mærsian þone ælmihtigan god / geonde alne middan-eard.”

Ælfric begins the tale of the young nephew of the saintly King Edwin in Marcan terms with a description of his baptism. Since the Anglo-Saxons in the north, though having enjoyed the *Pax Christiana* of Edwin, had generally fallen from their belief in Christ (26.60-3), Oswald had to sail to Ireland to get the sacrament performed among the still-believing Celts (5).⁹³ Because apostate Northumbria has lost its spiritual protection, the land is soon invaded by the evil Cædwalla (Ceadwalla in the text) and his likewise apostate Britons, who slay Edwin and Edwin's successors and torment the kingdom for two years (9-10). Oswald gathers together a small force and strikes back, and though his numbers are few, "his faith strengthened him, / and Christ helped him to the slaughter of his enemies" (15-16).⁹⁴ Knowing that success depends entirely on God, Oswald rears the large Heavenfield Cross as an emblem of their allegiance (17-9), leading his supporters in prayer in order that

. . . [t]he Almighty . . . will save us
 against the proud enemy who desires to kill us[,] . . .
 [for] God Himself knoweth well that we fight justly
 against this cruel king, to deliver our people. (20-3)⁹⁵

Thus his cause fits the model for saint-kings: Oswald does not fight for his own glory, but *justly* in the name of God and for the protection of his people. Because Oswald fights in this way, the next day's battle brings triumph, and he assumes the kingship of his people, his uncle Edwin's successor in both kingship *and* righteousness. Even the cross itself which he placed on the battlefield takes on Oswald's virtue and becomes a holy relic, healing

⁹³ Note that "Ireland" at this time did not exist in the same form we consider it today; Ælfric refers to it as *scot-lande*, or Scotland, because it was inhabited by the Celtic Scots. These people would only centuries later be considered "Irish," while the Picts in northern Britain would one day become the "Scottish."

⁹⁴ "[A]c hi geleafa hine getrymde / and crist him gefylste to his feonda slege."

⁹⁵ "[P]one þone ælmihtigan . . . he us ahredde / wið þone modigan feond þe us afyllan wile / god sylf wat geare þæt we winnað rihtlice / wið þisne reðan cyning to ahreddene ure leode."

“many infirm men, / and also cattle” (31-2), information which Ælfric cites directly to “Beda,” or Bede (33).⁹⁶

Oswald’s first act as king is reestablish Christianity in the realm, and he petitions his friends in Ireland to send someone who can help his kingdom return to the true faith (26.45-51). They send a devout bishop named Aidan, a future saint himself (280-2), who guides the Northumbrians back to the fold with great success (70-4). Oswald is not idle in the things of God, and through his great munificence and in a zealous but humble manner, donates money to be used for the construction of churches and monasteries throughout the realm (83-6). He is also known for his kindness to the poor (57-9), even sharing his Easter Sunday feast with impoverished beggars, a deed which Aidan prophesies will preserve the king’s right hand from decay, the symbolic hand of his generosity, forever (87-103).

Oswald’s Northumbria becomes so prosperous and righteous that it becomes “greatly enlarged,” even so much that “four other peoples received him as lord[:] / Picts, Britons, Scots, and Angles, / even as Almighty God united them for the purpose / because of Oswald’s merits” (26.104-8).⁹⁷ Not only these nations, but also Wessex, which after the conversion of its King Cynegils, desired to have alliance with Northumbria, a political union which established the influential See of Dorchester (119-36). This unity of the disparate Anglo-Saxon nations, so often at war with one another and with Celtic and Britannic groups, is no mean feat, and comes directly, Ælfric believes, from their (and especially Oswald’s) adherence to Christ, the instrument of any national atonement.

⁹⁶ “[A]nd wurdon fela gehælde / untrumra manna and eac swilce nytena / . . . swa us rehte beda.”

⁹⁷ “Oswoldes cynerice wearð gerymed þa swyðe / swa þæt feower þeoda hine underfengon to hlaforde[:] / peohtas [Picts] and bryttas [Britons][,] Scottas and angle / swa swa se ælmihtiga god hi geanlæhte to ðam / for oswoldes ge-earnungum þe hingum æfre wurðode.”

None of these successes make Oswald proud and despotic, though, which is another key point. Despite all of his riches, lands, and influence, Ælfric notes that Oswald “little loved” the “transitory dignities in the world,” and cared more about building “the heavenly kingdom” than expanding his own (26.111-3).⁹⁸ His piety is also to be admired, Ælfric believes, especially for a king. He relates that Oswald

would very often pray after matins,
and stand in the church apart in prayer
from the time of sun-rise with great fervour;
and wheresoever he was he ever worshipped God
with the palms of his hands uplifted heavenward. (114-8)⁹⁹

He remained pious, humble, and great, even to his death at age thirty-eight, which came at the hands of Penda and his army of Mercians. Mercia was generally Christian at this time, but Penda’s particular tribe seems to have been among the last pagan holdouts on the island (26.147-54). Oswald was slain and his army fell, but his saintliness still had a part to play. Penda had ordered Oswald’s head and right arm to be chopped-off and displayed on the battlefield as tokens of his great victory, but these relics were taken by Oswald’s brother Oswy, his successor, back to Northumbria and preserved for their sanctity (162-8). By a roundabout way, these holy objects ended up at a monastery in Mercia, and as a result of the miracles and healings that they caused, participated in the increase of faithfulness in that nation.¹⁰⁰ Not only that, but a further witness was given of Oswald’s holiness: the hand attached to the dismembered right arm retained its wholeness just as Bishop Aidan had prophesied (169-71).

⁹⁸ “[H]e swanc for heofonan rice mid singalum gebedum / swiþor þonne he hogode hu he geheolde on worulde / þa hwilwendlican gebincþu þe he hwonlice lufode.”

⁹⁹ “He wolde æfter uhtsange oftost hine gebiddan / and on cyrcan standan on syndrigum gebedum / of sunnam upgange mid swyðlicre onbryrdnyse / and swa hwaær swa he wæs he wurþode æfre god.”

¹⁰⁰ The ground on which Oswald fell at Heavenfield also became a place of miracles (26.200-3).

It would be a stretch to say that Oswald alone was responsible for paving the way for the unification of Anglo-Saxon England under Ælfric in the eighth century or to the Heptarchy in the early 900s. But Oswald's story coupled with the general acceptance of Christianity throughout the land "proved to be a resilient symbol in later centuries when Christian English kings contended with heathen Viking invaders" (Fiorentino); in other words, it serves as a *hagiographic narrative* that helps establish the rhetoric for English Christian solidarity. Both Bede and Ælfric, based on the attention they give and adulation they heap upon him, adored Oswald, and felt him to be an essential piece in the establishment of their land and the preservation of the Church they then enjoyed in the eighth and tenth centuries, respectively. And it's this political and spiritual inheritance that Ælfric wants to preserve in his own day, filled with "Caedwallas" and "Pendas" of its own. For him, England needs if not *an* Oswald, then *several* Oswalds, who are willing to fight as nobly and live as righteously as he did.

It's important to note that Oswald's classification for holiness can justifiably be accredited in part to his feats on the battlefield, which would not be the case for a monk or cleric. Loredana Lazzari calls this trope "the sanctification of war" (35), which found its roots, as I have noted, in Old Testament prophet-king archetypes. Ælfric, like Bede and other Anglo-Saxon hagiographers, typified "royal holiness" or "the holiness of the warrior-king" through a blend of "the Germanic ideal of the king endowed with divine powers with that of the Christian holy king. This model was different from that of the warrior-king who abdicated and became a monk." This "synthesis of the relationship between holiness and military activity," Lazzari continues, allowed Ælfric et al. to engage in a justifiably righteous hagiographic tradition "whereby it was possible to achieve holiness without

rejecting the violence of war *if* this was directed towards protecting the Christian faith” (35, emphasis added).

This again concurs with what I have written about the Judaic tradition which Ælfric expounds in his homily on the Maccabees, but transfers it to a very conspicuous Christian context, one meant as instruction for his living audiences. Ælfric, paraphrasing Bede, pointedly asserts that there’s no need to wonder about Oswald’s sainthood, or whether such a “holy king / should heal sickness” from beyond the grave, “now that he liveth in heaven, / because he desired to help when he was here on earth, / the poor and weak” (272-6).¹⁰¹ His legend as originally reconstructed by Bede has also passed into distant lands as far as Germany because of his good deeds (239-40),¹⁰² unifying the Christian faithful not only in England but throughout the world by his kingly and saintly example. England needs such lords, as does its Church.

King Edgar: A Closer Contemporaneous Example

Producing such a king was not so impossible a task in Ælfric’s day. He reminded his audience that within his own life, some forty or fifty years prior to this writing, that England had enjoyed the fruits of the reign of King Edgar (Eadgar), whose influential patronage “furthered Christianity, and built many monasteries” in such a manner that his kingdom achieved long-lasting peace, so much so that “no [invasion] fleet was ever heard of” from foreign lands. On top of that, his kingly clout led eight Welsh and Scottish kings

¹⁰¹ “[H]it nan wundor nys þæt se halga cynincg / untrumnyse gehæle nu he on heofonum leofað / for ðan þe he wolde gehelpa þa þa her on life wæs / þearfum and wannhalum[.]”

¹⁰² Bassi adds that the Oswald legend also found its way to Switzerland and Norway, and even also into an Icelandic Christian saga, adapted and modified by the different cultural traditions and for various rhetorical purposes (536).

to visit Edgar and submit themselves to his protection (22.445-53).¹⁰³ Although Edgar is not the focus of this homily—the subject of the treatise is Saint Swithun, whose bones Edgar rightfully enshrined during his reign, and Ælfric spends as many lines reverencing the recently deceased bishops Dunstan and Æthelwold as he does the young English monarch—the fact that he departs from Swithun to mention the saint’s efficacy as manifested through Edgar is telling. Clearly, the flourishing of Christianity and England during this period could be in part attributable to Edgar’s uprightness.

This is a unique move on Ælfric’s part, to uphold a recent monarch’s reign as an example of strong Christian kingship. This may have as much to do with Edgar’s sponsorship of the Benedictine monastic reform, including his cancellation of a previously nominated archbishop to the Canterbury See in favor of the retrenching Dunstan,¹⁰⁴ as well as an older man’s misty-eyed reminiscences of better days gone by, a theme also reflected in his earlier quotation of the covenants of Leviticus tied into his memory of “how well it [then] fared for us” in former times (13.147).¹⁰⁵ But the fact that he does devote a few lines to a recent king along with a very clear reference to the Vikings and their “fleets” suggests that Ælfric had hope in a righteous king’s ability to facilitate, to some degree, a *pax Christiana*. He could remember it happening! And if a king, then why not some other lord, too?

¹⁰³ “[W]e secgað to soðan þæt se tima wæs gesælig / and wynsum on angel-cynne þaða eadgar cynincg / þone cristen-dom ge-fyrðrode and fela munuclifa arærde / and his cynerice wæs wunigende on sibbe / swa þæt man ne gehyrde gif ænig scyp-here wære / but agenre leode þe ðis land heoldon / and ealle ða cyningas þe on þysum iglande wæron / cumera and scotta comon to eadgare / whilon anes dæges eahta cyningas / and hi ealle gebugon to eadgares wissunge” (21.444-53).

¹⁰⁴ For a further history of Edgar and Dunstan and their roles in the 10th-Century Benedictine Reform, see M. A. Locherbie-Cameron’s article in the *Reader’s Guide to British History*. Note too that Ælfric calls both Dunstan and Dunstan’s contemporary Æthelwold *wurð-fulle bisceopas*, “worthy bishops,” to suggest his admiration for their reforms (21.457).

¹⁰⁵ “Wel we magon geðencon hu wel hit ferde mid us.”

Edmund the Holy: A Martyr, Not a Fighter—A Contradiction?

King Edmund (Eadmund) represents a different kind of kingship entirely: one dependent on Christ, of course, but also one that involves no battling. Even under favorable Christian kingship, it seems, sometimes invaders still create destruction, just as the pagans did to some extent at the end of the rule of Oswald. Edmund's *vitae* stands among the most well-known English saint-tales, but unlike the likewise popular tale of Oswald, shows a king who surrenders to his Viking enemies but whose martyrdom and the miracles associated with his relics still led to profound Christian conversion throughout England. In other words, Ælfric deploys Edmund's legend to suggest that even when defeat is imminent, or if a Christian king is somehow prevented from fighting, his devotion to God can yet have powerful effects despite the losses. This is the rhetoric of martyrdom, that death in the name of Christ brings yet further glories, not only for the martyred, but for his (or her) adherents, too.

Edmund was such a martyr. King of East Anglia for four years, Ælfric notes that Edmund's reign was characterized by his avoidance of sin and circumspect holy lifestyle, as well as his sincere humility (32.13-19) and caretaking of his poor subjects (22-23). (Ælfric adds a hasty aside at this part, encouraging those of his audience who hold power, to be like Edmund in that "if you are made a chief man, exalt not yourself, / but be among men as one of them" [20-21]).¹⁰⁶ During his brief reign in the mid-800's the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms are invaded by Danes, who arrive with their "fleet" and began "harrying and slaying / widely over the land, as their custom is" (27-28)¹⁰⁷—a practice Ælfric probably

¹⁰⁶ "[G]if þu eart to heofod-men ge-set ne ahefe þu ðe / ac beo betwux mannum swa swa an man of him."

¹⁰⁷ "[P]a deniscan leode / ferdon mid scip-here hergiende and sleande / wide geond land swa swa heora gewuna is."

witnessed or had at least heard about during his lifetime. Their leaders are Hingwar (Hinguar or Ingwar / Inguar) and Hubba, bloodthirsty, destructive pagan brothers whom Ælfric characterizes as *geanlæhte þurh deofol*, “associated with the devil” (30),¹⁰⁸ who “wasted the land and slew the people” (32).¹⁰⁹

Hingwar particularly is loathsome to the Christians: he comes down to East Anglia *swa swa wulf*, “like a wolf” (32.39), killing and torturing people of both sexes and all ages (33-42). Boasting of his conquests of many peoples, he then demands that Edmund surrender his kingdom and serve as Hingwar’s own thane. This Edmund flatly refuses, for he will not bow to such a barbaric and heathen ruler unless Hingwar himself “first bow[s], in this land, to Jesus Christ with faith” (91-93).¹¹⁰ An enraged Hingwar sends warriors with the single mission to find and capture Edmund, who in the manner of Christ and to save his people from further destruction, offers himself as a lamb freely to the lupine desires of the pagan leader, even casting aside his weapons as Christ had commanded Peter to do in the Garden of Gethsemane (98-105).

His enemies bind him, torture him, and tie him to a tree—the Christian motif recurring yet again—where they riddle his bodies with spears and arrows, which Ælfric describes as then seeming like *igles byrsta*, “porcupine’s bristles,” in the same manner as the pagans in Rome had pierced Saint Sebastian.¹¹¹ While the dying king calls out to Christ

¹⁰⁸ Skeat et al. translate *þurh* as “by,” although I prefer the more contextually accurate “with.” This association is a much more tame description by Ælfric than his source, Abbo of Fleury, who called Hingwar and Hubba “‘hardened with the stiff frost of their own wickedness,’ straight from the roof of hell” (qtd. in Mills 37).

¹⁰⁹ “[A]weston þæt land and þa leoda ofslogon.”

¹¹⁰ “[N]æfre eadmund hinwgear on life / hæpenum here-togan buton he to hælende crist / ærest mid geleafan on þysum lande gebuge.”

¹¹¹ The term Ælfric uses in describing Saint Sebastian’s martyrdom is nearly identical: *iles byrsta* (5.248). Though Skeat et al. translate Sebastian’s bristles as “hedgehog” and Edmund’s as “porcupine,” there is no significant difference between the two root words *igles* and *iles* and both could be translated uniformly with accuracy. Bosworth-Toller (“igil”) suggests that the word could also be used to describe a sea urchin.

(32.123-6), the heathen soldiers chop off his head and pitch it into thick brambles so that Edmund's subjects would be unable to give him a proper burial. The East Anglian Christians, however, conduct a prayerful search for it, and find it under the protection of, interestingly, a wolf, which had been appointed by God to protect it from other wild creatures. Not only that, but the head itself had been calling out to the searchers so they could locate it despite being violently detached from the body (133-63).

This is the beginning of miracles involving Edmund's relics, which Ælfric makes apparent that God had miraculously preserved to offer more miracles to the faithful and to increase devotion to Christ through them. Once found, Edmund's mangled body and head are buried in "haste" (32.166); a few years later, however, when the Danes have been "checked" by the prominent Anglo-Saxon kings Æthelred and Alfred ("Ashdown"), the people give him a more fitting burial and are surprised to discover that Edmund's head and body have reattached with only a single red line, like a necklace, to denote the severance. The arrow-wounds too have healed, and his body overall has endured no decomposition whatever, a state which continues for decades and requires frequent nail-clippings and hair-trimmings to keep pristine; the products of such grooming become holy relics, too (32.164-97).

The virtue from Edmund's body emanates to his petitioners who experience new wholeness of both body and spirit as a result of their prayers and pilgrimages to his shrine in Beodricsworth, which due to the popularity of the shrine becomes Bury St. Edmunds—among the most popular holy sites in England until its destruction by the agents of Henry VIII in the sixteenth century (Lazzari 64-5). Ælfric extols the virtues of the shrine, popular in his day yet not as popular as it would become in centuries following, and uses the

opportunity to display some patriotism: “The English nation is not deprived of the Lord’s saints,” he writes, “since in English lands lie such saints / as this holy king,” among others (32.259-61).¹¹² A land with such a Christian legacy, he intimates, is worth preserving.

It’s not clear how long the miraculous preservation of Edmund’s body is supposed to have lasted, but its metaphorical power is obvious during the time of Ælfric, who along with his sources notes that the preservation symbolizes the resurrection, in which the bodies of the dead are raised from corruption in a similar manner to Edmund’s— though with a little more vitality than perpetually growing hair and nails (32.250-4). In any case, Edmund represents a rhetorical contrast to the other saint-kings Ælfric deals with. Unlike Oswald and other monarchs, Edmund receives no adulation for his battle prowess.¹¹³ His power as a saint comes from his spiritual wholeness: he never denies Christ, and refuses to become subservient to a heathen king. His power is also derived from his willingness to die in behalf of his people, a sanctifying self-sacrifice akin to that of the Lord Himself. Naturally, Ælfric seems to suggest, if a king can preserve his land from pagans by force of arms, then more power (godly power) to them. But if he is unable to do this, then he can still call down the power of Christ through falling on his faith rather than falling by the sword.

¹¹² “Nis angel-cynn bedæled drihtnes halgena / þonne on engla-lande licgaþ swilce halgan / swylce þæs halga cyning is[.]”

¹¹³ Indeed, Edmund did fight the Danes unsuccessfully before turning himself in. In this he was also owning up to his own mistake of having originally allowed the Danes to cross through East Anglia on their way to battle other kingdoms under a non-aggression pact; he even provided them with horses (“Ashdown”). Edmund only second-guessed himself when Hingwar’s intentions became fully known. This adds another dimension to Edmund’s willingness to die for his people, as a sort of atonement for his own political blunder. Ælfric was either unaware of this point or perhaps omitted it from his hagiographical narrative to shore-up the saint’s legacy.

Conclusion: The Significance of Ælfric's Hagiographic Rhetoric

Kings, virgins, monks, nuns—men and women from each of the three estates and all of life's walks have a part to play in furthering the cause of Christ, especially when it is threatened by the devil's forces. Ælfric, far from seeing the pressures on the English people at the turn of the new millennium as solely the responsibility of the nobility or even his own churchmen, viewed the problem holistically: anyone, perhaps everyone, could turn away the Viking tide. There were precedents—this was not England's first battle with pagans, nor Christianity's first assault by the devil. And though the *exempla* were all saints and thus a few cuts above the ordinary, there was nothing extraordinary about their firmness in faith. Ælfric's belief, then, that his homilies could influence his countrymen, is answered by the dedication he gave his work and the "tediousness" by which he completed it:¹¹⁴ *The Lives of the Saints* serving as a manual of sorts for how to resist the current threat to Christian England. He writes:

A certain prophet cried by the Holy Ghost, and said, . . . "wonderful in God is his saints; He shall give power and strength unto His people; blessed is God." We . . . describe many wonders in this book, because God is wonderful in His saints . . . and the miracles of His Saints glorify Him, because He wrought them by their means. (0.52-8)¹¹⁵

And further, in verse:

They [the saints] are innumerable, as befits God;
but we desire to write this book concerning some of them,
for the encouragement of other men and *for our own security*,
that they may intercede for us with Almighty God,

¹¹⁴ Ælfric's own word is the Latin *superfluous*, superfluous, which he worries his fellow monks may consider his work to be (0.33-4), but which detail and scrupulosity in fact characterizes his compilation and well-serves his rhetorical purpose (see Hill for Ælfric's scrupulous attitude against apocryphal material [6-7], and Lazzari's notes on his caution about miracles "to ensure that they are confirmed by an authoritative source" [58]).

¹¹⁵ "Sum witega clypode þure þone halgan gast and cwæð . . . / Wundorlic is god on his halgum / he sylf forgifð mihte and strengðe his folce gebletsod is he god. We awritað fela wundra on þissere bec forþan þe god is wundorlic / on his halgum . . . and his halgena wundra / wurðiað hine forþan þe he worhte þa wundra þurh hi."

even as we on earth make known their mighty miracles.
(0.69-73, emphasis added)¹¹⁶

His use of the word *mundian* (“munde”), translated by Skeat et al. as “security” but also referring to “protection,” has double significance for the preservation of his own soul as well as the preservation of the land and religion to which he belongs.

His concerns about the Viking invasion were real and prophetic: the Vikings *did* conquer all of England, where they already had a significant foothold, by the year 1016 under the Danish-Norwegian King, Cnut the Great, only a handful of years after Ælfric’s death (Moorman 5.2). But Ælfric, if he had lived, could have taken some solace in the fact that these Danes were Christians, and not the pagans of Hingwar and Hubba (Ælfric’s Edmund was willing to bow to a *Christian* conqueror, though not a pagan one).¹¹⁷ William of Normandy too solidified Christianity in the land, treating his 1066 invasion in part as a crusade to restore strong Church influence to England that had waned under the supposedly inept Edward the Confessor; Moorman notes that many Church authorities were eager to receive William and his reforming, continental influence (5.3). Since that time England has remained institutionally Christian, though, to say the least, in a much different form from that of Ælfric’s day.

Ælfric’s impact on Anglo-Saxon devotional literature is difficult to under- estimate, as the preservation of so many of his works and the dating of the extant copies, some made 200 years after his death, “attests” to his profound influence on the religious discourse of

¹¹⁶ “Hi synd ungeryme swa swa hit gerisð gode / ac we woldon gesettan be sumum þas boc / mannum to getrymme and to munde us sylfum / þæt hi us þingion to þam ælmihtigan gode / swa swa we on worulde heora wundra cyðað.”

¹¹⁷ Some historians have argued too that one of the reasons why Cnut was more or less accepted as the English overlord is because he agreed to support the interests of the Church (Moorman 5.2). His actual legacy as a Christian king is much more complicated and lends some evidence to support the idea that he was only “Christian” in a political sense (McLean). It’s important to note too that the Christianization of the Vikings was not “complete,” in some sense of the word, until the twelfth century (“Vikings”).

the inter-millennial years (“Ælfric”). Not only that, he made important contributions to the emerging political identity of England. Whereas a common “language, the Roman Church, and monastic institutions [had] lent these [Anglo-Saxon] kingdoms a certain cultural identity, . . . a political identity began to emerge only . . . in response to the Danish invasion” (Donoghue 1). I add that Ælfric played a part in this English national identity-building, just as Bede had done centuries before, by deploying the legacies of the saints through hagiographic rhetoric in his homilies—and not just for one demographic, but for the whole gamut of society who had ears to hear and apply his retellings of some of Christianity’s most important saints.

Chapter 2: Hagiographic Rhetoric in Thomas of Monmouth's

The Life and Passion of William of Norwich

Much has been written about the rampant antisemitic rhetoric of Thomas of Monmouth in his twelfth-century work, *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, the account of a twelve-year-old boy martyred, as the story goes, by conspiring Jews attacking Christianity itself through their young victim. Clearly, one of Thomas's purposes in this text—a collection of seven books written in installments over some fifteen years—was to characterize the Jews as enemies of Christendom, an international terrorist network (though he of course did not call it that) bent on punishing Christians for seizing their homeland and abusing them for a millennium. Despite his notoriously patchwork evidence¹¹⁸ and a good measure of “forgery and invention” (Rubin xii), he seems to have been successful in this; many historians and scholars see the folklore surrounding his castigation of Jews as the genesis of later antisemitic hagiographies that spread throughout England and the Continent through the appropriation of his narrative motifs.¹¹⁹

But his polemical antisemitism, though significant, makes up only a portion of the monk's collected work. And though Thomas uses the murder-by-Jews as one of the pillars of evidence in propagating his belief that the boy William was indeed a saint rife with Christological topoi, it is not the only nor even the primary grounds upon which he supports his argument, nor is blaming the Jews his primary goal.¹²⁰ While scholars have paid great attention to this aspect, and not undeservedly so, to truly understand Thomas of

¹¹⁸ Bennett believes that some episodes of Thomas's work belie “a narrative cobbled together from bits and pieces of rumour and hearsay” (“Towards a Revaluation” 132).

¹¹⁹ See in particular Emily Rose's exhaustive treatment of the subject in *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of Blood Libel in Medieval Europe* (2015).

¹²⁰ Rose notes: “The motivation to promote him [William] did not come from a single individual, nor was it a spontaneous outpouring of Christian fear of Jews” (123).

Monmouth's motivations we must look deeper into his particular historical and hagiographical contexts.

Thomas of Monmouth was a member of a relatively new religious community in Norwich, a priory of Benedictine monks attached to a recently completed cathedral. For some sixty years before his transfer to the priory in 1149, Norwich Diocese had struggled to get itself off the ground both financially and spiritually. Even though medieval Norwich was England's second city with a "booming" economic sector, its church network was not extraordinary. It had a bishop, a cathedral, and a large priory to boot, but still largely failed to create a significant spiritual ethos. And compared to the relatively near Abbey at Bury St. Edmunds—the East Anglian Christian mecca—Norwich Priory was little more than an ecclesiastical backwater. Unlike the abbey, Norwich had no saint's relics, and therefore lacked an "immediate" presence to attract devotion (Rubin xxvii).

Norwich's religious leaders had for decades been trying to rectify this problem, particularly for financial concerns—devotional cachet encouraged pilgrims, who brought money, and land endowments, which brought income—but also for spiritual disquietude. How could a substantial religious precinct more effectively increase piety in its parishioners and reduce the onslaught of sin if it carried little weight on the ecclesiastical stage?¹²¹ The answer did not come until the body of the young William was discovered buried in Thorpe Wood during Eastertide 1144, and more consequentially, the arrival of the boy's soon-to-be sacristan, Thomas of Monmouth, five years later.

¹²¹ Rose adds: "The possession of a [holy] body . . . was the basis of institutional patronage and was a primary source of significant social power in this period. A divine patron could defend property, encourage bequests and donations, draw attention to the community's strengths, and serve as a figurehead for a building campaign that in turn could spur other kinds of development, both religious and commercial" (94).

Thomas, encouraged by his bishop and his own witness of the dead boy's miracles, penned William's vita for the express purpose of increasing devotion to the saint and, by extension, increasing Norwich's spiritual prominence. All other purposes, including an increase in general piety and advancing an antisemitic platform, were secondary to these twin objectives. Norwich needed a substantial link to the divine through a saint's relics, and Thomas, with the support of his bishop and fellow monks, both created and rhetorically deployed the legend of Saint William to establish that ethos and effectively put Norwich Cathedral and its priory on the spiritual map; a project, as will be shown, that had some measure of success during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, though it afterwards diminished.

Throughout this chapter, I will examine Thomas of Monmouth's hagiographic rhetoric in *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich* by analyzing the following: (1) the historical and hagiographical context of Norwich in the first half of the twelfth century, particularly in comparison to Bury St. Edmunds; (2) the effect of the boy William's death on the public mindset; (3) the effect of Thomas of Monmouth's arrival in Norwich and his unshakeable belief in the boy's sainthood; (4) the effect of Thomas's writings on the advancement of the cult; and (5) the elevation of Norwich and its priory as a viable claimant to East Anglian spiritual prominence. These analyses will further substantiate my overarching claim that saint-tales were used by medieval writers for reasons beyond simply promoting piety, and in the case of this work, beyond fomenting antisemitic sentiments.

Norwich Cathedral & Priory in the Twelfth Century

Herbert de Losinga acceded to the see of Elmham and Thetford through simony (Virgoe 342). He purchased the bishopric—and a monastic office for his father—from William II in 1090 for a thousand pounds (Wollaston 23), and throughout his nearly thirty-year reign, frequently sought atonement for his sin (Dodwell, “Herbert” 43). His expiation of choice: enhancing the prestige of his diocese by constructing new sacred edifices as well as securing funds for the maintenance of his flock. Herbert made two significant decisions in particular that forever altered the spiritual ethos of Norwich, the largest town of his diocese: first by transferring the episcopal throne to Norwich, and second by building a massive cathedral in the city, which stands to this day. Moving the see was a natural, self-evident decision: while the villages of North Elmham and Thetford were dwindling (Dodwell, “Herbert” 36), Norwich was developing into a “booming” port city of some ten thousand people (Campbell 19). Herbert could more effectively represent the interests of the growing diocese from there than elsewhere in Norfolk. The second decision the bishop made, however—the cathedral-building—came at a greater financial and cultural cost, and was relatively unpopular.

Cathedrals were (and are) massive undertakings, requiring intensive labor, supplies, and funds to complete, not to mention space. A “densely populated” area of Norwich was cleared-out to make room for Herbert’s larger-than-average cathedral, disrupting established road systems and forcing hundreds of residents to move elsewhere (Cohen 37).¹²² But the problem was also ethnic: the Normans had controlled England and its

¹²² Dodwell writes: “Whether or not Herbert Losinga built [it] as an act of penance, he had grandiose ideas. He built a cathedral which was large even by the standards of his day, and established a priory which in size and numbers could bear comparison with the older monastic cathedrals” (“The Foundation” 18).

churches for some thirty years by Herbert's time, slowly diminishing the roles and influence of the Anglo-Scandinavian inhabitants.¹²³ Some English residents of Norwich resented the new cathedral as yet another elephantine imposition on their lives by the invader-elite, alongside the other new stone edifice in town, Norwich Castle. These twin "stone monument[s] to the conquest's permanence" were further signs that Norman influence was taking over at the expense of the English (38).¹²⁴

In addition to the cathedral, Herbert also called for an attached monastic priory that would see to its operations and sanctity. This too was an innovative and ambitious goal. Rarely at this period were cathedrals staffed by Benedictine monks (Dodwell, "The Foundation" 11). Rarely too would a cathedral priory be staffed by more than twenty or thirty brothers—Herbert's endowment called for sixty (Virgoe 342).¹²⁵ These moves aroused suspicion among the Norwich divines, not the least of which involved Herbert's motivations—he whose name was conspicuously inscribed on the foundation stone, which the bishop laid with his own hands (Wollaston 26). But part of the English churchmen's concern again was ethnic: the monks would be taken from both Norman and English populations, but the leaders of the priory and the cathedral, the sacrists, priors, and bishops, would as a rule be Norman (Cohen 37). Sexual politics were involved as well: many English parish priests were married, while the Norman transplants strictly adhered to

¹²³ While "Saxon" has been the term to describe the pre-conquest English, a more accurate term is *Anglo-Scandinavian*, which accounts for the fusion of Danish and Anglo-Saxon ancestry into "English" identity. In the thirteenth century, "Englishness" would also eventually accommodate Norman blood. See Cohen, who calls this ethnic convergence in English history as a classic example of "postcoloniality" (29).

¹²⁴ Cohen elaborates this point: "The English of Anglo-Scandinavian descent in the Vita are comparatively poorer and of lower social status. They do not live in the Norman-created urban center; they do not have the same access to structures of ecclesiastical and civic power, especially cathedral and castle; and in general they do not appear to speak either the prestige language of the wealthiest members of the city or (except perhaps for the priests) the official language of church and government administration" (Cohen 50).

¹²⁵ Cathedral priories themselves were a peculiarly English institution, "where the cathedral of a diocese was manned not by secular clerks [the clergy] but by professed monks" (Moorman 4.4).

Benedictine celibacy (51). In this tense milieu, Herbert, himself a Norman, seems to have had little support for his extensive initiatives outside members of the ruling class.¹²⁶

To put it in modern terms, Norwich Cathedral came into being with a massive public relations problem, and only saintly intervention could improve it. The Abbey at Bury St. Edmunds, Norwich's southwesterly neighbor, had a profound hagiographical ethos thanks to the well-marketed and well-attended shrine of its saintly Anglo-Saxon king. The Abbey, though nominally a part of the Norwich Diocese, enjoyed a good deal of autonomy in addition to its substantial wealth and prestige (Wollaston 29), a fact that somewhat irked Herbert when he considered the "relative paucity" of the rest of his jurisdiction (Harper-Bill 302). Norwich Cathedral, which for Herbert could not get built fast enough,¹²⁷ was unable to compete with the longstanding legends and traditions associated with Bury St. Edmunds (Dodwell, "The Foundation" 17), which provided pilgrims with the immediate presence of a well-known saint.¹²⁸ The cathedral, which added to a preexisting church, was "dedicated to the Holy Trinity, but this concept (impossible to associate with relics) lacked the immediacy and the benevolent agency of a holy person; as a result, the cathedral paled in comparison to its neighbour" (Rubin xxvii).¹²⁹

At least two of the priory's monks understood this and asked Herbert to do something about it. The priory, though it probably never reached its full capacity of sixty,¹³⁰

¹²⁶ King Henry I, one of Herbert's benefactors, supported the cathedral (Cohen 37, n. 48).

¹²⁷ Herbert upbraided the monks of the Norwich Priory for their lack of energy in hastening the work on the cathedral (Dodwell, "The Foundation" 9; Wollaston 31-3).

¹²⁸ Herbert had actually tried to move his episcopal seat to Bury St. Edmunds after abandoning Thetford, again probably due to the shrine's popularity and prestige (Rose 95).

¹²⁹ Rose gives a more complete background for the significance of such an important city being without a patron saint. Norwich, she writes, "had a cathedral, a castle, a market, an ancient heritage, and a diverse and growing economy. What it lacked was a patron saint. The cathedral was dedicated to the Holy Trinity and boasted [some] relics . . . but it was not the final resting place, the eternal home, of a single holy individual. For it was a city's possession of a saint's body that linked it indissolubly to that saint" (93).

¹³⁰ Dodwell also notes that unlike other cathedral-founding bishops, who "were content with fewer than two dozen" monks at their priories, "Herbert aimed at an establishment of sixty so that the new foundation would

commenced ca. 1100 (Dodwell, “The Foundation” 11). This was some forty years before the cathedral’s completion, though regular services continued in the preexisting Trinity church. The monks were first headed by William de Turbe (or Turba), a young Norman (Atherton, et al. 760). He and another monk, a man named Elias, “urge[d]” Bishop Herbert “to strive and procure . . . some venerable relics of the saints, for the honour of their church.” Herbert, however, realized that the massive financial undertakings of the cathedral and its priory needed greater security, and he responded to the monks that he “would not seek those [relics] just then, but rather lands and incomes” (Thomas of Monmouth 77).

Estate holdings and the income they provided were essential for the maintenance of any church, and throughout his episcopal tenure, Herbert devoted himself to bringing as many resource-yielding fields and forests, tithe-paying churches, license-paying priests, and rent-paying tenants as possible under the auspices of the diocese (Virgoe 341-2).¹³¹ Herbert recognized the need for a greater saintly attraction to their developing precinct, including relics—of which the cathedral had some (Rose 93)—but prudently understood that there would be no devotion if there was no church, and there would be no church if there was no money for its construction and upkeep. As such, he told the monks to wait patiently,

because after a certain period of time, by the working of divine grace, it would soon happen that they would have so many and such venerable relics that the church of

be on par with the older cathedral priories” in the country (“The Foundation” 12). Jessopp and James, however, believe the number of monks never exceeded fifty and was more likely forty (xix).

¹³¹ Herbert had great concern for the stability of the fledgling priory and cathedral. He recognized particularly that grants given to the diocese from kings or other benefactors (who often devoted land to the church in their wills for the benefit of their souls) would be short-lived if not sustained from other “episcopal revenues” (Virgoe 342). Dodwell adds that “the bishop was not wealthy,” and that without purchasing additional lands “would have seriously depleted his demesne had he not” sought expansion (“The Foundation” 13). This suggests that his purchases were made out of practicality and foresight, not greed, though admittedly his simony and grandiosity make this idea problematic; indeed, such charges followed him throughout his bishopric (Rose 95).

Norwich would be much exalted and become famous in the whole of England and [even] venerated in foreign parts. (Thomas of Monmouth 77)

Herbert's prophecy would find its fulfillment in the relics of a local twelve-year-old Norwich boy named William.

The Impact of William's Death & Burial on the Norwich Community

Shortly after the cathedral's completion, Norwich was the scene of a dramatic murder. Some of the locals had claimed that a twelve-year-old boy, a tanner's apprentice named William, had been seized by members of Norwich's Jewish community and killed during Passover in the year 1144, which at that time also coincided with Easter. The boy's mutilated body had been discovered in Thorpe Wood; his close family members from the start had informally blamed the Jews, and the boy's uncle, a parish priest named Godwin Sturt, had formally accused them at an episcopal synod later that spring. "I come forth to announce an affront recently committed against all Christians," he is supposed to have said in the presence of Bishop Eborard, Herbert's successor, and other priests and monks from the region. Sturt announced that the boy had been killed and discovered during Holy Week, and added that he found all Christians blameless for "so execrable a killing," and that he further "accuse[d] the Jews, enemies of the Christian name, as guilty in this matter, spillers of innocent blood" (Thomas of Monmouth 31).

His reasons for blaming the Jews have been debated by historians, although there is a consensus that the principal motive was ethnic: not only were Jews relative newcomers to England, immigrants brought from France by the Norman elite to "bankroll" lordly programs (Bennett, "Towards a Revaluation" 124), they were also easy scapegoats, the *other*, "eternal outsiders whose very existence pose[d] a bodily threat to Christians" (Cohen

48) and who seemed “disturbingly uninterested in or incapable of the assimilation in to Englishness” (53). The true cause of the boy’s death will never be known—and some have suggested the death may have been accidental, or even committed, purposefully or accidentally, by members of his family—but the accusation stuck, and it soon became common belief that the boy had been killed by Jewish hands.

One of the monks attending the synod, Aimar, Prior of Saint Pancras at Lewes in Sussex, saw hagiographic possibilities in this death. If the boy had indeed been killed during Easter by *Jews*, of all people, a strong case could be made linking the boy and Christ. Any “child martyr” would have been “a good catch” for a church, attracting pilgrims, offerings, and prestige—but one so explicitly similar to Christ? That had serious potential (Bennett, “Towards a Revaluation” 129). As such, Aimar approached Eborard after the synod and craved the boy’s body for reburial at Lewes. The bishop was not an enthusiast for the boy’s sanctity, but “impressed” as he was by the story, saw, like Aimar, opportunity for the spiritual ethos of the newly finished Norwich Cathedral. Eborard refused Aimar, and instructed instead that the boy’s body should be buried outside the cathedral in “the monk’s cemetery, whence, if further developments should take place, there might be an easy step to greater dignity” for both the boy and the edifice (Jessopp and James lxx).

This was carried out. The boy’s body was removed from a hasty and shallow burial in Thorpe Wood, reverently cleaned, kept on a bier in front of an altar so “crowd[s] of people would pay devotion,” and then solemnly buried (Thomas of Monmouth 36). Those who had cleaned the body later recalled that they had seen “sure and public signs of martyrdom in him,” including “thorn pricks” and wounds on his “palms, feet, and side” (37). Christ-like indeed. The burial was supposedly attended by “thousands of people”—

probably an exaggeration—who no matter their “lifestyle or sex,” or *ethnicity*, we could add, “were nevertheless all one as they watched.”¹³² Some later recounted “a sweetness of fragrance” coming from the coffin, another sure sign of sanctity (38).

Not all was reverential accord in Norwich Priory, however. The monks were divided into two parties on the question of young William’s saintliness, and whether or not their priory should support the development of a cult. The camp in favor of saintliness was headed by the long-serving Prior William de Turbe, who “welcomed the cult as a timely addition to the cathedral’s lore and a means of strengthening its claim to be at the head of Christian life in East Anglia” (Rubin xvii). There may also have been some feeling in this group that the boy would help bring solidarity to the ethnicity-divided region (Harper-Bill 304). In any case, Prior William seems to have done “his utmost to induce the monks to accept the tale with unquestioning credulity and to turn it to account” (Jessopp and James xxi) in the two or three years that remained of his tenure.

The anti-Saint William camp was headed by Elias (Jessopp and James xxi), who like his prior had been a disciple of Herbert de Losinga and yearned for the cathedral’s elevated prestige—both men, as mentioned, desiring a substantial presence of saints within the church. Elias and his party felt that the grounds for the boy’s saintliness were scanty, and that no action should be taken on the development of a cult until there was further and greater proof. In other words, Elias did not want the convent to be guilty of “presumptuous

¹³² Cohen characterizes “dead William” as the link between Norman and Anglo-Scandinavian identities in Norwich; Thomas of Monmouth, he writes, “transfigured” the boy “into a new patron for a city that had been riven by the conquest” (28). It was also not uncommon in this era for “a foreign-born abbot or bishop” to take interest in and preside over rituals involving an Anglo-Saxon saint (Paxton 104-5). The scene of urban unity at William’s funeral illustrates this point.

boldness” (Thomas of Monmouth 83)—as encouraging devotion to an unproven saint would be akin to tempting God.

The debate went on for several months, when sometime in 1146 Bishop Eborard died and William de Turbe was selected to succeed him. This left a vacancy in the leadership of the priory which needed to be filled by a vote from the monks. Jessopp and James believe that the central issue in the election of the new prior “turned mainly upon the question of recognising the dead boy as indeed the victim of the Jews, and so as a saint and martyr, and that at this early stage the sceptical party among the monks was the stronger and carried their man”: Elias (xxi). This disagreement between the new bishop, the new prior, and their parties would last for another three or four years, while the body of the boy lay undisturbed in its tomb outside the cathedral walls and the memory of his case faded in the public mind (x). The variable that substantially changed the debate and jump-started the sincere development of William’s cult was the arrival of a new monk in 1149, a man known to history as Thomas of Monmouth.

Thomas of Monmouth Goes to Norwich

No indication of Thomas’s background is given in his writings or in any historical chronicle save his name. If he was in fact of Welsh extraction and from Monmouth, as some scholars believe,¹³³ he likely received religious training in or near his hometown. It’s certain he was no novice. When he arrived in Norwich, he brought with him extensive

¹³³ “Thomas never speaks about his own family history, but the fact that he uses the descriptor *Monemutensis* and is attached to a Benedictine priory suggests that, unlike William, he was not of Anglo-Scandinavian descent. Given that Monmouth was an important Norman settlement on the Welsh border where many Bretons also settled, Thomas was probably of Norman, Welsh, Breton, or mixed extraction” (Cohen 51). He was also “presumably French-speaking” and unlike East Anglian monks “certainly under a vow of celibacy” (52).

familiarity with history and literature as well as profound Latin writing skills. He could also spin a good yarn, a skill Jessopp and James believe he inherited from the well-known Benedictine historian Geoffrey of Monmouth, a notion that has since been greeted with skepticism.¹³⁴ Wherever he got his skills and whomever he modeled his writing after, Thomas was, like other medieval monks of south Wales, rather “accomplished in the art of forgery and invention” (Rubin xii).

Thomas entered Norwich Priory at a time when stories of the boy William, largely dwindling, were being resurrected (Cohen 43). A group of Norwich Christians had been accused of murdering a Jew. King Stephen himself had come to Norwich to preside over the trial (the Jews were directly under the king’s protection), at which Bishop William de Turbe in an impassioned (if fallacious) speech declared:

[W]e Christians should not have to answer . . . to the accusation of the Jews, unless they are first cleared of the death of our Christian boy [William], of which they themselves . . . have been previously accused and have not been purged. (Thomas of Monmouth 69)¹³⁵

His words reminded the people of Norwich and the members of its priory of the story and infused some with the notion that certain things about the boy’s murder had been left undone. The king demurred and never passed judgment on the Jews, which Thomas later chalked up to bribery (71), but the debate revived.

¹³⁴ Jessopp and James suggest that “it is far from improbable” that Thomas had previously been a disciple of Geoffrey, though this is no more than a hypothesis. By stating this they imply that it was from Geoffrey or a similar Monmothian rhetorical school that Thomas inherited a penchant for religious and historical storytelling, though they make clear that Thomas’s Latin is, in their opinion, “correct and fluent . . . [and] less crabbed and pretentious than that of Geoffrey” (ix). Cohen calls this Geoffrey-Thomas association “an interesting if unprovable notion” (40, n. 57).

¹³⁵ It’s important to recognize that Thomas was not present for this trial or this speech; he artistically recreated the events several years after they occurred as a part of his *Life and Passion* (Rubin 226-7, n. 65). There is no reason, however, to suggest that de Turbe had *not* claimed this, if not so artfully as Thomas here expressed them.

Thomas himself never doubted the boy's saintliness. Almost as soon as he was exposed to the issue, it seems, he ensconced himself firmly in the pro-William camp. Within weeks if not days he "became an ardent lobbyist" for a cult (Cohen 43), something many of his brothers disapproved of, and his prior, Elias, heavily discouraged. Thomas was further emboldened in his devotion by a heavenly vision not many nights after his arrival at the priory from "[n]o less an authority than Herbert de Losinga," dead at this point for some thirty years. Herbert came to him "to provide a founder's benediction for the boy's burgeoning cult" (Cohen 46).¹³⁶ The apparition, Thomas recalled, clad in his episcopal authority, commissioned the monk to remind both William de Turbe and Elias of his decades-old prophecy "that the church of Norwich would be much exalted and become famous in the whole of England and [even] venerated in foreign parts." That time was now, Herbert claimed, and it would begin once the boy's body—that eminent relic the bishop and prior had long sought for—was translated from outside the cathedral walls and into the priory itself (Thomas of Monmouth 77).

When Thomas finally got around to telling his superiors of the vision (having waited several weeks from a desire to have the vision repeated—which it was, twice—and also from some doubt of its reality), both men were elated. The bishop's enthusiasm is not surprising, but it seems, at least according to Thomas's account, that even Elias "saw honour of great worth coming to the church of Norwich." The vision was quickly obeyed, and six of the monks—including Thomas—dug up the boy's coffin and laid it in a tomb in the priory (Thomas of Monmouth 79).

¹³⁶ Rose notes that "[t]he support of Norwich's most prominent ecclesiastical authority must have gone a long way to render the alleged youthful martyr acceptable to the [monastic] community" (96). She adds that priory superiors would have made Herbert himself their patron saint before William came along, except for the fact that "he was tarnished by accusations of simony" (95).

Elias's joy and amiability were apparently short-lived; he evidently felt that the vision required only this translation and token devotion to the boy afterwards, and that the bishop's and Thomas's constant desire to accord the "saint" more favor was again presuming too much. In this Thomas asserts that the prior was proven wrong by divine signs: part of the stone slab over William's tomb protruded above the rest of the floor despite two attempts to fix it and despite Elias's wishes (81); similarly, the candles and a prayer-carpet that Thomas had placed on and near the tomb without his prior's permission, and which Elias had ordered removed, were commanded in a series of visions by the boy-saint himself to be replaced (91-2). Elias died in 1150, perhaps still embittered about the whole business,¹³⁷ and was replaced by Richard de Ferrariis, "himself a zealous upholder of the martyrdom and a staunch supporter of Thomas and the bishop" (Jessopp and James xii) and "an uncompromising supporter of Brother Thomas and his story" (xxii). Evidently, according to Thomas, the tide of favor towards William's cult had changed in the priory in light of the recent supernatural events, though detractors even after Elias's death never totally overcame their doubt during Thomas's lifetime.

With a divine commission coupled with the support of his bishop, and along with the support of some of his fellow monks,¹³⁸ Thomas of Monmouth—now styling himself

¹³⁷ Thomas's first section in Book Four of the *Life and Passion* mentions the passing of Elias. He expressed bewilderment that this otherwise "most prudent man" would be so inflexible in the matter of Saint William. Thomas even reports rumors from the monks that Elias's death—so soon after the cult began to flourish—"was a consequence of" the "injury done" to the saint by the prior. Thomas, however, suggested that whatever Elias's personal failings, "such a man, whose life was a much needed support for our own and whose untimely death incurs us a mournful loss, ought to be lamented" and not scorned. Thomas also believed that Elias's "venerable merits of his venerable life . . . have left us no doubt of his salvation" (108). There is so little known about the life of Elias outside of Thomas's portrayal of him as an antagonist that his words here seem rather ceremonial and superficial. The characterization of Elias also affirms that there was in fact some dissent in the priory about the matter, though Emily Rose is correct in suggesting that such evidence comes only from Thomas himself (98).

¹³⁸ Thomas wrote that "at the request of the Bishop and Convent [Priory] of Norwich, I, Thomas of Monmouth, with God's will, have undertaken to commit [William's miracles] to writing, lest memory of them be lost for posterity and in order to preserve it for future times" (44).

“Thomas of Norwich” (Rubin 228, n. 5)—then initiated the cult of William of Norwich.¹³⁹ For the next thirty-plus years, the rest of his life, he applied himself to developing the cult and defending the boy’s sainthood (Rubin xii). He had become by divine election (and his new prior’s blessing) “the saint’s new sacrist, responsible for the maintenance and continued honor of the tomb” (Cohen 43), a calling on which he never reneged.¹⁴⁰ His most enduring defense of Saint William came in the form of hagiography, his *Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, the seven-volume text which contains almost all of the historical background for the now-defunct cult. One passage in the narrative shows just how much Thomas’s special relationship with the saint meant to him, or at least what lengths he would go to validate his claims for being the boy’s sacrist. In a vision to a Norwich man named Ralph, who had been healed from a sickness after making a vow to William, the boy-saint appeared and said:

[G]o to Thomas the monk, *my* guardian and sacrist, and tell him that he should be comforted and not feel deserted, that he should remain active and diligent in my service, because I hold dear the commitment which his devotion shows me.

To which Thomas replied: “I, Thomas, have striven to observe [those instructions] with the greatest care” (110, emphasis added).

¹³⁹ Rose provides a different characterization for Thomas as the cult’s initiator: “The efforts of Norwich Cathedral Priory to acquire its own patron saint were the work of a number of individuals; contrary to the impression he wished to convey, Brother Thomas did not initiate the cult on his own. Other members of the priory were instrumental” (97-8). While this may be true, no monk or priest is more vocal in their support of the martyr than Thomas of Monmouth, and the text strongly suggests that he was an ardent if not the foremost supporter of William’s patronage.

¹⁴⁰ Rose notes the strong probability of Ferrariis’s endorsement of Thomas’s “custodian[ship] of William’s shrine, for the young man [Thomas] had already traveled with the new prior on monastic business . . . even though he had joined the priory only recently” (105).

Developing William's Cult through Hagiographic Rhetoric

Most scholars who have examined *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich* recognize that, for its author, there is something larger at stake in his writing of the book than simply promoting a cult (though this is certainly his purpose). Instead, commentators reach beyond the superficial narrative to find clues that may indicate Thomas's deeper motivations. As mentioned earlier, this has most commonly resulted in essays exploring the monk's contempt for the Jews. Much of this has to do with the fact that the weight of his argument for William's saintliness depends, Langmuir reminds us, on whether or not the Jews killed him, and if they did, "how and why they did so." If the boy was not killed by Jews hungry for Christian blood in explicit imitation of the crucifixion of Jesus, then the whole enterprise—cult, shrine, and all—collapses. Langmuir further notes that this is the reason why Thomas dedicated the first two books of the *Life and Passion* to substantiating the Jews as murderers (820). This may also indicate why the monk was so vitriolic and spiteful towards them—the more anger and fear he could elicit in his audience about the Jews, the more likely the story would attract attention. If however the murder can be reduced to a handful of rogue Jews killing for something pedantic instead of a "cell" acting out an internationally coordinated terrorist directive,¹⁴¹ then the murder—if it was so—is nothing more than a sad local affair, not something worthy of Christianity-wide recognition.

¹⁴¹ This characterization is mine: the rhetoric Thomas uses about the Jews is strikingly similar to rhetoric used about Muslims in the modern era. As Heng writes, antisemitic authors like Thomas of Monmouth give "narrative attention" that is "unsurprisingly focused on racializing Jews as a unified, homogenous population defined by malignant, homicidal virulence toward Christians" (S62). The same goes for many characterizations of Muslims as monolithic in the West.

These commentators then point to Thomas's deployment of William's legend as hagiographic rhetoric in all but name, suggesting that he developed and used the stories associated with William of Norwich for some grander purpose beyond simply relating a saint's story. Jeffrey T. Cohen particularly, in his "The Flow of Blood in Medieval Norwich," sees Thomas deploying a "unifying rhetoric" in the castigation of the Jews, asserting that the monk's main purpose was to unify the Christian Normans and English against a common "foreign" enemy—especially something that had been so splintered by the construction of the cathedral he was trying to promote (54). Heather Blurton focuses her attention on the christological motifs inherent in church ceremony, a "liturgical rhetoric" (1072), which in the Middle Ages often included antisemitic material (1059).¹⁴² Thomas, she concludes, deployed such rhetoric to invoke the language of the Mass in Thomas's readers, in order to further convince them of Saint William's association with Christ (1075). Others, such as Miri Rubin, see Thomas's antisemitism as rhetorical "invention" (xx) to "easily explain evil and loss by demonizing [a] vulnerable people" (xxxiii). Others make similar claims, again focusing specifically on Thomas's rhetorical interaction with the Jewish population, or chart the influence of the *Life and Passion* on European antisemitism, as Emily M. Rose does in *The Murder of William of Norwich: The Origins of Blood Libel in Medieval Europe*.

While all of these analyses are profound, we again must bear in mind that Thomas's rhetoric against "the most wily and avaricious people, the Jews" (71) all but stops at the end of Book Two, which was completed in 1151-1152. The other two-thirds of the

¹⁴² For instance, Rose notes Good Friday services in particular, in which "two deacons sang reproaches (*improperia*) against the Jews, and the congregation responded with each refrain" (103).

compilation, comprising five books, is virtually silent on the subject:¹⁴³ Thomas, having made his case against the Jews and “proven” it, leaves his legal case behind to focus on chronicling the saint’s manifold miracles. And although the crux of evidence for sainthood surely rests on Jewish guilt, blaming the Jews is not his ultimate aim in writing the *Life and Passion*. Thomas instead, along with his bishop and brother monks, wanted to develop a saint’s cult in order to attract greater attention to Norwich Cathedral and its priory and precincts.

A few scholars acknowledge some relationship between Thomas’s aims and the prestige of the cathedral. Rubin, for one, affirms that the priory monks were very anxious to have the material presence of a saint in the cathedral for its greater acclaim (xvii); she also believes that Thomas wished to “rectif[y]” the imbalance of saintly prestige in the Norwich Diocese by creating a cult that would rival if not exceed that of Bury St. Edmunds (xxvii). Harper-Bill similarly attests that “the desire of the monks of Norwich to have their own local saint, particularly associated with their community” was what “lay at the root of the extremely dubious cult of little Saint William” (303). Bennett further casts Thomas’s eagerness for a cult in terms of “desperat[ion],” and paints a colorful picture of his intended result: if Thomas could convince people of his thesis, she writes, then “the boy would be hailed as a saint, a stream of pilgrims would want to visit his shrine and would leave offerings, and Thomas himself would gain income and prestige as the saint’s sacristan” (“Towards a Revaluation” 129). Despite these scholarly acknowledgments, none depicts enhancing the ethos of the cathedral as the *primary* function of Thomas’s hagiographic rhetoric; instead, their essays almost always point back at his thoughts on the Jews. His

¹⁴³ Rose notes that none of these five books contains “the word ‘Jew’” (110); “Thomas’s account,” she adds, “indicates no concern with real Jews after William’s death” (111).

antisemitism is certainly more dramatic than elevating a relatively new cathedral to greater prominence, but the force of the text and some of its overlooked passages indicate that *prestige for the cathedral*, not the encouragement of antisemitism, was more likely Thomas's highest priority.

Herbert de Losinga and the Cathedral Tombs

Thomas claimed that his own involvement with William's cult did not stem from his own desires, but rather from the literal specter of the cathedral's founder, Herbert de Losinga, in the vision given to the monk in March 1150. Whether real, invented, or supposed, claiming Herbert as the first to dictate greater attention to the deceased boy is a profound rhetorical move for Thomas's telling of the legend: no one better than the man with the original vision for the greatness of the cathedral would better serve to commission its major cult.¹⁴⁴ The cult itself would develop over the ensuing months and years, but Herbert's initial command to translate the boy's body from the monk's cemetery to inside the chapterhouse stimulated action. A simply marked outdoor grave would not be suitable for a cult's base of operations; instead, space needed to be set apart for a well-marked shrine *within the priory itself* where greater prominence could be afforded and greater attention paid. (This understanding may also have been the motivation for Thomas to place the controversial prayer-carpet and candles on William's tomb.) The translation of the body was also symbolic: a questionable saint could be buried outside the cathedral's walls with

¹⁴⁴ Apparitions encouraging ecclesiastical construction or renovation were not uncommon in medieval Christianity. Carty distinguishes between five purposes for these visions; the third item on her list is a vision given to inspire "the construction of a sanctuary or architectural structure specifically to house relics" (46), which is the case here with Thomas of Monmouth. Carty mentions Bishop Herbert's appearing to Thomas of Monmouth as producing a "positive" outcome—not all such contact between dead ecclesiastics and living monks concluded happily (56-7, n. 55).

little disputation, but once the body was moved inside, the saint would be seen to gain the stamp of authority and become more “official.”

Thomas’s characterization of Herbert’s ghost is consistent with the historical portrayal of a man rife with ecclesiastical ambition who “left a strong mark on the identity and lore of the Cathedral Priory” (Rubin xxvi). William de Turbe and Prior Elias would also likely have been struck by Thomas’s knowledge of conversations Herbert had had with them some forty years before about relics and “honour” for the cathedral (if they had not supplied him with the stories themselves) and the force of the deceased bishop’s commands. “If this is not done with greatest haste,” Herbert told Thomas in his third appearance to the monk, “let the brethren know for sure that they will soon lose him [William]” (78). In life, Herbert had called for alacrity in building the cathedral; now, he called for similar haste in translating the boy’s body. Neither William de Turbe nor even Elias, the fastidious doubter, offered any objection to Thomas’s series of visions of their former bishop, perhaps seeing in it nothing amiss from the nature of the man they had once known.

Their martyr was then translated indoors. Once buried in the chapterhouse, with his tomb notably protruding above the floor, the boy could be properly visited by petitioners, the first of which were two churchmen healed of toothaches—one by brushing his teeth with mortar taken from the tomb and the other by pressing “his aching face” to the tomb itself (84). Following this, two laywomen were healed from bloody discharges after praying at William’s tomb (86), possibly directed there by caretaker monks when they had

come to the cathedral with their complaints.¹⁴⁵ Others still were healed by visits to the tomb and prayers to the saint, including Elias's little nephew, whose father came to the tomb to pray in his son's behalf (87). Elias himself remained doubtful, even after Saint William appeared to another monk, Richard of Lynn, and rebuked Elias for not affording him appropriate honor (90).

Honor came with or without Elias's assistance, and throughout 1150-1, petitioners came in greater numbers, "not only from the surrounding villages," Thomas recorded, "but also from further parts." The crowds became so bothersome to the monks, who used the chapterhouse for their activities,¹⁴⁶ that the brothers decided to again move the body in July 1151, this time into the church or the major assembly area of the cathedral, "where access to him would be more easily available to the people thronging to it" (122).¹⁴⁷ The new location was near the high altar; Jessopp and James describe this location as especially "fitting" because of its proximity to the tomb of Herbert de Losinga (xii). Thus the cathedral's founder and its preeminent martyr were joined together before the high altar where the flesh and blood of Christ would be present at every mass, a token of the Lord's personal manifestation as well as his manifestation of glory in his saints.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Rose believes there may also have been "a *tabula* or board with basic information, much like a guidebook, located next to William's shrine, to announce to visitors to the cathedral the identity and the importance of the shrine" (121).

¹⁴⁶ Rose notes that a priory chapterhouse was "the focal point of monastic life. This was where monks met daily to listen to a chapter of the rule of St. Benedict, to hear sermons on feast days, to pray privately, and to have punishment meted out" (100). It's doubtless that pilgrims would have disturbed these routines.

¹⁴⁷ Rose contradicts Thomas's assertions of popularity here, suggesting that the repeated translations were "attempts to stimulate interest in a cult that apparently struggled to generate much enthusiasm." Her lack of faith in Thomas's narrative is warranted, but I would suggest that although "external corroboration" is lacking, as she writes (99), there is no reason to suppose that attention to William was virtually nonexistent. A "limited fame," as Rubin writes (viii), during the 1150s seems more credible than the mass exoduses that Thomas proclaims.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas writes of Christ's hand in the elevation of Saint William, describing how "the grace of Christ, which moderates all things, wished to make His blessed and glorious martyr [even] more glorious, and to make manifest to faithful folk in what glory he lives after his death in the flesh" through his saints (76).

Thomas chronicled dozens of miracles in the *Life and Passion* in order to establish the credibility of Saint William; once that ethos was established, the monk could harness it, and the publication of the legend would then redound to the cathedral's credit. This is the most significant aspect of his hagiographic rhetoric and led, as Thomas himself described, to increased "fame" which

spread more and more, as if sprouting new shoots, and rang in the ears of people all around, [insomuch] that many began to flock together to that beneficial tomb from all parts, and to beg for divine benefits there with vows and prayers. (98)

Thomas himself, along with his fellow monks, witnessed these miracles; he uses the term "we" throughout, as in this passage: "And others besides, who had illnesses and diseases, *we* have seen come to him; and *we* know from their subsequent accounts that they had received cures" (120, emphasis added). This further adds to the saint's credibility—his miracles can be attested by more than just those who claim to be healed. The nature of the healings too is key. Thomas inferred that the miracles witnessed were not simply people *claiming* to be healed, but actual healings that took place before the eyes of reliable witnesses, including himself: "we have frequently *seen* the restoration of the sight to the blind, walking to the lame, speech to the mute, and good sense to the insane. We have also *seen* many sick people cured and not a few people bound by shackles freed" (147, emphasis added). He was not alone in these observations: other monks saw them happen, too, each "boldly testify[ing] to what our eyes have truly seen." Because such eyewitnesses were plentiful, Thomas asserted, there was no reason to credit faithless detractors (156). "[G]ood things shine forth all the more beautifully if they are verified by the knowledge of many," he wrote. "Therefore, it is inappropriate to suppress through silence that which is highly useful to divulge for the edification of many" (133).

Location, Location, Location: Making the Tomb Norwich-Specific

Another important rhetorical strategy that enhanced the cathedral's hagiographical credibility was Thomas's emphasis on how Saint William influenced the *local* people of Norwich Diocese. As he was careful only to note those miracles which he or other monks could validate "by sight or hearing" (106), Thomas often takes pains to record the names, familial associations, and trades of the people who experienced healings or saw visions through the saint's merits. The names he records are both Anglo-Scandinavian and Norman and belong to both clerics and laypersons, suggesting a unity—as Cohen writes—of audience: William is a saint for all Christians, not just those of a single ethnicity or background (26).

The use of local names further suggests that William has patronage over Norwich particularly, which strengthens Thomas's argument of the importance of the town and its cathedral. For instance, he names Robert Palmer, whose son had been plagued with a yearlong bout of dysentery; this boy was healed immediately after petitioning the saint (98). Thomas also refers to another man named Hildebrand, "well known in Norwich, and a relative of the monk Paul of Norwich" (104), and a woman named Emma of Wighton (105), hailing from just north of Walsingham in Norfolk. Both were healed of their afflictions. Additional names could be listed ad nauseum, but the point Thomas made is that there are verifiable people throughout the region who have come to Saint William's shrine and have received healing; these people were perhaps acquaintances of his audience. Doubting the relative newcomer Thomas of Monmouth was one thing, but doubting the claims of many, even hundreds, of other locals was another.

This methodology of firsthand accounts is an essential component of Thomas's overall "detective work";¹⁴⁹ compiling the names of eyewitnesses whose accounts verified the rationale behind the monk's claims of William's saintliness.¹⁵⁰ Indeed, "rumour" was enough impetus for many to be "encouraged by the success of others," he recalled, and "no small crowd of sick people began to frequent the glorious Saint William's tomb." Consecutive waves came and went "because the frequent successes of the earlier ones spurred those who followed to good hope" (105). Thomas affirmed that he had "taken care" to "write down nothing but what we have seen or what we have learned as carried by common knowledge" (95), and that he had specifically disregarded accounts of which he had been "unable to track down the full certainty" (106). These strategies reinforce his own trustworthiness and credibility by making him a prudent steward of hagiographical fact; in other words, he was careful to make sure that no one could seriously call him a liar.¹⁵¹ If anyone doubted his claims, they had only to ask those people whose testimonies he had recorded.

Evidently (in his own telling), the rhetorical success of Thomas's legend of William helped establish William's patronage over the entire diocese: many local people had come to the saint and received healing from him. Heaven had also verified William's special status: one of the monks, a friend of Thomas's named Peter Peverell, had seen a vision of the chapterhouse in which the Virgin Mary crowned "her beloved friend, the martyr

¹⁴⁹ This term comes from Langmuir (842).

¹⁵⁰ Rose reminds us that Thomas himself would not necessarily have been the first or only monk to write *all* of the accounts. These miracles may have been documented by other monks, many of whom "were in a position to observe many of the miracles firsthand," which Thomas could then reproduce "into a more permanent and structured record" (112).

¹⁵¹ In another place his words are similar: "If . . . someone considers that we have included in this little book anything that appears to be untrue, let that person not . . . impute the sin of lying to us, because we have taken care to write down nothing but what we have seen or what we have learned as carried by common knowledge" (5).

William” as the “patron of this church . . . [with] power to cure at will” (84-5).¹⁵² The cathedral founders wanted the relics of any saint; now, not only did the cathedral and priory have relics, they had the legacy of a child martyr all to themselves. Also to their great benefit was the fact that nowhere in all the world could Saint William be physically accessed except at Norwich Cathedral.

Proximity to Saint William’s Tomb

Sociologists have studied the importance of physical presence at meaningful places and times; pilgrims visit shrines not only to show devotion, but to experience the “co-presence” of a saint and fellow petitioners. Certainly God and the saints could be prayed to from anywhere—William’s adherents accessed his virtues from their own homes or even at sea on occasion—but nowhere could the *presence* of the saint be as powerful and connective than at those places specifically set apart for holy ones and/or those which included their relics (qtd. in Bowman 246). Pilgrimage, in short, was not only a journey to access the saint’s power, but to actually *be* in his or her presence.

Thomas of Monmouth, Prior Aimar of Lewes, Bishop Eborard, Bishop William de Turbe, and other divines understood this concept, which was why ease of access to his tomb was so essential for them: without the boy’s bones, tomb, or shrine, there could be no physical presence or place for pilgrims to contact. That they saw pilgrimage potential in the dead boy is evident in Aimar’s initial request to take the recovered body to Lewes, Eborard’s refusal and retention of it, and de Turbe’s and Thomas’s efforts to enshrine it.

¹⁵² Rose notes that many blossoming saints of this period were “tied chronologically [through feast days] as well as rhetorically with the growing veneration of the Virgin Mary, as were many subsequent purported victims of the Jews” (104).

Space and presence, in other words, was key to developing the spiritual ethos of Norwich Cathedral. With the body in place inside the cathedral (wherever that may be), Thomas could then indicate specific places where a pilgrim could make contact with the saint. “*There* he lies,” Thomas wrote—and we can picture him pointing to the saint’s various burial places—and “*there* he rests, buried in body but alive in glory,” and “[*t*]here we have frequently seen” the miracles (146, emphasis added). Place is everything.

Proximity to the tomb was indeed another component of Thomas’s rhetorical promotion of William’s legend. In the *Life and Passion* it is usual for an afflicted person or his/her representative to make a personal appearance inside the cathedral and to make some physical contact with the tomb, or at least, if the crowd is too pressing, to otherwise be as close as possible. Thomas recounted people kissing the tomb, kneeling upon it, laying injured body parts upon it, and so forth; once the contact was made, healing was almost instantaneous. One gout-afflicted woman, noted by Thomas as “Ida, the wife of Eustace the Moneyer of Norwich,” flopped onto the chapterhouse floor, and “crying out in terrible cries,” finally reached over and pressed her lips to the tomb, receiving a cure “at the moment when she touched the stone” (100-1). Another woman was blessed for kissing the saint: “Agnes, the wife of Reginald called the Cowherd, of Norwich,” having kissed the tomb, was cured of a “menstrual flux” (110-1). One maiden went even further. Suffering from intense breast-pains and mattery effusion, she—called Matilda of Swafeld—exposed her bosom and laid the afflicted breast upon the tomb, recovering instantly, feeling her effusions dry up and the pain cease (167-8).

Women of course were not the only beneficiaries of “God’s power manifested, thanks to the merits of Saint William” (111). A man named “Robert, son of Harvey the

former baker,” weakened by disease and “at death’s door,” was carried to the shrine by concerned relatives, and as soon “as he touched the sacred tombstone, he felt the effect of celestial medicine” (127). Children too benefited.¹⁵³ A mute Anglo-Scandinavian boy arrived at the tomb with his parents, Coloborn and Ansfrida, and once the lad kissed it, “suddenly [broke] into speech in his mother tongue,” English.¹⁵⁴ All could be healed by William through their faith.

The stone from the tomb itself served as an instrument of healing. In addition to brushing their teeth with the stone, as has been discussed, petitioners could also be healed by dissolving stone flakes from the tomb into holy water and then ingesting it. Several people were cured this way (105-6), including the dysentery-afflicted son of Robert Palmer of Norwich (98). A noblewoman, Lady Mabel of Bec, took a piece of the tomb, and dissolved shavings from it in water to heal her sons whenever they were ill (88).¹⁵⁵ Thomas himself applied this strategy on “a certain boy, the son of Aluric, of the monks’ tailor’s workshop,” who had come to the shrine accompanied by his parents for healing. Thomas, “deeply moved by so bitter an illness,” scraped stone “off the tomb slab” and “mingled [it] with holy water.” Once the boy drank, the pain immediately subsided, and “in a short while,” Thomas reported, “he was cured” (106). As with all saints, William’s efficacy could extend to any contact with the tomb, however metaphorical.

¹⁵³ Rose suggests that if St. William had any specialization in his patronage, it would be for the healing of children—“pediatric cures” (117). William, after all, died himself a child.

¹⁵⁴ Thomas records a later episode where a boy cries out in English after being healed at the tomb (162). No doubt these episodes are, as Cohen notes, “efficacious for the surmounting of Norwich’s postcolonial dividedness” (58) and the bridging of the two classes, English and Norman (50). Even though the church is mostly Norman-run, Saint William is no respecter of persons.

¹⁵⁵ Rubin provides more information about the wealth and status of Lady Mabel (231, n. 31). She was a notable benefactress of Norwich Cathedral, both before and after the cult’s development; given this, Rose believes her generosity was little influenced by the efficacy of the stone shavings, and that her loyalty lay more with the cathedral itself than with its supposed martyr (118; cf. 121).

Those who could not initially make it to the tomb (or did not know about it) almost always visited later to give a thank-offering to the beneficial saint; such a visit seems almost required as a “payment” for healing or other miracle. Brichtiue, a woman of Norwich, had “a long-standing and debilitating illness,” which William healed by appearing to her in a vision and touching each of her limbs. Once her pain was gone, William encouraged her to visit the shrine and offer a candle at his tomb;¹⁵⁶ when she could afford one, she rushed to the cathedral to offer it in gratitude to both God and the saint (96-7). In a similar manner, others visited the shrine after making a vow to Saint William, pledging that if he healed them from their illnesses, they would come to him in Norwich to express gratitude and make offerings. One man from York made a long journey to Norwich as a vow-fulfillment (128-9), as did Robert, the dean of a parish in Lincoln, who came to Norwich annually to offer four pennies, which “he placed . . . on top of his [William’s] tomb as a tribute payment” (129-30). A woman named Gillida too came to the shrine after a vow to Saint William resulted in the healing of a goiter (165-6).

Contrariwise, curses were called down upon those who were healed away from the shrine and subsequently failed to fulfill their vows. An anonymous woman from Thornage in Norfolk¹⁵⁷—“whose name,” Thomas wrote, “escapes me” (176)—was healed from breast cancer by petitioning the saint and vowing to offer a candle at his tomb. When she

¹⁵⁶ Votive candles were and are important instruments of religious offering and personal gratitude; Saint William in the *Life and Passion* expresses a particular liking for them. At one point Thomas called the offering of candles a “health-giving plan,” contrasted with the mostly useless prescriptions of physicians (96; “some of whom,” Rose believes, “no doubt were Jews” [115], though this is arguable). Note the candle offerings associated with the healings of William, sacrist of Norwich (94); Aldith of Norwich (96); Brichtiue of Norwich (96-7); the daughter of Bartholomew of Creak (102); Botilda of Norwich, “wife of Toche the Baker” (111); and the son of William Polceheart (138), among others.

¹⁵⁷ Thornage was one of the villages that paid rent to Norwich Diocese (Rubin 243, n. 7), and was likely a part of the “lands and incomes” purchased by Herbert de Losinga during his bishopric. Thomas calls Thornage an “episcopal village” (176).

“delayed from day to day the presentation of the wax to Saint William at Norwich, as she had vowed,” Thomas recounted, “the disease recurred, [and] re-entered her breast . . . with pain worse than before.” The woman got the message, and “hurried to Norwich, offered the wax . . . [and] paid her vow” (176-7).¹⁵⁸

On occasion a representative for an afflicted person would visit the shrine to make an offering, usually the parent of a young child or other family member,¹⁵⁹ but even this was usually followed-up by a visit from the formerly afflicted person. Thomas nowhere suggested that the saint’s power was accessible only at his shrine—if that were the case, William would not be much of a saint—but through these episodes emphasized the necessity of physically presenting oneself at the shrine, either before or after healing, to pay the saint due respect for his grace.¹⁶⁰

In any case, personal contact with the tomb was essential. One could not simply pray to the saint alone to be healed; even then, some kind of trip or other offering had to make it to the shrine itself. This understanding is not unique to Norwich Cathedral—relics and saint legends have always attracted pilgrims to specific spaces—but the fact that William belonged solely to *this* cathedral reinforced the idea of the necessity to visit the fledgling edifice and to pay devotion within its precincts. Thomas does not state this

¹⁵⁸ Saint William similarly cursed a simoniac priest named Godwin who refused to help a woman without payment for allowing her to come in contact with one of the saint’s relics. In punishment, the saint killed all of Godwin’s chickens—an economic blow not without significance (126-7).

¹⁵⁹ Animals too could be healed after their owners visited the shrine and prayed for the creatures. Several were cured in this way: a pig (99-100), an ox (100), a horse (104-5), and a falcon (171)—each important resources for food or work, although the falcon seems to have been more of a pet for the son of a nobleman, beloved by the boy “with great affection” (171). The healed animals, unlike people, would not later be brought to the tomb by their owners. In any case, the healing of animals demonstrated that no request brought to Saint William would be dismissed if petitioned in true faith.

¹⁶⁰ Many people made difficult journeys to reach the shrine, occasionally in the duress of great pain or other hardship. One woman named Goldeburga came with “her limbs hardly supporting her” and was healed (102), and another named Matilda, warped and bent by bone deformities, walked to Norwich herself at a snail’s pace, “each step . . . hardly the size of a finger.” She too found healing (160).

explicitly in the text, but it is implied by the fact that, at least by my count, not one miracle in the *Life and Passion* takes place without some eventual contact with the cathedral and the tomb housed within it. *Come to Norwich*, Thomas seems to say, *and you'll be healed*. And thus the prestige of the cathedral grows with the increased fame for the saint and his tomb.

Norwich Cathedral vs. Bury St. Edmunds

Another significant indication that Thomas's primary aim in writing was to enhance the cathedral's ethos becomes apparent in his comparison of the shrine to Bury St. Edmunds.¹⁶¹ There seems to have been a strong connection between Bury St. Edmunds and Norwich—the two monastic communities of these towns often borrowed legends and liturgical material from each other (Rubin xxx), including an adaptation of the child-murder motif at Bury St. Edmunds in 1181 of a young boy named Robert (Jessopp and James lxxv), which Bennett believes “owes a great deal to Thomas of Monmouth's *Life* of William of Norwich” (“William of Norwich” 311) and which came at a time when “William's reputation [was] at its zenith” (Jessopp and James lxxvi). There was also significant ecclesiastical intercourse between what had been two episcopal sees before the merger under Herbert (Dodwell 2; cf. Jessopp and James lxxxi). The disparate locations of the diocesan seat and its most prominent and wealthy shrine created a natural rivalry: abbots at Bury St. Edmunds occasionally clashed with the bishops during the Anglo-Norman era, and the center of the argument was always economical: at one point, both wanted control

¹⁶¹ The Anglo-Saxon name for the town was Beodricesworth or Bedricesworth; the name changed to Bury St. Edmunds due to the popularity of the shrine (Lazzari 64-5). I occasionally refer to the town by its modern colloquial “Bury” for convenience, a strategy also employed by Emily Rose.

of the popular and wealthy abbey (Dodwell, “The Foundation” 3). Bishop Herbert particularly at one point desired “to assist at the translation of the relics of Saint Edmund,” an important episcopal role, but was refused, likely the result of these and other ecclesiastical politics (5).¹⁶²

Bury of course had a much more longstanding spiritual tradition of the two locations, having attracted the attention of pilgrims for some three centuries as well as the loosening of aristocratic purse-strings.¹⁶³ It was also much wealthier in general. Historians value Norwich’s diocesan holdings as producing income “considerably less valuable than those of Bury St. Edmunds Abbey,” though it was enough to support the monks in Norwich Priory (Virgoe 342). Dodwell concurs that Saint Edmund’s abbey was “rich” (2), and that the income the abbey’s lands produced “contrast[ed] markedly” with the relatively meager appropriations of Norwich (16).

As a result, Norwich Priory, Rose writes, “was conscious of competition from nearby communities that had been successful in harnessing religious devotion and building a cult center”—Bury most of all (Rose 94-5).¹⁶⁴ The trick was to duplicate these public relations strategies, or even better, utilize them to ensure that their shrine surpassed the prestige of the others. The years 1150-1 also provided a kairotic moment to enact a sort of spiritual coup in this game of shrines, as the abbey at Bury was reeling from extensive fire

¹⁶² Wollaston notes that Herbert, “[l]ike his predecessors . . . conducted a running battle with that richest and most splendid of East Anglian monasteries, Bury St. Edmunds” (29).

¹⁶³ Edmund’s Norman successors found a kinship in his kingship: “Bury proved a suitable model [for Norwich], for it had long wooed royalty and benefited from repeated royal visits. Unhappily for Norwich, Henry II showed no interest in Norwich’s new saint” (Rose 109).

¹⁶⁴ Bury was an especially irksome target because of regional and diocesan power-plays. “For nearly a century,” Rose writes, “the bishops of Norwich [and Elmham and Thetford] had attempted to wield authority over the wealthy and prominent Suffolk abbey and to move the episcopal seat there. Repeatedly foiled in their attempts to dominate Bury, Norwich’s leaders welcomed the opportunity to boost its fortunes at this time” (106).

damage and the ensuing financial burdens of repair (Rose 106).¹⁶⁵ To this end, Thomas of Monmouth made comparisons between the efficacy of healing at William's shrine in Norwich versus supposed failures at Bury St. Edmunds, hoping, Rubin believes, that the inequity of Norwich in comparison to Bury "might be rectified once his story became established and led to a flourishing cult" (xxvii).

Thomas mentions three episodes associated with Bury, and one specifically where a person does not find relief in Bury only to receive it in Norwich. First is the story of a "little woman . . . bent for many years," who from her youth onwards had "lived in Bury St. Edmunds." There is no mention of whether she sought healing at the shrine of Saint Edmund or not, but certainly it would have been easier for her to do so instead of making the painful and slow journey "with hand-crutches" to Norwich, which is what Thomas claims she did. When she arrived, "she prayed at the aforementioned tomb that by the merits of Saint William the martyr the mercy of divine compassion would take pity on her disability," and was soon healed (135). The inclusion of this woman's hometown seems fairly minor—as has been shown, Thomas purposefully identified many people by their place of residence—but the fact that she did not go or did not consider going to the well-known abbey in Bury is a significant omission. Perhaps too she failed to find healing there, or found the shrine to be inaccessible for her condition. In any case, she found Norwich better suited for her needs, and found relief not at her local saint's shrine, but at Saint William's.

Such a minor mentioning of Bury St. Edmunds could be dismissed if not for Thomas's other specific references to the shrine. In his second reference to Bury, Thomas

¹⁶⁵ These financial straits nearly bankrupted the abbey thirty years later (Rose 106).

described how “a certain woman called Gilliva, daughter of Burcard the Carpenter,” who lived in Bishop’s Lynn (now King’s Lynn)—a town which Thomas was careful to note existed “in the parish of St. Edmund”—came to Norwich to be cured of blindness (151). Gilliva, Thomas emphasized, viewed Saint William as her “*sole* and *singular* remedy, and with greater confidence than other saints, since she had learned by common report that others similarly condemned to blindness had been cured at his [William’s] tomb” (152, emphasis added). Thomas’s connection between the fact that the blind woman resided in Saint Edmund’s parish and that she viewed William, not Edmund, as her “sole and singular remedy” is no dismissible slight; in this, Thomas suggested that even one so powerful as Edmund did not have the power to cure such ailments for people in the region as William did. Like the disabled woman previously, Gilliva could have much more easily gone to Bury, but instead came to Norwich, in this case being led by the hand by a “young nephew” (152). Again, Thomas emphasized that William’s saintly efficacy extended throughout Norfolk and East Anglia, and hinted that his powers were greater than those of other saints nearby.

The last rhetorical jab at Bury St. Edmunds is also the most explicit. Thomas wrote of a Lincolnshire man named Glewus, who after his brother had illegally seized a plot of land belonging to him, went out with a pitchfork and slew his brother and his brother’s sons while they were working on the disputed field. Extreme remorse set in, and Glewus—made an exile by the law and a penitent by the church—bent the iron of the pitchfork into a ring and clasped it tightly over his right wrist. Donning a hair-shirt, “he travelled round the shrines of the saints throughout England, seeking mercy” (156-7). The iron band was quite painful for the sinner; the text suggests that Glewus believed that once the ring was

broken by supernatural aid, it would be a sign that his great sin had been forgiven and he would be free from both physical and spiritual pain.

The thrust of Thomas's driving point here is his note that the man went throughout England visiting several shrines while seeking for a divine remedy. None of his petitions to any of the saints at those shrines had the desired effect. Glewus eventually turned to Bury St. Edmunds, "and entered the church in which the eminent king and martyr Edmund lies at rest, in order to pray and seek pardon." Tearfully holding his arms in the air, he prayed that the saint would have mercy on him, when "suddenly the iron circle snapped, broken by divine power." And yet the band was not totally riven: "the crack stretched to an opening the size of a thumb," Thomas recorded, and "still remained so, unmoving, around the arm." The severed edges of the ring pressed even more securely on Glewus's wrist, "caus[ing] more acute pain when it was broken than it had done while it was whole" (157). Although his prayer had in a sense been answered, Heaven apparently had one more lesson to teach Glewus before allowing him to be completely shriven of his evil. At this point, the man "professed he would have preferred *not* to have come to Saint Edmund, rather than taste in this manner the potency of that power" (158, emphasis added). The point is clear: not even Edmund was able to *fully* heal the man from his sin.

Thomas initially noted that he "[did] not know by what secret design of God" this painful response to prayer had been afforded; however, he was quick to supply one: God wanted the virtue of Saint William of Norwich to be known through Glewus's healing narrative. Accordingly, Thomas recounted that Edmund himself appeared to Glewus in a dream and instructed him to "go over to Norwich and wait there at the tomb of the holy martyr William for absolution." With such an endorsement, the man traveled northeast,

where for several days he petitioned the young martyr for forgiveness and freedom. Sure enough, his prayers were answered, and more directly than at Bury: the band burst, one half flying against a wall, the other dropping to the floor. The incident caused such a commotion that even Bishop William de Turbe was summoned, “and, having examined its truth, . . . led a hymn of praise to the Lord” (158). Again, Thomas’s point is clear: Saint William, not Saint Edmund, had God’s authority to free the man from sin’s imprisonment—even Edmund himself acknowledged that this was so.

Thomas protested that he had no desire to challenge Edmund’s efficacy, only to suggest through this narrative that Saint William and Saint Edmund were equals. It is apparent through the vision to Glewus, Thomas asserted, that “the glorious king and martyr Edmund wanted to have the glorious martyr William as his fellow-worker, whom he happens to have as an associate in martyrdom in his own region” (159-60). But then he added this underlying codicil: “what Edmund had begun, he directed William to complete” (160). Thomas of course is explicitly referring to the fact that Edmund had started the process of freedom for Glewus and that William, by Edmund’s charge, had finished it. But it’s difficult to ignore the rhetorical undertone and implication for Norwich that Thomas of Monmouth is trying to effect: Edmund is the East Anglian saint of the past, William is the saint of the region’s future. This point is further established, again implicitly, by Thomas’s avowal

that the royal martyr Edmund and the blessed boy and martyr William are [both] truly, greatly meritorious with God. One triumphed in the times of the ancients; the other suffered in the days of our own time. One sustained the law of Christ, which was being savaged by the pagans; the other endured the Jews, who were repeating, as it were, the death of Christ. The former, indeed, has shone with miraculous signs up until the years of our own time; the latter multiplies his miracles every day. (159)

His word choice is significant, and the apposition of the two saints' attributes—and their temporal relation to each other—suggests that one saint has become outmoded while the other rises and flourishes. Edmund is *ancient*, William belongs to “our own time”; the former battled against pagans, the enemies of old, the latter battled against Jews, the enemy of the contemporary English Church; and Edmund has *had* miracles “up until the years of our own time,” while William’s miracles are manifest *now*. In this characterization, Edmund is Moses, the founder of the Old Law, antagonized by the invading Canaanites of the land; William is Christ, who fulfilled the law and ushered in a new age and chose a new people to call his own. Edmund is likewise John the Baptist, who “must decrease” in favor of “one whose shoe’s latchet I am unworthy to loose”—or, we might say, “whose penitential iron ring I am unworthy to break.”¹⁶⁶ Edmund, though still important, has receded into the background in favor of the region’s new patron, Saint William.

Thomas was conscious that many readers, particularly monks, would take offense at this characterization. Accordingly, he penned a brief justification of his thesis, making clear that “I do not assert that the latter [William] is to be preferred over the former [Edmund], nor do I affirm that the former is not equal to the latter.” He also noted the folly of comparing the efficacy of one shrine to another: “since saints [themselves] are not envious of each other in glory, why indeed should we bite into each other for the miracles the saints perform?” (159). While he may or may not have been sincere, Thomas here brushes aside the fact that Bury St. Edmunds Abbey and Norwich Cathedral Priory had long been “biting into each other” spiritually and financially, as well as over power in the notable diocese. Not one modern historian noted herein characterizes the relationship

¹⁶⁶ Cf. John 1.27 and 3.30 (KJV).

between the two locations as friendly or at least without rivalry; monks of this period, Rose notes, were concerned with “the very real powers . . . attributed to a patron saint, the presence of whose whole and incorrupt body was crucial to . . . [political and ecclesiastical] power” (Rose 107). The fact remains that Norwich was indeed “envious” of Bury—if not the other way around—and that the monks and priests of Norwich truly believed that their priory would certainly increase with the diminishment of its neighbor. Thomas of Monmouth, too, despite his rhetorical backtracking, made clear his belief in William’s preeminence among Heaven’s martyrs, as has been and will be shown throughout this chapter, and could not possibly have been unconscious of the effect a new saint would have on devotional space in East Anglia.

William’s Equality with Other English Saints

Thomas’s efforts to put William on par with the great saints of the Church did not stop in England. Other saints and their associated shrines were also compared with William to suggest that he was equal to (if not greater than) the “who’s who” of the European Church. One episode in particular recounted how one English pilgrim, sailing over the “Norman Sea” (now the English Channel) to return home, was saved along with the ship’s crew and other passengers by petitioning aid from Saint William of Norwich. She had never heard of the boy-martyr before receiving a vision from him warning her of an approaching tempest, which would sink the ship if William was not petitioned. This pilgrim had only recently been to visit the massive shrines of Saint Giles in France and Saint James in Compostela—vast religious spaces that had served as pilgrimage destinations for centuries by the 1100s—and yet in this seafaring episode, neither one of these saints came to her aid:

only an unknown saint, a boy from Norwich, had the power of deliverance (117). Bury St. Edmunds was small game compared to these continental behemoths, and yet Thomas, through oblique implication, challenges even their saintly reputations.

But he does not stop there: Ireland and even the Holy Land too were set in Thomas's sights. A knight from Lorraine named Philip de Bella Arbore, who like the English Glewus had killed an adversarial brother, in this case had burned down a church where the brother and his retainers had taken sanctuary (154). For these unholy crimes, Pope Eugene III sentenced him to a ten-year penitence that included wearing iron mail over bare skin, an iron link clasped on his arm, and a heavy sword hanging from his side. In seven years he was freed of the mail by divine means "at the Lord's sepulchre in Jerusalem"; after that, his sword was broken "in Ireland, at the shrine of Saint Brendan"; and finally—the capstone liberation—"in England, at Norwich, at the tomb of the blessed martyr William, the iron ring on his right arm was broken" (155). Again, Thomas shows William to be in league with the most eminent saints, and his shrine equal to the efficacy of longstanding, remarkable shrines throughout the world.¹⁶⁷

These stories too show William's expanding circle of influence. While the brunt of his narrative focused on Norwich and claiming East Anglia for William's own, Thomas made certain to point out that the saint was not limited to healing English paupers. Here

¹⁶⁷ Thomas also characterizes William as quite jealous of the fame he achieved as a saint. One Norfolk woman, who lived closer to two smaller shrines dedicated to Saint Faith than she did to Norwich Cathedral, was making candles to dedicate to the Holy Trinity on Faith's Feast Day, and had vowed to make one for William as well. She apparently forgot this promise, as she soon dedicated the reserve candle to Saint Faith instead, and received a sign reminding her of her error. Thomas made it plain that when he and other monks looked into the matter, they believed "that the holy martyr did not want what had been vowed to him to be offered to another" (177-8). This is a far cry from the saint Thomas earlier attempted to depict as not being envious of the fame of other saints (see note above; cf. 159). Rubin further describes Saint Faith's cult in Norfolk, which interestingly was promoted by the sheriff who Thomas believed was bribed into protecting the Jews who had killed Saint William (243, n. 9-10); Thomas may have sought to diminish this local cult too via this narrative and by association with the unscrupulous sheriff.

are tales of knights and popes, seafarers, far-off places, and intersections with notable Christian figures. While Norwich was his home and the people of that diocese under his special care, any petitioner, particularly those who came to Norwich, could find the divine aid that they sought “through the merits of the most blessed martyr” (178).

William of Norwich and the See of Canterbury

Thomas’s final move in shoring up his defense and rhetorical promotion of William’s legend was written in the seventh and final volume of the *Life and Passion*, which scholars believe was written 15 or 20 years after the preceding six, ca. 1173. The comparison made here is between Norwich and Canterbury. Canterbury had been the see of the English Church since the arrival of Augustine in the early seventh century, and the basic Norman structure which remains today was completed ca. 1130. When Thomas of Monmouth wrote the majority of the *Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, Canterbury had not yet seen the mass pilgrimages that Geoffrey Chaucer referenced over two centuries afterwards; Archbishop Thomas Becket was killed in the cathedral in 1170. The publicity surrounding his death and Becket’s quick papal canonization brought hordes of people to his shrine, which soon became the most important and popular pilgrimage destination in England, never to be surpassed until the Reformation.

Knowing just how hard Thomas and his compatriots had worked to drum-up support for Norwich Cathedral and their own martyr, one wonders whether a sense of competition prompted Thomas the sacrist to pick up the pen again after a two-decade gap. Perhaps he and his compatriots became concerned that the growing cult of the archbishop would outshine their own carefully managed prestige, and that pilgrims would flock to a

more novel shrine in a more ecclesiastically potent place instead of Norwich. This cannot be ascertained with any certainty; however, what is clear is that Thomas deployed the influential hagiographic legacy of Becket to once again defend his own patron's importance.

In the final chapter of Book Seven, Thomas recounted the disease of a man named Geoffrey of Canterbury, who in 1172 became afflicted with such grotesque swelling in his head "that it no longer looked like a human face, but presented a monstrous appearance of a monstrous animal" (192). Since the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket was so close and by then more than a year established at the cathedral, Geoffrey was led by friends "to the glorious tomb of the glorious martyr and archbishop," at which he eventually fell asleep next to while praying for relief. Saint Thomas himself then appeared to the man in a vision, and like other apparitions before him, directed the petitioner elsewhere. "'Your cure is not here,'" he told Geoffrey, then added:

"But so that your coming up to me should not be in vain, I give you a piece of advice. Get up and go home, have a candle made in the name of Saint William the martyr of Norwich, and then roll it round your whole head in a circle, and immediately you will receive a cure. Once you are cured, hurry to Norwich, where you will offer the candle to him, your liberator."

Geoffrey did so and found immediate relief from the terrible swelling (192-3). Like Saint Edmund before, Saint Thomas here is unable to heal a petitioner, but offers the remedy of the more efficacious saint in Norwich.

Thomas continued Geoffrey's story, noting how the cured man left for Norwich with little delay to make his thank-offering at William's tomb. Not far out of Canterbury, he was met with two men who wished to join him in his travels; both were "of venerable appearance and distinguished habit," the one "resplendent in the whitest of clothes" and

“the other . . . [wearing] the signs and emblems of kingship” (193). These men were Saint Thomas Becket the Archbishop and Saint Edmund the martyr-king, the two most important saints in the medieval English Church. They guided him first to Bury St. Edmunds, where Geoffrey made obeisance—as he had done at Becket’s tomb before leaving Canterbury—and then to Norwich, where he made his final offering to Saint William, his healer (194). Thomas of Monmouth met with Geoffrey while he was at Norwich Cathedral, who related the story to him; the sacrist-monk was so intrigued by the tale that he later went to Canterbury himself to investigate Geoffrey’s backstory, all of which he claimed was corroborated by others (194-5).

Real or fabricated, the inclusion of this final tale with its eminent characters was Thomas of Monmouth’s final word on the matter: no matter the efficacy of any other saint, new or longstanding, William the boy martyr stood among (and possibly above) them. This conclusion was to be Thomas’s final extant installment of his rhetorical defense of the saint he had dedicated his life to serving and extolling.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, he established that William was an *English* saint, a saint for the new Anglo-Norman society, a standing member of the English saintly triumvirate; the boy’s saintliness too made his sanctuary in Norwich Cathedral at least on par with if not more significant than the eminent shrines at Bury St. Edmunds and Canterbury. To prove that not only he believed this, Thomas included in Book Seven a purported letter to Norwich Priory from Christian of Pershore, a monk from a village in Worcestershire, who after experiencing a miracle by the grace of

¹⁶⁸ These were not the only saints to praise William in vision. A woman named Ida had a vision of William and three candle-bearing virgins, one of whom spoke to the woman and introduced her to the saint, declaring herself “the virgin Katherine” of Alexandria, and encouraging her to give devotion to him (101). This and the other references to saintly endorsements are again part of Thomas’s hagiographic rhetoric to prove that William had recognition in heaven as well as on earth.

Saint William of Norwich, declared that “Divine mercy has deigned to reveal even to us, [who are] far away from you by a long distance, with how much joy He has shone upon you *before all others in the region, even in the whole world*” (188, emphasis added).¹⁶⁹ The boy, Thomas concluded, was clearly a saint for Christians everywhere.

Conclusion: A Failed Cult

Despite all of Thomas’s pretensions and hopes, Norwich Cathedral never did reach the status of that in Bury St. Edmunds,¹⁷⁰ and of course throughout the Middle Ages was dwarfed by Canterbury and the later Marian shrine in Walsingham which, like Norwich, is also in Norfolk.¹⁷¹ Saint William of Norwich also never really existed as a “‘regional’ saint” by any definition, as attention was mostly paid him by people “connected with the monastery and its business” and “within the cathedral close, ‘a village [unto] itself’” (Rose 98-9), serving only as “a representative of the extended interests of the bishop and of Norwich Cathedral Priory” (Rose 123). The saint’s legacy was similarly overshadowed by the thirteenth-century supposed martyrdom of another young boy named Hugh of Lincoln, which scholars tip as the most well-remembered and purported slaughter by Jews of a Christian boy in England, perhaps due to Geoffrey Chaucer’s description of the event in “The Prioress’s Tale” (Cohen 65). Furthermore, William’s renown on the Continent touted

¹⁶⁹ This acknowledgment, if authentic, came despite the Pershore monk’s nearness to the older and more longstanding Worcester Cathedral, home since the end of the tenth century to Saint Oswald of Worcester, Archbishop of York. Oswald, like William, had a burgeoning cult almost immediately after his death and a vita authored by a rather enamored monk (Farmer, “Oswald[2]”).

¹⁷⁰ Harper-Bill notes that “William . . . was never able to provide the focus of local piety and solidarity achieved by the cult of Saint Edmund in the southern part of the diocese; no more, despite his evident sanctity, [than] did the revered thirteenth-century [Norwich] bishop, Walter Suffield, at whose tombs offerings were also made” (304).

¹⁷¹ One of the key indicators of a shrine’s success, fiduciary offerings, are shown to have all but vanished by the fourteenth century (Jessopp and James lxxxiii); after the Reformation, the cult was abolished and virtually forgotten. Scant artifacts survive: a dozen or so altar-screen paintings, coins bearing William’s image, and a few other miscellanies (lxxxv-viii).

by Thomas as evidence of William's global popularity was limited to the brief mention of the saint in a German martyrology, which may have only gotten their attention in the first place because it corresponded with the monks' antisemitic views there (Rose 107). Indeed, while the cult may have gained some local traction in its early years, Thomas's best remembered contribution remains his narrative of antisemitism (123), though even that seems to not have directly resulted in any reprisals against the Jews in Norwich. Although Thomas of Monmouth was indeed antisemitic, spreading such a narrative was not his primary intent, as the story of the Jews was simply a means to an end alongside the miracle and vision narratives. His main purpose was to develop an enduring cult to attract attention to Norwich Cathedral, a task in which he ultimately failed.

The saint's bodily remains have long since vanished, and the only memento to William at Norwich Cathedral today is a small chapel in the central nave of the church under a "rood-loft" (Jessopp and James lxxxiv) with a placard resting on it apologizing on behalf of the community to persecuted Jews and warning readers of the dangers of racial prejudice, which I saw when I visited the cathedral in May 2015.¹⁷² The chapel is, tellingly, no longer dedicated to William, but to the Holy Innocents, the *Jewish* boys murdered by Herod as described in Matthew 2 ("Chapel of the Holy Innocents"). If anything, and despite Thomas's failure to generate a sustainable cult, Herbert de Losinga may be pleased to know that the edifice which he worked so hard to establish, maintain, and popularize still stands, having weathered the test of a thousand years of political and religious upheaval—a fact which neither the abbey at Bury St. Edmunds nor the shrine of Thomas Becket can boast.

¹⁷² The placard reads in part: "This Chapel was restored to use in 1997 and dedicated in the presence of Jewish representatives as a place for remembering the sufferings of all innocent victims, particularly the young. It is also a place of prayer for reconciliations between people of different faiths, remembering especially all victims of Christian-Jewish persecution" ("Chapel of the Holy Innocents").

Chapter 3: Challenging Lollardy with Hagiographic Rhetoric: John Mirk's *Festial* Sermons

In the previous chapters I discussed how two particular monks deployed hagiographic rhetoric partly in their written works. In Chapter 1, I discussed how Ælfric of Eynsham used hagiographic tales to create solidarity among English Christians in the face of Danish/Viking invasions. In Chapter 2, I discussed how Thomas of Monmouth used hagiography of his own making to attract pilgrim attention to Norwich Cathedral. In this third chapter, I will discuss how another monk, John Mirk, responded to the threat of Lollardy in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries through the deployment of hagiographic rhetoric in his *Festial* homily collection.

Among Mirk's concerns seems to have been the Lollard challenge to ecclesiastically supported saint-veneration. In several sermons, he specifically included language and narrative details, even altering from his source material, to address the heresy, and prove that the cult of the saints was indeed efficacious to the souls and physical well-being of the Christian faithful. Mirk's sermons thus further indicate how the deployment of hagiographic rhetoric was used in the Middle Ages for purposes other than simply promoting piety, in this case, to maintain the authority and sanctity of inherited church tradition in the face of perceived Lollard threats.

To this end I will first review the historical context of Lollardy and its objections to saint-veneration, along with a description of Mirk's awareness of Wycliffite tenets. I will then review four sermons where his hagiographic rhetoric is particularly apparent, and explore how his textual choices within the hagiographic tales reinforce orthodox dogma

about the saints. These four sermons are the feasts of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, Thomas's translation, Saint Winifred, and Saint Alkmund.¹⁷³

Lollardy in England

Lollardy emerged in the late 1300s, growing largely from the teachings of John Wycliffe, an Oxford theologian and professor. As with certain other religious movements, the terms "Lollards" or "Lollardy" were names assigned by opponents and only later adopted, more or less, by the followers themselves. This name comes from a false Germanic etymology meaning "mumbler" (Mazzio 47) or "babbler" (Burton 388), although a more apropos translation could be "murmurer" or "complainer." The objections that Wycliffe and his associates raised against the late-medieval Church anticipated the theses of Luther and Calvin by more than a century (Aston 135).¹⁷⁴

In essence, Wycliffe and then the later Lollards sought to "[return] Christianity to its early purity" by doing away with many supposed extraneous ecclesiastical traditions that had grown in the faith over the course of its development (Aston 135). This included what Lollards saw as a bloated and corrupt clergy, but by extension "the whole sacramental system[,] as well as the devotional system[,] as well as devotional practices such as pilgrimage." Lollards also believed that the measuring-stick of Christian legitimacy was not dependent on priesthood or Church traditions, but on the Bible alone "as the supreme rule of faith." Wycliffe's controversial English translation of the Bible was his ultimate

¹⁷³ The text of the *Festial* referenced in this chapter is the two-volume collated edition by Susan Powell for the Early English Text Society (2011). My citations are noted by sermon and line number, e.g. 16.50. Endnote citations are from Powell vol. 2, and are indicated by volume number and page number, followed by sermon number and line reference, e.g. 2.374-5, n. 40.24-27.

¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, Martin Luther used the lessons of two vitae to justify his point in his twenty-ninth thesis that "[not] all souls in purgatory wish to be redeemed," based on "the exceptions in the legends of Saint Severinus and Saint Paschal" (6).

sacrilegious act resulting in his excommunication (Foster and Carey 78-9)—vernacular translations of scripture being seen by late medieval church authorities as an extrathetical liability that would tend to lead the laity into heresy by way of human proneness to error (Aston 108-9).¹⁷⁵ Although later Lollards drew inspiration from him, Wycliffe himself should not be considered a “Lollard,” as “[b]y the fifteenth century, Lollardy represented much more radical versions of Wycliffe’s ideas” (Brandolino, “God’s Gluttons” 413).¹⁷⁶ In general, however,

Modern scholars seeking to define the beliefs and practices of the Lollard movement agree that Lollards owned and studied English Bibles, promoted literacy among their ranks, and held that any good Christian could preach. From the Lollard perspective, the institutional church was nonessential; Christians needed no intermediary to facilitate their relationship with God. The heresy’s radically singular focus endangered the church’s role as Christians’ intermediary to the divine and thus also endangered the ‘social boundaries between cleric and layperson,’ as Rice explains. Disregard for such a social distinction carried the more general threat of ‘potential social disorder.’” (413-4)

Among these objections to the Church was its opposition to the extravagance of the cult of the saints and all of the associated “popular devotional custom[s]” (Jones 28), in particular, veneration of saints, pilgrimage to holy sites associated with saints, hagiographic iconography, and also the elevation of hagiographic narrative over Biblical text. These practices, they suggested, distracted from the essential tenets of the faith as Christ established them in his teaching described in the New Testament. Pomp and

¹⁷⁵ The orthodox perspective suggested that “there is a limit to what religious knowledge and practices all lay Christians should be able to learn about on their own in texts. . . . Vernacular religious texts were also enabling Christians to pursue increasingly independent, interior forms of piety that endangered both the church as an institution and the social order that relied upon a significant separation between lay and religious Christians” (Brandolino, “God’s Gluttons” 416). It seems that some clergymen felt that the education of the laity worked too well, and that some laypersons had become so well-educated that they had become too smart for their own good, the increased knowledge leading to critical thinking, heretical notions, and apostasy (418). It was acceptable for the *clergy* to be thus informed, as they could be guided by the establishment into proper thinking, but opening up such a life to the laity was liable to misinterpretation and misrule.

¹⁷⁶ Cigman differentiates between academic Lollards, aka. the “Wycliffites,” and the “popularizers” of the movement, the ones who principally wrote and preached Lollard sermons (“The Preacher” 69).

circumstance, supposed miracle narratives, elaborate shrines and churches, ornamented and wealthy clergy—all of this was antithetical to the pure and simple Gospel of Christ and his Apostles (29), to which the industry of sainthood profoundly contributed through relics, shrines, icons, images, pilgrimages, and *vitae*. As a result some Lollards wanted to do away with it entirely, or, like Wycliffe, to at least reform its practices and correct false tradition (30).

While complete homogeneity among the Lollards should not be assumed,¹⁷⁷ nor should their influence be exaggerated,¹⁷⁸ their common criticisms of the church disturbed the ecclesiastical order in England enough that official injunctions against their preaching were issued (Aston 8). Lollard preachers were taken to trial and punished (42-3), and even Wycliffe's bones were posthumously dug up and set aflame to purge the influence of his heresy (Flinn). The term "Lollard" too was prominent enough to be featured as insults and accusations in the work of two of this period's now well-known authors, Geoffrey Chaucer and Margery Kempe.¹⁷⁹ Over time, the derogation eventually came to imply *all* heretics,

¹⁷⁷ Margaret Aston notes that "Lollardy was a variable creed," and not a unified or hierarchical movement (9); and that Wycliffe, though its founder, was not necessarily a figurehead and certainly not a "chief executive" (13). Bracy V. Hill also rightly suggests that the "hermeneutics of the heterogeneous Lollards have been homogenized and oversimplified for the purpose of comparison" (2). Yet W. R. Jones notes, and I agree, that some consensus of Lollard beliefs "can . . . be extracted from several sources, both particular and general, and of both Wycliffite and orthodox authorship" (31). Gloria Cigman further characterizes a difference between the academic Wycliffites and the Lollard "popularizers," who were not always in doctrinal or practical accord ("The Preacher" 69).

¹⁷⁸ Eamon Duffy is the most prominent critic of the presumed popularity of Lollardy, suggesting in his seminal work, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1480*, that "the impact of Lollardy on . . . religious awareness [of the masses] has been grossly exaggerated. The mainstream of fifteenth-century piety was indeed conventionally censorious of heresy, but not in my view greatly affected, much less shaped, by reaction to it. . . . [E]ven at the height of the struggle against Lollardy, in the decades on either side of 1400, it is possible to exaggerate its cultural and political impact" ("Preface" 1.4). Steven Justice adds that "it is now commoner [in academia] to stress its [Lollardy's] appeal to the gentry and nobility and at the royal court" (668), though W. R. Jones sees it more appealing to the "minor bourgeoisie" (36); in any case, modern scholarship casts doubts on the idea of Lollardy as really representing the vast majority of English men and women (Ford, "The Autonomy" 33).

¹⁷⁹ The *Book of Margery Kempe* records several instances where Kempe is labeled a "Lollare" for her extraordinary religious practices (95.901), such as quoting scripture and telling people not to curse (110.1152-3). Chaucer famously deploys the term when the Host, using a characteristic string of blasphemies, invites

actual or presumed (Bisson 59), as well as anyone convicted or suspected of treason (Aston 4-5). The defining characteristics of the so-called “Lollard” thus “grew in content” (8) and became, in the apt words of Susan Powell, a medieval “bogeyman” (“Lollards and Lombards”).

But in Mirk’s day, Lollardy had not yet reached the extreme notoriety it would gain in the 1410s and 1420s, though its “common reput[e]” was severe enough (Aston 8). The movement was considered heretical from the outset, and English theologians “quick[ly]” responded to Wycliffe in “a small but important corpus of English iconodule literature,” including contributions from his Oxford colleagues. The principal point of contention, W. R. Jones notes, was, generally speaking, the Lollard objection to saint-veneration; these responses however were principally textual and academic, and almost entirely written in Latin (37). Such treatises then would not have reached nor been accessible to the average English person, who in this period were “overwhelmingly rural and uneducated” (Ford, “The Autonomy” 21). A sermon delivered in a parish church by a priest in the mother tongue, however, would.

That sermons were popular in this period is demonstrated in *The Book of Margery Kempe*, which records an appearance of a well-known preacher in Kempe’s hometown of Lynn, ca. 1420 (Windeatt, n. 5098-9).¹⁸⁰ This preacher’s reputation precedes him; Kempe notes that he was “holdyn an holy man and a good prechowr,” whose “name and . . . perfeccyon of prechyng [had] spred and sprong wondyr wyde” (4979-81).¹⁸¹ She reports

the righteous Parson to tell a tale, and the Parson calls the Host out on his “swearing,” to which the Host indicates that he “smell[s] a Loller in the wind” (“The Man of Law’s Epilogue” 85-6.1166-77). Interestingly, the accusation of being a Lollard in both these situations is related to Kempe’s and the Parson’s suggestions to others to quit breaking the Third Commandment (cf. Windeatt, n. 1146, and Aston 147-9).

¹⁸⁰ Windeatt speculates that this friar may have been the Franciscan William Melton (n. 4979).

¹⁸¹ “[H]eld [to be] a holy man and a good preacher, whose name and [reputation for] perfect preaching had spread far and wide.”

that the church in Lynn where this friar holds his first sermon is crowded with “meche pepyl gadyrd to heryn” him (4989).¹⁸² She also notes “how fast the pepyl cam rennyng to heryn” it (5005-6).¹⁸³ Of course, we cannot assume that *all* sermons were attended by the thundering feet of people dashing to hear them based on this one metropolitan example, but it can be understood that the hearing of sermons was an important part of thirteenth- and fourteenth-century English life, and was one of the principal ways the common man and woman was exposed to the word of God.¹⁸⁴ For Kempe, as it must have been for other laypersons, sermons were among “the hyest comfort[s] in erth whan [I] myth heryn it” (5080-1).¹⁸⁵

John Mirk and the “Lolleres”

John Mirk’s compendium participates in this period’s tradition of vernacular sermonizing.¹⁸⁶ His aims in producing the *Festial*—or, in modern terms, “festival,” referring to the different *feast* days of saints—are practical: the text was compiled in order “to provide accessible preaching material for a typical poor parish.” Mirk was an Augustinian monk in Lilleshall, a small town in Shropshire not far from Shrewsbury, the nearest sizeable town, which in turn is not far from Wales. Mirk (active ca. 1380-1420) was a canon at Lilleshall Abbey, and eventually served as prior (S. Powell xix).¹⁸⁷ The

¹⁸² “[M]any people gathered to hear his sermon.”

¹⁸³ “[H]ow fast the people came running to hear it.”

¹⁸⁴ And despite modern popular belief, these sermons—though not the Mass itself—were given in the vernacular.

¹⁸⁵ “[T]he highest comfort[s] on earth when I might hear them.” Her sentiment here is all the more reason why she’s so downhearted at being comprehensively banned from this friar’s sermons courtesy her boisterous wailings in church services (5079-85).

¹⁸⁶ Ironically enough, the dramatic increase of vernacular sermons in this period is directly attributable to Wycliffe (Aston 15).

¹⁸⁷ His name is only ever written in Latin, Ioannes Mircus; the name is possibly an English derivative of the New Testament nomenclature John Mark.

Festial is actually one compilation in a three-part series, the other two of which were a set of instructions for parish priests and a manual for performing sacred offices. Two of these works, including the *Festial*, were in English; the final text was written in Latin when serving in his leadership role (xx).¹⁸⁸ He was clearly an accomplished writer, “unusually energetic and talented” (xxv); the numerous extant copies of his works and the *Festial* in particular suggest that his sermons “were widely preached . . . throughout the late Middle Ages and into the sixteenth century” until sometime after the English Reformation, more than a hundred years after his likely date of death (xix-x).

Mirk’s principal devotion in his role was to “pedagogic and missionary endeavours” (xxv), which in small West Midlands parishes were constant priorities. Susan Powell characterizes this common problem in rural English churches as having a “need to teach the people” while dealing with “the inadequacy of available teachers” (xxix). Lilleshall was no Oxford, but this is precisely why Mirk’s sermons are so valuable: they were not produced for the educated person or for the religious elite, but for the rural priest and parishioner (xxix). The sixty-plus sermons of the *Festial* are notable precisely because they “offered an impressive preaching programme at a time when regular preaching was not necessarily to be found in the parish church” (xxxi).

The format and language of his sermons similarly reflects Mirk’s attention to his audience. Like one of Aelfric’s priests referring to *The Lives of the Saints*, once Mirk’s parish priests had a copy of Mirk’s sermons, they could simply turn to the appropriate

¹⁸⁸ Susan Powell adds that “[i]n Mirk’s own mind, at least, the three works constituted a full pastoral programme—the sermons for preaching and the manuals for constant reference—to be read often, not thrown in a corner but kept by the priest’s side throughout his daily life” (xxviii).

homily for the particular saint's day and read it (S. Powell xl).¹⁸⁹ Rather than being long doctrinal treatises, the sermons are dominated by narrative based particularly in saintly *vitae* with an occasional, though rare, glimpse of Biblical scenes (xli). Rare too are completely faithful paraphrases and summaries of his sources (xxxv; xlii). His use of a "familiar tone and colloquial style" further suggests his appeal to "ordinary people," whom he is clearly targeting throughout (xxxix).

Thus the average person hearing these sermons would not likely have been overly familiar with the scholarly, theological debates going on in Oxford and the eastern reaches of the English church, nor would most of the parish priests reading these sermons have been at a high risk of converting to Lollardy in the late 1380s. Yet the growing Lollard movement *was* familiar to both laymen and women and clergy alike, and oppressive enough that Mirk, in two of his sermons, mentions the Lollards and their teachings specifically. He offers little explanation of Lollardy itself, and in one of the sermons wholly mischaracterizes their supposed beliefs. But his use of the term and his references to Lollard teachings suggest that the priest reading the text and the people hearing it would have recognized both the name "Lollard" and would have identified them as heretical.

Mirk's References to the Lollards in the Holy Trinity Sermon

Mirk's first explicit condemnation of the Lollards comes in his sermon for the Feast of the Holy Trinity, Trinity Sunday—a holy day set apart especially to emphasize the triune nature of the Godhead, following the extensive, Christ-focused Christmas/Easter feasts. In his thesis, he reiterates that one of the reasons this feast was founded was for the

¹⁸⁹ Powell also notes that there are nearly forty extant *Festial* texts, half of them in near-perfect condition (xlili-iv).

“confondyng” of “heretykkys” (the confounding of heretics) (40.12-3), a reference to the early Christian silencing of the Arian heresy which denied the Trinity.¹⁹⁰ In short order, he similarly defends the supreme authority of “Holy Chyrche,” suggesting simply that because the Church had long-established this feast to remind everybody about the truthfulness of the doctrine, it was in everyone’s best interest “to don honure and reuerens to þe Holy Trinite” as a result (40.24-6).¹⁹¹

Mirk then launches into his anti-Lollard diatribe, forcefully suggesting that the feast was founded “to distroyen þe falce opynions þat þei heldyn aʒeynus þe Holy Trinity, os Lollerdes doth now” (40.28-9)¹⁹² and again compares their doctrine to Arianism:

For rythe os heretykys in þe begynnyng of þe fayth weryn abowten wyth here smethe wordys [and] plesyn and falce opynyons to ha distroyed þe feythe of þe Trinite, ryght so now þis Lollardes wyth here smethe wordys and plesyng to þe pepul ben abowtyn to drawen þe pepul fro þe fayth of Holy Chyrche þat holy popys, byschoppes[,] and dotteres taghton and hath ben holdyn and vsyd eure into þis tyme. (29-35)¹⁹³

His specific mentioning of clerics, including popes, is a further defense of the Church against the anticlerical Lollards. Mirk adds that not only do the Lollards reject these foundational Christian teachings approved and established by such authorities, they are also guilty of seeking to murder these same church officials. Just as their metaphorical heretical cousins the Arians “pursued holy popes, martyres[,] and confessoures to þe death,

¹⁹⁰ Arianism in part denied the Nicene formula of the Holy Trinity, and also depicted Jesus as the Son of God but as “a supernatural creature not quite human and not quite divine” (“Arianism”). This of course was at odds with the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity as coeternal and consubstantial, which Mirk supported.

¹⁹¹ “Þan for þat Holy chyrche ordeyneth suche worchep to a man in mynde of þe Trinite, a man is miche holdon to don honure and reuerens to þe Holy Trinite in heven.” (“Because Holy Church ordains such worship for a man to remember the Trinity, that man is beholden to do honor and reverence to the Trinity [as a result]”).

¹⁹² “[T]o destroy the false opinions that they [the heretics] held against the Holy Trinity, [just] as the Lollards do now.”

¹⁹³ “For just as heretics at the beginning of the Faith went about with their smooth words and pleasing and false opinions to destroy faith in the Trinity, so now do these Lollards with their smooth words and pleasing [words] to the people are [going] about to draw the people from the faith of Holy Church that holy popes, bishops, and [religious] doctors have taught and upheld and used [from that day] to this time.”

ryght so now þeys Lolleres pursueth men of Holy Chyrche and ben abowtyn in all þat þei may [do] to vndon hem” (36-9).¹⁹⁴ And to make sure his point is clear, he adds specifically that because of their opposition to Church doctrine and because of their desire to kill, these Lollards “be not Goddys servauntes” (40).

Even though his accusation against the Lollards was not necessarily in conflict with the period’s sentiments about the group, Mirk’s association here of these dissidents as being on par with murderous persecution by early heretics is both an exaggeration and a mischaracterization which Susan Powell believes is a calculated “ploy to discourage speculation [about Lollardy] in an uneducated audience”—a scare tactic. Even if the parishioners who heard this sermon, delivered by Mirk or a parish priest, had not previously heard about the Lollards or known about them, they would then have been warned of their evil, murderous intentions. His characterization then is also a straw man made more poignant by the irony that of all the many Lollard objections to the established Church, anti-Trinitarianism was not among them (2.374, n. 40.27-47).

Mirk’s Reference to the Lollards in the Corpus Christi Feast

In other writings Mirk’s take on the Lollards is more accurate,¹⁹⁵ such as his subsequent sermon for the Feast of Corpus Christi (Christ’s Body). This feast day was often a day for priests to teach correct doctrine about the transubstantiation of the Eucharist, and so served Mirk’s purpose well in responding to the Lollards. There are several oblique

¹⁹⁴ “Wherefore, just as heretics at the beginning of Holy Church pursued righteous popes, bishops, and confessors to the death, so now [do] these Lollards pursue men of Holy Church, going about that they might undo them” (35-9).

¹⁹⁵ Susan Powell notes that Mirk was particularly accurate about Lollardy in his later Latin work, suggesting that he knew more than he was telling here, and that, indeed, he was trumping-up anti-Lollard ideas to alarm his lay audience (2.374-5, n. 40.24-27). Whether Mirk had been misinformed or was being deceptive on this point is a matter of speculation.

allusions to Lollard teachings in this sermon, including transubstantiation,¹⁹⁶ but Mirk eventually takes on the Lollards directly in regard to their opposition to holy images. Just as the Eucharist serves as a literal reminder of Christ's Passion for the faithful, Mirk preaches, so do "crosses and oþer ymages ben necessary in chyrches, whatte-euer þeis Loleris seyne" (106-7).¹⁹⁷ He again appeals to the ethos of the Church itself for guidance on correct Christian practice by adding that if these images "had not ben profettabul, gode holy faderes wolde a dystroyed hem oute of chyrches many ȝeres ago" (107-9).¹⁹⁸

While this notion about the Lollards is more accurate than his characterization of their supposed unbelief in the Trinity, it is again an exaggeration of their views in that the Lollards of his day, along with John Wycliffe, were not necessarily opposed to images themselves but to the replacement of worshipping God with the worship of the images—or, as Margaret Aston writes, "worshipping the sign instead of the signified"—which amounted to idolatry (141). It was only later that a handful of self-described Lollards turned to iconoclasm, though even these episodes were exaggerated in number and in consequence in the public mind (137).

In any case, and whether Mirk got the Lollards "right" or not, it's clear that Lollardy was a concern for Mirk, and that he used his sermons as an opportunity to correct the heresy.¹⁹⁹ Such a case is obvious, and has been well-established by scholars placing Mirk's *Festial* within its historical context, many of whom are cited in this chapter. But what has

¹⁹⁶ Lollards asserted that the worthiness of a priest determined whether the Host was actually blessed or not. Mirk responds that the "virtue of the Eucharist is not therefore affected by the vice of a priest, although [the priest] . . . himself will be punished after death" for his sin in doing so (S. Powell 2.377-8, n. 30-42).

¹⁹⁷ "And so crosses and other images have been necessary in churches, whatever these Lollards say."

¹⁹⁸ "If they [these images] had not been expedient, the righteous holy fathers would have destroyed them out of churches many years ago."

¹⁹⁹ Susan Powell notes that Mirk deliberately paired the Corpus Christi sermon with the one for Trinity Sunday "through the need for perfect belief in two *hard doctrines* [i.e. transubstantiation and the Trinity], both open to heresy" (2.377, n. 41.11-15, emphasis added).

not been noticed is that Mirk also uses saint-tales in his sermons to support his doctrinal points, and that by so doing, deploys hagiographic rhetoric to combat Lollardy. I will develop this point further in the next section, where I detail specific *vitae* presented in four sermons where Mirk, I believe, responds to the heresies of the period in general and Lollardy in particular. But to further substantiate Mirk's consciousness of the Lollards in the *Festial*, I will now relate one such story from the Corpus Christi sermon where a saint-tale is clearly used to defend Church orthodoxy and, by extension, to attack Lollard sentiments of the Eucharist.

After some refutation of Lollard teaching and immediately before he mentions Lollards by name, Mirk in the Corpus Christi sermon relates a story of Saint Odo of Canterbury, a twelfth-century English monk and twenty-five-year Abbot of Battle.²⁰⁰ A few of Odo's monks did not believe in transubstantiation or that Christ's blood was literally shed during the mass (41.83-6). Feeling pity for the men, Odo prayed that this disbelief would turn to faith (86-7). In short order, during a mass in which Odo presided, the abbot noticed that as he tore the Eucharistic bread in two that "blode droppyn downe fro þe hoste faste into þe schalys" (87-9).²⁰¹ Odo then summoned the disbelieving monks to the altar to witness the miracle firsthand, and, seeing the blood run from the bread into the wine-cup, the monks cried out their belief and asked for God's pardon (89-97). Mirk concludes the episode by noting that "þei weren gode men and perfyte in þe beleue alle way aftur" (98-9).²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Susan Powell notes that like many hagiographic tales, the one Mirk relates here has several analogues and was probably appropriated from another saint's story decades if not a century or more before Mirk's paraphrase (2.378, n. 41.82-99).

²⁰¹ "[B]lood dropped down steadily from the Host into the chalice."

²⁰² "They were good men and perfect in their belief forever after."

Mirk's basic hagiographic purpose is clear: *we see from this story that many people have witnessed miracles involving the Eucharist, so we should not doubt that it is in reality the body of Christ*. But his rhetoric goes deeper, suggesting by association that those who do not believe in transubstantiation are committing a grave error—specifically the Lollards, whom early in the sermon he challenges obliquely and then mentions explicitly in his subsequent point. His lay audience then may not have known that the first oblique reference pertained to the Lollards; we may also assume that some, if not many, would similarly have failed to connect the off-handed Lollard reference to Mirk's previous discussion of Lollards in context.

This ordering then is a clear rhetorical use of a *vita* for an ecclesiastical and political purpose: to denounce the beliefs of the Lollards. In other words, it's evidence of John Mirk's hagiographic rhetoric. And just as these oblique references to Lollardy in these sermons suggest that part of his *Festial* was designed to combat Lollard ideas, so too other oblique references in other *vitae* suggest that these sermons as well, if indirectly, deployed hagiographic rhetoric to warn parishioners of Lollard or Lollard-like heresy, including those aspects of their ideology that challenge the efficacy of the communion of the saints.

Mirk's Oblique Refutations of Lollard Ideas in Other Sermons

Although, as noted, John Wycliffe himself fell short of outright condemnation of images, many of the Lollards and “popularizers” of the movement were staunch iconomachs, opposed to religious imagery, though only occasionally iconoclasts, destroyers of religious imagery. Aston writes that “denial of image-worship” was probably “one of the commonest . . . Lollard beliefs, and the view that it was idolatry to serve saints’

images with pilgrimage or other acts of devotion secured wide support” among them (143). The injunction against images came from, of course, the Ten Commandments, in a “scriptural fidelity [which] embraced the old law with the new” (144). An “earnest” adherence to and a strict repetition of the Decalogue thus became one of the foremost ways to detect a Lollard, as demonstrated in the cases of Margery Kempe and Chaucer’s Parson (152). Even those Lollards who, like Wycliffe, took a more even-keeled approach to images, pilgrimage, and other aspects of the cult of the saints, still objected to ceremonial pretense and extracanonical practices (Cigman, “The Preacher” 78).²⁰³

Several of Mirk’s sermons “[draw] attention to the Lollards’ disregard for church tradition” and defend the practices of the orthodox Church regarding the cult of the saints—that “authority of Christian tradition which Lollardy sought to replace with the authority of the Bible” (Ford, *John Mirk’s Festial* 147). I will now discuss four in particular where such defense is apparent: two sermons for the feast days of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, and one each for Saints Alkmund and Winifred. Other sermons would serve just as well. As Nancy E. Atkinson notes, many *Festial* sermons “provided preachers with homilies that encouraged parishioners to revere images and worship at shrines” (340). But I have selected these four because, first, all of the saints are English, and second, only one is based on the *Legenda Aurea*, which Mirk generally borrowed in other sermons; thus these

²⁰³ One unidentified Lollard preacher, himself composing a “handbook” of sermons at the same time as Mirk but not in direct dialogue with him, characterizes pilgrimage as stemming from a “blyndenesse of bileue,” and pilgrims as those who “rennep fro cuntre to cuntre, to ymages ȝoten or grauen wiþ mannes hondes.” He asserts that the images themselves have no virtue, and castigates those who falsely assume that even when an image is stolen, that somehow God’s power is diminished in that location, when in fact God’s power is never diminished, and is equally abundant in all places. Finally, in a list of sins, he cites “mawmetrie”—the Middle English word for “idolatry,” used to refer to Muslims, the followers of Mohammed/Mawmet, who were wrongly presumed to practice idol-worship—as a “gateway” sin leading to other vices, including greed, murder, fornication, and sodomy (Cigman, *Lollard Sermons* 10.328-32), to say nothing of breaking the first commandment by replacing the worship of God with that of human beings (11.287-92). For most Lollards, then, the practices within the cult of the saints were at best problematic misdirections and at worst mortal sins.

sermons seem more original to Mirk though they do correlate with other less widely disseminated works.²⁰⁴ It's important to note too that all of Mirk's responses to heresy and Wycliffite teachings in these sermons are oblique, but his rejection of Lollard-specific ideas warrants further discussion into John Mirk's hagiographic rhetoric.

Saint-Veneration in the Sermons for Saint Thomas of Canterbury

Mirk's support for orthodoxy is very apparent in his sermon for the "Feast of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, Bishop."²⁰⁵ The story follows the same pattern of Thomas's usual hagiography as related in the *Legenda Aurea*—how he had been a bosom friend to King Henry II (10.53-4), serving as the king's trusted chancellor responsible for driving out corrupt Flemish merchantmen and retrieving castles and towns from French hands (35-8), and then eventually being named to the archbishopric, an office the king had hoped to turn, through Thomas, to support crown policies over those of the Church. Henry was frustrated in this by Thomas, who, Mirk recounts, as "sone as he was archebyschop of Canturbury, anon he wox anopur mon and turned al hys lyf into bettur, and þoght to serue þe kyng of heuen aftur þat as wel as he hadde don þe kyng in erþe byfore" (77-80).²⁰⁶ Thomas's commitment to heaven's king over England's king came to a head a few years later, when as archbishop he "reproved" the king for seeking to supplant "the rights of the Church with those of the state" (107-10),²⁰⁷ and refused to "setton hys seeal to cursed lawes þat þe kyng

²⁰⁴ "Apart from *LA*, he had access to other legends, particularly those relating to the local saints Alkmund and Winifred, and to the national saint, Thomas of Canterbury" (S. Powell xxiv).

²⁰⁵ Titled in Latin as *De Sancto Thoma Cantuariensi Episcopo*.

²⁰⁶ "As soon as he became Archbishop of Canterbury, he immediately became a different man, and changed all his life for the better, thinking to serve the King of Heaven from that point on as well as he had a king of earth [Henry] before."

²⁰⁷ This quote is from S. Powell 2.291, n. 10.2. Mirk does not go into much detail over this dispute between the former friends, but simply states that the king had attempted to make "lawes in such [a way] þat schuld haue destroyed þe lond" ("[make] laws in such [a way] that would have destroyed the land").

and hys sory counsayle hadde imaked” (111-3).²⁰⁸ Later an exiled Thomas excommunicated, with the backing of the Pope, certain bishops who had unlike Thomas acceded to the king’s wishes (2.294, n. 10.131-2), further severing their already broken relationship (10.131-2).

Thomas’s subsequent well-known exile in France is only amended when the Pope intervenes—a point Mirk emphasizes several times for good measure.²⁰⁹ When the infamous quartet of knights later appears at Canterbury Cathedral to do justice for their king (Mirk is vague about whether the king himself ordered them or not), they demand that he approve the bishops appointed by Henry, to which Thomas replies orthodoxly, ““Syres, þey [the bishops] ben acursed by þe pope and not by me, and Y may not asoyle þat þe pope acurseth”” (10.131-4).²¹⁰ Mirk’s representation of Thomas’s final statements during his violent martyrdom further serve to illustrate the saint’s loyalty to the established Church: “[Y] taken my deth for Goddes loue and for þe ryght of Holy Chyrch” (147-8); “God, into þy hondes Y betake my cause and þe ryght of þys chyrch” (153-4).”²¹¹ Once Thomas has perished in the narrative, Mirk echoes: “Þus for ryght of Holy Chyrch and þe lawes of þus lond Thomas tok hys deth ful mekely” (163-4).²¹²

For Mirk, the repetition of the words “holy church” and “pope,” combined with the assertion that no man’s laws, even a king’s, can take precedence over the decrees of the

²⁰⁸ “[Refused to] set his seal of approval to the cursed laws that the king and his sorry council had made.”

²⁰⁹ For instance: “by trete of þe pope” (10.118), “princepaly [by] þe byddyng of þe pope” (123-4), etc.

²¹⁰ “Sirs, they [the bishops] have been cursed by the Pope and not by me, and I may not pardon them who the Pope has cursed.”

²¹¹ “I die for God’s love and for the right[s] of Holy Church”; “God, into your hands I take my cause for the right[s] of this Church.” Jacobus de Voragine renders Thomas’s last words somewhat differently in the *Legenda Aurea*: “I am ready to die for God, to to defend justice, and to prrotect the freedom of the Church. . . . I commend myself and the cause of the Church to God, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Denis, and all the saints” (Duffy 61).

²¹² “Thus for the right[s] of Holy Church and the laws of this land Thomas died with full meekness.”

papacy, serve to reinforce the idea in his fourteenth-century audience that the Church has the final word on all matters of dispute throughout the world (and particularly in England). Notably, these statements are further departures from Mirk's source material; in the *Legenda Aurea*, Jacobus de Voragine never mentions the Pope, and the Church itself is not so emphatically defended. This suggests that Mirk intentionally added these discussions into this sermon in order to emphasize the primacy of church tradition. Whatever the Church and the Pope suggest is true, he seems to say, that is the end of discussion—to which he could have added, as he does later, “whatever these Lollards say.”

But the story of Saint Thomas of Canterbury serves not merely as an oblique refutation of Lollard anticlerical arguments: in the rest of the sermon, with his orthodox point established, Mirk is able to explore the efficacy of the cult of the saints through a retelling of two of Thomas's posthumous miracles. One story involves a man who petitions Thomas at his shrine in Canterbury to be healed of an illness; the man's prayer is granted (10.189-90). In this, Mirk infers that saints' shrines indeed have power, and that seeking out saints at their holy sites can hasten the answering of prayers. The other story, however, is particularly telling. Here Mirk recounts the story of a bird, evidently a native creature from somewhere along the pilgrimage trail to Canterbury. The text informs us via Jacobus that this bird, perhaps some species of jay, had picked up certain words used by the pilgrims. When at length this bird was pursued by a sparrowhawk, it cried out, repeating the pilgrims, ““Seynt Thomas, helpe, Seynt Thomas, help!”” Immediately, Mirk notes, the predator “fel doun ded” (183-6). The *Legenda Aurea* account ends there, but Mirk characteristically adds his own moral of the story to his intended audience: “Pen, insomuch þat Thomas herde so sone a bryd þat wyst not wat he mante, much sanner he hereth ham

pat calleth to hym in hure herte” (186-8).²¹³ By adding this detail Mirk points out that yes, indeed, saints can help those who petition them—just look at how quickly Thomas answered the prayers of a bird! How much more so then will he answer the prayers of men and women who call out to him?

Mirk expands this theme in a sequel sermon of sorts, “The Sermon of the Translation of Saint Thomas, Archbishop and Martyr,”²¹⁴ written for the commemoration of the movement of Thomas’s remains from “hys graue [grave] . . . [into] a schryne” (47.5-6)—the conspicuous place behind the high altar where his bones were at rest until their desecration during the sixteenth century (S. Powell 2.393, n. 47.83-4). The first part of the sermon is a summary of Thomas’s archbishopric and martyrdom; since this feast is held at the beginning of July, some seven months after his date of martyrdom of December 29, the hearers would likely need some recap to understand the significance of the translation. Following this review, Mirk further discusses the extent of the miracles in Canterbury granted by virtue of the cathedral’s own saint, reporting that because there were so many miracles, Pope Alexander III—the same who had defended Thomas from King Henry (2.393, n. 47.80-1)—soon called for a more elaborate shrine to house the saint so that he “myght ben worscheppyd of all þe pepul, as he was wel worþy” (47.79-84).²¹⁵

Mirk then implicitly defends the concept of relics, describing how the monks handling the remains of Thomas do so reverently, with literal “drede and quakyng for fere,”

²¹³ “Then, seeing how Saint Thomas so quickly answered the prayer of a bird who did not know what it was saying, we can see how much sooner he will hear the prayers of people who call out to him in their hearts.” As noted, these lines do not appear in the *Legenda Aurea*; they also do not appear in the *Nova Legenda Anglie* by the Northumbrian monk John of Tynemouth, who composed his work some thirty or forty years before and whom Mirk likely referenced. (For cross-references, see S. Powell 2.295, n. 10.189-95. For the corresponding passage in *NLA*, which is virtually identical to *LA*, see Horstmann 396.13-38).

²¹⁴ In Latin, *De Translacione Sancti Thome Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi et Martiris Sermo*.

²¹⁵ So that he “might be worshipped by all people, as he was very worthy.”

i.e. with fear and trembling (47.90-2), and carefully bore the bones to the archbishop for examination. The relics are treated so worshipfully that the archbishop and each of the priests kiss the skull before reburial, and then cover the remains in golden linen (97-102). The ceremony is attended by the king, perhaps the teenaged Henry III, grandson to Thomas's nemesis, and there behind the high altar the saint lay to the day—"þe place [wh]er it is now" (106)—that the Lilleshall laity would have heard Mirk or one of his proxies relating the tale (105-6). Though Shropshire was far from Kent, Saint Thomas would never be far from the hearts of devoted English Christians.

Mirk's use of the word "now" to describe the location of the shrine lends immediacy to the final admonition of this sermon, which is that all should follow the example of the reverencing monks who rendered "alle þe worchep and reuerens þat þei cowthe in worschep to God and honoure to þis holy seynte and martyr," to the "grete forthering to alle [of] þis reme," or realm (47.106-8).²¹⁶ For Mirk, then, the reverencing of Saint Thomas of Canterbury is important if not essential to the spiritual maintenance of England as a whole, the saint being a gift from God for their preservation. His concluding words, though formulaic for hagiographic homilies, reinforces this idea: "Now prayeth to Seynt Thomes of helpe," to which the reading priest was then instructed to lead the congregation in prayer to God through the saint (108-9). In this he presses upon the minds of his audience the importance of clinging to the saints, particularly English ones, who are the protectors of the church and their kingdom, again in spite of "whatever these Lollards say"—or any other heretics. Without the saints and the institutional church, he suggests, no king or kingdom can prosper.

²¹⁶ The monks who rendered "all the worship and reverence that they could in worship to God and [in] honor to this holy saint and martyr . . . [to the] great furthering to all in this realm."

While of course the evidence Mirk presents here is based on preconceptions and occasionally specious examples (the bird), he considered these justifications important for his lay audience, who he likely hoped would see through heretical arguments against saintly efficacy through these kinds of narratives. The hagiography of Saint Thomas of Canterbury was of course deployed by clerics throughout Europe to support church orthodoxy, whatever spiritual or political situation their flocks would have found themselves in. And while it's certainly possible that Mirk did not intend to refer to any particular heresy in these sermons, the story itself would have served Mirk's anti-Lollard purposes well, providing narratives for him to justify church tradition as well as present *exempla* to shore-up a defense of this Lollard-challenged doctrine of saints.

Saint-Veneration in the Saint Winifred Sermon

While Mirk utilizes the legacy of Saint Thomas of Canterbury to support the worship of saints throughout all England, he deploys the *vita* of Saint Winifred for a similar but more local effect. Winifred, born Brewa (43.63-6), was a seventh-century Welsh almost-martyr²¹⁷ who, in the spirit of many virgin-saints from early Christianity, had pledged her maidenhood to Christ (17-21), only to be threatened with sexual assault by a young nobleman named Craddock (25-6). When she rebuffs him, Craddock draws his sword and “at on[e] strok[e]” lops off her head (36-7). Her severed head, Mirk explains, rolls down a hill to the door of the new church her wealthy landowner father had sponsored and was just then being dedicated (38-9). A priest retrieves it, and bears it back to the body where Craddock is using the grass to wipe Winifred's blood off his weapon. The priest

²¹⁷ Mirk refers to her death as a “martirdom,” though in his narrative it only lasts a matter of moments (74). For brief background on Winifred, see S. Powell 2.381, n. 43.2.

curses him, and immediately “þe erþe openyd and swolowed hym down body and sowle into helle” (49-50).²¹⁸

Mirk then describes the miracle. Winifred’s body and head are taken back to the new church where the priest finishes the mass, and by the virtue of the prayers of the assembled people and, we can infer, the miracle-working nature of the mass itself, the girl rises, her head reattached (51-8). From that point on, her life is marked not only by singular holiness—she “lyved so perfyttly in alle wayes þat alle token ensaumpul be hyr” (72-3)²¹⁹ and by dutiful participation in “þe sacramentys of Holy Chyrch” (80)²²⁰—but also by a thin scar circling her neck à la Saint Edmund: “þeras þe strok[e] was, leke a whyte threde” (63-4).²²¹ When she dies permanently some years later, she is buried in a nondescript churchyard (82-3) but later translated to the abbey of Saint Giles Church at Shrewsbury (93-6).²²²

Mirk’s attention to the consecration of a physical church and a priest being associated with the miracle, along with the virtue of the mass and the sacraments, could be an oblique response to Lollard teachings against the sacerdotal system. His possible references to these heretics become all but explicit when in the next part of this sermon Mirk describes the miracles associated with Winifred during her life and at her Shrewsbury shrine. He points out that there are at least thirty miracles attributable to the saint of which he is aware, though he acknowledges that some of these narratives have been written while

²¹⁸ “The earth opened and swallowed him down body and soul into hell.”

²¹⁹ She “lived so perfectly in all ways that everyone looked to her as an example.”

²²⁰ “The sacraments of Holy Church”—which, we can infer, excluded matrimony.

²²¹ “For as long as she lived, there was a white circle like a white thread about her neck where the [sword’s] stroke had been” (63-4).

²²² Mirk’s description of Winifred’s translation to Saint Giles bears a striking resemblance to the story of William of Norwich by Thomas of Mounmouth (see Chapter 2), where the monks had been decrying their lack of a patron saint, or at least of relics, which “other abbeys of þe cuntre haddon” (43.85-8).

others have not.²²³ This short note about written texts may not have been important for his lay, mostly illiterate audience, who had little to do with textual authority. Because of this, Mirk's statement here seems to be a response to Lollard privileging of the written word over verbal tradition. Just because some stories have not been written down, he seems to suggest, does not preclude such narratives from being authoritative.

The fact that such an argument departs from Mirk's source material likewise supports this idea. Susan Powell believes that this inclusion of local hagiographic tradition must have been "widely known in the Shrewsbury area" (2.384, n. 43.102-5). This inclusion is a direct appeal to Shropshire parishioners who knew about Winifred and, in Mirk's time, witnessed the shrine's refurbishment (n. 101-2) and had long celebrated her feast on midsummer's day (n. 43.2). His appeal to non-textual tradition is thus an acknowledgment of local customs and beliefs, which Lollards rejected, and validates place-specific claims to special sanctity. Although he then notes that his purpose for the parishioners is to "styre 3oure deuocion more to þis seynte" (43.106),²²⁴ there is a strongly implied parallel argument about the potency of saint-traditions, countering whatever his audience may or may not have heard from Lollard teachings.

Mirk's attention to place and proximity is furthered by a description of miracles that happen directly at Winifred's shrine or in contact with her relics. One man, he recounts, suffering from a painful deformity of limbs, prayed all through the night at her shrine, pleading for healing; the next morning, his prayers were granted, and he awoke to find his limbs straightened and whole (43.8-13). He was so grateful to Winifred that he pledged to

²²³ "Wherefore in schorte tyme aftur God wroghte þritty grete myracles þat ben wryton[,] wythowtyn mony othyr þat ben not wryton" (103-4). [In a short while afterwards God wrought thirty great miracles that have been written, although there are many others which are not written.]

²²⁴ To "further stir your devotion to this saint."

“neure gon from hyr[,] bot ben a servaunte in þat chyrch alle hys lyfe aftur, and so he was” (120-1).²²⁵ The man’s decision to be anchored at the Church of Saint Giles in order to remain “near” to Winifred, or at least her relics, supports the principle of proximity regarding saints—a notion that, again, is antithetical to Lollardy. His emphasis on locality is reinforced by his acknowledging that the man in question was named Adam, who hailed from Ercall in Shropshire (43.107; cf. S. Powell 2.384, n. 43.107); naming the healed man too lends further credibility to this previously unwritten story, a strategy similarly employed by Thomas of Monmouth to support the developing cult of William of Norwich. If the hearers were not familiar with Adam of Ercall himself, they probably were with the town, which makes this inclusion a shrewd rhetorical move by Mirk to further connect the immediate virtue of the saints to their own land in the minds of his hearers.

Two other episodes include similar elements that stand in opposition to Lollard ideas. One concerns a Shrewsbury man bitten by an “atturcoppe,” or poisonous spider, who is healed by Winifred after his mother both lights a candle in his behalf at the shrine and brings him some of the consecrated water to drink that had been used to wash the saint’s bones during her translation. Afterwards, he provides a thank-offering of silver to Winifred and serves her, like Adam of Ercall, for the rest of his days (130-46). Another man, a Welsh knight, is similarly cured of dumbness by ingesting Winifred’s holy water, and pledges to “be hyr pylgrym” forever (147-63). At the sermon’s conclusion, Mirk instructs the reading priest to then lead the hearers in prayer to “þis holy maydyn and martyr.”²²⁶

²²⁵ “[H]e made a vow that he would never go from her, but would be a servant in that church for the rest of his life—and so he did.”

²²⁶ Susan Powell notes that this final injunction in the Winifred homily is only present in two of the surviving *Festial* manuscripts, and thus not in the majority of the extant texts (2.385, n. 43.163).

Each of these miracles is tied to a specific place or substance associated with Winifred. While such inclusions are generally part of hagiography, particularly the *vitae* of local saints, it seems even more so that Mirk, a consummate orthodox preacher and, as has been seen, anti-Lollard, wants to reinforce hagiographic tradition in his hearers through the rhetoric of proximity. If one wants to access a saint's virtue, Mirk implies, he or she will find it more fully in nearness to the saint's remains . . . *whatever these Lollards say*. Even here in our very own Shropshire!

Saint-Veneration in the Saint Alkmund Sermon

Mirk continues to pay attention to locality and the virtue of saints in specific places in his sermon for Saint Alkmund, which Susan Powell believes was written to be delivered for the dedication of a Lilleshall church to Alkmund on his feast day, March 19.²²⁷ Mirk spends considerable time at the beginning of this sermon teaching the concept of saintly patronage to help his lay audience understand not only the history of this particular saint for whom the church is being named, but also the doctrinal foundation behind the dedicatory event. He commences his exposition by defining the Latinate word *patron*, which “in Englys[h],” he writes, refers to a “defendur” (56.2). Every dedicated church has two patrons, he continues, “one in heven, anothyr in erthe: on[e] to defende hur from gostely enemyes and anopur to defende hur from bodyly enmyes” (4-6).²²⁸

²²⁷ Powell further notes that of the extant manuscripts of this sermon, two were later adapted to be given in other locations than this Alkmund church, principally omitting the words “*this church*” to “*a church*.” She avers that the textual evidence is strongly in favor of a sermon written for a specific dedicatory event, and that the still-standing Alkmund church in Lilleshall is a viable candidate (n. 414.2-3). The church was likely built on abbey/college property previously dedicated to Alkmund (n. 417.138-40).

²²⁸ “[E]ach church has two patrons, one in heaven, another on earth: one to defend her from spiritual enemies, and another to defend her from physical enemies.”

He then casts this two-patron model in terms of the feudalistic three estates, noting how great lords in the past have lent their bodies and swords to defend churches from “paynemys” (pagans) who would otherwise have desecrated holy spaces (56.9-17). Similarly, saintly patrons in heaven send their extra-virtuous prayers to God on behalf of specific churches associated with their names and/or relics. The saint, he implies, is an advocate for their parish with God, actively working for the benefit of his (or her) followers. Mirk becomes particularly forceful at this point, and boldly claims it is principally by saintly intercession that the Church is supported: it is “b[y] [t]hur mayn swyng [that] Holy Church is holdyn vp and Goddys seruise þerine mayntenid,” he avers (34-6).²²⁹ He also makes explicit the importance of the relationship between the saint and those associated with a church over which he is patron: “rythe os [a] temperal lorde helputh and sokuruth hys tenautes, rythe so þe seynt þat is [patron] of a chirch helputh and defenduth alle þat ben parychonus to hym and doth hym worschep, halowing hys day [and] offering to hym” (38-41).²³⁰ The feudal covenant is thus maintained: the lord repays the dutiful servant with physical protection, the saint repays the worshipful parishioner with spiritual defense.

These sentiments are wholly orthodox and anti-Lollard. Whereas Lollards would have balked at heavenly intercessors other than Christ, Mirk here reaffirms the existence of such beings as a pillar of church doctrine. Without the saints, he implies, our access to God is diminished, and our land and our parish would suffer. While there is no direct reference to Lollardy in this sermon, his meaning is clear: Christians need the saints for the

²²⁹ “[F]or by their hard labor Holy Church is held up and God’s service therein [is] maintained.” S. Powell notes that *mayn swyng* or *swynk* should be interpreted as “hard labor” (2.415, n. 56.34-5).

²³⁰ “Just as a temporal lord helps and succors his tenants, so a patron saint of a church helps and defends all his parishioners who worship him, hallow his holy day, and make offerings to him.”

spiritual maintenance of the Church, without which they would be floundering. To further drive home his point, he refers to the newly dedicated church itself in which he or one of his proxies was then preaching: “Seynt Alkemonde,” he affirms, “was makud patron to *his* chyrch” (56.42, emphasis added).²³¹

Following this comparatively lengthy exposition, Mirk then relays the saint’s *vita*, which reinforces his thesis of the centrality of saints and of Alkmund in particular to the Lilleshall parish. Alkmund (or, in Farmer, Alcmund), Mirk explains, was an eighth-century Northumbrian king well-beloved by his people and widely known for his virtues (56.43-5). In addition to his liberality, he was “devoute in Holy Chirch and sustenid alle þat wereon seruing God.” He so loved the Christian faithful that he “hadde eure a fervent desyre to dyon for Goddys ryghte an for defense of Goddys pepul, and [t]herefore he prayed to God nyght and day” for such an opportunity (60-3).²³² He got his chance when he and his soldiers rushed to the aid of allies in Wiltshire (“Wyldeschyre”), who had been terrorized by the menacing and ungodly Duke of the Welsh Marches (66-70; cf. S. Powell 2.415, n. 56.66-7). Alkmund first attempted to make peace between the parties, but found the Welsh duke so incorrigible that he had no choice but to take to the field (75-8). Mirk notes that the king rejoiced in this, “for he seygh þe day was comyn þat he hadde often prayid God fore, þat he most dyon in a rythwys querel and in help of Goddys pepul” (84-6).²³³

²³¹ “Saint Alkmund was made patron to *this* church” (again, emphasis added for emphasis).

²³² “He was devout in the Holy Church and sustained all who served God in the Church. He always had a fervent desire to die for God in defense of God’s people, and therefore he prayed [for this opportunity] both night and day.”

²³³ “[H]e saw that the day had come that he had often prayed to God for—that he would die in righteous warfare in the defense of God’s people.”

Mirk's relation of Alkmund's death is, like Ælfric's *vitae* of Anglo-Saxon saints, both religious and nationalistic. He describes Alkmund fighting "manly for Goddys pepul" (56.90) and turning back the tide of Welsh invaders, "schedd[ing] hys blode and suffr[ing] deth for Goddys loue" (90-2). Such devotion to God, Mirk declares, has earned Alkmund sainthood as a "holy martyr before God and alle hys angellys" (92-3). Most importantly for his Lilleshall listeners in the late-fourteenth century, Mirk notes that Alkmund, because he had been killed so far away from his Northumbrian realm, was initially interred in Lilleshall and only later translated to Derby, where the saint's remains were at the time this sermon was composed (114-29). Several miracles were reported while his body lay in Lilleshall (Farmer, "Alcmund"), which, Mirk notes, allowed "þe name of hys holynesse [to] spradde wyde in many cuntres" (56.136-7).

The historical picture of Alkmund's death, as it always is in these cases, is more complicated. The battle, Susan Powell suggests, was not so much in defense of righteous allies against a wicked invading force as much as a protection of property—Alkmund owned land in Wiltshire (2.416, n. 114-5). While Mirk acknowledges this, writing that the king "hadde lordeschep in þat cuntre nygh to Wyldeschyre" and had ridden there "to kepon hys tenautes from ere enmyes" (70-2),²³⁴ this political reason for going to war is far less important to his narrative than Alkmund's service to God in defense of his people.

Mirk's source material provided him with the basis of the hagiographic narrative, including the details of Alkmund's supposed beneficence and piety.²³⁵ But to connect the saint even more closely with his Lilleshall listeners, Mirk filled gaps in his sources by

²³⁴ "Saint Alkmund had lordship in that country near Wiltshire, and . . . he went there to preserve his tenants from their enemies."

²³⁵ Chiefly *The Gotha Life*, a hagiographic collection preserved in Germany (S. Powell 2.415, n. 42-93).

explaining why their land could be so closely tied to this Northumbrian king who had perished in a battle well over a hundred miles away.²³⁶ For this he relies on local tradition (n. 416.114-7) and “folk memory” (n. 121-2), substantiated by the reports of “olde men” (56.121), all of which related that Alkmund’s body had indeed been interred for a time in a Lilleshall churchyard. Mirk suggests that convenience played a part in this burial: Lilleshall was not close to Wiltshire, but it was closer than Northumbria²³⁷; more importantly, he adds, the town had been important in Alkmund’s life history, as he had apparently also intervened in a battle between “men of Scheropschyre and of Staffordschyre” at some unspecified time. Because many people who had perished in that battle were buried in Lilleshall, his men thought it fitting to bury their lord in the same graveyard in honor of those who had previously fallen (114-22). Alkmund’s Lilleshall burial is substantiated in other sources and traditions, but this addition about a supposed battle is not, and is again likely taken from local folklore (n. 416.117-24).

The setting of when this sermon was likely first delivered is crucial to its rhetorical context. Mirk’s primary intent is of course to praise a saint for whom Lilleshall had some special regard and to whom a church was being dedicated, but on a deeper level he is creating a connection to orthodox beliefs by harnessing the rhetoric of place. For Mirk, this was not simply a dedication, but a reminder of eternal truth—Alkmund *was* a saint, and did exhibit certain virtues over his dedicated parishioners. He may not have been from or even martyred in Lilleshall, but his bones—which produced notable miracles (136-7)—

²³⁶ It’s not clear whether the battle was fought in Wiltshire, as Mirk claims, or at Gloucestershire, as Susan Powell suggests (n. 415.78). In either case, the location is not close to either Lilleshall or Derby.

²³⁷ “[F]or encheson þat Saint Alkemonde was slayne fer oute of hys cuntre, hys men tokyn hys body forthe wyth hem . . . and haddun it to þe towne of Lylleshul” (114-6). (Because Saint Alkmund was slain far from his home country, his men took his body forth with them . . . and bore it to the town of Lilleshall).

had lain there, albeit temporarily, and the town had not forgotten it. Even though they were only remotely connected to Alkmund, he still watched over them, was still a patron for them, and would intercede for them at the “hegh ma[j]este of God” (38). And it was for this reason that they were gathered, and that they should “knelon down” and offer their prayers to this great saint together (141).

This sermon for the Feast of Saint Alkmund is unique in that Mirk deployed hagiographic rhetoric for an immediate context in which perhaps he was the orator. In it, he pointedly describes the parish’s unique connection to and dependence on their patron Alkmund, and encourages his hearers to trust in church tradition. There is not one reference or appeal to the Bible in this sermon, nor to any of its figures save Christ. A Lollard hearing or reading this sermon would not necessarily have disagreed with the existence of saints or of certain virtues they may or may not have possessed, but almost certainly would have objected to Mirk’s notion that any element of God’s power was dependent on a specific place, and especially to his notion that the saints were central to ecclesiastical maintenance and parishioner spirituality. Thus an integral part of this sermon is Mirk’s correction of such heresies with his defense of orthodox teachings. *At the dedication of this new church*, he seems to say, *let’s not forget to whom we owe special consideration, St. Alkmund*—and to once more co-opt the phrase—*no matter what these Lollards say*.

Conclusion: John Mirk vs. the Lollards

I have cast my net somewhat widely in suggesting that the sermons for the feast days of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, Saint Winifred, and Saint Alkmund include oblique responses to Lollardy. It would be a mistake to assume that Mirk composed all of the

Festial sermons chiefly for this purpose. However, the evidence suggests that Lollardy was indeed present in the back of his mind as he wrote the narratives, and not simply as he wrote the sermons for the feasts of the Holy Trinity and Corpus Christi where Lollardy is made explicit, but also in other sermons where he considers certain orthodox traditions, including the communion of the saints, could potentially be challenged. His principal purpose for creating the *Festial* was practical, for the benefit of semi-literate parish priests, although the defense of dogma is vital to the text (cf. S. Powell xliii). But I concur with the words of Alan J. Fletcher, who noted that “[a]t the very least, the *Festial* should be regarded as the product of the same decade which saw . . . the growing unease of the orthodox establishment with content and implications of Wycliffite thought” (“John Mirk” 220). Mirk *was* concerned with the Lollards, and as part of his purposeful sermon-writing, deployed hagiographic rhetoric—the stories and legacies of the saints—to bolster orthodox tradition.

Chapter 4: Pedagogical Implications:

Teaching Hagiographic Literature and Rhetoric

The study of hagiography can, and should, be an important component of any class dealing with Europe and the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages. The genre is a vast repository of anthropological socio-religious history “for which other evidence is either imprecise or nonexistent” (Lotha). The value of hagiography goes well beyond its at times cloying representation of deeply pious lifestyles because it so vividly depicts “the character of everyday life in the Middle Ages, the values and the tools, both intellectual and physical, with which medievals [sic] confronted life’s challenges” (Stoller). Likewise, as I have demonstrated here, the rhetorical moves and style of the genre of hagiography was heavily intertwined in public consciousness, whether a person’s engagement with the stories was principally oral or textual. Saints were an intricately woven part of medieval worship and folklife. The medieval European calendar was organized around feast days of saints, so that extant letters from the period, such as those of the Pastons, are principally dated by feast day, not by the day and the month (Rosenthal 14). On top of this, many medieval English works commonly studied in higher education—*The Canterbury Tales*, *The Paston Letters*, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, *Piers Plowman*, and Julian of Norwich’s *Revelations*—intersect with hagiographic material, and at the very least are written with the assumption of awareness of the communion of saints in their audiences. The pervasiveness of the saints in medieval European life thus makes passing over hagiography in a medieval history or literature class a disservice to students approaching a comprehensive view of the medieval outlook.

The benefits of studying hagiography are not limited to understanding the past: connections can also be made to the present. Students are sometimes surprised to learn that they unconsciously observe, in some form, holy days dedicated to various saints throughout the year, from sending love-notes on February 14 to wearing green on March 17. The reverence paid to George Washington or Martin Luther King, Jr. (who is a saint in fact in the Anglican communion), or pop-culture icons like John Lennon or Kurt Cobain, clearly follow “a hagiographic and iconographic model” (Puccio-Den 68). Adapting words from Peter Jan Margry, a leading figure in the study of secular pilgrimage, it’s clear “that the spectrum of [hagiography] has widened” from its original framework (37),²³⁸ and can be universally applicable to both religious and non-religious students alike.

However, the actual implementation of hagiographic subject matter can be challenging, depending on the student audience, especially when the curriculum goes beyond simply studying hagiographic literature to understanding or applying its rhetoric. Many students may be only vaguely aware about what a saint is, and may require substantial foundational teaching in order to understand the concepts. To understand the significance of hagiographic rhetoric, students must first have a fundamental knowledge of saints and sainthood. This is especially true within medieval contexts. Instructors cannot assume that their students, even at a private religious college, come with the same degree of religious literacy (Blessing 25). The “increasingly secular” backgrounds of college students, too, John Black writes, necessitates providing contextual information for student understanding (908). Even students who come with some understanding of Christianity—the basic familiarity of which, Black notes, is so “crucial” to understanding medieval

²³⁸ Margry’s precise statement is “that the spectrum of *pilgrimage* has widened” (emphasis added). Since both *pilgrimage* and *hagiography* are components of devotions to sanctity, both terms apply.

Europe—arrive in class with a variety of doctrinal beliefs and cultural practices (909). In many college courses in the United States, there is a strong likelihood that some or even many students will arrive with little to no knowledge of the Bible and Christianity (“Bible Literacy”).

To this end, I propose a short, progressive curriculum that introduces students to the language and concepts of medieval Christian sainthood before inviting them to tackle the ramifications of the rhetoric of hagiography. In the sections below, I will first review my, somewhat unsuccessful attempt to teach hagiographic literature in a British Literature course. This took place in a religiously homogeneous class in rural Utah, where many if not most students have some former or current connection to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, i.e. “Mormons.” I will then provide an example learning unit of three class days, concluding with specific lesson plans designed to enable more effective teaching of hagiography and hagiographic rhetoric, including within a predominantly Latter-day Saint environment (see appendix).

My Experiment: Fall 2018

I attempted to teach hagiographic literature and rhetoric as part of my early British literature course at Snow College in Fall 2018. The class consisted of some twenty students and was not demographically diverse. The students were all female save two, all Caucasian save one who also had Latin heritage, all under the age of twenty-two save one nontraditional student in her fifties, and all Latter-day Saint (“Mormon”) save one, a non-practicing Roman Catholic. This course surveys Anglo-Saxon, medieval, and early modern British texts through the late eighteenth century. During the second unit on the Middle

Ages, about mid-semester, I introduced the class to saints and saint-narratives, which included some discussion of hagiographic rhetoric. My goal was to help students understand the purpose of these texts, and to see how the stories applied to the larger medieval world. I assumed that they would come with some knowledge of saints, which could then be expanded by reading a few saint-tales and then discussing the purposes of these narratives beyond simply promoting piety. Although the discussion of saints was somewhat salvaged at the end of the unit, my assumptions about previous knowledge and the ease of reading proved very wrong; the experience, though discouraging, helped me devise a way to introduce the concepts progressively rather than all at once.

The process went like this: first, the students were assigned to read four *vitae* before class: Saints Nicholas, Lucy, Agnes, and Thomas of Canterbury. I chose these stories for their highly diverting content—I was especially eager for them to read about Nicholas, so that we could have a further discussion about the origins of Santa Claus. I picked Lucy and Agnes to further discuss Roman persecution of early Christians, and Thomas of Canterbury to relate the genre back to England, which we were of course studying. The texts were taken from a public domain version of *The Golden Legend* online, which I provided links to on our class Learning Management Software (LMS). As part of the pre-class learning module, I included background information on hagiography, as well as a definition of hagiographic rhetoric with emphasis on how these narratives can function beyond promoting piety. This was followed by critical thinking questions designed to help the students formulate ideas about the purpose of these particular *vitae*. After reading the background and the *vitae*, they were asked to respond to the questions in their class journals and be prepared to discuss their responses in class.

The problems with this approach were immediately apparent. First, I had counted on the background information providing enough context for the traditional Catholic and Orthodox definition of saints and hagiography that I assumed we could jump right into a discussion of the purposes of these tales without much additional time; from the beginning of the class, however, it became apparent that the students had really struggled with the concept of saints to begin with, and were somewhat overwhelmed with the amount of information covered in the module. Many had never heard traditional saint-tales before, and the genre was new and intellectually challenging for them. Second, many students had struggled with the readings themselves, as the available texts were in Early Modern English. I had assumed that because we had just finished reading selections from *The Canterbury Tales* in Middle English, that the language would be more straightforward for them—a wrong assumption. Thirdly, each of these tales were comparatively long and written in an unfamiliar genre, and several of the students had only managed to get through one. So when I asked for their insights on how these stories could be applied to what we knew about medieval society, most of them were at a loss.

This was entirely my fault; I recognized that in the first minutes of the class, and apologized to the students for having overwhelmed them. We then spent the class discussing saints more fully and reviewing what happened in the vitae, and actually had a fruitful conversation that included some discussion of relevance to the medieval world. We talked specifically about the hagiographic rhetoric of Thomas of Canterbury, and how his narrative could be used to support the precedence of the church over the king (or at least that the church was not answerable to the whims of the king). I showed pictures of Canterbury Cathedral and the site of Thomas's martyrdom, which may have helped the vita

become more memorable. I also pointed out that the Lucy and Agnes tales were very anti-pagan, anti-Roman in nature, and had to provide context for fourth-century martyrdoms. Despite my initial failings, the class concluded with some success, the students going away with a basic idea of how saint-tales were very much a product of historical as well as religious contexts. I was also pleased when during a series of oral exams, two or three of them remembered that the vita of Saint Thomas reminded the faithful of the independence of churches from monarchy.

Upon reflection, I now recognize that a better approach to teaching hagiographic rhetoric would include the following:

- Allowing more *time* for the students to become familiar with hagiography in general before discussing the “rhetoric”; at least three days of class.
- Assigning one short vita first to familiarize them with the genre.
- Working hagiographic rhetoric into a discussion *after* they have had a chance to understand the genre and the historical contexts.
- Providing sources translated into modern English, or allow more time for them to parse a text in older style.
- Providing examples of hagiographic rhetoric in class, such as Thomas of Canterbury, then provide time for them then read more tales afterwards looking for other rhetorical themes.
- Encouraging more accountability, perhaps in small groups or in an LMS discussion post, etc., and let them work through some possibilities together before sharing with the class.

Identifying these principles helped me reorient my teaching of this subject in a new direction, one with fewer assumptions about student background and preparedness to delve into higher-order thinking without first becoming familiar with basic concepts.

Approaching Hagiography through the Science of Learning

Perhaps most surprising to me was that all of these students had some background in Christianity, particularly, as I noted, present or former affiliation with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but many were hard-pressed to identify what a “saint” is in the traditional or historical sense, as Latter-day Saints see the term as referencing any faithful church member (Lyon 1249)—similar to Paul’s salutations to the “saints” in his epistles and how some Protestant denominations, such as the Puritans, have interpreted the term to mean Christians at large (Hale). My experience shows that even some measure of shared religious experience in a classroom should not lead to any assumptions about Biblical or hagiographical literacy.

Indeed, historical and religious illiteracy is a problem endemic to many humanities fields which “approach past eras,” as students view the material from a “collection of misconceptions and generalizations that govern how many students approach” these periods, including “reductive abstractions that . . . exoticize, idealize, and demonize peoples and cultures viewed as strange and unfamiliar” (Attar and Shutters 7). The particular group of students I taught did have some hand-me-down notions about the Middle Ages derived from popular media, although for the most part their religious literacy of the period was without exoticization, idealization, or demonization—there was simply

little basic knowledge to be found at all.²³⁹ As one group of educators notes, ““one cannot apply what one knows in a practical manner if one does not know anything to apply”” (qtd. in Brown, et al. 18).

As such, the first principle of teaching hagiographic literature and rhetoric is to deliver basic knowledge, the first level of Bloom’s taxonomy of learning,²⁴⁰ or in other words, to “start with the students rather than the discipline” (Bain 110), and, in the words of John Black, “build a bridge” between class content and student understanding (911). Black provides a series of ideas to accomplish this by assessment and application: ask questions about what students believe about the Middle Ages (or some component of the field); provide “subject-related activities” to engage them in historical context, such as art, manuscript facsimiles, objects, music, etc.; receive “periodic” feedback from students for reassessment of familiarity; and create engaging assignments that encourage students to apply their knowledge into new contexts (910). In a digital age especially, with such a wealth of “dynamic” resources to “capture students’ attention and help guide them to understanding history and culture in the Middle Ages,” the ability for an instructor to provide sensory experiences for students is unprecedented, and such opportunities should be seized (Cavell 83).

Carolyn Whitson similarly characterizes the challenges of teaching medieval texts within larger academic objections to the medieval studies field, noting *perceived* difficulty,

²³⁹ This may be in part due to the Latter-day Saint perspective, again similar to Protestant ideology, that the Middle Ages were a time of “Great Apostasy”—the “Dark Ages”—and that most religious thought from the period was a corruption of apostolic truth. This naturally includes the communion of saints. Protestant reformers are often hailed in LDS teachings as predecessors to the “Restoration” of the undefiled Gospel through Joseph Smith; Catholic, or other orthodox teachers, are rarely mentioned (see appendix; cf. Garr).

²⁴⁰ Bloom’s original 1956 taxonomy defined knowledge as “the recall of specifics and universals, . . . methods and processes, . . . [and] pattern[s], structure[s], or setting[s].” The 2001 update instead refers to this stage as “remember[ing],” defined as “recognizing” and “recalling” (Armstrong).

irrelevance, and elitism among both the works themselves and the professors who assign them (44). Each of these perceptions needs to be countered in the modern classroom, especially at a two-year, open-enrollment college where many students are seeking “hard” skills for future employment and may not see the relevance of a twelfth-century story about, say, a boy supposedly killed by Jews (Langdon and Sprunger 7). Thus in addition to allowing time for the students to become more familiar with the medieval context, an instructor should also help students see relevance. Such careful presentation of the material is vital to the process of student understanding and engagement.

With all of this in mind, I propose a four-step process for an instructor to allow time for a sufficient introduction to hagiographic discourse, and then building on that foundation by introducing ideas of hagiographic rhetoric:

1. Expose students to foundational information before class.
2. Build bridges to students’ prior knowledge about saints and sainthood.
3. Encourage critical analysis through problem-based learning during class.
4. Assess engagement via written responses in a class journal.

This structured process will yield more meaningful learning and student engagement.²⁴¹ I will review each of these in turn throughout this chapter, and conclude with a detailed lesson plan that can be adapted to such circumstances. Using this methodology will allow an instructor to help his or her students more fully engage with hagiography, and to understand how saints and sainthood have been applied for particular rhetorical ends.

²⁴¹ Richard E. Mayer who defines “the three broad classes of learning . . . [as] no learning, rote learning, and meaningful learning”; while rote learning can be advantageous, meaningful learning is the longest-lasting.

Step 1: Expose Students to Foundational Information before Class

Teachers of hagiographic literature and rhetoric should create a curriculum that emphasizes learning foundational concepts outside class. Many teachers do so already, with readings or learning modules designed to introduce basic information ahead of time. Because class time is so precious—especially when it’s limited to fifty- or seventy-five-minute periods two or three times a week—it’s especially important that students are granted opportunities to learn outside of class and taught practical strategies for how to do so (Bain 114). This is why I have adopted a “teaching naked” methodology, a term coined by Southern Methodist University professor José Antonio Bowen to refer to introducing course content and facilitating engagement *before* class, thus allowing more time *during* class to focus on problems, applications, and assignments—a nuanced take of the “flipped” classroom model (186-7). Such a process, Bowen asserts, avoids the problem of “forfeit[ing] class time that could be used for more advanced [learning] activities” (112) and “creates other possibilities” (124), including an “increase [in] faculty-student interaction” (125) and “applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating” (103).

While “teaching naked” discourages technology use for content delivery in class, the practice strongly encourages using technology to do so *outside* of class. The main delivery units are learning modules: “collections of activities, resources, and materials for teaching content, application, or skill that . . . include learning objectives and an assessment” (Bowen 122-3). This can be chiefly done via a school’s LMS and customized according to the instructor’s individual teaching style and course learning outcomes. The availability of such resources for content delivery for any discipline is astounding—readings, podcasts, videos, and more can all be utilized to engage students in the material.

The teacher can create his or her own content or borrow it from other resources, such as linking to a website or embedding a video.²⁴² While some may balk at relying so heavily on technology for providing foundational information, it's important to remember that technology is clearly the modern student's preferred method for obtaining information (112), and that "multiple modes of content delivery" are an effective way to draw the students into the material (126).²⁴³

The LMS for Snow College is Instructure's Canvas, which features a "modules" tab that allows an instructor to insert pages, files, quizzes, assignments, and more into an unlimited number of learning units. Other LMS systems have similar module components. I have experimented with various formats, and will continue to do so in the future, but the overall layout for this subject should correspond with the four points I made above: content delivery, discerning student background, critical thinking exercises during class, and assessment. For content delivery, I usually include a combination of text and video, which are used to introduce textbook readings, website links, or PDFs. Again, the goal of this stage is to provide the basic background information the students will need about the subject and to prepare students for the readings.

Content Delivery Format

In the first part of a module on saints and hagiography, the students will be provided information on saints, hagiography, and vitae. These need not be long, and should be

²⁴² On this point, Bowen recommends that a teacher asks herself: "Can you do it better? If not, just link and spend your time doing something you *can* do better. . . . [The] observation that there is more value to thinking about the user than the content applies equally to the classroom" (125, emphasis added).

²⁴³ Baragash and Al-Samarraie found that "[s]tudents' learning from the Web individually had a positive effect on their performance in terms of final exams and quizzes. Theoretically, Web resources are believed to provide students with an unlimited informal content interaction that can enhance their engagement and improve their examination scores" (8).

simple explanations quoted from accessible reference sources. For instance, a definition for “saints” from *The Chambers Dictionary* could be provided, or even more rudimentarily, a definition from Dictionary.com.²⁴⁴ Similar definitions and foundational information should also be provided for other terms, such as canonization, hagiography, vitae, etc. Further information, still kept brief, could be included from other reliable sources at the instructor’s discretion. I tend to use a combination of reference sources with my own paraphrases, again to help keep the language as accessible to students as possible.

Next, the module provides an example vita, preferably short, that gives the students a taste of the genre. In a discussion of English saints, the legend of Saint Thomas of Canterbury from *The Golden Legend* could be used; in other contexts, the vitae of Lucy or Agatha. The purpose of this short vita in the module is to familiarize the students with the hagiographic genre itself, and to prepare students for more critical readings of such texts later on. As I learned in my experiment, it will likely be helpful for the students to be reading from a modern translation of the vita. Unless additional time is provided in the curriculum for the students to parse Middle or Early Modern English, it’s simply more effective to find one as modernized as possible. While there is certainly benefit to reading texts in older forms of English, the students may become more concerned with word-level comprehension than they will be with themes and narrative elements of the genre. This practice will similarly allow more class time to focus on “higher-order issues” (Oswald 108).²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ Chambers: “a person formally recognized by the Christian (especially Roman Catholic) Church as having lived a life of holiness and exceptional virtue, and to whom the right to be venerated is therefore accorded.” Dictionary.com: “any of certain persons of exceptional holiness of life, formally recognized as such by the Christian Church, especially by canonization; a person of great holiness, virtue, or benevolence.”

²⁴⁵ Oswald’s research focuses on teaching Chaucer specifically, although her observations can be applied to any text rendered in its original English form. “While reading Chaucer in Middle English is a valuable experience,” she writes, “it is not the *only* way to enjoy Chaucer. Students can come to Chaucer with fewer

To further increase student understanding, the reading could (and probably should) be supplemented with linked or embedded photos, such as a picture of the shrine of the saint in question, relevant artwork, cathedral ruins, etc., or videos, such as an explanation of the canonization process, an animated version of the narrative, or a clip from a movie featuring the saint, like the Peter O'Toole and Richard Burton 1964 classic *Becket*. Visual imagery helps reinforce the concepts learned from the previous readings, and can also make the impressions more memorable. Again, the wealth of such resources available online—and for free—is remarkable, and the opportunity for visualization and content delivery before class should be taken advantage of as part of any teaching methodology.²⁴⁶

Information Retention through Class Journals

The students should not simply access and read or watch the material on the module, but should also employ methods to remember what they have just learned. In my classes, I require everyone to purchase a notebook to serve as a class journal. Students use the journal to respond to questions in the module (as explained in the next step), but first they use it as a space to take notes and write their first impressions.²⁴⁷ I cover critical

barriers if they experience him first in language . . . more familiar than Middle English” (110). Murphy explains an alternative to this of simply rendering the original text into modern spelling, which he terms “modspell” (36-7). This latter method would allow the students to think critically about unfamiliar syntax while not having to be bothered by the spelling (38-9). Or a teacher could employ the SparkNotes method of NoFearShakespeare, and have the original version of the text in one column, and a modern rendition on the other, thus allowing for easier comparison. In an introductory survey course, at least, the instructor should keep in mind that comprehension is more important than the ability to fluently read older English.

²⁴⁶ Use of photos and videos can be helpful during class time, but it may be more effective to have the students engage with such media on their own, thus “free[ing] up class time for higher-order processing of foundational knowledge” (103).

²⁴⁷ In this I follow the methodology of Nowak and Knappe, who indicate that class journals are “meant to be much more than just a notebook. At the same time that these journals functioned as places for writing class notes in the familiar mode, they were also intended to be a kind of sandbox for sketching out ideas they would read about and discuss in class, as well as for completing assignments and in-class reflections integral to the course design.”

reading strategies at the beginning of the semester,²⁴⁸ so at this point the students should be familiar with effective note-taking strategies. Among these strategies is what I call “SPQR,” an acronym obviously borrowed from the Romans and meaning, in my class, “Summary + Paraphrase + Quotation = Restatement.” This mnemonic device reminds students when taking notes to restate key ideas in their own words with only occasional quotations—the fewer the better. Thus for almost all modules, the students will be required to produce an SPQR of a certain length for the introductory material, including the assigned reading. Depending on the length of the material and the reading, this could be anywhere from a half- to a full-page entry in their notebooks. This process allows the students a space to express understanding of “the relevant material,” and shows that they have “mentally organized and integrated it” in a meaningful way (Mayer).

True to *Teaching Naked* pedagogy, I do most of my content delivery via technology, but in-class interactions typically are sans tech. Since I consider class journals to be part of the in-class experience, I require the students to complete their exercises in it by hand unless a documented disability necessitates otherwise (Bowen 192-3). Some students resent this, and I’ve had some pushback in the past, as they claim they cannot write by hand as fast as they type; I explain to my students that the slower pace of writing forces them to articulate their ideas.²⁴⁹ There is also evidence suggesting that learning is enhanced when composing with a traditional pen or pencil (Dynarski). I assess their SPQRs at the end of each class along with their responses to critical thinking and application

²⁴⁸ I do principally by having them read John Bird’s “How to Read Critically,” which in two pages effectively teaches the purpose of critical reading and also explains various strategies to do so. I use this reading in all of my classes at the beginning of the semester, both composition and literature.

²⁴⁹ Nowake and Knappe also faced a little intransigence in their experiment with class journals, which they believe derives from “occasional student resistance to active learning, which is probably inevitable when shaking things up with unfamiliar methods.” Their results, however, like my class journal assignments, have been overwhelmingly positive.

questions posed next in the module. These components are described in the following sections.

Step 2: Build Bridges to Student's Prior Knowledge about Saints and Sainthood

After content delivery, the students should then be encouraged to reflect on their prior knowledge about saints and sainthood. As I found out in my experiment, what they know may be very limited, but with some prompting they are likely to see some connections in their lives to hagiography, whether or not they've previously recognized it. The response questions are listed in the module with a required length. (And depending on the nature and the number of questions, I may invite them to only choose one or two for their responses.) The first set of questions should strive to ascertain the student's own understanding of "sainthood," and could add the following: What is your definition of a "saint," either from your own faith tradition or based on how you use the word? What does a person have to do to be considered a "saint"? How does your definition contrast with the medieval definition of a saint, if at all?

The second set of questions can then ask them to think critically about the *vita* they read or the nature of the genre, which serves as a stepping-stone for a later module about hagiographic rhetoric. Such questions could include the following:

- "Stories of saints often blend literary genres; they are obviously faith-promoting stories, but they can also be fantasy, history, horror, mystery, romance, and much more. In [title of *vita*], what literary genres do you see besides the obvious religious one? Note specific examples from the story to support your ideas." Such questions

encourage deeper thinking of the text, and again prepares the students to think deeper about the purposes these narratives serve in society.

- In what ways are these supernatural stories about saints similar to stories in your own faith tradition, or in other stories you are familiar with? In what ways are they different? Note specific similarities and differences in your class journal.

Building Bridges in Class

These responses will be completed before class. The students will then bring their class journals with their ready-made responses, providing an opportunity for them to share and collaborate with each other and with their instructor. The class session could begin with a simple question such as, “What is a saint to you?” Since the students are ideally prepared with a response right in front of them, there will hopefully be voluntary answers; if students are more reluctant, individuals can be called on to share their ideas. This kind of discussion will help the teacher ascertain at what point of understanding her students are about saints, and various religious interpretations of the term can be respectfully reviewed and compared. Other discussion questions should be asked, either at the beginning of class or sometime during the period. Something like, “What did you think was the craziest part from [vita]?” will surely encourage animated discussion.

Sometime during this discussion, I like to point out that everyone who participates in American culture to some degree has a connection to the saints. I tell my students that they all have probably celebrated saints’ days, and ask which ones they’re familiar with. I usually get the holy days of Saints Valentine and Patrick, to which I follow-up by asking what those saints were known for—generally, the students do not know, which provides

an opportunity to summarize their own saints' tales. I also point out that most of them have celebrated the eve of All Saints Day, also known as "Halloween," which again opens up further engagement with saints and the hagiographic genre. We then make connections to other American holidays which, while not celebrating "saints" per se, do acknowledge the lives of extraordinary people, such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Presidents Day (formerly the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln), Pioneer Day in Utah—a celebration of the immigrant Latter-day Saints—and others. This then opens further discussion of the criteria for "sainthood" in various societies, and how these criteria reflect a society's values. There are also other avenues for such questions: What cities are named after saints? What sports teams? What historical ships or vehicles? etc.

The discussion will largely depend on how the students themselves understand saints, and can be adapted accordingly. For instance, this discussion at a private Catholic school will be very different than one held at a public college in rural Utah, or in a classroom of Jehovah's Witnesses. International students' experiences and voices will also have profound impact on the nature of the discussion. For instance, I taught one group of students during my graduate studies at Idaho State University that included a substantial portion of Muslim students from Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. If I were teaching hagiography to this audience, I would invite them to share holidays that honor specific persons in their own religious traditions or in their home countries. In fact, at one point that semester the idea of hagiography (though not in name) came up when the Shi'a students in the class discussed observing the 15th of Dhu al-Hijjah, or the day of the Birth of Ali Naqi, one of the Twelve Imams; the Sunni students did not observe this occasion. The discussion we

had that day was very fruitful for a diverse classroom, and would be even more so in a class dealing with hagiography.

Discussion can also be promoted in other learning settings, such as LMS discussion boards. The teacher can pose similar questions, and the students can be given opportunities to share and respond to each other's ideas. In any case, the discussion should expand the ideas and traditions the students have brought to class (or the online forum) in their writing journal responses, which strengthens student understanding of the applications of traditional Christian hagiography.

Step 3: Encourage Critical Analysis through Problem-Based Learning During Class

Once the students have a broad understanding of saints and connections are made to students' prior understanding, the class can turn to analysis and creation. Part of this initial discussion about hagiography can refer again to what the students have already brought with them, which is a discussion as to what literary genres are blended in the vita in question. Since the students have also noted specific passages where fantastic, historic, romantic, et al., elements are apparent, it should be easy for the class to reference the appropriate section of the text quickly. This process again allows them to reflect on what knowledge they have already created, and to share that with their peers. They will add to this knowledge by comparing what other students contribute and recording those ideas alongside their own through note-taking—part of cognitive synthesis.

Problem-Based Learning in Groups

Asking such questions and allowing time for the students to prepare their answers represents a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach, which can be done in groups as well as individually. This methodology encourages active learning by helping the students decode and analyze texts “by working in groups to solve an open-ended problem”; this problem then “is what drives the motivation and the learning” (Center for Teaching Innovation). The teacher presents the problems to the students, who are then provided the resources and time to develop potential solutions or interpretations for the problem (Lettau 44). The students are expected to produce something together in the allotted time—written responses, cognitive maps or diagrams, or short presentations—that shows the result of their collaboration (46). The ultimate goal of PBL is to guide students, more as a “facilitator” in this setting than an “instructor” (40), “[t]hrough personal research and discovery,” which allows them to “gain the confidence to inform others in small group situations and then to convert that knowledge into . . . [the] larger class discussion” (46).

This principle can be applied in a class learning about hagiography by introducing new material and then dividing into groups for discussion purposes. This could include looking at another vita together—or for time’s sake, portions of another vita—and inviting responses to questions such as the following:

- What is the purpose of this vita? Why would the author want to write this story, or retell it for his audience?
- The stories contain a lot of fantastical elements. What is the purpose of these occurrences in the story? Why include the “supernatural”?

Once appropriately divided,²⁵⁰ groups should respond to the same question(s), so that everyone is invested in each other's answers during the sharing time (Sibley and Spiridonoff 3). After this is completed, time should be allotted for end-of-class reflection, which allows the students to further their ideas from what they came to class with. In all, the instructor must bear in mind that the reason for asking these questions and inviting discussion is to help students apply material into new contexts and to prepare them for a future discussion of hagiographic rhetoric.

Step 4: Assess Engagement via Written Responses in the Class Journal

Students should be held accountable for their preparation before class and their participation within it. Several scales can be developed and should be made plain to the students early in the semester or at least for every day of class. For this exercise, students will be principally assessed on what's in their class journal: what they came prepared to class with, and what they've added—notes and further ideas—from the day's discussion. These end-of-class assessments are less formal; the students simply show their class journals to the instructor (or teaching assistant) on their way out the door. A cursory, five-second overview by the assessor reveals much about a student's participation before and within class. The assessor can make quick comments about what to improve, or simply say "good." More formal reviews of class journals should take place periodically outside of class, perhaps during instructor-student conferences, and then more detailed feedback can be provided.

²⁵⁰ There are several things to consider when dividing a class into groups so that the learning environment is most effective. These considerations are far too many to list here, but Hershock and Milkova's "Guidelines for Using Groups Effectively" discusses several, as does Michaelsen, et al.'s *Team-Based Learning*.

Nowak and Knappe use a three-point scale, similar to the common check, check-plus, and check-minus scale some teachers use, although 1, 2, and 3 do just as well. I've used seven points (four or five for preparation, two or three for participation) and ten. Whatever scale one chooses, the assessment should be low-stakes. The students are not writing polished prose at this point, but notes and possibly diagrams to be referred to throughout the length of the course. Nowak and Knappe call this the "sandbox" model, which they suggest allows students more freedom in their note-taking, not restricting them to the complex Roman numeral, subsection lists; they also claim that this model "made grading relatively easy."²⁵¹ The periodic, more formal assessment should be graded on a higher point scale to reinforce the idea of the class journal as a comprehensive tool, not something for one-time use or that ends up in the recycling bin at the end of class.²⁵² By the end of the semester, the journal should be full of notes and ideas—a "record," as one student phrased it, of their classwork.

Following the Pattern for Future Classes

The process described so far has only represented the options for one class day of teaching hagiographic rhetoric—and the "rhetoric" part has only to be touched on. Future classes can then build on this foundation of knowledge. The learning unit need not be longer than three class periods, although a higher-level course could expand it further—

²⁵¹ The class journals Nowak and Knappe ask their students to use are actually sketchbooks, not lined notebooks, which allows the students an even greater deal of freedom in how they annotate.

²⁵² There is always the possibility of the student misplacing or damaging the class journal at some point. To prevent this, I invite students to regularly take pictures of the pages in their journal, so that if anything happens, they still have something to refer to. I also make them fill out a form on which they can explain how the journal was lost, what measures they've taken to back-up the content (i.e. photos), and what they intend to do to be able to fulfill the requirement for the future. This has yet to happen to one of my students, but precautions should be taken for such an important assessment tool.

perhaps an entire course could be devoted to hagiography and hagiographic rhetoric on the graduate level. For a freshman or sophomore class, however, the main learning outcomes for the class days should be as follows:

- Day 1: Understanding Saints, Sainthood, and Hagiography
- Day 2: Identifying the Purposes of Hagiography
- Day 3: The Effects of Hagiographic Rhetoric

The following sections summarize the basic components of each day. More detailed lesson plans are included at the end of the chapter.

Day 1: Understanding Saints, Sainthood, and Hagiography

I have described Day 1 in full above. In review, the purpose of this day is to provide background information for the students on the basic terminology of hagiography, including the basic terms of “saint” and “sainthood.” Students should be exposed to this information ahead of class and be held accountable for their preparation. Contextual information about this genre should also be provided within the framework of the Middle Ages. During the class, instructors should assess what the students understood about the content and help the students bridge that understanding within their own lives. Further time should be spent on discussing the peculiar narrative elements of the genre, and also the possible purposes behind the existence of particular vitae.

Day 2: Identifying the Purposes of Hagiography (Hagiographic Rhetoric)

The second day will focus more fully on why individual vitae were written. Since the students have been introduced to the genre, they should now be more capable of

working with multiple vitae, perhaps two or three, but still rendered in accessible language. The pre-class module will include, for the first time, a definition of the term “hagiographic rhetoric,” with a description of how vitae reflect deeper or more subliminal purposes beyond simply promoting general piety or devotion to a particular saint. The module should remind students of the vita they read for the previous class, and present possible additional purposes behind the writing of the vita. (If the previous class discussion yielded some of these ideas, they can be referred to in the module.) They can then be prompted to look for clues in the vitae assigned for Day 2 that may point towards ulterior purposes. Follow-up questions could involve specific language to point the students towards specific conclusions, such as, “What do the stories of Agatha and Lucy teach us about the medieval perspective on sexuality and virginity? What purpose could the author have in highlighting such specific examples of chastity?” etc. In-class discussions and problem-based assignments, potentially as a part of group work, should further these ideas by a closer review of the assigned vitae with reflection in the class journals.

Day 3: The Effects of Hagiographic Rhetoric

In this final stage, the students will come to know that hagiography can often speak to larger sociopolitical issues in a given context. At this point one vita with profound hagiographic rhetoric can be assigned for the students to read and think about before class; any of the three examples from this dissertation, alongside many others, would do, although Thomas of Monmouth’s iteration of William of Norwich’s martyrdom is probably the most dramatic, and, because it deals with racial and religious stereotypes, perhaps the most

meaningful for contemporary students.²⁵³ The students should not only be provided with portions of Thomas's work, but also a full context showing the history of Jews in England and common perceptions about them (terms such as "antisemitism" and even "Jews" will likely need to be defined, as experience has taught me in other teaching situations).

Questions for class preparation can then ask what specific elements of the story could be used to motivate racial violence and expulsion, as well as questions about Thomas's motivations. During class and after initial discussion, similar questions can be asked about how contemporary stories, some imitative of hagiography, have been used to justify violence and genocide, such as how the death of innocent people in a terrorist attack by radical Muslims—another kind of martyrdom—can prompt reprisals against Muslims in general. This may (and likely will) require further contextualization for these modern issues, but connecting the "spectrum of hagiography" to the modern world shows that the applications of hagiographic rhetoric in contemporary society, as it was in medieval society, are limitless.

Conclusion: Wrapping-Up the Significance of Hagiographic Rhetoric

Because "students actually learn better when they learn both content and theoretical frameworks simultaneously" (Bowen 151), it's important to discuss the elements of rhetoric simultaneously with the vitae themselves. However, the term "hagiographic rhetoric" and its implications should be introduced gradually, and not with the expectation that the students will comprehend things after one class. Reflection is essential for long-

²⁵³ I'm of course referring here to his hagiographic rhetoric against the Jews. His further rhetoric about drumming-up spiritual (and financial) interest in Norwich Cathedral, which I describe more fully in Chapter 2, can also be used for this purpose, but may overwhelm and not be as relevant to the students as racial and religious injustice.

term learning, and as a way to conclude this unit, an opportunity should be provided for reflection on the significance of hagiography and hagiographic rhetoric. This could be accomplished at the end of the third day of class, although a delayed opportunity may be more beneficial for learning; perhaps the unit could be expanded into a fourth day, or the reflection could be part of an exam or essay prompt. They should express their understanding in writing and provide specific examples of how hagiographic rhetoric impacted the mindsets and actions of individuals and communities. Thus the relevance and importance of the hagiographic genre, to say nothing of the significance of the Middle Ages, will be reinforced.

Day 1: Introduce the Concept of Hagiography

The purpose of this day is to provide the basic background information the students will need about saints and the hagiographic genre.

Readings before Class

- Background information on saints, hagiography, and *vitae*; these should be brief entries from accessible reference sources.
- A short *vita*, such as Saint Thomas of Canterbury from *The Golden Legend*, to familiarize students with the genre itself.
- Embed relevant video clips either providing further background or which dramatizes a saint's tale.

Journal Exercises before Class

- SPQR of the background information and the *vita*.
- Critical thinking questions such as the following:
 - What is your definition of a “saint,” either from your own faith tradition or based on how you use the word? What does a person have to do to become a “saint”? How does your definition contrast with the medieval definition of a saint, if at all?
 - Stories of saints' lives often blend genres; they are obviously faith-promoting stories, but they can also be fantasy, history, horror, mystery, romance, and much more. In [title of *vita*], what literary genres do you see besides the obvious religious one? Note specific examples from the story to support your ideas.

During Class

- Assess understanding of the material by reviewing the critical thinking questions. (“What did you think was the craziest part from [*vita*]?”)
- Discuss the permeation of the cult of the saints throughout the United States, including holidays, city names, football teams, etc.
- Look at another example or two from the saintly genre. Invite the students to consider the following questions by responding in their journals and then aloud:
 - What is the purpose of this *vita*? Why would the author want to write down this story, or retell it for a contemporary audience?
 - The stories contain a lot of fantastical elements. What is the purpose of these occurrences in this story? Why include the “supernatural”?
 - In what ways are these supernatural stories about saints similar to stories in your own faith tradition, or in other stories you are familiar with? In what ways are they different?

Optional Activities

- Invite the students to review the *vita* as a group, and respond to the questions together.

Day 2: Introduce Hagiographic Rhetoric

The purpose of this day is to build on the foundational information from Day 1 by introducing students to concepts of hagiographic rhetoric.

Readings before Class

- A definition of hagiographic rhetoric, or the idea that writers of hagiography wrote their stories for more than just promoting piety.
- Further background information about martyrdom, particularly the martyrdoms in the early Christian church. Depending on the assigned vitae, perhaps information on medieval ideas about virginity and the perceived threat of paganism.
- 2-3 vitae, such as Saints Lucy and Agatha, to provide students with an additional perspective on the social values expressed in hagiography.
- Embed relevant video clips either providing further background or which dramatizes a saint's tale.

Journal Exercises before Class

- SPQR of the background information and the vitae.
- Critical thinking questions such as the following:
 - Now that you're familiar with the medieval European outlook on chastity, describe how the vitae of Agatha and Lucy demonstrate how maintaining virginity can be a source of spiritual power and miracles in these stories. Similarly, discuss *why* a medieval writer would want to highlight such stories in a collection of stories about saints. Use the term "hagiographic rhetoric" in your response.
 - Pagans (i.e. polytheists, particularly Roman ones) are often the villains of these stories. Describe why pagans were perceived as such threats by early and medieval Christians, and how they are represented in the vitae you read. *Why* do you think a medieval writer would want to include such characterizations of pagans in these vitae? Use the term "hagiographic rhetoric" in your response.

During Class

- Assess understanding of the material by reviewing the critical thinking questions.
- Ask the students to define hagiographic rhetoric from their study. Discuss the purposes of the assigned vitae, and look at specific passages where the power of virginity and the wickedness of pagans are manifest.

Optional Activities

- Ask the students to determine some social value or action they support (green energy, a sports team, honesty, etc.). Invite them to outline a vita of a saint and through that story demonstrate how the saint's tale supports their chosen value.
- The students should then report on their newly created saint, and explain the hagiographic rhetoric of the story.
- Discuss further how hagiographic rhetoric is an important component of its genre.

Day 3: The Effects of Hagiographic Rhetoric

The purpose of this day is to show students how hagiography can be a powerful literary force in the context in which it is written.

Readings before Class

- Background readings for the history of Jews in England, with definitions provided for Jews, Judaism, and antisemitism.
- Books 1-2 of *The Life and Passion of William of Norwich*, or selections from it.
- Embed relevant video clips either providing further background or which dramatizes a saint's tale.

Journal Exercises before Class

- SPQR of the background information and the vitae.
- Critical thinking questions such as the following:
 - The first goal of this work is to promote piety towards William of Norwich as a boy-saint. Describe how Thomas of Monmouth characterizes the slain boy in this way using specific examples from the reading. An ulterior goal for this work, however, is to blame the Jews for William's death. Describe how Thomas characterizes the Jews by using specific examples from the reading.
 - Also determine how Thomas deploys hagiographic rhetoric in this story, and how such rhetoric may have contributed to the expulsion of the Jews from England later in the twelfth century.
 - We've now looked at two examples where specific groups are characterized in hagiography as being particularly dangerous to Christians. Think of some groups in our own period who are often depicted in a similar light, either in your own faith tradition or in the news. Why are they perceived as threatening? What could some of the effects be if a society adopts such views against these particular groups?

During Class

- Review the concepts and address questions.
- Ask for responses to the final question in the class journal. Provide additional examples if necessary, such as Muslims, immigrants, non-Westerners, etc., and how violence has taken place as a reaction to these groups being perceived as threatening to social values.
- Determine together the potential influence hagiography can have on the public mindset. Encourage further reflection in their class journals.

Appendix: Teaching about Saints in a Predominantly Latter-day Saint Environment

Teaching medieval hagiography to Latter-day Saint students can prove especially challenging.²⁵⁴ The definition of sainthood will have to be explored when teaching to students of this audience, as described above. Additionally, there is likely to be little understanding of the history of hagiography or familiarity with saint-narratives from students raised in a prevailing LDS culture, such as those in which I've taught in Utah and southeastern Idaho. The difficulty in reconciling the medieval and Catholic understanding of saints with their own Christian faith stems from the fact that the narrative of legitimacy for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints depends on the failure of the Catholic (and Protestant) narratives. In order for students to gain appreciation of hagiography, some comparison to their own faith should be provided so the students come to see the importance of the Middle Ages and the profound ideological contributions stemming from that period.

Theological Undercurrents Affecting Latter-day Saint Engagement with Medieval Ideas

Both Catholics and Latter-day Saints highly value authority, and the question of who or what is authorized to act in God's name is paramount to the philosophies of both churches. The Catholic narrative depends on whether it represents the same organization referred to in Matthew 16:18—that Peter would be the key-holder and “rock” upon which Christ would build his church—suggesting that Jesus's one and only church (with some

²⁵⁴ The term “Mormon,” though common, has been forcefully rejected since at least 2018 by the church, which is a stark deviation from past practice where the term was either implicitly encouraged or passively discouraged (Dias). As a result of this, I have chosen to use the full name of the church when referring to the entity itself, as well as the term “Latter-day Saints” when referring to the church's membership. I use the term “LDS” only for brevity's sake, and “Mormon” only in historical context.

allowances for Orthodox and Anglican churches) has existed from the first century onwards without a cessation in authority. The Latter-day Saint narrative depends on the failure of the church to even really get started shortly after its inception, “falling away” into false teachings and apostasy near the end of the first century after the deaths of the apostles, a state of corruption that lasted until the nineteenth century. During this time, Latter-day Saints believe, there was no true authority to act in God’s name on the earth, and that spiritual darkness prevailed (“The Great Apostasy”). The term “Dark Ages” is regularly invoked in LDS parlance and is essentially synonymous with the “murky and monochromatic” Middle Ages (Dursteler 31), being described as “the fullest expression of the effects of apostasy in contrast to the light that the Renaissance revival of learning reflected in the world” (24).²⁵⁵ While this “binary view” (32) is also common in some Protestant and even secular discourse communities, it is particularly connotative to Latter-day Saints, suggesting that whatever form of Christianity existed during this period was merely pretense if not outright evil.²⁵⁶

This time of spiritual darkness is referred to as the “Great Apostasy,” which began to cease with the Renaissance and the Reformation which were preludes to the Restoration of the Gospel through Joseph Smith (Garr),²⁵⁷ who claimed to receive the keys of authority from none other than the resurrected Peter himself, along with James and John, to act in God’s name. In Latter-day Saint belief, then, the Restored Church of Jesus Christ is thus

²⁵⁵ For instance, see former Church President Thomas S. Monson’s use of the term to describe the Great Apostasy, where the “dark ages of history seemed never to end” (qtd. in “Prophets and Apostasy”).

²⁵⁶ Unlike the Anglican Communion, which describes itself as “*both* Catholic and Protestant” (Epting, emphasis added), the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints defines itself as “*neither* Catholic or Protestant” (Johnson and Mullins 52, emphasis added). This is similar to other restorationist faiths which claim that their teachings come from a purer Christianity before its “corruption” in the Middle Ages.

²⁵⁷ Famed Mormon scholar Richard L. Bushman challenges the idea that Joseph Smith himself was influenced by Enlightenment skepticism and rationalism (184). However, the “Enlightenment” period is often described by Latter-day Saints as a prelude to Smith (Dursteler 24).

the only “true and living church on the face of the earth,” and all other religions, while having elements of truth, do not have all of it.

The necessity of a gospel *restoration*, not a reformation, is reinforced constantly in Church meetings and teachings, and is among the fundamental concepts that Latter-day Saint missionaries teach. Some church leaders used to specifically name the Catholic Church as the cause of doctrinal corruption, reflecting the New England Protestant environs of Joseph Smith and the early church, which tended to be very suspicious of “popery” (Esplin). At least since the 1960s, however, the church has backed-off from such a direct attribution, and now no one specific entity is blamed for the “great apostasy” (Dursteler 27-8). However, the failure of the Catholic narrative is constantly reinforced, if only obliquely. For instance, the LDS missionary manual, *Preach My Gospel*, instructs missionaries to emphasize “that Priesthood authority *did not continue* in an unbroken line of succession from the Apostle Peter” if such a question about authority—probably from a Catholic audience—arises during their teaching (“Lesson 1,” emphasis added).²⁵⁸ Similarly, it’s not uncommon in church meetings to hear very negative views of the concepts of the Trinity, transubstantiation, and infant baptism; it’s rare to have the word “Catholic” attached, as these ideas also belong to other Christian churches, but the connection is implied. The Nicene Council (and Creed) is especially anathematic to Latter-

²⁵⁸ An occasionally quoted statement by a Catholic scholar to an early Mormon apostle characterizes this tension between the competing claims of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints by noting the following: “‘You Mormons are all ignoramuses. You do not even know the strength of your own position. It is so strong that there is only one other tenable in the whole Christian world, and that is the position of the Catholic Church. The issue is between Catholicism and Mormonism. If we are right, you are wrong; if you are right, we are wrong; and that’s all there is to it. The Protestants have not a leg to stand on. For, if we are wrong, they are wrong with us, since they were a part of us and went out from us; while if we are right, they are apostates whom we cut off long ago. If we have the apostolic succession from St. Peter, as we claim, there is no need of Joseph Smith and Mormonism; but if we have not that succession, then such a man as Joseph Smith was necessary, and Mormonism’s attitude is the only consistent one. It is either the perpetuation of the gospel from ancient times, or the restoration of the gospel in latter days’” (qtd. in Richards 3-4).

day Saint doctrine, which posits the metaphorical, but not substantial, unity of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (Petersen and Ricks).²⁵⁹

As a result, many Latter-day Saints only acknowledge the contributions of thinkers from the Middle Ages so long as their ideas and actions support the church's narrative, again suggesting that "the whole of western history" was "directed . . . toward the culminating event of Joseph Smith's 1830 restoration of Christ's original church" (Dursteler 27). Some ideas from early Christian thinkers are evoked, such as those from Saint Augustine, but these have been usually limited to specific quotes that support LDS theology (cf. Petersen and Ricks). Reformist thinkers, especially Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and John Wycliffe, are far more likely to be mentioned ("Prelude to the Restoration"), but again only in cherry-picked quotations which bridge the gap between apostasy-derived Christian (i.e. Catholic) ideas and "restored" truth—a way of paying homage without indicating that these Reformers got it completely right (cf. Johnson and Mullins 61).²⁶⁰ Again, this does not mean that most Latter-day Saints or that the church itself is anti-Catholic, as the amicable 2019 meeting in Rome of Pope Francis and LDS Church President Russell M. Nelson has demonstrated (Wooden). What the Latter-day Saint reluctance to engage with Catholic history and ideas does suggest, however, is that

²⁵⁹ Apostle Jeffrey R. Holland, former President of Brigham Young University and among the most engaging Latter-day Saint orators, explained: "These various evolutions and iterations of creeds—and others to come over the centuries—declared the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost to be abstract, absolute, transcendent, immanent, consubstantial, coeternal, and unknowable, without body, parts, or passions and dwelling outside space and time. In such creeds all three members are separate persons, but they are a single being, the oft-noted 'mystery of the trinity.' They are three distinct persons, yet not three Gods but one. All three persons are incomprehensible, yet it is one God who is incomprehensible. We agree with our critics on at least that point—that such a formulation for divinity is truly incomprehensible."

²⁶⁰ I find this interesting, as I personally believe that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has far more in common with the Catholic Church than Protestant churches than is often allowed, as both churches rely so heavily on direct authority, are headed by a divinely appointed patriarch with the sole ability to interpret scripture, support a male-only priesthood, reject *sola fide* and *sola scriptura*, emphasize the endowment of grace by receiving sacraments and ordinances, and so on.

its founding narrative cannot exist without the temporary dissolution of authorized Christianity that Catholicism claims never to have lost.

Pedagogical Approaches to Engaging Latter-day Saint Students with Hagiography

It would be unfair to suggest that hagiography will be dismissed out of hand by any Latter-day Saint student. Objections, if they arise at all, or resistance, if offered, will more likely arise on the level of what Carol Blessing experienced as a professor at a Protestant college in the United States. She describes many of her students as having a “predispos[ition] against Catholicism,”²⁶¹ which as I have shown may also reflect the attitudes of some Latter-day Saints. Blessing’s experience suggests that “students’ past Bible instruction interferes with their ability to read critically religious works with theological views that differ from theirs” (25). She adds that although she and her colleagues try to “contextualize” such readings, that their “students often come wearing religious training-forged armor that is difficult to penetrate in one or two semesters” (26). A class with several Latter-day Saint students may also include a few—in most of my classes, several—returned missionaries, male and female, who have tested their own armor in religious dialogue during their proselytization. As a result, some students may have developed ideological immunities against certain doctrines posited by other Christian faiths, i.e. the Trinity, and may be shaken to some degree by the “cognitive dissonance that causes [them] . . . to reevaluate their entrenched views, . . . none [being] as entrenched as their religious faith” (33).

²⁶¹ One particular objection Blessing faced while teaching medieval literature at this religious institution occurred while reading the writings of Julian of Norwich, who, the students said, claimed that “Jesus was a girl” in her musings of the maternal nature of God (32).

However, this sort of cognitive dissonance is exactly what may help engage Latter-day Saint students in a study of hagiography or other aspects of medieval religion. Blessing agrees with my position in this chapter, that the “more foreign the subject matter is to the students, the more it needs foregrounding within concrete contexts.” She similarly concludes that managed and respectful ideological “conflict produces good teaching and the chance for better learning” (36). The key, again, is to provide sufficient context *first*. Once that has been established, comparisons to Latter-day Saint doctrine, history, and culture can be made to help the students see similarities of the hagiographic tradition to their own beliefs. I’ve used some of the following as part of my teaching, in both the early British literature course and other situations.

Sainthood. As noted above, the word *saints* in the name of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints refers to its general membership, and not to canonized persons. The term has been in use since at least 1832, when it replaced the previously predominant term *disciple* (“Saints”), and was confirmed in 1838 when the church adopted its current name with some later stylization changes (“Name of the Church”). While self-references among Latter-day Saints have varied, the term *saint* is always used synonymously with “member of the Church.” However, once the traditional definition of sainthood is better understood, many Latter-day Saint students will be able to identify people of prominence in their faith tradition, particularly from the early years of the church, all who are said to have exhibited extraordinary courage or endurance in the face of hostilities and who are afforded some measure of traditional saint-like status.

The figures who will likely come most readily to mind as “martyrs” are Joseph and Hyrum Smith, who were killed while prisoners in a jail cell in 1844; their “martyrdom” is

frequently invoked in Latter-day Saint discourse.²⁶² Particular people among the Mormon Pioneers are also noted as being exceptional, such as the three eighteen-year-old young men who carried dozens of migrants across the bone-chilling Sweetwater River in present-day Wyoming; the three teenagers each eventually perished from the cold, and were subsequently extolled by Brigham Young as having earned “an everlasting salvation in the Celestial Kingdom of God, worlds without end” (qtd. in Orton 8).²⁶³ Inviting students to consider these examples can help them see the connections to traditional or Catholic sainthood, particularly when individuals exhibited resilience of one form or another during persecution. Asking why these figures are so important to Latter-day Saint tradition, and how they contribute to the modern-day understanding of church identity, can be extrapolated into similar questions about Catholic saints.

Pilgrimage. There are a few strong undercurrents of pilgrimage in the Latter-day Saint tradition. I once asked my students if any of them had ever made a trip to a particular place considered “holy” in their faith. The readiest answer involved trips to a temple as part of their youth group to participate in what are called “sacred ordinances”; most Latter-day Saint teenagers have experienced this, particularly if a temple is relatively close to their home. Others indicated that they had visited notable places from church history, such as Palmyra, New York, near where Joseph Smith had his “First Vision”; the Hill Cumorah, where the golden plates of the Book of Mormon were said to have been buried and

²⁶² See, for instance, Doctrine and Covenants, Section 135, which “announce[s] the martyrdom of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and Hyrum Smith the Patriarch” (1). See also the hymn commending Joseph Smith, “Praise to the Man”; the second verse reads in part: “long shall his blood which was shed by assassins / plead unto heav’n while the earth lauds his fame” (Phelps), the word “plead” taking on a very saint-like function indeed. (The original words were much more direct, reading that the martyr’s blood would “*stain Illinois while the earth lauds his fame.*”)

²⁶³ I am indebted to Tina Sutton, a fellow Utah State University graduate student, for pointing out the “sainthood” of these individuals to me in 2013; we were enrolled in a class together which compared medieval and modern forms of sainthood and pilgrimage.

recovered; Kirtland, Ohio, and Nauvoo, Illinois, where the Latter-day Saints gathered for periods in the 1830s; and also Carthage Jail in Illinois, the place of the Smiths' martyrdom. I helped the students recognize these places as holy sites where they traveled to have a closer connection with the divine and to confirm their religious identity, just as medieval pilgrims would have done.

The most direct correlation with "pilgrimage" in the Latter-day Saint tradition are, however, the pioneer reenactment "treks," in which thousands of people each year revisit the sites where the Mormon Pioneers traveled across the plains from the Midwest to present-day Utah (*Handcart Trek* 1-2). These can be highly involved productions, requiring participants to wear authentic period clothing, reenact camp scenes, bury dolls to represent deceased children, and so forth. I have brought this example up in my classes to show the students that pilgrimage is often meant to require physical as well as spiritual exertion, and that these "treks"—which can involve pushing handcarts, traveling while fasting, and other exertions—are designed to bring about spiritual humility, just as a medieval person may have experienced traveling to a saint's shrine while wearing a hair-shirt or going barefoot.²⁶⁴ Many of my students had experienced such treks, and were able to share their stories of their own group's variations of the tradition. This again helped the students make connections to what "pilgrimage" may have meant to a Christian in the Middle Ages.

Hagiographic Rhetoric. When enough contextual information about sainthood has been provided, there are aspects of Latter-day Saint culture that can be connected to the

²⁶⁴ The church issued policy guidelines in 2015 for handcart trek reenactments. The instruction manual for such endeavors has a lengthy safety guide which in part eliminated the tradition of fasting during these experiences, known colloquially as a "starvation trek." Students who participated in treks before 2015 are therefore more likely to have had such experiences than those who trekked after that year (*Handcart Trek* 19-20).

concept of hagiographic rhetoric. The stories of prominent church members have often been used for purposes beyond promoting piety, or in LDS terms, “strengthening a testimony.” This is readily noted in the political sphere, where the deeds and sayings of prophets in particular are used to justify supporting certain ideologies or even candidates for office, generally with a conservative bent. Joseph Smith is said to have uttered a statement, now known as the “White Horse Prophecy,” that indicates a time when “the Constitution of the United States [would be] almost destroyed,” and would “hang like a thread as fine as a silk fiber,” but would ultimately be saved by Latter-day Saints. Although the so-called prophecy is specious and is disavowed by both Mormon apologists (FairMormon) and the institutional church, the idea remains pervasive, surfacing particularly in the 2012 presidential election when Mitt Romney was occasionally touted by individual Latter-day Saints as a fulfillment of the prophecy (Mueller).²⁶⁵ In a similar vein, the life and sayings of Apostle Ezra Taft Benson, who eventually served as the thirteenth prophet of the church but beforehand as Dwight D. Eisenhower’s conservative and staunchly anticommunist Secretary of Agriculture, are often used not merely to teach the virtue of good citizenship, but also to promote conservative, even libertarian, ideals and values.²⁶⁶ Both of these examples show how the ethos of credible and well-known “saints” has been used for appended purposes by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Many other examples could be cited here, but one more will suffice, and is one I remember distinctly. Shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks, references were made

²⁶⁵ Again, the church itself never adopted such a view, only some individual Latter-day Saints. The modern church does not endorse individual candidates, and did not endorse Romney (cf. “Political Neutrality”).

²⁶⁶ For instance, the Rexburg, Idaho-based Madison Liberty Institute often uses quotes from Benson as part of its libertarian rhetoric.

by Latter-day Saint authorities to how the terrorist cells resembled the “secret combinations” of murderers described in the Book of Mormon, and how the Christian believers in the story went to war against these evildoers to preserve their way of life, their liberty, and their faith. Invocations were similarly made to Captain Moroni, one of the most prominent figures in the Book of Mormon and arguably its most well-known holy warrior (Jenkins 91). Moroni—not to be confused with the Angel Moroni who reportedly visited Joseph Smith—has consistently been upheld in Latter-day Saint rhetoric about the necessity of fighting evil under certain defensive circumstances, and doing so courageously and piously (Wood). Such was also the case post-9/11, when Moroni was again invoked for fighting radical terrorists (Hinckley).²⁶⁷ I will venture to say that the freedom-fighter legacy of Moroni is almost inevitably referenced in discussions about warfare among American Latter-day Saints, both to justify it and to condemn it (Judd and Rogers).²⁶⁸

As such, Latter-day Saint students will be familiar with Captain Moroni in the context of warfare, which can bridge easily into a discussion about hagiographic rhetoric. Medieval Christians too invoked their own battle-saints, as demonstrated by Ælfric’s *vitae*; some even describe apparitions of the saints appearing on the field of battle alongside their troops, such as the apparition of Saint James the “Moorslayer” in Spain (*Santiago Matamoros*). Raising such examples can provide profound and engaging discussions of the

²⁶⁷ In particular, I remember an image of Moroni printed on the bulletin cover for one of our congregation’s sacrament meetings shortly after 9/11.

²⁶⁸ “The greatest problem we face in trying to justify or condemn war is that the scriptures contain diverse teachings about the morality of conflict. That being the case, it is a simple matter to fall into partisan scholarship and to write with an agenda, quoting this and that verse of scripture or this and that authority as having declared the final word on the subject. . . . Another key, perhaps even more important than providing a balanced view of the various arguments for and against war, is to correctly understand the context in which the various statements on war have been given. Modern and ancient prophets often write to their times, to their people, and to their particular situations. They have had to speak specifically during times of justifiable conflict, times of questionable conflict, and times of clearly immoral conflict. At other times, the Lord has meant for their words to apply universally. Unless we read the prophets within appropriate contexts, they might seem to be contradictory” (Judd and Rogers).

meaning of sainthood to politics, and how many nations have approached warfare via the *exempla* of noted religious figures.

Conclusion: Let the Students Share

Perhaps the best strategy for engaging students of any faith tradition is to simply ask them to discuss similarities. For instance, once they understand the concept of pilgrimage, ask, “What kind of pilgrimage do you have in your faith tradition?” Or when discussing martyrdom, “Who are some people considered ‘martyrs’ in your faith?” No doubt, especially with such a strong evangelization effort among Latter-day Saints (called “sharing the Gospel”), the students will be willing and even eager to share—so long, of course, as enough contextual information about the terms being defined have been provided beforehand. My experience so far in making connections between medieval saints and Latter-day Saints has been rewarding, and has been satisfying for me to watch student engagement increase because of such comparisons.

Conclusion

The strength of hagiography as a genre lies in its application—its rhetoric. For Ælfric of Eynsham, Thomas of Monmouth, John Mirk, and countless other medieval hagiographers, the saintly vita served as a vehicle for expressing anxieties and proposing solutions to real-world problems. All three authors were deeply concerned with the state of their communities and the socioreligious implications of failing to pay homage to God through his saints. These concerns drove the writing of the saintly narratives, and textual evidence makes their purposes—both explicit and implicit—very clear.

This dissertation has shown that the critical application of hagiographic rhetoric for studying saintly vitae of any period, but especially medieval works, plays a crucial role in expanding scholarly assessment of these important writings. Through this critical lens, a scholar is able to see beyond the fantastic elements of the narratives themselves to better understand the purposes behind their creation. Most importantly, a study of hagiographic rhetoric can also help scholars further explore the subliminal purposes in the production of hagiography, those beyond promoting piety and encouraging devotion to a specific saint.

This work has also shown that hagiography should be an important component in a college course examining the lives and mindsets of medieval people; students too can be trained to see the pronounced role saints played in medieval identity and discourse. Hagiographic rhetoric helps the genre be understood as all-encompassing, covering history, religion, warfare, nationality, economics, prejudice, identity, gender roles, and more. The concept thus provides a critical avenue for both professional scholars and students to further engage with this essential component of medieval studies.

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