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THE REFORMIST EXEMPLUM OF THE MONASTIC BISHOP IN BEDE'S  
*ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH PEOPLE*

A Thesis Presented

by

Christopher Kelm

to

The Faculty of the Graduate College

of

The University of Vermont

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Master of Arts  
Specializing in English

October, 2022

Defense Date: September 15, 2022

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## ABSTRACT

Throughout his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*, Bede displays a recurring interest in and admiration for the lives of bishops who also live as monks. The reason for this is better understood in the context of Bede's *Letter to Egbert*, written a few years after the completion of the *Historia*, and a few months before Bede's death. In the *Letter*, Bede complains of contemporary Northumbrian bishops who lack any personal discipline and who fail to adequately provide pastoral care for their oversized dioceses, while they yet demand excessive tributes from the laity; he also laments the presence of "false monasteries," which fail to follow any monastic rule. Bede argues that the solution to both problems is to create new episcopal seats on the sites of properly Rule-based monasteries, with the bishop chosen by and from among the monks. The aforementioned "false monasteries" may then be added to the episcopal monastery's territory, where they may be reformed under the monk-bishop's leadership.

I argue that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* serves this reformist program as a text of exempla. Bede is an inheritor of classical and patristic rhetorical traditions, which favor the use of good examples as a means of provoking imitation in the listener or reader. The patristic tradition in particular views history as a source uniquely authored by divine will, whose events and lessons may be rightly applied to present-day circumstances. This view of history synergizes well with Bede's background as a biblical exegete—he essentially performs an exegesis of English Church history, drawing the reader's attention to the monk-bishops who showcase the merits of his monastic-episcopal model. These exemplary bishops spring from two lineages: those of the Augustinian mission ordered by Gregory the Great and those of the Irish Ionan mission to Northumbria. Yet despite notable liturgical and organization differences between these two traditions, Bede narrates exempla from both as participants in the same tradition as that of the early apostolic Church, a tradition which he presents as critical to the success of the English and Northumbrian Church of both past and present.

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## INTRODUCTION: THE *HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA* AND BEDE'S REFORMIST INTENTIONS

In the year 734, a few months before his death, Bede the Venerable penned a letter to Egbert, bishop of York. This letter was no social call—it carried an emphatic and forceful appeal for Egbert to enact a fundamental structural change in his diocesan territory. Bede urges Egbert to complete the plan that Pope Gregory had held for the kingdom of Northumbria that twelve bishops should rule in the kingdom, with the bishop of York as metropolitan (9). The letter's text reveals that this objective arises not merely from Bede's personal admiration for Gregory but from very specific degradations in the Northumbrian Church that, in Bede's opinion, demand immediate reform. Bede complains vigorously about the present corruption in both the bishops and the monasteries of Northumbria, two declines which, as we shall see, are intimately linked in Bede's perception.

At the beginning of the *Letter*, Bede exhorts Archbishop Egbert to be vigilant in maintaining his own holiness in both his actions and his teaching, “For neither of these virtues may duly be fulfilled apart from the other: if either the man of good life neglect the office of teacher, or the bishop which teacheth rightly despise the practice of good works” (3).<sup>1</sup> We may observe here the appearance of a theme that Alan Thacker notes as common across Bede's written corpus: those endowed with the sacred role of *doctor* (or “teacher”) had a responsibility to “Above all...set a holy example, to show in deed what they taught in word” (131). In his *Letter*, Bede identifies this “teaching” role as paramount in importance to the bishop's vocation.

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<sup>1</sup> “*Neutra enim haec virtus sine altera rite potest impleri: si aut is qui bene vivit docendi officium negligit, aut recte docens antistes rectam exercere operationem contemnit.*”

To this end, Bede urges Egbert to surround himself with sober and holy companions, who might recall him to righteousness should either his words or his deeds begin to stray toward corruption or wantonness (4)—we may well note the monastic undertones of this recommendation. This advice is not rooted in idle concern; Bede notes that “it is commonly reported of some bishops that they in such wise serve Christ, that they have none about them which are men of any godliness or temperance; but rather men which are given up to laughter, jesting, tales, revelings, drunkenness, and the other allurements of dissolute living; which daily rather feed their belly with feasts than their mind with heavenly sacrifices” (4).<sup>2</sup> Instead of surrounding themselves with individuals who support them in forming their lives as “holy examples,” these bishops foster communities that support their libertine appetites.

This is hardly the only complaint Bede levels at the common practices of Northumbrian bishops. Bede bids Egbert to “[c]onsider the very grievous sin committed by them that are most diligent to seek earthly profit from their hearers, but yet strive not to spend any labor at all in preaching or exhortation or reproof to win their eternal salvation” (7).<sup>3</sup> Bede notes that in many of the more inaccessible settlements of the kingdom, years go by without the bishop visiting even once to minister the sacraments or even a teacher to instruct the people in the true faith or right living—yet these same bishops who forsake their duties to these populations are quite diligent in extracting monetary tribute from them. Bede rails against these bishops, indicating that greed is the

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<sup>2</sup> “*Quod non ita loquor, quasi te aliter facere sciam, sed quia de quibusdam episcopis fama vulgatum est, quod ipsi ita Christo serviant, ut nullos secum alicuius religionis aut continentiae viros habeant: sed potius qui risui, iocis, fabulis, commensationibus et ebrietatibus, ceterisque vitae remissionis illecebris subigantur, et qui magis quotidie ventrem dapibus, quam mentem sacrificiis coelestibus pascant.*”

<sup>3</sup> “*Attende quid gravissimi sceleris illi commiserint qui et terrena ab auditoribus suis lucra diligentissime requirere, et pro eorum salute aeterna nihil omnino praedicando, vel exhortando, vel increpando, laboris impendere contendunt.*”

cause of not only their exploitation of these hamlets and steadings but also their neglect: it is the bishops' "love of money" that prompts them to expand their prelacy over many more territories than to whom they could ever provide adequate pastoral care (8).

As with Bede's previous complaint, the culture of monastic asceticism provides an antidote to this ecclesiastical greed. This reason, along with the accountability that comes with the communal religious life, helps us to understand Bede's purpose in urging Egbert, with the approval of a greater council of bishops and the king, to situate the see of a new diocese on the lands of a monastery, with one from among the monks to be chosen as the new bishop (10). This new bishop would, as a matter of course, bring to his episcopacy a grounding in monastic discipline, sobriety, and disdain for material wealth, as well as a community of companions ready to keep him accountable to these virtues. Additionally, as I shall later show, Bede associated monasticism with zeal for preaching and ministration, especially to remote and inaccessible regions—thus this bishop would exemplify Bede's ideal vision of the *doctor* in both example and action.

All this assumes, however, that the monastery selected to serve as the diocesan see practices these monastic virtues faithfully. Bede implies that Egbert should be careful to select a healthy monastery as his base; he writes that if the chosen monastery should require more land or resources to support the bishopric, "there are, as we all know, innumerable places reckoned under the name of monasteries which yet have no mark at all of monastical life and conversation: of which I would have some brought over, by authority of the synod, from wantonness to chastity, from vanity to verity, from greed and gluttony to continence and godliness of heart, and used for the furtherance of the



episcopal see which is newly to be established” (10).<sup>4</sup> Bede’s horror at the state of these “false monasteries” equals or even exceeds his indignation at the spread of lax and corrupt bishops. He frames these monasteries as sites founded by laymen “neither accustomed to any rule of religious life nor having any love thereof”<sup>5</sup> who acquire monastic charters from kings as a pretext for having land where they “may more freely have opportunity for their lust” (12).<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, they assemble as their “monks” men who have been discharged from other monasteries for disobedience and other profligates willing to promise obedience to themselves. Bede provides an infamously lurid description of the result: “With these perverse companies they fill the cells that they have built, and (a wonderful and horrible thing to behold) the very same men are at one time occupied with their wives and begetting of children, and at another, rising from their beds, they diligently set themselves to be occupied with necessary business within the bounds of the monasteries” (12).<sup>7</sup>

For Bede, this collapse of the integrity of the monastic system (which he notes has been underway for about 30 years (13)) is intimately connected with the corruption of bishops he described earlier. Bede implicates the bishops in the same “blindness”<sup>8</sup> that he ascribes to the abbots and monks of these corrupt monasteries, arguing that the bishops

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<sup>4</sup> “...sunt loca innumera, ut novimus omnes, in monasteriorum ascripta vocabulum, sed nihil prorsus monasticae conversationis habentia: e quibus velim aliqua de luxuria ad castitatem, de vanitate ad veritatem, de intemperantia ventris et gulae ad continentiam et pietatem cordis synodica auctoritate transferantur, atque in adiutorium sedis episcopalis quae nuper ordinari debeat assumantur.”

<sup>5</sup> “...nullius vitae regularis vel usu exerciti, vel amore praediti...” It is important to note that when Bede refers to a monastic “rule” or “regular discipline,” he does not mean a single codified rule (i.e., that of Saint Benedict). Sarah Foot notes that a multitude of rules were practiced throughout Anglo-Saxon England prior to the 10<sup>th</sup> century (6), which mixed pastoral action and contemplation as “complementary routes toward the fulfillment of both individual and collective spiritual quests” (11).

<sup>6</sup> “...in quibus suae liberior vacent libidini...”

<sup>7</sup> “*Horum distortis cohortibus, suas quas instruxere cellas implent, multumque informi atque inaudito spectaculo, iidem ipsi viri modo coniugis ac liberorum procreandorum curam gerunt, modo exsurgentes de cubilibus quid intra septa monasteriorum geri debeat, sedula intentione pertractant.*”

<sup>8</sup> “caecitas”

could easily check this corruption with the assertion of regular discipline, “if the bishops themselves were not found rather to help and consent to this kind of wickedness: they which not only take no pains to overthrow unjust decrees of this sort with just ones, but are forward, as we said, rather to confirm them by the writing of their own hands, the same covetousness moving them to confirm the evil agreements, as compelleth the buyers to establish monasteries of this sort” (13).<sup>9</sup> The corrupt bishops function as enablers and sponsors to these corrupt monasteries, permitting them to exist as a means of enriching themselves.

The connection between the decline of ecclesial and monastic righteousness also works in the opposite direction. As I have already pointed out, the insobriety, sloth, and greed which Bede describes as common among Northumbrian bishops all find their remedy in the regular discipline cultivated within healthy monasteries. As these functioning monasteries diminish and these “false monasteries” replace them, fewer and fewer men ascend to the office of bishop with a grounding in this discipline Bede seems to deem necessary for carrying out the bishop’s duties as *doctor* and for the custodianship of their dioceses’ monasteries. Indeed, the very fact that Bede expects his bishops to be able to understand and enforce “regular discipline” on their monasteries indicates his expectation that these bishops will have a monastic education. However, Bede’s ideal model for the relationship of bishop and monastery becomes fully realized, not in the *Letter to Egbert*, but in his magnum opus also completed towards the end of his life, the

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<sup>9</sup> “...si non ipsi pontifices magis huiusmodi sceleribus opem ferre atque astipulari probarentur: qui non solummodo huiusmodi decreta iniusta iustis infringere decretis non curant, verum suis potius subscriptionibus, ut praefati sumus, confirmare satagunt: eadem ipsis philargyria dictante, ad confirmandum male scripta, qua emptores ad comparandum huiusmodi monasteria coacti.”

*Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* (*Ecclesiastical History of the English People*), which will serve as the primary object of focus for my project.

The *Historia ecclesiastica* (which I will hereafter refer to as the *HE*) does not at first appear to bear the hallmarks of a reformist text. Aside from a few off-hand comments, Bede refrains from issuing any explicit critique of his contemporaries, choosing instead to write in a measured historiographical voice about the persons and events of England's past. However, this does not mean that the *HE* is free of value judgements—on the contrary, Bede unabashedly constructs almost heroic narratives of the foundational *doctores* of the English Church. It is in Bede's portrayal of these figures, and the religious communities surrounding them, that we may observe the full integration of monastic and ecclesial systems that Bede urges Egbert to pursue. I argue that this is no accident, that in fact the *HE* is embedded in the same program of reform that Bede took up in the *Letter*. Bede deploys figures from the distant and recent past as rhetorical exempla, object lessons in the virtues and attributes needed of a leader and teacher of the faith. Most of Bede's favorite bishops originate from monasteries and, in addition to exercising monastic virtues like discipline, frugality, and contemplation, continue to keep their communities close to them and even use their monks as arms of their ministry.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will evaluate Bede's rhetorical and historiographical method and attempt to reveal its roots in patristic and classical rhetoric and historiography, as well as the uniquely Christian exegetical tradition. I will aim to establish the principles of Bede's particular brand of Christian exemplarity, to better interrogate the exempla scattered throughout the *HE*. In my second chapter, I will consider several early foundational pillars of Bede's exemplary model: Pope Gregory the

Great, the Benedictine who, even after assuming the papacy, “turned his house into a monastery” (*HE* II.1); the missionary monk-bishops first sent by Gregory to England; and the Irish “second wave” of missionaries who, despite not having any direct connection to the Gregorian mission, so embody the same monastic-episcopal way of life that Bede considers them worthy successors to the same mission. And in my third chapter, I will consider Bede’s treatment of later-period bishops, such as Wilfrid, Theodore, Chad, and Cuthbert—through them, I will explore the changing landscape of post-missionization Northumbria and the conflicting influences working to shape the nature of the episcopal office—and how Bede works to prove that his monastic-episcopal paradigm continues to remain a necessary ideal to pursue even in his present day.

## CHAPTER 1: EXEMPLARITY, EXEGESIS, AND BEDE'S HISTORIOGRAPHY

### 1.1. Introduction

When attempting to reconcile the vast disparity in tone between the *HE* and the *Letter to Egbert*, we must consider the literary conventions under which Bede labored to produce each. The *Letter* is a personal (if not completely private) and explicitly persuasive communication to a former pupil (Whitelock 34) and study partner (*Letter 1*): we may suppose that Bede felt freer to express his dismay at the state of ecclesial and monastic affairs with the intensity he truly felt; furthermore, it would behoove his instructive cause to lay out his remedies for these failings as clearly as possible. By contrast, Bede writes the *Historia Ecclesiastica* in the genre of *historiography* of the English, and one meant to be both palatable and edifying to the patriotic spirits of secular readers, such as King Ceolwulf, to whom the *HE* is dedicated—Bede assumed that Ceolwulf would enthusiastically support Egbert in the formation of new bishoprics (*Letter 9*). Before all else, we must consider what a “historiography” was to Bede and from whence he drew his influences. We may take the *HE*'s own preface as a self-evident starting point for this project. In it, Bede explains to Ceolwulf that he can best learn from history by recognizing the good and bad examples within and choosing to imitate the good (*HE*, Preface). As a king, imitation is not limited to Ceolwulf's own personal behavior but also extends to the way in which he administrates his kingdom (i.e. supporting Archbishop Egbert in enacting Bede's desired reforms). As I will argue in future chapters, Bede repeatedly uses *exemplary* historical *doctores*, especially his favored bishops, to showcase virtues he identifies with the monastic life: virtues which Bede considers indispensable for the spiritual health of the English Church. Christian

exemplarity is frequently associated more with hagiography than historiography, and indeed, many of Bede's lovingly told exempla in the *HE* bear a distinctly hagiographical flavor. Nonetheless, we cannot separate these narratives from the rest of his history—for Bede, exemplarity and imitation is part and parcel to history's value, as he states in the *HE*'s Preface.

With this chapter, I hope to develop a theory of Bede's understanding of the role of exemplarity in the telling of history. I will survey a few of his historiographical and rhetorical forebears, both classical and patristic, who utilize exemplarity as a rhetorical device, and attempt to track some of the ways Bede follows and departs from them. I will also examine the way Bede and his predecessor Augustine understood their role in describing the past and their relationship to the divine in the construction of a historical narrative meaningful to contemporary readers. Finally, I will turn to a selection from Bede's exegetical work, considering his view of the relationship between Biblical and extra-Biblical history, and demonstrate Bede's willingness to identify historical events and individuals directly with those of the present, with the intent of inspiring either imitation or avoidance.

## **1.2. Classical and Patristic Contexts**

For the purposes of our examination, it is useful to situate Bede within a broader western historiographical tradition. I by no means intend to imply that such a tradition exists as an unbroken continuity; rather, I simply mean to point to influences at work in Bede and his forebears. It seems most practical and appropriate to begin by considering the historiographers of classical Rome. These were the writers whose styles and techniques shaped those of late antique Christian writers such as Ambrose, Augustine,

and Jerome, occasionally to their own discomfort (Knappe 8, Love 45). Bede, in turn, had ample opportunity to consume these Christian writings in his famous library at Wearmouth-Jarrow Monastery (Love 43).

In his essay “Augustine, Martyrdom, and the Exemplary Rhetoric of History,” Adam Ployd notes the following: “Whereas [classical Roman] rhetoric needed to draw on history, Roman historiography was inherently rhetorical. While fictionalized speeches, conforming to best rhetorical practice, make up much of classical histories, the nature of good historiography itself was understood by some to be not only rhetorical but exemplary in its narration of the past” (430). As an example of this type of exemplary narration of history, he cites Livy’s preface to his *Historia Romanae*: “What chiefly makes the study of history wholesome and profitable is this, that you behold the lessons of every kind of experience set forth as on a conspicuous monument; from these you may choose for yourself and own state what to imitate, from these mark for avoidance what is shameful in the conception and shameful in the result” (*I.praefatio*).<sup>10</sup> One cannot help but note the marked resemblance in Livy’s line to that in Bede’s own preface in the *HE*: “Should history tell of good men and their good estate, the thoughtful listener is spurred on to imitate the good; should it record the evil ends of wicked men, no less effectually the devout and earnest listener or reader is kindled to eschew what is harmful and perverse, and himself with greater care pursue those things which he has learned to be good and pleasing in the sight of God” (*Praefatio*).<sup>11</sup> While we cannot know whether or

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<sup>10</sup> “*Hoc illud est praecipue in cognitione rerum salubre ac frugiferum, omnis te exempli documenta in inlustri posita monumento intueri; inde tibi tuaeque rei publicae quod imitere capias, inde foedum inceptu, foedum exitu, quod vitas.*”

<sup>11</sup> “*Siue enim historia de bonis bona referat, ad imitandum bonum auditor sollicitus instigatur; seu mala commemoret de prauis, nihilominus religiosus ac pius auditor siue lector deuitando quod noxium est ac peruersum, ipse sollertius ad exsequenda e aquae bona ac Deo Digna esse cognouerit, accenditur.*”

not Bede had direct access to any of Livy's corpus (Love 43), we can observe that both Livy and Bede conceptualize the value of exemplary history in terms of *imitatio*; the notion that the student of history is to both learn what practices are good from "heroic" historical figures, and to emulate these figures in their own actions in order to appropriate this good—or to do the inverse with regard to wicked or shameful historical figures.

This "directly applicable" exemplarity differs substantially from other, more hagiographical exempla appearing in the Christian Middle Ages—for example, the narratives of virtually-suicidal martyrs or extreme ascetics, to which the words Bede's own foundational exemplum Gregory the Great could be applied: "*non imitanda set veneranda*" (Brasington 143).<sup>12</sup> We might observe here a distinction Bede recognizes between the telling of hagiography and of history. A hagiographical work might focus on a saint's extraordinary personal holiness for the purpose of building up the saint's cult, perhaps even emphasizing "heroic" feats of virtue that the reader could not or ought not to attempt to imitate. A historiography, meanwhile, was to adopt a more grounded stance, emphasizing those righteous deeds that readers could learn to imitate.

Just *how* the student of history was to imitate the praiseworthy figures of history in a present context was a question that both the classical Roman and early Christian writers struggled to answer. Ployd takes Sallust, a 1<sup>st</sup> century BC Roman historian and politician, as an example of the former. Sallust praises the ability of wax statues to awaken cultural memories of great past deeds and diligence in such men as Q. Fabius

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<sup>12</sup> These words appear in Gregory's *Books of Dialogues*, a text which Bede himself praises in *HE* II.1. Gregory writes these words in reference to Biblical figures such as Moses or John the Baptist, who led and taught despite not having any apparent teachers themselves. Gregory explains that, though these figures were given divine inspiration in their actions, the "weak" of the present should not presume that they are similarly inspired and so "disdain to be a disciple of man and become the master of error" (quoted in Brasington 143).



Maximus and P. Scipio Africanus. However, Sallust felt that such exempla could only be effective so long as the audience shared a comparable struggle with the heroic examples of the past—since Carthage no longer acts as a source of adversity for Rome, the present Roman is now only inspired to attain the same heights of wealth and power as these ancestors, rather than their good character (432–33, 437).

By contrast, Augustine rejects this narrative of decline when describing the relationship between present Christians and his past, exemplary martyrs in *City of God*. Though he does not suggest that his readers could or should aspire to the same heroic heights as these exempla, he nonetheless defines his martyrs in opposition not to worldly forces but rather “a perennial threat that would never be removed from Christians until the end of history itself” (Ployd 437); this is to say, the spiritual temptation to love the things of the world, rather than the things of heaven. While these martyrs may have been put to death by pagan human authorities who could no longer threaten Augustine’s readership, their choice to embrace martyrdom embodied their opposition to this perennial temptation—a temptation that Augustine’s readers could also resist, if not through martyrdom, then through daily spiritual conflict with temptation. The desired imitation on the part of the reader could be safely separated from the original historical context of the exemplum.

Thus, Augustine avoids a sense of inevitable moral decline due to the political ascendancy of the Christian religion—although the forces of paganism no longer physically threaten either the Church or individual Christians, the demonic forces of temptation provide plenty of adversity for Christians to test themselves against. The martyrs, therefore, remain straightforwardly imitable by Augustine’s contemporaries; for

example, Ployd mentions that in one of his sermons, Augustine urges the faithful to “imitate those whom one venerates” by refraining from drunkenness and gluttony when practicing *refrigerium* (ritual feasting) at the site of the martyrs’ tombs (426–27). Augustine here indicates that to overindulge in bodily pleasures is to yield to the same temptations over which the martyrs once triumphed: “if they [the martyrs] had delighted in such things, they would not have been martyrs” (Augustine, quoted in Ployd 427). Effectively, Augustine stretches the definition of “imitation” to encompass not merely the literal act of dying for the sake of eternal life but also the spiritual act of “dying” to one’s bodily desires for the same eternal life. An observer could, quite reasonably, say that Augustine allegorizes the sacrifices of the martyrs to signify the need for rather different and perhaps lesser sacrifices among the faithful of his own day; however, Augustine himself does not seem to think of this transference of meaning in terms of allegory. Rather, he treats the struggle of the contemporary faithful as morally the *same in kind* to the struggle of the martyrs—it is merely the outward trappings of the conflict which are different. This concept of moral equivalency will prove very relevant to Bede’s construction of exemplarity, as I will show shortly.

Bede was faced with a similar challenge as both Sallust and Augustine in writing the *HE*. Many of his foundational exempla (such as Gregory, Augustine of Canterbury, and Aidan) operated in or upon an England that was yet a missionary field—Anglo-Saxon paganism held cultural and political dominance, affording these exemplary figures plenty of opportunities for evangelical heroism. By Bede’s day, the opposition of institutional paganism no longer loomed—the greatest threat, as Bede expresses in his *Letter to Egbert*, was the internal decline of monastic discipline and the resulting failure

of bishops to act as adequate *doctores* to their flocks. And in the *HE*, Bede recognizes a waning in holy fervor in Northumbria when he contrasts the life and missionary zeal of Bishop Aidan with “our modern slothfulness”;<sup>13</sup> he notes Aidan’s detachment from worldly possessions, his willingness to travel far and wide on foot to preach and minister to both believers and unbelievers, and his insistence that his travelling companions, both lay and monastic, either read the scriptures or memorize the Psalms (III.5). We might impute to Bede a “Sallustian” nostalgia for this missionary period, in which men like Aidan were inspired by a spirit exclusive to the adversity of the missionary field. If Bede follows the Sallustian paradigm, the “modern slothfulness” he indicates is essentially an inevitability, unreversible save for a loss of Christian cultural hegemony and a return to a struggle against a dominant force of paganism.

Yet rather than fully embracing Sallust’s perspective, attributing this decline to the loss of an earthly resistance to provide a “proving ground” for the virtues of diligence and discipline, Bede provides examples of monk-bishops operating in post-missionary Northumbria who nonetheless display similar virtues as earlier bishops like Aidan. Of these, I am particularly interested in Cuthbert, to whom I will dedicate a significant portion of my third chapter. Cuthbert exemplifies the missionary spirit seen in the likes of Aidan and Colman before him, as a monastic prior traveling far and wide to minister to layfolk and correct their errors, and as a bishop caring for and defending his whole flock, leading by example and with great patience (IV.28). Thus, it seems that Bede does not perceive the apathy of his present day to signal an inevitable or permanent descent of the Christian people into decadence and moral collapse—this would essentially mean that Christian society has no more staying power than that of the pagan Roman Republic, a

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<sup>13</sup> “*In tantum autem uita illius a nostri temporis segnitia distabat...*”

view that we could hardly imagine that Bede (or Augustine) would countenance. Instead, the bishops and monastics of Bede's day are simply failing at present to adequately take up the lessons of history and apply them to their present situation. Reform is very possible to Bede, as shown by his exceptionally hopeful readings of successful reform in *Ezra* and *Nehemiah*; I will explore these in detail later in this chapter.

I posit that Bede's reformist objective in writing the *HE* is to provide a series of exempla showcasing the virtue of an English Church governed by *doctores* (especially bishops) who are themselves regulated by properly monastic lifestyles. Bede hoped that those in power (i.e., kings, bishops, and abbots of large monasteries) might be compelled to imitate these exempla by restructuring the present diocesan and monastic systems, such that a monastic rule would be observed at the highest levels of authority (the bishops) and that these same bishops would safeguard the practice of this discipline at the level of individual monasteries. Note that this imitation that Bede desires to instill would occur at varying degrees of separation from the *facta* of the original exempla. Bede's target audience could not exactly recreate the circumstances of the English missionary period, after all. Any imitation of Bede's earlier exempla would therefore have to occur at the level of moral equivalency: by practicing regular and communal discipline and by caring for the laity at the expense of the self, contemporary *doctores* could engage in the same *moral* struggle as the missionaries in a similar manner to that with which Augustine identifies the sacrifices of a temperate life as *same in kind* to the bloody sacrifices of the martyrs.<sup>14</sup> As I will argue in chapter two, Bede's later-period exempla provide a line of

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<sup>14</sup> Additionally, those leaders with secular power (i.e., Ceolwulf) could assist the *doctores* in this imitation by sanctioning proper monasteries that would reinforce their regular lifestyles and support their pastoral care.

continuity of *doctores* waging the same moral struggle in a post-missionary era, and themselves act as exempla who may be more “literally” imitated by Bede’s readers.

### 1.3. The Order of Time

If we suppose that Bede is indeed writing in a persuasive mode in the *HE* (as I will demonstrate in chapters two and three), we are compelled to reckon with the following question: how exactly does Bede arrive at his reformist reading of English history that he showcases in the *HE*? Does he start from his political stance and then deliberately shape his history to support his reformist apologia? After all, the historical narratives that Bede chooses to include and his representations of these narratives are carefully curated and framed in such a way as to suit his agenda. We might worry for Bede’s reputation as a lover of history for its own sake and perhaps even imagine a more cynically calculating Bede, for whom the narration of history is simply a rhetorical tool to advance his position. However, I reject such an interpretation of Bede, for reasons I will now explain.

To begin, we need to know what “history” was to Bede and his Early Church forebears. In “On Bede as Christian Historian,” Jan Davidse contrasts Bede’s notion of history with a variety of distinctly modern models, including the “narrativist” understanding; that is, the historian impresses significance upon “meaningless facts” by providing them with linguistic form and causal structure, as well as moralistic meaning: “In the view of those who take this approach, ‘theological’ notions are often transported by both the self-evident and unconscious inheritance. Accordingly, [if we read him through a narrativist lens] in Bede’s *Historia* the narrative imagination is imposed upon a ‘naturalistic and ‘chaotic’ world of events, and historiography becomes story-writing”

(Davidse 7) To a narrativist, “history” arises in the mind of the historian describing and interpreting events, and causation and moral significance is ascribed to loose facts, which, without the historian’s interpretation, are devoid of any special meaning: meaning is assigned in the process of observation. But to Bede, history was something very different.

A subjective, narrativist understanding of history was not a part of the vocabulary of either Bede or the historians of the Early Church; they merely viewed themselves as the discoverers and relaters of a preexisting story. Davidse describes the distinctly supernatural character that history held to these writers, using Augustine as a case-study:

In *De doctrina christiana* Augustine demonstrates for his followers what *historia* really is: it relates what people in the past have done and shows that that past had an order. For that reason *historia* cannot be reckoned with human institutions, for the latter are instituted by people. *Historia*, on the contrary, depends on research into what is effectuated by time or is instituted by God. For Augustine, everything is focused on the order of time, and this is what prevents events from dropping out of sight and becoming incomprehensible to us. The order of time is God’s work, and that is why history is not a human institution, even though it concerns matters human. (9)

This “order of time” is critical—it represents the mind of God engineering the events of the past (and present) in a manner that is fundamentally both coherent and meaningful. Davidse cites Augustine, who states that “we are not to reckon among human institutions those things which men have handed down to us, not as arrangements of their own, but as result of investigation into the occurrences of the past, and into the arrangements of

God's providence" (*De doctrina christiana*, xxvii (41)).<sup>15</sup> In other words, the historiographer's duty is to discern God's organizing hand at work in the events of history, to understand their significance, and to report this meaning to the reader. Davidse continues:

Because history as such (*historia ipsa*) transcends man's domain, it is more than a narrative formulation of the past, and more than a subjective idea which consciousness imposes on meaningless events; on the contrary, history precedes all human interpretation. For Augustine, interpretation can be nothing other than the indication of the relation of the *facta* to the order of time, created and controlled by God, and which contains their 'meaning'. (9–10)

By connecting individual historical occurrences to a divine order of time, the historian reveals divine meaning in history, rather than engineering this meaning on their own. Augustine does not deny a creative or rhetorical aspect to the process of forging these connections, but he insists that any edifying meaning in history can only originate from the preexisting divine order, which the historian can only illustrate.

Does Bede, well-read in Augustine as he is, take a similar conceptual approach to historiography? Let us return for a moment to his preface to the *HE*. Bede praises King Ceolwulf in the following manner: "I gladly acknowledge the unfeigned enthusiasm with which, not content merely to lend an attentive ear to hear the words of Holy Scripture, you devote yourself to learn the sayings and doings of the men of old, and more

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<sup>15</sup> "*Iam vero illa quae non instituendo, set aut transacta temporibus aut divinitus instituta investigando homines prodiderunt, ubicumque discantur, non sunt hominum instituta existimanda...*"

especially the famous men of our own race” (*praefatio*).<sup>16</sup> Ceolwulf’s interest in history is taken as a continuation of his pursuit of divinely revealed scriptural knowledge—English history is here “biblicized,” intimated to have a divine order that can be studied, just as scripture is studied. Bede further describes the devout student of history being “spurred” (*instigator*) to imitate the good, and “kindled” (*accenditur*) to reject the bad within history (*praefatio*)—we might note the passive voice and consider the implied subject, which could either be “God” or “history itself” (*historia ipsa*) as a form of divine revelation. Of course, to understand and benefit from this revelation, to even distinguish the good from the bad, the student must have the divine order of time made visible to them—this is where Bede steps in as a historian, interpreting the *facta* (individual events, persons, and actions) to reveal this order.

If we accept that Bede believed history to follow a pre-existing and divinely established order, we must accept the consequences this has for his use of rhetorical exemplarity and his reformist project as a whole. It would not be enough for Bede to simply think that that figures like Gregory, Aidan, Cuthbert, etc., made for good illustrations of his argument for a beneficial relationship between bishopric and monastery; this had to be the *correct*, “orthodox” interpretation of *historia ipsa* if Bede were to write in good conscience. This in no way means that Bede lacked rhetorical freedom to structure his exempla for maximal persuasive effect—on the contrary, this means that Bede had confidence that his ecclesial and monastic ideal was not merely his own perspective, but rather the one that God had revealed to him through the order of time in history.

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<sup>16</sup> “...satisque stadium tuae sinceritatis amplector, quo non solum audiendis scripturae sanctae uerbis aurem sedulus accommodas uerum etiam noscendis priorum gestis siue dictis, et maxime nostrae gentis uirorum inlustrium, curam uigilantuer inpendis.”



#### 1.4. Bede's Own Rhetoric and the Exegetical Connection

It is helpful here to recognize that Bede's development as a historiographer and as an instructive writer is firmly rooted in his extensive career as a Biblical exegete. As Roger D. Ray notes in his essay "Bede, the Exegete, as Historian," for both Bede and the Early Church Fathers, the "true antiquity" of the historiographical genre "would lie far less in Greece and Rome than in the Early Church and Israel" (127). Bede's work as an exegete was to interpret the lessons within biblical historiography for his contemporary readership; in particular, he was interested in scripture's custom to "trace out generations of good men and bad" (127). Furthermore, Bede felt that the study of extra-biblical history could function as a natural outgrowth of scriptural study, as we may observe when Bede praises King Ceolwulf's interest in English history as a continuation of his study of scripture (*Praefatio*). There is a clear generic distinction between Bede's exegetical work and his historiography of the *Ecclesiaa gentis Anglorum*—unlike his work on Scripture, Bede does not draw much attention to Christological or anagogical interpretations of English history—however, we may hardly suppose that the *HE* could have remained untouched by Bede's exegetical thinking.

What significance does this have for our understanding of Bede's model of reformist historiography? For one part, we might investigate the exegetical tradition observed by Bede and his forebears, including Origen, Augustine, and Gregory the Great (a personal hero of Bede's)—all whose writings could be found in the Wearmouth-Jarrow library (DeGregorio 133). Bede "self-reports" his exegetical model in his short text *De schematibus et tropis* (*On the Figures of Rhetoric*). The *De schematibus* was a short text appended to his *De arte metrica*, intended to teach principles of rhetorical figures and

tropes to students at Wearmouth-Jarrow. For his illustrations, he uses entirely Biblical text, stating:

The Greeks pride themselves on having invented these figures or tropes. But, my beloved child, in order that you and all who wish to read this work may know that Holy Writ surpasses all other writings not merely in authority because it is divine, or in usefulness because it leads to eternal life, but also in artistic composition, I have chosen to demonstrate by means of examples collected from Holy Writ that teachers of secular eloquence in any age have not been able to furnish us with any of these figures and tropes which did not first appear in Holy Writ. (240)

Here we may observe Bede's profound admiration for scripture as the work of rhetorical excellence—an admiration that exceeds that of most patristics, who had a closer knowledge and training in classical pagan rhetoric and tended to “depreciate” Biblical composition by comparison (Tanenhaus 239). Yet, as stated above, both Bede and the patristics valued sacred scripture as the origin point of historiography, and by observing how Bede thought these “tropes” could be read in scripture, we may gain insight into his approach to interpreting all varieties of history.

Most significant for my investigation is Bede's discussion of tropological (moral) allegory and *paradigma* (exemplification) in the *De schematibus*. While Bede is frustratingly vague in his definitions of both, his usage of these terms is nonetheless significant in their very inclusion. Bede broadly defines allegory as “a trope in which a meaning other than the literal is indicated” (249). Bede further notes that “Allegory may now denote a historical fact, now have a figurative meaning, now a tropological or moral interpretation, and still again an anagogical explanation leading us figuratively to higher

things” (251). This statement is typical of the “four senses” model of scriptural interpretation popular among Bede’s exegetical forebears (DeGregorio 133), by which Christian readers attempted to claim the Jewish sacred texts of the Old Testament as their own. According to this model, these texts were taken to reveal several distinct layers of truth: first, the literal truth of the historical events they described or alluded to; second, the figurative or “typological” meaning, by which the texts prefigured the events of the New Testament; third, the “tropological” truth, by which the text provided moral instruction for readers in the present; and fourth, “anagogical” truth, by which the text provided insight into spiritual and eschatological realities of the Christian world to come.

I identify Bede’s tropological reading methodology to be most relevant to his conceptualization of *paradigma* and consequently most applicable to the meaning he derives from the events of the *HE*. Bede defines *paradigma* thusly at the conclusion of *De schematibus*:

*Paradigma* or Exemplification is the use of an example for the sake of encouragement or restraint. Encouragement:

Elijah was a man of like passions with us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain; and it rained not on the earth for three years and six months.<sup>17</sup>

Again:

Behold the birds of the heaven, that they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; and your heavenly Father feedeth them.<sup>18</sup>

Restraint:

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<sup>17</sup> Jas. 5:17

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 6:26

In that day he that shall be on the housetop, and his goods in the house, let him not come down to take them away: and let him that is in the field likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife!<sup>19</sup>

(253)

Regrettably, this is the full extent of Bede's definition; he offers no further clarification as to the mechanism or qualities of this "encouragement" and "restraint," apparently considering them self-evident. However, from his choice of New Testament scriptural examples, we may observe the moral message conveyed in each. In Jas. 5:14, the reader is told to identify with Elijah as a man of "like passions" and is encouraged to imitate his example of fervent prayer through the results it yields for him. The reader may not have the same need as Elijah for the weather to be changed, however, they are still asked to imitate Elijah on a moral level by holding the same faith as him in the power of prayer. Similarly, in Matt. 6:26, the reader is unlikely to ever be in the same literal position as one of the "birds of heaven" but is nonetheless encouraged to imitate the moral "core" of their example, that is, to avoid undue worry over material needs. And finally, the reader of Luke 17:31 is directed to the same core moral message, this time revealed in the negative; they are to reject the impulse of Lot's wife to prioritize material goods over salvation. To make each of these interpretations, we must assume the presence of a moral core, distinct from the external circumstances of the example, which may be extracted and "imitated" by the reader. The identification of this core is the work of a tropological, moral reading of scripture or, for that matter, history. We may recall Augustine's reading of martyrs' sacrifice as a moral struggle against the trappings of the material world, a

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<sup>19</sup> Luke 17:31

struggle which may be imitated through smaller-scale acts of temperance—Augustine uses the martyrs as *paradigma* or exempla, and in so doing, he reads them tropologically.

As I conclude this chapter, I will describe how, in his exegesis *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, Bede interprets these two Biblical narratives tropologically to contain moral cores that can and must be imitated by the Church of Northumbria. I do this to reveal what Bede's tropology looks like in action and to provide a means of comparison to the similar tropological and exemplary project in the *Historia ecclesiastica*.

The Biblical books of *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* are occupied mainly with two historical issues: the physical reconstruction of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem and the correction and purification of those Jews who had taken non-Jewish wives. Bede reads this history as morally applicable to the Northumbrian Church—frequently in ways that display his preoccupation with the virtues of a distinctly monastic “regular life” and the need for learned *doctores* who can teach such a life by both preaching and example.

For one example, consider Bede's commentary on Nehemiah 5, which concerns Nehemiah's rebuke of certain members of the Jewish nobility who exacted such heavy taxes from their own people that their resulting poverty made it impossible to progress construction on the city wall. Bede writes:

We see that this occurs among us in the same manner everyday [sic]. For how many are there among God's people who willingly desire to obey the divine commands but are hindered from being able to fulfil what they desire not only by a lack of temporal means and by poverty but also by the examples of those who seem to be endowed with the garb of religion [i.e., bishops], but who exact an immense tax and weight of worldly goods from those whom they claim to be in

charge of while giving nothing for their eternal salvation either by teaching them or by providing them with examples of good living or by devoting effort to works of piety for them? (184)

Bede interprets the scripture here as a warning against the same greed and negligence perpetrated by bishops that he will later rail against in the *Letter to Egbert* (7). This interpretation falls well within the bounds of tropological allegory as Bede defines it in *De schematibus*: the Jewish authorities here stand in as negative *paradigma* or exempla, embodying the same greed as the bishops who would demand tribute from their charges without ministering to them, a connection which Bede articulates plainly. He even goes on to express a wish that “some Nehemiah (i.e. a ‘consoler from the Lord’) might come in our own days and restrain our errors, kindle our breasts to love of the divine, and strengthen our hands by turning them away from our own pleasures to establishing Christ’s city!”—by this he indicates the sort of *doctor* Bede desires to return to prominence within the Northumbrian Church (184).

For another example of the key place exemplarity holds in Bede’s exegetical program, observe his reading of the words of Shecaniah to Ezra, whom Bede chooses to represent as a *pontifex* or high priest (143).<sup>20</sup> Shecaniah stands as a representative of the assembly of Israel, who have seen Ezra’s grief and the people’s sins, and themselves have been moved to weeping: “And Schecaniah son of Jehiel, one of the descendants of Elam answered and said to Ezra, ‘We have sinned against our God and have married foreign wives from the peoples of the land...And now...if there is repentance in Israel for this, let

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<sup>20</sup> At no point in the Biblical narrative is Ezra ever called a high priest. DeGregorio argues that Bede deliberately assigns such a title to him to equate him with archbishops like Egbert of York, whom Bede hopes will be the catalyst for contemporary reform (DeGregorio 139). This claim is supported by Bede’s own direct equation of *pontifex* with “archbishop” (*On Ezra* 138–39).

us make a covenant with our God and send away all these wives and those who are born from them... Rise up, it is your part to make the decision, and we will be with you, so take courage and do it.” (Ezra 10:2–4, quoted in Bede 143). Bede reads this passage as an exemplum whose moral core is to be imitated in monastic terms: “[Shecaniah] very fittingly teaches how one should consult with superiors, namely that a person should say what he has understood is best according to his own reason, if he believes that he has understood well, and yet leave the prerogative of decision-making to the person who is qualified to make it and be ready to submit to all that this person ordains should be done in accordance with the will and law of God” (143–144). Shecaniah’s position is framed as equivalent to that of a monk under a superior, and Bede simply notes the applicability of Shecaniah’s behavior to his contemporaries, particularly his fellow monastic brothers (in a footnote to his translation, DeGregorio notes that Bede’s words here echo those of St. Benedict in the *Regula Benedicti* (144)). We may also observe that in Bede’s telling of this exemplum, it is Ezra the *pontifex* (a title that Bede expressly equates with “archbishop” (138–39)) to whom Shecaniah offers this monastically-formulated advice. Even here we may find an element of the relationship between bishop and monastery that Bede deems so critical; the monastic community functions as an external conscience for the one with the power to act with authority, submissive to him, but not without influence.

I hope to have established by this point that Bede views exemplary meaning to be an innate and key element of Scripture (to him, the pinnacle of all historiography). Furthermore, since extra-Biblical history is studied by relating facts to a divine order of time, the exempla that may be found in this history carry a similarly inspired weight to

those within Scripture and are as applicable to the current day as to the moments the narratives took place. Moving forward, I will begin to enumerate the specific exempla spread throughout Bede's definitive English historiography, which, just as in *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, serve as examples for both "encouragement and restraint" towards the proper relationship between bishop and monastery.



## CHAPTER 2: THE BISHOPS OF THE GREGORIAN AND IONAN MISSIONS THROUGH THE EYES OF BEDE

### 2.1. Introduction

Having articulated Bede's sense of the exemplary value of history, we now begin our practical examination of Bede's use of exemplarity within the *HE*. This chapter will primarily examine Bede's telling of the lives and acts of a series of bishops involved in the early missionizing of Anglo-Saxon England and, particularly, Northumbria. It is within this period that Bede first begins to build an argument that the English Church holds a uniquely special place within the order of time because of the joining of monastic and episcopal institutions.

We may divide Bede's narrative of the missionary period into two phases: the initial Roman, Gregorian mission across the whole of England and then, following the lapse of King Edwin's successors into paganism, the re-conversion of Northern England (and Northumbria specifically) by Irish missionaries, who arrived at the Irish-trained convert King Oswald's invitation. However, as I will show in this chapter, Bede himself does not emphasize the distinction between Roman and Irish—rather, the bishops upon whom he heaps the most praise, of both Roman and Irish origin, are shown to cleave to a singular exemplary model: that of the *doctor* inspired by monastic principles and always surrounded by a monastic community. Bede uses his accounts of both Roman and Irish missionaries to construct a single moral and exemplary narrative of the ideal relationship between monasticism and episcopal leadership, one which connects the English Church to the unimpeachable holiness of the New Testament Church.

## 2.2. The British Negative Exemplum

Before considering Bede's treatment of these positive exempla, it is useful to briefly consider that which Bede represents as their moral opposite: namely the Celtic British Christians,<sup>21</sup> whom Allen Thacker goes so far as to call the "villains" of the *HE* (33). Bede narrates that a period of prosperity for the British following their conflicts with the Irish and Picts in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century led to a period of excess and wanton sin, in which Bede notes the complicity of the churchmen: "Not only were laymen guilty of these offences but even the Lord's own flock and their pastors. They cast off Christ's easy yoke and thrust their necks under the burden of drunkenness, hatred, quarreling, strife, and envy and other similar crimes" (I.14).<sup>22</sup> Once again, the similarity here to Bede's excoriation of false monks and disorderly, selfish bishops in the *Letter to Egbert* is striking. Bede's warning is left implicit but clear enough: the fall of the British from their ill-used prosperity and cultural dominance is the direct result of their sins. Bede first describes a plague that decimated the British population and notes that this was not enough to "awaken" the survivors from their spiritual death; this provokes a "still more terrible retribution" in the form of their sack at the hands of the Anglo-Saxons (I.14–15). To quote Bede, "the fire kindled by the hands of the heathen executed the just vengeance of God on the nation for its crimes. It was not unlike that fire once kindled by the Chaldeans which consumed the walls and all the buildings of Jerusalem" (I.15).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Most of Bede's history of the British in this early section is borrowed verbatim from the 6<sup>th</sup> century British monk Gildas' *De excidio et conquestu Britanniae*, a notoriously blistering screed against the sins of his own people and that which he views as their resulting divine punishments.

<sup>22</sup> "*Et non solum haec saeculares uiri sed etiam ipse grex Domini eiusque pastores egerunt, ebrietati animosittati litigio contentioni inuidiae ceterisque huiusmodi facinoribus sua colla, abiecto leui iugo Christi, subdentes.*"

<sup>23</sup> "*Siquidem, ut breuiter dicam, accensus minibus paganorum ignis iustas de sceleribus populi Dei ultiones expetiit, non illius inpar qui quondam a Chaldaeis succensus Hierosolymorum moenia, immo aedificia cuncta consumsit.*"

Bede momentarily turns sympathetic towards the British between chapters 16 and 21 of Book I, which cover the successful rebuilding of a British society and their reception of guidance from the saintly Gallic bishop Germanus, while struggling spiritually against the Pelagian heresy and temporally against both Saxons and Picts. But after this, the British enjoy a period of relative peace, with spiritually disastrous results:

Nevertheless, so long as the memory of the calamity and bloodshed was still fresh, somehow the kings, priests, nobles, and private citizens kept within bounds, But, when they died, a generation succeeded them which knew nothing of all these troubles and was used only to the present state of peace. Then all restraints of truth and justice were so utterly destroyed and abandoned that, not merely was there no trace of them to be found, but only a small, a very small minority even remembered their existence.<sup>24</sup> (I.22)

In other words, the British here fall into the same kind of moral decline that Sallust noted in his own contemporary Romans—without the living memory of adversity to spur them towards proper living, they relapse into their old sins almost immediately. Of these sins, he emphasizes one in particular: “that they never preached the faith to the Saxons or the Angles who inhabited Britain with them” (I.22).<sup>25</sup> Above all, the leaders of the Church of the British failed to fulfill their most sacred duty as preachers.<sup>26</sup> The result of this failure,

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<sup>24</sup> “Attamen recente adhuc memoria calamitatis et cladis inflictae seruabant unicumque reges, sacerdotes, priuati et optimates suum quique ordinem. At illis decedentibus, cum successisset aetas tempestatis illius nescia et praesentis solum serenitatis statum experta, ita cuncta ueritatis ac iustitiae moderamina concussa ac subuersa sunt, ut earum non dicam uestigium sed ne memoria / quidem praeter in paucis, et ualde paucis, ulla appareret.”

<sup>25</sup> “ut nunquam genti Saxonum siue Anglorum, secum Britanniam incolenti, uerbum fidei praedicando committerent.” This is, notably, an addition that Bede makes to the text he borrows from Gildas.

<sup>26</sup> This condemnation is likely not entirely fair to the British Christians. As Rob Meens argues in “A Background to Augustine’s Mission to Anglo-Saxon England,” the eighth and ninth questions that Augustine of Canterbury poses to Gregory (in their correspondence related in the *HE*) concern matters of ritual purity: i.e., entering church or receiving communion during menstruation or directly after childbirth

according to the divine order of time that Bede saw so plainly, would be that the sinful British would diminish and become a minority within their own homeland, dwarfed in size, power, and historical significance by the Anglo-Saxon Christian kingdoms.

### 2.3. The Gregorian-Augustinian Mission

It is amid this failure that Bede introduces the missionaries sent by Pope Gregory the Great, Augustine of Canterbury and his companions, who represent the first of the “much worthier heralds” who would begin the conversion of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms (I.22).<sup>27</sup> From the moment of their introduction in the *HE*, Bede takes special care to emphasize two things about these missionaries: their status as monks (I.23) and their dependance on Gregory—their spiritual *doctor*—for both the initiation and success of their mission. Bede wears his admiration for Gregory on his sleeve, and it is not hard to see why: Gregory both embodies and, as we will soon see, directly articulates Bede’s exemplary model for the monastic-bishop.

We may observe in Book I that Gregory not only sends forth Augustine and the other missionaries but also provides them with constant reinforcement, encouragement, and instruction, as is required from a *doctor*. In one early example, Bede reports that the missionaries had hardly begun their journey to Britain when they became overwhelmed with fear at the thought of entering a “barbarous, fierce, and unbelieving nation whose

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or sexual activity (I.27). Meens notes that that these particular notions of ritual purity were alien to the Roman Christian thought of both Gregory and Augustine (13), and there were no such prohibitions amid the Frankish Church either (14–15). Furthermore, had these concerns originated from the Pagan practices of the Anglo-Saxons, Augustine would not have had need to consult papal authority to correct them; that he does suggests a Christian challenge to Augustine’s authority (13). The British remain the only probable source through which these ideas were introduced to the Anglo-Saxons, with British Christian texts containing similar notions of ritual purity (16). All this suggests that the British did in fact have missionary contact with the Anglo-Saxons, introducing ideas that Augustine would need papal authority to refute.

<sup>27</sup> “*Sed non tamen diuina pietas plebem suam, quam praesciuit, deseruit; quin multo digniores genti memoratae pracones ueritatis, per quos crederet, destinauit.*”

language they did not even understand”<sup>28</sup> and sent Augustine back to Rome to plead permission to abandon such a dangerous journey (I.23). In response, Gregory sends Augustine back with a letter of gentle, but firm, encouragement to continue their mission, reminding them of the glory of eternal reward if they persevere; furthermore, he formally appoints Augustine as abbot over the missionaries, providing them with a figure of monastic authority around whom to arrange themselves (I.23). Notably, Augustine is not consecrated as bishop until after a Christian mission is well-established in Kent (I.27)—thus Gregory ensures that the mission’s hierarchical structure is first monastic, then diocesan. Bede also records Gregory’s supposed communication with Etherius, whom Bede misidentifies as bishop of Arles,<sup>29</sup> in which Bede requests that the Gallic bishop provide material support for Augustine’s ministry (I.24). Bede ensures that the reader cannot miss the primacy of Gregory’s role in the mission, as the primary provider of moral impetus, spiritual encouragement, and material necessities.

Additionally, Bede makes sure to depict Gregory’s continued communication with the mission, once established, by including the *Libellus responsionum*, a letter which Bede frames as sent to Augustine by Gregory shortly following Augustine’s consecration as bishop (I.27). In this letter, Gregory addresses a variety of Augustine’s questions concerning both administrative practice (i.e., the consecration of new bishops and the English Church’s relationship to the bishops of Britain and Gaul) and pastoral care—the latter comprises the bulk of the letter, covering topics ranging from the usage of regional

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<sup>28</sup> “*Qui cum iussis pontificalibus obtemperantes memoratum opus adgredi coepissent, iamque aliquantulum itineris confecissent, percussi timore inertii redire domum quam barbaram feram incredulamque gentem, cuius ne linguam quidem nossent, adire cogitabant, et hoc esse tutius communi consilio decernebant.*”

<sup>29</sup> In a footnote to his edition of the *HE* (71), Colgrave notes that Etherius was actually bishop of Lyons, not Arles, and that the letter recorded in *HE* I.24 was actually sent to Bishop Pelagius of Tours and Bishop Serenus of Marseilles.

customs in the Mass, to the punishment of church-robbers, to matters of marriage, sexuality, and ritual purity. A notable consequence of the *Libellus*'s inclusion in the *HE* is that Gregory's authoritative *doctoral* role is emphasized well beyond that of Augustine, who is in this instance reduced to a student receiving instruction from Gregory. This is not to say that Bede undervalues Augustine as teacher—as I will show later, Bede is more than happy to use Augustine as an exemplary monastic bishop and *doctor*—but here, Bede positions Gregory as the original articulator and model of his exemplary archetype.

This may be seen plainly in Gregory's response to Augustine's first questions, which concern how a bishop ought to live with his clergy, apportion and use the offerings of the faithful, and lead and behave toward his Church (1.27).<sup>30</sup> Gregory's words effectively capture Bede's own view of the value of monastic discipline in Church leadership, which Bede will return to again and again in his exempla.<sup>31</sup> Gregory begins:

It is a custom of the apostolic see to give instruction to those who have been consecrated bishops that all money received should be divided into four portions: that is, one for the bishop and his household for purposes of hospitality and entertainment, a second for the clergy, a third for the poor, and a fourth for the repair of churches. But because you, brother, are conversant with monastic rules, and ought not to live apart from your clergy in the English Church, which, by the guidance of God, has lately been converted to the faith, you ought to institute that manner of life which our fathers followed in the earliest beginnings of the

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<sup>30</sup> “*De episcopis, qualiter cum suis clericis conuersentur, uel de his, quae fidelium oblationibus accedunt altario, quanta debeant fieri portiones, et qualiter episcopus ager in ecclesia debeat.*”

<sup>31</sup> We may well suppose that Bede first developed his vision for this model from reading Gregory.

Church: none of them said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common.<sup>32</sup> (1.27)

In these lines, Gregory and, by extension, Bede establish an exceptional status for the burgeoning English Church; whereas other bishops on the continent live separately from their clergy, because Augustine and his companions are monks and “conversant with monastic rules,” the English Church has the privilege to follow a version of ecclesial structure far closer to that of the original apostles, one marked by a distinctly intimate and trusting sense of community but also by rigor and sacrifice. This reprise of Biblical history serves to further entrench the significance of the English Church within the order of time, suggesting that readers ought to interpret the meaning of this history with near-exegetical attention.

Gregory continues by providing qualification to his broad prescription for monastic living in the English Church:

If however, there are any who are clerics but in minor orders and who cannot be continent, they should marry and receive their stipends outside the community; for we know that it is written concerning those fathers whom we have mentioned that division was to be made to each according to his need. Care must also be taken and provision made for their stipends and they must be kept under ecclesiastical rule, living a moral life and attending to the chanting of the psalms

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<sup>32</sup> *Mos autem sedis, apostolicae est ordinatis episcopis, praecepta tradere, ut omni stipendio quod accedit quattuor debeant fieri portiones: una uidelicet episcopo et familiae propter hospitalitatem atque susceptionem, alia clero, tertia pauperibus, quarta ecclesiis reparandis. Sed quia tua fraternitas monasterii regulis erudita seorsum fieri non debet a clericis suis in ecclesia Anglorum, quae auctore Deo nuper adhuc ad fidem perducta est, hanc debet initio nascentis ecclesiae fuit patribus nostris; in quibus nullus eorum ex his / quae possidebant aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant eis omnia communia.*

and, under God’s guidance, keeping their hearts, their tongue, and their body from all things unlawful.<sup>33</sup> (1.27)

This, I argue, is an exception that proves the rule. We may note that Gregory only allows those in *minor* orders to live outside the restraints of a monastic community—those in major orders (deacons, priests, and bishops) are all assumed to hold to a “continent” regular life. Furthermore, even the minor clerics permitted to marry and draw stipends are to be held by the bishop’s authority to adhere to standards and practices identifiable with a monastic life, such as the regular chanting of psalms and submitting to the direct moral oversight of a superior—we may note that the bishop’s role becomes like that of an abbot in this instance.

Gregory concludes his first answer by addressing Augustine’s question of how to distribute offerings:

And what need we say to those who lead a common life about assigning portions or dispensing hospitality or giving alms? For all that is over is to be spent for holy and religious purposes as the Lord and Master of all teaches: ‘Give alms of what you have over and behold all things are clean unto you.’<sup>34</sup> (1.27)

The brevity of this answer is striking; one might even think that Gregory is dismissive of the question. However, it is in this brevity that Gregory’s (and Bede’s) meaning is conveyed: the common, monastic life provides sufficient guidance on material matters of

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<sup>33</sup> *Siqui uero sunt clerici extra sacros ordines constituti, qui se continere non possunt, sortire uxores debent, et stipendia sua exterius accipere; quia et de hisdem patribus, de quibus praefati sumus, nouimus scriptum, quod diuidebatur singulis, prout cuique opus erat. De eorum quoque stipendio cogitandum atque prouidendum est, et sub ecclesiastica regula sunt tenendi, ut bonis moribus uiuant et canendis psalmis aucore conseruent.*

<sup>34</sup> *Communi autem uita uiuentibus iam de faciendis portionibus uel exhibenda hospitalitate et adimplenda misericordia nobis quid erit loquendum?—cum omne quod superses in causis piis ac religiosis erogandum est, Domino magistro omnium docente: ‘Quod superses, date elemosinam, et ecce omnia munda sunt uobis.’*



the episcopal office. After all, if no one individual claims wealth for himself, there should be no temptation to misappropriate that wealth for one's own use. Gregory implies that a monastic lifestyle will orient the Church toward good and generous judgement in matters material and spiritual, a message which is borne out in Bede's narrative of both Gregory's life and those of the Augustinian missionaries. Due to the pride of place Bede has given Gregory thus far, I will turn my attention to Bede's narrative of Gregory's life first, even though it appears after that of the Augustinian mission's establishment.

### 2.3.1. Gregory

Bede's first rhetorical move in this miniature *Vita* is to draw attention to Gregory's choice to sacrifice his secular nobility to enter a monastery, "winning glory and honour of a higher kind." (II.1)—we may note that Gregory is in fact the first monk to become Pope (Carruthers 32). Bede lovingly describes the heights to which monasticism elevated Gregory's contemplative holiness: upon entering the monastery, "he proceeded to live with such grace and perfection—as he used afterwards to declare with tears—that his soul was then above all transitory things; and that he rose superior to all things subject to change. He used to think of nothing but thoughts of heaven, so that, even though still imprisoned in the flesh, he was able to pass in contemplation beyond the barriers of the flesh" (II.1).<sup>35</sup> Bede then notes that Gregory reported these things not out of pride but out of grief—for Gregory felt that he had lost these heights of holiness due to his worldly obligations as bishop and pope. "Once, for instance, when he was talking privately with his deacon Peter and enumerating the former virtues of his soul, he added

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<sup>35</sup> "Nam mutato repente habitu saeculari monasterium petiit, in quo tanta perfectionis gratia coepit conuersari ut, sicut ipse postea flendo solebat adtestari, animo illius labentia cuncta subteressent, ut rebus omnibus quae uoluuntur eminent, ut nulla nisi caelestia cogitare solleret ut etiam retentus corpore ipsa iam carnis claustra contemplatione trasiret."

mournfully that now on account of his pastoral cares, he had to trouble himself with the business of men of this world, and after the enjoyment of peace so lovely, he was soiled by the dust of earthly activities” (II.1).<sup>36</sup> This, in Gregory’s view, led to an “impairment” in his own spiritual devotions.

However, at this point in the narrative, Bede steps in as interpreter of Gregory’s words, and in a manner not dissimilar to exegetical style, he explains to his reader that these words of Gregory should not be read literally and that by his labors as bishop and pope he in fact exceeded his earlier virtue: “The holy man said all this in a spirit of great humility. We need not believe, however, that he had lost any of his monastic perfection by reason of his pastoral cares. It would appear that he profited more by his efforts over the conversion of many than he had done from the quiet retirement of his earlier way of life” (II.1).<sup>37</sup>

Bede has multiple reasons for adopting this non-literal interpretation of Gregory’s words. First, this reading turns a seeming diminishment of Gregory’s holy serenity into a positive exemplum of that most monastic of virtues, humility. Second, Bede would certainly not wish to read Gregory’s papal tenure, in which he initiated the conversion of the English to Roman Christianity, as part of the “lesser” portion of Gregory’s spiritual life. And third, the positive interplay between the communal, contemplative monastic life and the active work of pastoral care is precisely what Bede most wants to exemplify. To continue the above quote:

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<sup>36</sup> “Denique tempore quodam, secreto cum diacono suo Petro conloquens, enumeratis animi sui uirtutibus priscis mox dolendo subiunxit: ‘At nunc ex occasione curae pastoralis saecularium hominum negotia patitur, et post tam pulchram quietis suae speciem terreni actus puluere fedatur.’”

<sup>37</sup> “Haec quidem sanctus uir ex magnae humilitatis intentione dicebat; sed nos credere decet nihil eum monachicae perfectionis perdidisse occasione curae pastoralis, immo potiore tunc sumsisse profectum de labore conuersionis multorum quam de propriae quondam quiete conuersionis habuerat.”

...It would appear that he profited more by his efforts over the conversion of many than he had done from the quiet retirement of his earlier way of life. This was largely because, while fulfilling his pontifical duties, he turned his own house into a monastery; and when he was first taken from the monastery and was ordained to the ministry of the altar, having been sent to Constantinople as delegate of the apostolic see, he never ceased from his heavenly manner of life, though he had to live in an earthly palace. He even used some of the brothers from his monastery who had followed him out of brotherly love to the royal city to protect him in his observance of the Rule. Thus, as he himself writes, through their unremitting example he could bind himself, as it were by an anchor cable, to the calm shores of prayer, while he was being tossed about on the ceaseless tide of secular affairs. So his mind, shaken by worldly business, could be strengthened by the encouragement derived from daily reading and contemplation in their company. By their fellowship he was thus not only defended against worldly assaults, but was also encouraged more and more to the activities of the heavenly life. (II.1)<sup>38</sup>

By the influence of the community surrounding him, Gregory is not only strengthened to resist the influences of worldly temptations and troubles but also able to make great advances in holiness, the fruits of which show themselves in his outward ministry.

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<sup>38</sup> ...immo potiore tunc sumsisse profectum de labore conuersionis multorum quam de propriae quondam quiete conuersionis habuerat; maxime quia et pontificali functus officio domum suam monasterium facere curauit, et dum primo de monasterio / abstractus ad ministerium altaris ordinatus atque Constantinopolim apocrisarius ab apostolica sede directus est, non tamen in terreno conuersatus palatio propositum uitae caelestis intermisit. Nam quosdam fratrum ex monasterio suo, qui eum gratia germanae caritatis ad regiam urbem secuti sunt, in tutamentum coepit obseruantiae regularis habere; uidelicet ut eorum semper exemplo, sicut ipse scribit, ad orationis placidum litus quasi anchorage fune restringeretur, cum incessabili causarum saecularium impulsu fluctuaret, concussamque saeculi actibus mentem inter eos cotidie per studiosae lectionis roboraret alloquium. Horum ergo consortio non solum a terrenis est munitus incursibus, uerum etiam ad caelestis exercitia uitae magis magisque succensus.

As to these fruits, Bede is plainly most interested in his contributions to the salvation of the English, as we have already seen; nonetheless, Bede provides numerous other examples of Gregory's triumphs; in particular his written compositions, which show their influence on Bede's own style and methodology. Bede makes special note of Gregory's exegetical work on the book of Job: "in thirty-five books of exposition he taught in a marvellous manner the literal meaning of the book, its bearing on the mysteries of Christ and the Church, and the sense in which it applies to each of the faithful" (II.1)—to paraphrase, the literal, allegorical, and tropological senses of the scripture—the model which Bede himself so favored. Bede also mentions Gregory's *Liber regulae pastoralis* (*Pastoral Care*) "in which he set forth in the clearest manner what sort of persons should be chosen to rule the Church and how these rulers ought to live; with how much discrimination they should instruct different types of listeners and how earnestly they ought each day to reflect on their own frailty." (II.1).<sup>39</sup> And in his *Dialogorum libri IIII* (*Four Books of Dialogues*), "he collected the virtues of the most famous saints he knew or could learn of in Italy, as an example of life to posterity: as in his expository works he taught what virtues men ought to strive after, so by describing the miracles of the saints, he showed how glorious those virtues are" (II.1).<sup>40</sup> In other words, Gregory himself favored moral exempla, drawn from both Biblical and extra-Biblical history, as a tool to inspire the faithful to imitation of the virtues contained within. It is hardly a stretch to intuit that Bede likely formed his own exegetical and

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<sup>39</sup> "Alium quoque librum composuit egregium, qui uocatur Pastoralis, in quo manifesta luce patefecit, quales ad ecclesiae regimen adsumi, qualiter ipsi rectores uiuere, qua discretion singulas quasque audientium instruere personas, et quanta consideration propriam cotidie debeant fragilitatem pensare."

<sup>40</sup> "Libros etiam Dialogorum IIII fecit, in quibus rogatu Petri diaconi sui uirtutes sanctorum uiuendi posteris collegit ut, sicut in libris expositionum suarum quibus sit uirtutibus insudandum edocuit, ita etiam descriptis sanctorum miraculis quae uirtutum earundem sit claritas ostenderet."

exemplary methodology in imitation of Gregory—thus we may understand why Gregory forms such a load-bearing pillar in the exemplary project of the *HE*.

### 2.3.2. Augustine and Companions

Let us now briefly turn back to Bede's depiction of the Roman missionaries sent to the English at Gregory's behest. Leo Carruthers notes that Gregory selected these missionaries from his own original Benedictine monastery, St. Andrew's in Rome (34). And as we have established previously, Gregory openly declared his desire for the missionaries to integrate their communal monastic lifestyle into the fabric of their episcopal structure, with Bishop Augustine living directly among his fellow missionaries—in this way, they were to model the Church of the New Testament (I.27). This is indeed how Bede depicts the mission in this early stage, from the very moment King Æthelberht of Kent grants the missionaries a site in Canterbury to live:

As soon as they had entered the dwelling place allotted to them, they began to imitate the way of life of the apostles and of the primitive church. They were constantly engaged in prayers, in vigils and fast; they preached the word of life to as many as they could; they accepted only the necessities of life from those whom they taught; in all things they practiced what they preached and kept themselves prepared to endure adversities, even to the point of dying for the truths they proclaimed.<sup>41</sup> (I.26)

The explicit parallels Bede draws between the foundation of the English Church and that of the original Church of the apostles are a rhetorical masterstroke. Bede appeals to the

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<sup>41</sup> *At ubi datam sibi mansionem intrauerant, coeperunt apostolicam primitiuae ecclesiae uitam imitari, orationibus uidelicet assiduis uigiliis ac ieiuniis ser/uiuendo, uerbum uitae quibus poterant praedicando, cuncta huius mundi uelut aliena spernendo, ea tantum quae uictui necessaria uidebantur ab eis quos docebant accipiendo, secundum ea quae docebant ipsi per omnia uiuendo, et paratum ad patiendum aduersa quaeque uel etiam moriendum pro ea quam praedicabant ueritate animum habendo.*

patriotism of his English readership, emphasizing their role in the order of time by establishing this special connection between the origins of their Church and that of ur-Christianity itself, and he forges this link through the mission's monastic discipline. If we recall the words of Gregory's letter to Augustine (1.27), this regular way of life was distinct from the Roman norm—it is the missionaries' monastic structure, even at the level of the bishop, that facilitates this link to the age of the apostles.

This apostolic connection is reinforced by the prevalence of miracles worked by the missionaries. Bede records that Gregory felt the need to send a letter exhorting Augustine to humility, lest he succumb to pride at the “great number” of miracles he was performing (I.31). Augustine restores the sight of a blind man where the erring British priests cannot (II.2). And Mellitus, a former subordinate to Augustine and the third archbishop of Canterbury, miraculously halts a fire in Canterbury by his prayers, causing a south wind to suppress the flames (II.8). These miracle narratives do more than emphasize the individual holiness of each associated missionary; they also evoke the great works of the primitive Church, such as those recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. By this apostolic connection, Bede identifies monastic discipline within the English Church's structure as a uniquely moral institution, linked to an age of “heroic” holiness characterized by great conversions and miracles yet still imitable in his present day.

#### **2.4. The Irish “Second Wave”**

However, these Roman missionaries would not ultimately be responsible for the final conversion of Bede's own Northumbria to Christianity. While the Roman bishop Paulinus prevailed upon King Edwin to be baptized in 627 and began the work of conversion (II.14), this ministry would be interrupted by the death of Edwin, upon which

Northumbria was divided between his heirs back into the kingdoms of Bernicia and Deira, and new kings of both forsook Christianity (III.1). It would not be until King Oswald reunified the two kingdoms that that Christian missionaries would return to Northumbria. And these would not be the direct successors of the Gregorian mission—instead, Oswald would turn to the Irish, who hosted him in his exile and saw to his own conversion.

This fact seems to break the continuity of Bede’s project: why has Bede given so much praise to the monastic leadership of Gregory and his missionaries, even the point of calling Gregory “our apostle” (II.1), only to admit that the Christianity of his own Northumbria has an entirely different origin? Indeed, much of Irish Christianity was separated from Roman orthodoxy by both distance and practice, as Bede himself takes care to note.<sup>42</sup> Yet despite this apparent break, Bede continues to both repeat and develop his model of the exemplary monk-bishop using the missionary bishops sent by the Irish. These Irish missionaries prove themselves worthy successors of the Gregorian mission, not by line of descent but by their participation in the same mode of moral exemplarity. What is more, Bede displays the fruits of their monastic virtues among the English in far more specific terms than he is able to with the initial Roman missionaries (i.e., Augustine). To see this, let us first look to the first leader of the Irish mission, Bishop Aidan, and his co-missionaries.

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<sup>42</sup> Bede records that Bishop Aidan “had a zeal for God though not entirely according to knowledge” (*habentemque zelum Dei, quamvis non plene secundum scientiam*), noting his keeping of the “irregular” Irish calculation of Easter. However, in the same breath, Bede notes that this irregularity was not common to all Irish and that the southern Irish Church had already accepted the Roman Easter by this time (III.3).

### 2.4.1. Aidan

Bede introduces Aidan by describing his tremendous successes in Oswald's Northumbria, describing the fruitful partnership between the king and bishop in building up the Church there. Bede describes this cultivation of Christianity in detail, noting the priorities of Aidan and his missionaries:

From that time, as the days went by, many came from the country of the Irish into Britain and to those English kingdoms over which Oswald reigned, preaching the word of faith with great devotion. Those of them who held the rank of priest administered the grace of baptism to those who believed. Churches were built in various places and the people flocked together with joy to hear the Word; lands and property of other kinds were given by royal bounty to establish monasteries, and English children, as well as their elders, were instructed by Irish discipline in advanced studies and in the observance of the discipline of a Rule.<sup>43</sup> (III.3)

With striking, almost nonchalant fluidity, Bede asserts the significance of monasticism within this new Irish missionizing of Northumbria. Monasteries serve as hubs of both education and religious formation, the latter having monastic discipline at its heart. Bede makes special note of Aidan's own monastic status and pedigree: "Bishop Aidan was himself a monk; he was sent from the island known as Iona, whose monastery was for a

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<sup>43</sup> *Exin coepere plures per dies de Scottorum regione uenire Britanniam atque illis Anglorum prouinciis, quibus regnauit Osuald, magna deuotione uerbum fidei praedicare et credentibus gratiam baptismi, quicumque sacerdotali erant gradu praediti, ministrare. Construebantur ergo ecclesiae per loca, confluebant ad audiendum Verbum populi gaudentes, donabantur munere regio possessiones et territoria ad instiuenda monasteria, inbuebantur praeceptoribus Scottis paruuli Anglorum una cum maioribus studiis et obseruatione disciplinae regularis.*



very long time chief among the monasteries of the northern Irish and Picts, exercising supervision over their communities” (III.3).<sup>44</sup>

Following from this origin, Bede frames Aidan’s leadership as bishop and *doctor* as exemplary in its monastic qualities:

Aidan taught the clergy many lessons about the conduct of their lives but above all he left them a most salutary example of abstinence and self-control; and the best recommendation of his teaching to all was that he taught them no other way of life than that which he himself practised among his fellows. For he neither sought after nor cared for worldly possessions but he rejoiced to hand over at once, to any poor man he met, the gifts which he had received from kings or rich men of the world. He used to travel everywhere, in town and country, not on horseback but on foot, unless compelled by urgent necessity to do otherwise, in order that, as he walked along, whenever he saw people whether rich or poor, he might at once approach them and, if they were unbelievers, invite them to accept the mystery of the faith; or if they were believers, that he might strengthen them

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<sup>44</sup> This reference to Iona prompts Bede to dedicate his next chapter (III.4) to a brief history of the Ionan monastery itself, starting from its foundation by the Irish abbot Columba, “a true monk in life no less than habit,” who received the island of Iona from the Northern Picts as a gift after he “turned them to the faith of Christ by his words and example.” Bede notes that the island has a peculiar hierarchical structure, with an abbot of the presbyteral order serving as temporal ruler over the whole island, even above the bishops (This organization was not uncommon in Ireland; John Ryan notes in *Irish Monasticism* that by the time of the sixth century, ecclesial jurisdiction was frequently exercised by presbyter-abbots, while a bishop, superior to the abbot in the power of sacramental order and personal dignity but subordinate to the abbot in administrative authority, was chosen from among the monks (175–90)). However, Bede at no point explicitly condemns this organization—his only critique is the island’s uncanonical calculation of Easter. Even this he seems to excuse by noting that “they were so far away at the ends of the earth that there was none to bring them the decrees of the synods concerning the observance of Easter, but they diligently practised such works of religion and chastity as they were able to learn from the words of the prophets, the evangelists, and the apostles.” Furthermore, he jumps ahead in this chapter all the way to the year 715, when they were “set right” in this regard by the English priest Egbert. It almost seems that Bede is anxious to assure the reader that this one imperfection has been corrected, such that Aidan’s Ionan origin, with its high value placed on monastic authority, may be counted as an unambiguous positive.

in the faith, urging them by word and deed to practise almsgiving and good works.<sup>45</sup> (III.5)

Aidan is not merely an overseer of the missionizing process—he personally is an active participant. His disdain for wealth, comfort, and convenience, as well as his zeal for evangelization and exhortation of the laity, is emphasized as part and parcel to his monastic discipline and, furthermore, instructive to all laypeople with whom he comes into contact. Yet again, let us return to the *Letter to Egbert*, specifically to Bede’s indictment of the bishops who “are most diligent to seek earthly profit from their hearers, but strive not to spend any labor at all in preaching or exhortation or reproof to win their eternal salvation” (7). In case Aidan’s contrast with these modern bishops was not obvious enough, Bede breaks with his moratorium on direct present-day commentary in the *HE* and declares flatly that “Aidan’s life was a great contrast to our modern slothfulness; all who accompanied him, whether tonsured or laymen, had to engage in some form of study, that is to say, to occupy themselves either with reading the scriptures or learning the psalms. This was the daily task of Aidan himself and all that were with him, wherever they went” (III.5).<sup>46</sup> We may understand this requirement as for the benefit of Aidan’s followers, as he expends great effort to instruct them with both high expectations and his own example of discipline. At the same time, this requirement serves the reverse role, ensuring that Aidan is never isolated from the framework of

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<sup>45</sup> *Vnde inter alia uiuendi documenta saluberrimum abstinentiae uel continentiae clericis exemplum reliquit; cuius doctrinam id maxime commendabat omnibus, quod non aliter quam uiuebat cum suis ipse docebat. Nihil enim huius mundi quaerere, nil amare curabat. Cuncta quae sibi a regibus uel diuitibus saeculi donabantur, mox pauperibus qui occurrerent erogare gaudebat. Discurrere per cuncta et urbana et rustica loca non equorum dorso sed pedum / incessu uectus, nisi si maior uel diuites uel pauperes incedens aspexisset, confestim ad hos diuertens uel ad fidei suscipiendae sacramentum, si infideles essent, inuitaret uel, si fideles, in ipsa eos fide confortaret, atque ad elimosynas operumque bonorum exsecutionem et uerbis excitaret et factis.*

<sup>46</sup> “*In tantum autem uita illius a nostri temporis segnitia distabat, ut omnes qui cum eo incedebant, siue adtonsi seu laici, meditari deberent, id est aut legendis scripturis aut psalmis discendis operam dare.*”

monastic discipline and always surrounded by the “men of godliness and temperance” whom Bede notes many contemporary bishops lack (*Letter to Egbert* 4). Aidan, like Gregory, “made his own house into a monastery,” surrounding himself with practitioners of a Rule who could reinforce his own discipline even as he instructed and cultivated theirs.

As Alan Thacker states, “Aidan is a truly Gregorian *doctor* and *praedicator*” who serves to “vindicate the antecedents of Northumbrian Christianity, and hold up to the degenerate heirs of that tradition patterns to recall them to their salvific role” (43). While Bede takes great pains to avoid condoning Aidan’s irregular observance of Easter, he nonetheless identifies his own duty as “a truthful historian” to describe “in a straightforward manner those things which were done by him or through him, praising such of his qualities as are worthy of praise and preserving their memory for the benefit of my readers” (III.17)—and it so happens that these qualities he praises fall well within the Gregorian pattern. The moral exemplary message of Aidan’s life is the same as for the Roman missionaries—Aidan (and by extension, the early history of the Northumbrian Church as a whole) is “adopted” into the Gregorian paradigm, serving to inspire readers back to an ecclesial framework with proper monastic discipline at its center. Bede explicitly notes this connection in Book IV of the *HE* when discussing Aidan’s organization of Lindisfarne monastery as received by Cuthbert:

In fact in this monastery, even from ancient times, the bishop had been accustomed to live with his clergy and the abbot to live with the monks, who none the less belonged to the bishop’s household, because Aidan who was the first bishop of this place came as a monk and established monastic life there. This also,

still earlier, the most blessed Father Augustine is known to have done in Kent, when the most reverend Pope Gregory wrote to him as has been related above: ‘You, my brother, being conversant with monastic rules, ought not to live apart from your clergy in the English church, etc...’<sup>47</sup> (IV.27)

It is worth noting that Bede must stretch the facts somewhat to make this equation. Clare Stancliffe has noted that the organization of Lindisfarne under Aidan and his successors was not the same as it was in Canterbury under Augustine—in Canterbury, Augustine was simultaneously abbot and bishop, while at Lindisfarne, the bishop was a monk under the abbot’s disciplinary rule, an arrangement which bore more similarity to the Irish-ruled Iona (29). Furthermore, Henry Mayr-Harting casts doubt as to whether Aidan would have thought of himself as “bishop of Lindisfarne” at all; he writes:

It was natural for Bede to think in these terms for he had grown up amidst a system of dioceses based on sees. There had been a bishop of Lindisfarne since he was a small boy, and since Archbishop Theodore organized the diocese of Northumbria in 678–79. But Aidan was a wandering missionary bishop (an *episcopus vagans*) and Lindisfarne was merely his monastic centre; he would have thought of himself simply as bishop of the Northumbrians. (95)

Contrast this with Gregory or Augustine, whose sees were very clearly defined. But regardless of whether Bede was conscious of these distinctions, in eliding them he makes Aidan a less ambiguous inheritor of the Gregorian legacy. In so doing, he exonerates the

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<sup>47</sup> *Siquidem a temporibus ibidem antiquis et episcopus cum clero et Abbas solebat manere cum monachis, qui tamen et ipsi ad curam episcopi familiariter pertinerent. Quia nimirum Aidan, qui primus eius loci episcopus fuit, cum monachis illuc et ipse monachus adueniens monasticam in eo conuersionem instituit; quomodo et prius beatus pater Augustinus in Cantia fecisse noscitur, scribente ei reuerentissimo papa Gregorio, quod et supra posuimus: ‘Sed quia tua faraternitas’ inquit ‘monasterii regulis erudita seorsum fieri non debet a clericis suis, in ecclesia Anglorum...’*

Lindisfarne monastic “see,” which he desires to hold up as an exemplum, from suspicion of Irish irregularity. Even more importantly, he reinforces the precedent for diocesan sees with fully integrated monasteries as a recurrently successful model in English and Northumbrian history, proven within the order of time, further supporting his recommendation for the foundation of new sees in the *Letter to Egbert*.

#### **2.4.2. Colman**

Aidan is not the only Irish monk-bishop to champion this model in the *HE*. His second successor, Bishop Colman of Lindisfarne, also bears special mention, for Bede maintains his status as a positive exemplum even as he frames him as a hold-out against the adoption of the Roman Easter in Northumbria. Bede introduces Colman as the chief opponent of Wilfrid (then still only a priest and monk) at the Synod of Whitby, and by the conclusion of the chapter, Colman is soundly defeated (III.25). Rather than embracing the ruling of the Synod, Colman gathers his supporters and returns to Ireland (III.26). Taken on its own, this would seem damning. However, almost in his next breath, Bede praises both Colman and his Irish predecessors for the sheer degree of their frugality and austerity, evidenced by the see he left behind at Lindisfarne:

When they left, there were very few buildings there except for the church, in fact only those without which the life of a community was impossible. They had no money but only cattle; if they received money from the rich they promptly gave it to the poor; for they had had no need to collect money or to provide dwellings for the reception of worldly and powerful men, since these only came to the church to pray and hear the word of God...The sole concern of these teachers was to serve God and not the world, to satisfy the soul and not the belly...If by chance a priest

came to a village, the villagers crowded together, eager to hear from him the word of life; for the priests and clerics visited the villages for no other reason than to preach, to baptize and to visit the sick, in brief to care for their souls. They were so free from all taint of avarice that none of them would accept lands or possessions to build monasteries, unless compelled to by the secular authorities. This practice was observed universally among the Northumbrian churches for some time afterward.<sup>48</sup> (III.26)

Once again, this praise is deeply exemplary in character—the contrast to the negligent, exploitative bishops and decadent, sprawling false monasteries described in the *Letter to Egbert* is almost self-evident. Colman’s episcopacy offers Bede an opportunity to expound on the long-term fruits of the system established by Aidan at Lindisfarne. Bede’s final words in this passage even tacitly imply that this frugal practice is *no longer followed* by Northumbrian churches, suggesting the criticism of false monasteries Bede will state explicitly in the *Letter*.

Bede’s choice to use Colman in this exemplary manner, despite even his obvious opposition to liturgical conformity with Rome, demonstrates the sheer priority Bede places on exemplifying the fruits of the diocesan-monastic model—an archdiocese where priests of the Church are deservedly beloved by those under their care, for their discipline

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<sup>48</sup> *Quantae autem parsimoniae, cuius continentiae fuerit ipse cum prodecessoribus suis, testabatur etiam locus ille quem regebant, ubi abeuntibus eis excepta ecclesia paucissimae domus repertae sunt, hoc est illae solummodo sine quibus conuersatio ciuilis esse nullatenus poterat. Nil pecuniarum absque pecoribus habebant; siquid enim pecuniae a diuitibus accipiebant, mox pauperibus dabant. Nam neque ad susceptionem potentium saeculi uel pecunias colligi uel domus praeuideri necesse fuit, qui numquam ad eclessiam nisi orationis tantum et audiendi uerbi Dei causa ueniebant...Tota enim fuit tunc sollicitudo doctoribus illis Deo seruiendi, non saeculo; tota cura cordis excolendi, non uentris...Nam neque alia ipsis sacerdotibus aut clericis uicos adeundi, quam praedicandi baptizandi infirmos uisitandi et, ut breuiter dicam, animas curandi causa fuit; qui in tantum eran ab omni auaritiae peste castigati, ut nemo territoria ac possessiones ad construenda monasteria, nisi a potestatibus saeculi coactus acciperet. Quae consuetudo per Omnia aliquanto post hacc tempore in ecclesiis Nordanhymbrorum seruata est.*

ensures that they will have no competing interests but serve as *doctores* and *praedicatores* to their flocks. Thus, even the liturgically recalcitrant Colman fits into Bede's exemplary pattern.

It is here, with Christianity firmly established in Northumbria and the rest of England, that I will draw this chapter to a close. In the next, I shall consider how Bede constructs his moral exemplarity in his history of post-missionary Northumbria, as priorities shift from conversion to maintenance of the Christian faith.

## CHAPTER 3: COMPETING EPISCOPAL MODELS AND BEDE'S LATTER-DAY EXEMPLA

### 3.1. Introduction

As Bede's historical narrative begins to approach events and figures more directly relevant to his own present, Bede's exemplary project encounters new challenges. We might well expect this, as the problems Bede seeks to address find their origin in this period. As England, and Northumbria in particular, had transitioned from a fresh mission field to firmly Christian territory with far greater populations, the way that the episcopal system should develop in response came under dispute. As we have seen in the *Letter to Egbert*, Bede felt that the current Northumbrian dioceses were far too large for their bishops to effectively exercise pastoral care; he favored the creation of new bishoprics among which this responsibility could be more efficiently distributed. However, we may observe between the lines of the latter half of the *HE* that an opposing vision of episcopal authority, distinct from the one Bede favored, had risen to prominence.

In his monograph *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, Henry Mayr-Harting identifies a long-brewing dispute that came to a head at the 672 Synod of Hertford (recorded by Bede in *HE* IV.5): that is, "whether dioceses should be large or small, or whether there should be one diocese or many for each Anglo-Saxon kingdom" (130). Theodore of Tarsus, archbishop of Canterbury between 668 and 690, had sought to divide the large, kingdom-spanning dioceses into smaller, more localized ones. Mayr-Harting posits that "his policy was to combine the virtues of both Roman and Irish organization" (131). This is to say, he held to the Roman principle that each bishop needed a clearly defined see and diocese to call his own, such that no bishop would



encroach on another's authority. But in the Irish vein, Theodore also took great care to account for not just the boundaries of kingdoms but also cultural and tribal divisions among the faithful as he determined the territory of each bishop's pastoral care (i.e., his eventual division of Northumbrian episcopal authority between Bernicia, Deira, and Lindsey with the sees at Lindisfarne, York, and "presumably Lincoln" respectively, after Wilfrid's first expulsion from York (Mayr-Harting 132, *HE* IV.12)).

Yet Theodore faced opposition to his policy of episcopal proliferation. Chapter IX of the Synod of Hertford ("That more bishops shall be created as the number of faithful increases"), has a rider attached to it, noting that while the chapter received general discussion, the Synod could reach no agreement on the matter (*HE* IV.5). Mayr-Harting identifies three of the four other bishops attending or represented at the Synod (Bisi of the East Angles, Leuthere of the West Saxons (himself a Gaul), and Wilfrid of the Northumbrians (represented at the Synod through his underlings) as forming a "Gaulish party," who had adapted the distinct vision of episcopal power and comportment that had developed on mainland Gaul to the English milieu (132–34). Gaulish bishops, in general, ruled over formerly great Roman cities, whose populations, histories, structures, and educational levels granted their bishops both tremendous prestige and immense revenue streams. In the less urbanized English setting, the Gaulish party viewed the source of this prestige and revenue as lying "in identification with a whole tribe or kingdom" (Mayr-Harting 135). Furthermore, bishops according to the Gaulish model favored far more ostentatious displays of external grandeur, wealth, and power than, say, the Irish missionary bishops—take, for example, Wilfrid's consecration in Gaul "with great dignity" in the presence of twelve bishops. Mayr-Harting is careful to note that this

seeming preoccupation with political control, personal majesty, and elaborate ceremony could all, in theory, be justified:

For the sake of their flocks, it could be argued, bishops were compelled to cut an impressive figure beyond their own dioceses, to be dignitaries of more than local importance. It was in the interest of their flocks that kings should be instructed in their duties by persons whom they respected, that bishops should be able to stand up to kings, and that as the chief officers of government in the cities they should exercise a commanding presence when surrounded by the agencies of otherwise unrestrained commotion. (134)

For the bishop in the Gaulish mould, then, such things as territory, material wealth and beauty, and personal majesty were necessary tools to be exercised for the long-term health of the Church and the salvation of souls.

But regardless of how rational this long-view might seem, we may be assured that both Theodore and Bede himself differed substantially in their priorities. We have already observed the crucial value Bede places on the personal humility of his exemplary bishop-*doctors* and his concern that these bishops be able to personally minister to their entire flocks—a feat that was rapidly becoming impossible in these kingdom-spanning dioceses as the faithful population increased. And Theodore’s policy of consecrating new bishops and breaking up large dioceses (for example, his opportunistic splitting of Wilfrid’s massive diocese of York into three, and later five, following Wilfrid’s first expulsion from Northumbria (IV.12)), indicates that he felt similarly. Mayr-Harting identifies Theodore’s stance as fundamentally echoing that of Gregory the Great (one of Bede’s foundational exempla). While Gregory felt that a bishop needed a sufficient air of

gravity around him to exercise his authority, he also feared the threats of pride and vainglory posed by excessive manifestations of worldly power and furthermore emphasized the need for a pastor to have a personal relationship with his flock (Mayr-Harting 135–38).

Clare Stancliffe takes one significant step further in describing these two opposing perspectives, broadening their terminology from “Gaulish and Gregorian” to “clerical and monastic” (30). On the one hand, she looks at Northumbria’s foundational Gaulish/clerical representative, Wilfrid of York. She notes that Wilfrid’s life as a bishop, as chronicled by his dedicated partisan Stephen of Ripon, reveals a conception of the episcopal office as something very distinct from the monastic calling—indeed she doubts that Wilfrid ever professed as a monk at all, despite his early life at Lindisfarne (30).<sup>49</sup> Meanwhile, as we have already discussed at length, Bede was deeply concerned that bishops both have the practical ability to preach and teach to their entire flocks and that they live the necessary (monastic) virtues of temperance, humility, and discipline in order to preach effectively.

Thus, to make his exemplary project work in these later stages of increasingly post-conversion Northumbrian history, Bede must defend his favored monastic model by demonstrating its viability and value, while also somehow dealing with the towering clericalist figure of Wilfrid, whose partisans (including Bede’s own bishop Acca) remained a potent force in the Northumbrian church. He accomplishes this goal in multiple ways. For one part, Bede approaches Wilfrid with a deft and circumspect touch,

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<sup>49</sup> Even Bede admits that Wilfrid was not tonsured at Lindisfarne (which at that point would have practiced the Irish, not Roman tonsure) (V.19), and Bede and Stephen agree that he was tonsured by Bishop Dalfinus in Gaul (*HE* V.19, *Vita Wilfridi* VI). Stancliffe notes that the fact that he received his tonsure from a bishop and not an abbot indicates that he was tonsured as a cleric, not a monk (30).

emphasizing his monastic connections and attributes to soften his image, and even to integrate him into the monk-bishop paradigm. For the other part, he uses figures like Archbishop Theodore, Bishop Chad, and most especially his beloved Cuthbert to form a clear continuity with his earlier exempla, while also showing a maturation and perfection of this model in which the best virtues of the Roman and Irish traditions may be seen working in unison for the benefit of the Northumbrian Church.

### 3.2. Wilfrid

The looming figure of Bishop Wilfrid of York presented a unique challenge to Bede's project. On the one hand, Wilfrid's deeds left their mark on the state of the Northumbrian Church like few others, and his disciples (such as Bede's own bishop Acca) continued to hold a great deal of power at the time of the *HE*'s writing. It is due to the arguments of Wilfrid at the Synod of Whitby that the Northumbrians accepted the Roman reckoning of Easter, an accomplishment that Bede was compelled to approve of (III.25). Yet in so doing, Wilfrid shamed Bede's Irish and Irish-trained exemplary figures and brought into sharp relief their "unorthodox" practices, even driving Colman and many other Irish missionaries out of England altogether (III.26, 28). Bede chooses to praise Colman's dedication to austerity and the success of his pastoral care (III.26) immediately following Wilfrid's humiliation of him at Whitby, an editorial decision that indirectly makes Wilfrid appear overbearing at the very least.

Furthermore, Wilfrid plainly embodied a far more grandiose episcopal style than the humility-driven monk-bishops Bede prefers to present. Wilfrid is consecrated in Gaul by Agilbert, bishop of Paris, "with great splendour in the presence of a number of bishops" (III.28). He comes into such conflict with the reigning kings that he is driven

from his see twice: first he was expelled by King Ecgrith, (IV.12)<sup>50</sup> and then, after his restoration following Ecgrith's death, he was cast out again by King Aldfrith, Ecgrith's successor, "and several bishops" (V.19). Bede does not describe the reasons for either of these expulsions; however, Wilfrid's own hagiographer Stephen of Ripon reports these "crimes" against Wilfrid in breathless detail. In the first case, Stephen explains how Queen Iurminburg, whom Stephen likens to the Biblical Jezebel, stirred Ecgrith's heart to jealousy by describing "all the temporal glories of St Wilfrid, his riches, the number of his monasteries, the greatness of his buildings, his countless army of followers arrayed in royal vestments and arms" (*Vitae Wilfridi* XXIV). And as for Wilfrid's second banishment by Aldfrith, Stephen points to three reasons for Wilfrid's coming into conflict with the king: that Wilfrid's Church of St. Peter was deprived of its wealth and territory; that Wilfrid's monastery at Ripon had been converted to an episcopal see, losing its autonomy; and that Aldfrith insisted on upholding the decrees that Theodore had made in the middle portion of his episcopate, which had divided the formerly Northumbria-spanning Diocese of York (XLV). The circumstances behind these conflicts paint a picture of Wilfrid that might well appeal to the Gaulish/clerical vision of a bishop surrounded in magnificence and worldly power, but it flies in the face of Bede's monk-bishop model, whose chief concern was to instruct his people by living as an imitable example of humility and righteousness.

Though this may be the case, Bede at no point attacks Wilfrid directly—such a move would only make his *History* needlessly divisive and in particular alienate Bishop

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<sup>50</sup> Bede reports that, immediately following this first banishment, Theodore divided Wilfrid's enormous diocese into three smaller ones (administering Deira, Bernicia, and Lindsey respectively), which leaves the impression that Wilfrid's territory had been too large for him to provide adequate pastoral care for his entire diocese.

Acca, with whom, as a priest in his diocese, Bede needed a positive working relationship (Stancliffe 35–36). Instead, Bede approaches Wilfrid with a light and circumspect touch, emphasizing the aspects of his career that align most with Bede’s own monastic exemplary model. We may observe this most plainly in Chapter 19 of the *HE*’s fifth book, which serves as a biography of Wilfrid, provided to mark the year of his death.<sup>51</sup> Bede describes the youthful Wilfrid as a boy defined by his practice of “modesty and discretion in all things” (V.19).<sup>52</sup> He frames his adoption of the monastic life thus:

After he had reached the age of fourteen, he chose the monastic rather than the secular life. When he told his father this, for his mother was dead, he readily consented to the boy’s godly desires and aspirations and bade him persevere in his profitable undertaking. So he came to the island of Lindisfarne and there devoted himself to the service of the monks, diligently striving to learn how to live a life of monastic purity and devotion. Since he was quick-witted he speedily learned the psalms and a number of other books; although he had not yet been tonsured, he was in no small measure distinguished for the virtues of humility and obedience, which were more important than the tonsure; and for this reason he was loved by the older monks as well as by his contemporaries.<sup>53</sup> (V.19)

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<sup>51</sup> Much of this chapter appears to have been borrowed from Stephen of Ripon’s *Vita Sancta Wilfrithi*, though with significant editorial changes.

<sup>52</sup> “...cum esset puer bonae indolis, atque aetatem moribus transiens ita se modeste et circumspecte in omnibus gereret, ut merito a maioribus quasi unus ex ipsis amaretur, ueneraretur, amplecteretur...”

<sup>53</sup> ...ubi quartum aetatis contigit annum, monasticam secolari uitum pretulit. Quod ubi patri suo narrauit (iam enim mater obierat), libenter eius uotis ac desiderii caelestibus adnuit, eumque coeptis insistere / salutaribus iussit. Venit ergo ad insulam Lindisfarnensem, ibique monachorum famulatui se contradens diligente ream, quae monasticae castitatis ac pietatis erant, et discere curabat et agere. Et quia acris erat ingenii, didicit citissime psalmos et aliquot codices, necdum quidem ad tonsuram, uerum eis quae tonsura maiores sunt uirtutibus, humilitatis et oboedientiae, non mediocriter insignitus; propter quod et a senioribus et coetaneis suis iusto colebatur affectu.

Bede here makes a notable and seemingly deliberate omission. Stephen of Ripon tells us that prior to his entry to Lindisfarne monastery, the young Wilfrid had received the patronage of Queen Eanfled, wife of King Oswiu, for his religious education. The queen then placed Wilfrid in the service of a nobleman named Cudda, who had chosen to enter Lindisfarne Monastery—this was how Wilfrid was introduced to the monastic life (II). Bede’s occlusion of this fact gives the reader the sense that Wilfrid chose the monastic life wholly of his own volition. And though Bede admits that Wilfrid remained untunsured in his time at Lindisfarne, he emphasizes the youth’s dedication to the prized monastic virtues of humility and obedience, which he posits are “more important than the tonsure.” Bede thereby paints Wilfrid as a monk in practice, if not by official profession. Bede even frames Wilfrid’s campaign against Irish liturgical practices as an outgrowth from his zeal for monastic perfection: he writes that “[a]fter he had served God in that monastery for some years, being a youth of shrewd understanding, he gradually came to realize that the traditional way of virtuous life followed by the Irish was by no means perfect; so he resolved to go to Rome to see what ecclesiastical and monastic practices were observed in the apostolic see” (V.19).<sup>54</sup>

Up to and throughout Wilfrid’s career as a bishop, Bede takes care to emphasize his role as a preacher and founder of monasteries (i.e., his re-founding of Ripon (previously an Irish-run monastery) and his preaching to the South Saxons and Frisians), while at the same time minimizing his grandiosity as much as possible. As stated earlier, Bede declines to explain the details of Wilfrid’s disputes with Kings Ecgfrith and Aldfrith, which saves Bede from having to describe Wilfrid’s worldly power and

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<sup>54</sup> “*In quo uidelicet monasterio cum aliquot annos Deo seruiret, animaduertit paulatim adulescens animi sagacis minime perfectam esse uirtutis uiam, quae tradebatur a Scottis, proposuitque animo uenire Romam, et qui ad sedem apostolicam ritus ecclesiastici siue monasteriales seruarentur uidere.*”

magnificence that induced royal jealousy and his struggle to regain his (in Bede's eyes) formerly excessive diocesan territory. When Wilfrid falls sick in Gaul while returning from his second exile, Bede recounts a miraculous episode in which the archangel Michael is sent by God to spare Wilfrid from death "in answer to the prayers and tears of [his] disciples and brothers" (V.19)<sup>55</sup>—this anecdote serves to affirm Wilfrid's link to and dependence on his monasteries for not only his spiritual welfare but also his physical health. Bede concludes his narrative of Wilfrid's life by noting that he died in his own monastery at Oundle and that his remains were interred at the first monastery he ruled, Ripon (V.19). Through this careful narration, Bede succeeds in not only softening Wilfrid but even in adopting him into his monastic-episcopal exemplary pattern.

### 3.3. Chad

Yet even as Bede masterfully works Wilfrid into his narrative, the other parallel figures whom Bede also chooses to praise reveal his true priorities. For one such example, let us consider the twice-bishop Chad. Bede's elevation of Chad as exemplum is particularly remarkable, given that in Chad's first appointment as bishop, he occupied the see of York, which at that time had been intended for Wilfrid. Bede explains that, shortly after the Synod of Whitby, King Alhfrith of Deira had sent Wilfrid to Gaul to be consecrated a bishop. But as Wilfrid took his time seeking out his grand consecration, King Oswiu, Alhfrith's father and liege, decided to appoint his own Bishop of York: Chad, abbot of Lastingham, whom Bede introduces as "a holy man, modest in his ways, learned in the scriptures, and zealous in carrying out their teachings" (III.28).<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> "...donavit enim tibi Dominus uitam per orationes ac lacrimas discipulorum ac fratrum tuorum..."

<sup>56</sup> *Quo adhuc in transmarinis partibus propter ordinationem demorante, imitates industriam filii rex Osuii misit Cantiam uirum sanctum, et ea quae in scripturis agenda didicerat operibus sollerter exsequentem, qui*



According to Bede, Chad was originally meant to be ordained in Kent by Bishop Deusdedit, but upon his arrival, Chad found that Deusdedit had died, and no bishop had yet taken his place. Therefore, he travelled to West Saxony, where he was ordained by Bishop Wine, assisted by two British bishops—whose own ordinations, Bede states, were uncanonical (III.28).

Even though these circumstances also made Chad's consecration uncanonical, Bede nonetheless praises Chad's style of episcopal rule effusively:

So Chad was consecrated bishop and immediately devoted himself to the task of keeping the Church in truth and piety, to the practice of humility and temperance, and to study. He visited cities and country districts, towns, houses, and strongholds, preaching the gospel, travelling not on horseback but on foot after the apostolic example. He was one of Aidan's disciples and sought to instruct his hearers in the ways and customs of his master and of his brother Cedd.<sup>57</sup> (III.28)

Chad's behavior in his role as bishop of the Northumbrians represents a continuation of Aidan's tradition and, more broadly, Bede's exemplary model. Once again, the embodiment of this model is so important to Bede that it briefly overrides the very validity of his consecration in Bede's focus, not to mention his potential status as a usurper to Wilfrid's seat. Bede mentions Chad's education at the hands of Aidan—Chad not only represents a continuation of Aidan's *doctoral* style of leadership but also an

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*Eburacensis ecclesiae ordinaretur episcopus.* [In a footnote to his edition of the *HE*, Colgrave notes the peculiarity of Oswiu appointing Chad seemingly in the place of Wilfrid. He notes that it may have had to do with a quarrel between Oswiu and his son Alhfrith or that he merely intended Chad to assist Wilfrid (316–17).]

<sup>57</sup> *Consecratus ergo in episcopum Ceadda maximam mox coepit ecclesiasticae ueritati et castitati curam inpendere, humilitati continentiae lectioni operam dare, oppida rura casas uicos castella propter euangelizandum non equitando sed apostolorum more pedibus incedendo peragrarere. Erat enim de discipulis Aidani, eisdemque actibus ac moribus iuxta exemplum eius ac fratris sui Cediti suos instituere curauit auditores.*

ongoing redemption of the Irish tradition from some of its perceived failings. First, we may assume that, as bishop, Chad most likely accepted the Roman Easter and tonsure—Bede makes no note to the contrary, even as he mentions that “as the catholic principles daily gained strength, all the Irish who had remained among the English either gave way or returned to their own land” (III.28).<sup>58</sup>

Furthermore, even the inevitable trouble concerning Chad’s uncanonical consecration facilitates this sense of redemption and reveals Chad’s exemplary humility. When Theodore, shortly after entering into his position as bishop of Canterbury, explains to Chad that his consecration was not regular, Bede narrates Chad’s response thusly: “If you believe that my consecration was irregular, I gladly resign from the office; indeed I never believed myself worthy of it. But I consented to receive it, however unworthy, in obedience to the commands I received” (IV.2).<sup>59</sup> Chad’s apparent preference for his earlier purely monastic life and his ultimate submission to the episcopate out of obedience rather than ambition, simultaneously echo Gregory and prefigure Cuthbert, showcasing what Bede felt was the appropriate attitude toward episcopal power. Bede’s approval of Chad’s humble response is corroborated by Theodore, who responds by completing Chad’s consecration according to the “catholic manner” (IV.2).<sup>60</sup>

However, Chad is not deprived of his gesture of humility and retires back to his own monastery at Lastingham—until he is once again called upon by Theodore to serve

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<sup>58</sup> “*Vnde factum est ut, crescent per dies institutione catholica, Scotti omnes, qui inter Anglos morabantur, aut his manus darent aut suam redirent ad patriam.*”

<sup>59</sup> “*‘Si me’ inquit ‘nosti episcopatum non rite suscepisse, libenter ab officio discedo, quippe qui neque me unquam hoc esse Dignum arbitrabar, sed oboedientiae causa iussus subire hoc quamuis indignus consensi.’*”

<sup>60</sup> “*catholica ratione*”; Colgrave notes that it is unclear whether Bede means by this that Theodore entirely reconsecrated Chad (which would mean that his consecration had heretofore been sacramentally invalid) or if Theodore merely completed some necessary ritual formality in his consecration (335).

as bishop to the newly-converted Mercians (IV.3). Bede provides a noteworthy anecdote of an exchange between the two men, which apparently occurred when Chad was first given his appointment:

[B]ecause it was the custom of the reverend Bishop Chad to carry out his evangelistic work on foot rather than on horseback, Theodore ordered him to ride whenever he was faced with too long a journey; but Chad showed much hesitation, for he was deeply devoted to this religious exercise, so the archbishop lifted him on to the horse with his own hands since he knew him to be a man of great sanctity and he determined to compel him to ride a horse when the necessity arose.<sup>61</sup> (IV.3)

This “religious exercise” of exclusive foot-travel was uniquely Celtic, as Colgrave comments in a footnote (336). Indeed, we have already seen Aidan and Colman practice the same. Bede does not condemn Chad for his dedication to this ascetic custom—in fact, he seems to admire it—but neither does he condemn Theodore for insisting on the practicality of using a horse.

To this point, Mayr-Harting describes a certain “balance,” valued by Theodore and by Gregory before him:

On the one hand a pastor must take care of external matters otherwise he neglects his flock; he must uphold a certain external appearance and not be too humble or depreciate himself too much, otherwise he loses the authority to restrain and discipline those under him. On the other hand he must not indulge in outward

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<sup>61</sup> *Et quia moris erat eidem reuerentissimo antistiti opus euangelii magis ambulando per loca quam equitando perficere, iussit eum Thodorus, ubicumque longius iter instaret, equitare, multumque renitentem studio et amore pii laboris ipse eum manu sua leuauit in equum, quia nimirum sanctum esse uirum conperiit atque equo uehi, quo esset necesse, compulit.*

show to gratify his self-importance; he must not grow cold amidst external works for want of internal humility or the fire of contemplation... To his [Theodore's] mind, the bishops trained in the Irish tradition had failed to strike a balance. Where St. Martin of Tours refused to ride anything better than an ass, these bishops even insisted on going round on foot; they neglected their external dignity; they had to be made to ride horses. (136)

This dignity was critical to Chad's pastoral role, and Bede allows us to see Theodore's corrective action, tacitly acknowledging a weakness of the purely Irish model. While admirable, Chad's dedication to humility and asceticism above all else ultimately result in pastoral inefficiency. To show such a weakness may seem like a surprising choice for Bede in depicting one of his monastic-episcopal exempla. However, as I shall argue toward the conclusion of this chapter, Bede uses this small failing to set up a future success—namely that of Cuthbert. Furthermore, this moment permits Theodore to act in an exemplary manner: as a kind but firm pastor of pastors, able to correct the well-intentioned but unbalanced practice of his subordinate. Given Chad's past deference to Theodore, Bede leaves us with the impression that Chad accepted this (mildly humorous) correction without further issue.

Following this episode, Bede tells us that “following the example of the early fathers, [Chad] administered the diocese in great holiness of life” (IV.3). Bede notes the monastery Chad built in Lindsey and tells us that “up to the present day traces of the monastic Rule which he established still survive” (IV.3).<sup>62</sup> Yet, Bede makes sure that we know that Chad, in addition to spreading this Rule, remained dedicated to personally practicing it. He describes a “retired dwelling place” that he built not far from his see in

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<sup>62</sup> “...in quo usque hodie instituta ab ipso regularis uitae uestigia permanent.”

Lichfield, “where he could read and pray privately with a few of his brothers, that is to say, seven or eight of them; and he did as often as he was free from his labours and from the ministration of the word” (IV.3).<sup>63</sup> Like Bede’s other exempla, Chad rules with great success by carrying his monastic discipline with him into his episcopate, keeping his brothers around him and using communal scripture reading and prayer as an anchor to hold himself steady against worldly concerns and temptations. Bede’s admiration for Chad is made even more evident when he dips into hagiography at the moment of and following Chad’s death: Bede narrates how angels visited Chad to tell him of his entrance into the heavenly kingdom a week hence, and after his death, Bede speaks of healing miracles regularly occurring at the site of his tomb in Lichfield (IV.3). Even though Chad’s final episcopate was in Mercia rather than Northumbria, Bede still sees fit to narrate Chad’s story in loving detail, presenting him as an important member in the lineage of effective monk-bishop *doctores* and one who prefigures Bede’s most beloved exemplum of all, whom we come to presently.

### 3.4. Cuthbert

To say that Cuthbert of Lindisfarne was significant to Bede would be a gross understatement. Prior to writing the *HE*, Bede had composed two *Vitae* of the saint: the first in verse and the second in prose, both of which he references in his *History* (IV.28). Though it is tempting to discuss the content of these *Vitae* at length, I will, for the sake of brevity and focus, constrain my examination to Bede’s conspicuously lengthy chapters of the *HE* dedicated to Cuthbert. As I shall argue, these chapters frame Cuthbert as a

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<sup>63</sup> “*Fecerat uero sibi mansionem non longe ab ecclesia remotiorem, in qua secretius cum paucis, id est septem siue octo, fratribus, quoties a labore et ministerio Verbi uacabat, orare ac legere solebat.*”

culmination of Bede's preceding exempla, Roman and Irish alike, perfected for Bede's contemporary Christian Northumbria.

Bede begins this miniature *Vita*, as we might expect by now, by describing his early and abiding love of the monastic Rule: "From his earliest years, he had always longed for life under a Rule, and it was as a young man that he assumed both the name and habit of a monk" (IV.27).<sup>64</sup> Bede notes his dutiful submission to his prior Boisil at Melrose monastery, whom Sarah McCann has convincingly argued was likely an Irishman.<sup>65</sup> Upon Boisil's death, Cuthbert succeeded him as prior, and Bede emphasizes how well Cuthbert steps into the role of *doctor* at this time:

[Cuthbert] trained many in life under a Rule, both in his capacity as teacher and by his own example. Not only did he teach those in the monastery how to live under the Rule and show them an example of it at the same time, but he also sought to convert the neighboring people far and wide from a life of foolish customs to a love of heavenly joys. For many of them profaned the creed they held by wicked deeds and some of them too, in times of plague, would forget the sacred mysteries of the faith into which they had been initiated and take to the false remedies of idolatry, as though they could ward off a blow inflicted by God the Creator by means of incantations or amulets or any other mysteries of devilish art. So he frequently went forth from the monastery to correct the errors of those who sinned in both these ways, sometimes on horseback but more often on foot;

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<sup>64</sup> "*Qui quidem a prima aetate pueritiae studio religiosae vitae semper ardebat, sed ab ineunte adulescentia monachicum et nomen adsumsit et habitum.*"

<sup>65</sup> See McCann, "Cuthbert and Boisil: Irish Influence in Northumbria."

he came to the neighboring villages and preached the way of truth to those who had gone astray, just as Boisil had been accustomed to do in his time.<sup>66</sup> (IV.27)

There is much to discuss in these lines. Firstly, Bede makes it apparent that Cuthbert's instructive power comes from his ability to act as an example of his own teaching, which in turn comes from his own love of monastic discipline. This applies both within and without the bounds of the monastery itself, as Cuthbert understands his teaching responsibilities extend not only to his fellow monks but also to the surrounding laity. Secondly, Bede demonstrates that the need for *doctores* like Cuthbert remains undiminished; despite Northumbria's ostensibly complete conversion to Christianity, the same spiritual forces (i.e., pagan traditions) that challenged the first missionaries yet remain and must be constantly engaged by preachers in order to maintain the people's spiritual health. And thirdly, Bede notes that Cuthbert, while apparently preferring to travel on foot, was willing to utilize horses when the need presented itself. The inclusion of this detail seems to directly address the issue of balance that Theodore experienced when commanding Chad to ride on horseback. Cuthbert's preference for the humbler exercise of foot travel is plain, but unlike Chad, he does not hold the practice in such high regard as to allow it to interfere with his ministry. In Cuthbert then, this Celtic expression of piety is validated but also tempered, signaling an increasing perfection in Bede's exemplary model, inclusive as it is of both Irish and Gregorian influences.

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<sup>66</sup> *Cudberct eidem monasterio factus propositus plures et auctoritate magistri et exemplo suae actionis regularem instituebat at uitam. Nec solum ipsi monasterio regularis uitae Monita simul et exempla praebabat, sed et uulgi circumpositum longe lateque a uita stultae consuetudinis ad caelestium gaudiorum conuertere curabat amorem. Nam et multi fidem quam habebant iniquis profanabant operibus, et aliqui etiam tempore mortalitatis, neglectis fidei sacramentis quibus erant inbuti, ad erraticam idolatriae medicamina concurrebant, quasi missam a Deo Conditore plagam per incantationes uel fylacteria uel alia quaelibet daemónica artis arcana cohibere ualerent. Ad utrorumque ergo corrigendum errorem crebro ipse de monasterio egressus, aliquoties equo sedens sed saepius pedes incedens, circumpositas ueniebat ad uillas, et uiam ueritatis praedicabat errantibus. Quod ipsum etiam Boisil suo tempore facere consueuerat.*

Bede further emphasizes Cuthbert's particular dedication to ministry in "those places...that were far away on steep and rugged mountains, which others dreaded to visit and whose poverty and ignorance kept other teachers away," adding that Cuthbert would sometimes leave the monastery for days, weeks, or even a month at a time to provide pastoral care for these communities (IV.27). Once again, this detail seems intended to directly contrast with the indolent and greedy bishops described in the Letter to Egbert, who provide no attention to communities such as these save for as a source of revenue (7). Cuthbert, not even yet a bishop, has realized the pastoral ideal of the preacher responsible for the entirety of his flock, in a manner which appears to flow from his own monastic humility, zeal, and disdain for material wealth.<sup>67</sup>

After distinguishing himself through his spiritual labors at and around the monastery at Melrose, Bede tells us that he was transferred by his abbot Eata "to the island of Lindisfarne so that there also, by his authority as prior, he might teach the brothers how to keep the discipline of the Rule and illustrate it by his own behaviour" (IV.27).<sup>68</sup> Cuthbert's arrival at Lindisfarne carries a great symbolic significance for Bede's exemplary project, a fact that he reveals by openly invoking several of his previous exempla:

In fact in this monastery, even from ancient times, the bishop had been accustomed to live with his clergy and the abbot to live with the monks, who none

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<sup>67</sup> Cuthbert's apparently independent pastoral work as prior of Melrose makes especial sense if we accept the supposition that his predecessor and mentor Boisil was an Irishman. As John Ryan explains in his 1972 monograph *Irish Monasticism* (177–179) and as Bede himself tells us of Iona (III.4), it was common from the 6<sup>th</sup> Century forward for Irish monasteries to exercise full jurisdiction over a district or region in the place of a bishop. Prior Cuthbert's ministrations to the isolated members of the Christian laity fit well as a participation in this tradition.

<sup>68</sup> "*Cum ergo uenerabilis Domini famulus multos in Mailrosensi monasterio degens annos magnis uirtutum signis effulgeret, transtulit eum reuerentissimus abbas ipsius Eata ad insulam Lindisfarnensium, ut ibi quoque fratribus custodiam disciplinae regularis et auctoritate propositi intimaret et propria actione praemonstraret.*"



the less belonged to the bishop's household, because Aidan who was the first bishop of this place came as a monk and established a monastic life there. This also, still earlier, the blessed Father Augustine is known to have done in Kent, when the most reverend Pope Gregory wrote to him as has been related above: 'You, my brother, being conversant with monastic rules, ought not to live apart from your clergy in the English Church, which by the guidance of God, has lately been converted to the faith; but you ought to institute that manner of life which our fathers followed in the earliest beginning of the Church: none of them said that anything he possessed was his own but they had all things in common.'<sup>69</sup>

(IV.27)

In referencing these great monk-bishops and Gregory's instructions, Bede once again reinforces the fusion of monastic and episcopal systems as both superior and an enduring part of the English Christian legacy, spiritually linking the English to the biblical Church in the order of time and foreshadowing Cuthbert's own participation in this tradition.<sup>70</sup>

But before the bishopric is thrust upon him, Cuthbert entered the hermit's fully contemplative life on Farne Island, off the coast of Lindisfarne. Bede makes clear that this was not an abandonment of his monastic life but rather a further development of it; Bede tells us that Cuthbert "attained" (*peruenit*) the hermit's life after having grown "in

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<sup>69</sup> *Siquidem a temporibus ibidem antiquis et episcopus cum clero et Abbas solebat manere cum monachis, qui tamen et ipse monachus adueniens monasticam in eo conuersationem instituit; quomodo et prius beatus pater Augustinus in Cantia fecisse noscitur, scribente ei reuerentissimo papa Gregorio, quod et supra posuimus; 'Sed qui atua fraternitas' inquit 'monasterii regularis erudite seorsum fieri non debet a clericis suis, in ecclesia Anglorum, quae nuper auctore Deo ad fidem perducta est, hanc debet conuersationem instituere, quae initio nascentis ecclesiae fuit patribus nostris; in quibus nullus eorum ex his quae possidebant aliquid suum esse dicebat, sed erant eis omnia communia.*

<sup>70</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, this comparison elides some significant distinctions between the Gregorian/Augustinian model and the Irish model used at Lindisfarne; see chapter 2, page 17 of this paper for details.

merit and in the intensity of his devotion.”<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, by describing their assistance of Cuthbert in constructing his hermitage, Bede demonstrates that he had the full support of his fellow monks (IV.27). In this extended period of contemplative isolation, Cuthbert only increased in holiness, a fact marked both by his miraculous success in inhabiting the barren island and by his sheer reluctance to leave when called upon to become bishop—Bede writes that King Ecgrith and Bishop Trumwine, as well as many Lindisfarne monks, had to sail to Farne Island before Cuthbert would consent to stand before the synod which had elected him bishop (IV.28). However, Bede does not present Cuthbert’s reluctance here as a desire to shirk duty; rather it reflects an appropriate detachment from worldly ambition and a righteous concern for his inner peace—indeed, Bede seems to deliberately evoke the grief that Gregory experienced after being pulled from his monastic contemplation to become Pope (II.1). And much like Gregory and Bede’s other monk-bishops, Cuthbert’s monastic and contemplative experiences become assets to his authoritative ministry:

After Cuthbert had been consecrated bishop, his works of virtue, like those of the apostles, became an ornament to his episcopal rank. He protected the people who had been committed to his charge with his constant prayers and summoned them to heavenly things by his most wholesome admonitions. He taught them what should be done but first showed them how to do it by his own example, as it is most helpful for a teacher to do. He was before all things fired with divine love, sober-minded and patient, diligent and urgent in devotion and prayer, and friendly to all who came to him for comfort. He held that to give the weak brethren help

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<sup>71</sup> “*Exim Cudberct crescentibus meritis religiosae intentionis ad anachoreticae quoque contemplationis...*”

and advice was a fit substitute for prayer, for he knew that He who said, ‘Thou shalt love the Lord thy God’, also said, ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor.’<sup>72</sup> (IV.28)

As bishop of Lindisfarne, Cuthbert completes his development as a monastic *doctor*, being himself both teacher and exemplum to his flock. His deep knowledge of contemplation grants him a special capacity to direct the hearts and minds of his flock heavenwards. Furthermore, his view of active ministry as a “fit substitute for prayer” was clearly not a deviation from his monastic experience but rather learned from his time as a monk prior to becoming a hermit. For Bede, Cuthbert’s two-year ministry as bishop marks the climax of his spiritual development and the climax of Bede’s own exemplary narrative. After these two years, Bishop Cuthbert is permitted to return to his hermitage, having been notified “by a divine oracle” of his upcoming death (IV.29). Once again, this is not framed as an escape from his episcopal responsibilities but as a well-earned respite and conclusion to a highly successful contemplative and active life.

The narrative of Cuthbert’s career forms what we might call Bede’s “final argument,” a blueprint for the spiritual formation of Northumbria’s bishops. In the *Letter to Egbert*, Bede proposed that new bishops ought to be chosen from the ranks of the monasteries upon which their sees were founded and that these bishops be prepared to minister to their entire dioceses personally. Throughout the *HE*, we have seen this model developed, refined, and perfected as divinely governed history unfolds. This occurred first in the missionary period, a time to Bede not dissimilar to the church seen in the Acts

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<sup>72</sup> *Qui susceptum episcopatus gradum ad imitationem beatorum apostolorum uirtutum ornabat operibus. Commissam namque sibi plebem et orationibus protegebat adsiduis et admonitionibus saluberrimis ad caelestia uocabat; et, quod maxime doctores iuuare solet, ea quae agenda docebat ipse prius agendo praemonstrabat. Erat quippe ante omnia diuinae caritatis igne feruidus, patientiae uirtute modestus, orationum deuotioni sollertissime intentus, affabilis omnibus qui ad se consolationis gratia ueniebant; hoc ipsum quoque orationis loco ducens, si infirmis fratribus opem suae exhortationis tribueret, sciens quia, qui dixit ‘Diliges Dominum Deum tuum’, dixit et ‘Diliges proximum’.*

of the Apostles, where bishops lived in community with their followers, standing against the forces of an unbelieving world. In the latter half of the *HE*, by softening Wilfrid's clericalism and emphasizing the success of monastic bishops like Chad and Cuthbert, Bede demonstrates that this model remains equally effective and necessary within a fully (or near-fully) Christianized landscape, guarding against the same spiritual evils (ignorance, apathy, pride, and ambition) that challenged the first missionaries.

## CODA: BEDE LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

In the final chapters of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, two items merit our special attention. The first of these is the conversion of Iona to the canonical Roman Easter and Roman tonsure at the hands of the English monk Egbert (V.22).<sup>73</sup> Previously Bede had written that, as a young man, Egbert had traveled to Ireland to study and develop in the monastic life; upon being brought close to death with plague, he vowed to live in voluntary exile from England for the rest of his life (III.27). While Egbert had initially desired to minister to the pagan German tribes, the forebears of the Angles and Saxons, Bede states that he was prevented from traveling to German lands himself by several divine interventions, including two apparitions of Abbot Boisil, mediated through a monk subordinate to Egbert, through which Egbert was told that God was reserving him for ministry to the monasteries of Columba (the Ionan monasteries) (V.9). In describing his ministry to Iona, Bede writes that that Egbert was “a most gracious teacher and a most devout doer of all that he taught,” acting once again as Bede’s ideal *doctor*, whose life functions as an exemplum for his teachings, which were gladly received by the Irish (V.22).<sup>74</sup>

Bede does not leave the providential significance of this Ionan conversion to subtext, writing, “It is clear that this happened by a wonderful dispensation of divine mercy, since that race had willingly and ungrudgingly taken pains to communicate its

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<sup>73</sup> Egbert, not to be confused with Egbert of York, to whom Bede penned his Letter. Mayr-Harting identifies him as “almost certainly Northumbrian” in an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. In a footnote to his translation of the *HE*, Colgrave notes some ambiguity in how the moniker *sacerdos*, which Bede repeatedly employs in reference to him, ought to be translated. While Colgrave chooses to translate it as “priest,” he acknowledges the possibility that Bede may have meant it to mean “bishop,” as he notes that several other early writers have assigned Egbert that title (225). If we were to take this as the correct reading, we would need to add Egbert to our list of Bede’s monk-bishop exempla.

<sup>74</sup> “*Qui quoniam et doctor suauiissimus et eorum quae agenda docebat erat exsecutor deuotissimus, libenter auditus ab uniuersis...*”

own knowledge and understanding of God to the English nation; and now, through the English nation, they are brought to a more perfect way of life in matters wherein they were lacking” (V.22).<sup>75</sup> In other words, Bede points out the divine ordering of history at work in this conversion: the English (and more specifically, Northumbrian) people, fostered by Ionan teachers and leaders, are empowered to repair the faults in the practices of their erstwhile evangelists, while the Irish Ionans are rewarded for their ministry by the perfection of their own religion. This reciprocal conversion also plays out in miniature in figure of Egbert, the Englishman who, under Irish instruction, learns the monastic life and of his need for a life of penitential self-exile and then repays this gift by bringing proper Roman practice to the Irish monks of Iona.

It bears remembering that for Bede, these “divine dispensations” are in fact the driving force of history—it is his duty as the historian to identify them and explain their significance. And one key consequence of this particular outcome is that the Irish evangelization of Northumbria cannot be taken as anything less than a positive—after all, the Ionans received a divine reward for their service in the form of Egbert’s ministry. Thus, Bede’s own exemplary model of the ideal monk-bishop, formed as much by the examples of Aidan and Colman as by Gregory and Augustine, is made unassailable by those who would cast doubt on the Irish influences of Bede’s model and its value moving forward into the future.

The second notable passage is Bede’s presentation of the current state of the English people, and Northumbria in particular, as of the *HE*’s conclusion. He notes that at present, the Northumbrian church is governed by four bishops with four sees: Wilfrid (the

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<sup>75</sup> “*Quod mira diuinae constat factum dispensation pietatis, ut quoniam gens illa quam nouerat scientiam diuinae cognitionis libenter ac postmodum per gentem Anglorum in eis quae minus habuerat ad perfectam uiuendi normam perueniret.*”

younger) at York, Æthelwold at Lindisfarne, Acca at Hexham, and Pethelm at Whithorn, which Bede notes is a new see created because “the number of believers has so increased” (V.23).<sup>76</sup> The creation of this newest diocese may have been a start, but if we return to the *Letter to Egbert*, this alone was clearly not enough for Bede, who still felt that more bishops and sees were needed to minister to the needs of the faithful (9). Bede refrains from belaboring this point outright in the *HE*, likely to avoid breaking the relatively measured historiographical tone he has cultivated throughout the work. That said, his acknowledgement of the rising number of believers and the need to designate a new episcopal center to accommodate them may be read as a hint that more bishops might be needed as the number of faithful grows yet larger.

Furthermore, among the last lines of the *Historia* proper, Bede writes the following:

In these favourable times of peace and prosperity, many of the Northumbrian race, both noble and simple, have laid aside their weapons and taken the tonsure, preferring that they and their children should take monastic vows rather than train themselves in the art of war. What the result of this will be, a later generation will discover.<sup>77</sup> (V.23)

The foreboding tone of these words may at first reading seem strange, given Bede’s obvious love of monasticism; however, when his wording here is compared to that of the *Letter*, it becomes apparent that Bede here refers to those monks who occupy false monasteries, which “are serviceable neither to God nor man...because neither is the

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<sup>76</sup> “Pethelm in ea quae Candida Casa uocatur, quae nuper multiplicatis fidelium plebibus in sedem pontificatus addita ipsum primum habet antistitem.”

<sup>77</sup> *Qua adridente pace ac serenitate temporum, plures in gente Nordanhymbrorum, tam nobiles quam priuati, se suosque liberos depositis armis satagunt magis, accepta tonsura, monasterialibus adscribere uotis quam bellicis exercere studiis. Quae res quem sit habitura finem, posterior aetas uidebit.*

regular life according to God kept in them, nor do they have in them soldiers or thanes of the secular powers to defend our nation from barbarians” (*Letter to Egbert* 11).<sup>78</sup> Bede does not describe or even mention this collapse of monastic discipline in the *HE*—he has elected to keep his exemplary project largely positive and avoids diatribe, likely to avoid provoking the ire of powerful members of his readership (i.e., lax abbots and permissive bishops) who might feel targeted. However, this backhanded warning reveals that the Bede at the *HE*’s end feels the same way as the Bede who would pen the *Letter to Egbert* a few years later at most.

Bede’s practical solution to this decline of monastic standards, as well as the standards of episcopal ministry (i.e., greed and lack of discipline among bishops and dioceses too large for a bishop to exercise sufficient pastoral care), bears restating. Bede first steers Egbert of York toward founding new dioceses upon (properly) monastic foundations:

Wherefore I should deem it convenient if, after holding a greater council and obtaining its consent, by an edict of the bishop as well as of the king, some place belonging to the monasteries<sup>79</sup> be looked for, where the see of a bishopric may be had. And lest perchance the abbot and monks make endeavor to withstand and resist such a decree, let them have leave themselves to choose one of their number to be ordained bishop and have the episcopal charge over all the places adjoining, which appertain to the same diocese, as well as over the said monastery: or, if it

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<sup>78</sup> “*Et quia huiusmodi maxima et plurima sunt loca, quae, ut vulgo dici solet, neque Deo neque hominibus utilia sunt, quia videlicet neque regularis secundum Deum ibidem vita servatur, neque illa milites sive comites secularium potestatum qui gentem nostram a barbaris defendant possident...*”

<sup>79</sup> Contextually, it seems likely that Bede here refers to monasteries that meet his standard of discipline and adherence to a monastic Rule—it would make little sense for Bede to suggest that a new bishop be drawn from one of those places merely “reckoned under the name of monasteries,” which Bede later refuses to even dignify with the monastic label in the *Letter* (10).



shall happen that in the said monastery none can be found meet to be ordained bishop, yet in accordance with the ordinances of the canons let it still rest with them to settle upon enquiry who from their diocese shall be ordained bishop.<sup>80</sup>

(10)

This plan would not only ensure that the monks would have a positive relationship with their new bishop; it would also ensure that the bishop would be, in Gregory's words, "p with monastic rules" (or at the very least, chosen by those who were) (HE I.27). This bishop would then have the duty of bringing the false monasteries to heel:

And if, in order to maintain a bishopric, it shall be found necessary that such a monastery shall require some farther increase of territory and possessions, there are, as we all know, innumerable places reckoned under the name of monasteries which yet have no mark at all of monastical life and conversation: of which I would have some brought over, by authority of the synod, from wantonness to chastity, from vanity to verity, from greed and gluttony to continence and godliness of heart, and used for the furtherance of the episcopal see which newly is to be established.<sup>81</sup> (*Letter 10*)

Not only would this seizure of territory consolidate resources to support the operations and ministry of the new bishopric; it would also enable the new (monastic) bishop to

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<sup>80</sup> *Quapropter commodum duxerim, habito maiori concilio et consensu, pontificali simul et regali edicto, prospiciatur locus aliquis monasteriorum ubi sedes episcopalis fiat. Et ne forte abbas vel monachi huic decreto contraire ac resistere tentaverint, detur illis licentia, ut de suis ipsi eligant eum qui episcopus ordinetur, et adiacentium locorum quotquot ad eandem dioecesim pertineant, una cum ipso monasterio curam gerat episcopalem: aut si forte in ipso monasterio qui episcopus ordinari debeat inveniri nequeat, in ipsorum tamen iuxta statuta canonum pendeat examine, qui de sua dioecesi ordinetur antistes.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ac si opus esse visum fuerit, ut tali monasterio, causa episcopatus suscipiendi, amplius aliquid locorum ac possessionum augeri debeat, sunt loca innumera, ut novimus omnes, in monasteriorum ascripta vocabulum, sed nihil prorsus monasticae conversationis habentia: e quibus velim aliqua de luxuria ad castitatem, de vanitate ad veritatem, de intemperantia ventris et gulae ad continentiam et pietatem cordis synodica auctoritate transferantur, atque in adiutorium sedis episcopalis quae nuper ordinari debeat assumantur.*

exercise especially direct authority in reforming the abuses of these reprobate monasteries, while using his own familiarity with the proper monastic life to establish a true Rule at these sites, making them “serviceable for God and for men” as centers of prayer and ministry.

This reformative aspect particularly captures Bede’s attention, as he is quick to note the Biblical precedent for this seizure:

[I]f anyone, to meet present needs, set up the see of a bishopric in these same places, he shall not be held to come under guilt of transgression, but rather to be performing a virtuous act. For how can it be reckoned sinful if the unrighteous judgements of some princes be amended by the right judgement of better princes, and the lying pen of unjust scribes be blotted out and brought to naught by the sober utterances of wise priests, after the example of sacred history [i.e., the example of the righteous prophets, priests, and rulers of Scripture]?<sup>82</sup> (*Letter 11*)

Bede plainly places great value on the imitation of scriptural examples. But as I hope I have demonstrated, Bede views figures from the course of English history, guided as it is by the divine order of time, to be of similar value to the figures of Scripture in providing examples for the princes of the Church to imitate. For example, Gregory, Aidan, or Cuthbert fill a similar role to Ezra or Nehemiah in exemplifying Bede’s ideal pastor, and as they are monks and bishops in the contemporary sense, Bede may communicate his vision for the model monastic bishop far more specifically with these latter-day historical figures than with Biblical exempla.

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<sup>82</sup> *...si quis in eisdem ipsis locis pro necessitate temporum sedem episcopatus constituat, non culpam praevaricationis incurrere, sed opus virtutis magis agere probabitur. Quomodo enim in peccatum reputari potest si iniusta principum iudicia recto meliorum principum examine corrigantur: ac mendax stilus scribarum iniquorum discreta prudentium sacerdotum sententia deleatur ac redigatur in nihilum, iuxta exemplum sacrae historiae...*

Bede has constructed an exegetical history of the English Church to offer very particular examples for the present and future Northumbrian bishops—in which each bishop is integrated within the monastic system. Not only does this arrangement allow the bishop to exercise better oversight over his monasteries, but it also allows his own monastery to support his personal holiness and discipline, enabling him to live as an example of right living to his entire flock. It should come as no surprise that Bede prized the model of *doctor*—one who instructs and inspires imitation through his own example—so highly for his bishops. Bede valued the power of exemplarity to inspire imitation, whether said examples came from scripture, from English history, or from present day leaders and teachers. As exegete, he understood enumerating the lessons of scriptural exempla to be a key part of his responsibility, and this was no less true in his role as an English historian. In both cases, the lessons applicable to the leaders of the present-day Northumbrian church, those who were the living exempla to the present-day faithful, stood chief among Bede’s priorities.

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