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## The Old English Christ Poems and Anglo-Saxon Law

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THE OLD ENGLISH CHRIST POEMS AND ANGLO-SAXON LAW

By

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A Dissertation submitted to the  
Department of English  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Degree Awarded:  
Spring Semester, 2011

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For Cheryl, Matthew, and Ian

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee, and especially David Johnson and Nancy Warren, for their help in preparing this manuscript. I would also like to thank my dad and my brother, and my mother- and father-in-law for their support throughout this project. Most importantly, I would like to thank my wife Cheryl for all she has sacrificed while I worked on this.

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## ABSTRACT

The *Christ* poems of the Exeter Book, Exeter Library Manuscript 3501, are three religious poems depicting three different episodes of Christ's time on earth. The Christian ideals regarding behavior expressed in the poems echo cultural ideals, so that Christ appears as a heroic king and judge, generous to his supporters, and severe with oath-breakers who disobey his law. Similarly, Christ's disciples are described as loyal thegns, ready to do their lord's bidding.

Cultural analyses of the *Christ* poems have traditionally concentrated on the images and motifs incorporated within them. There has been little study with regard to the audience of the *Christ* poems, much less on how that audience may have consumed the texts. This dissertation argues 1) that the *Christ* poems reference Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, as expressed in law codes or legal documents such as wills and contracts; 2) that the poems contain religious and secular models of ideal behavior, as well as examples of behavior to be avoided; 3) that the introduction of secular legal elements into the poems expand the potential audience of the poems; and 4) that the combination of secular law and church ethics, the one open to interpretation, the other believed to be immutable, creates a tension within each poem that opens the texts to being consumed in ways counter to how the compilers intended. Michel de Certeau's theories on reading as productive consumption are used to explore the ways in which the Anglo-Saxon audience may have responded to this tension with regard to their social relationships. This study provides a new analysis of some of the complications of the relationship between ruler and ruled in Anglo-Saxon England as reflected in these texts from the Exeter Book.

## INTRODUCTION

The *Christ* poems, the first three poems in the Exeter Book, have been subjected to a good deal of analysis, much like the rest of the corpus of Anglo-Saxon poetry. This has usually been done in areas such as heroic imagery, the themes of exile, and to some extent the potential audience of the poems. For the most part this last area has stayed focused on who might have read the poems, rather than on how the poems may have been consumed by its audience. This dissertation seeks to fill this void, through the use of Michel de Certeau's theories about reading as an act of productive consumption, by examining the legalistic echoes found in the poems and exploring the potential impact these echoes may have had on their reception.

In terms of when the Exeter Book was compiled, scholars generally accept that it was produced sometime between 940 and 970, with many preferring the time of Edgar, who reigned from 954 until 975. As to where the Exeter Book was produced, there is no clear consensus.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there is some uncertainty as to the path the book took before ending up in the possession of Bishop Leofric at Exeter in 1069X1072.<sup>2</sup> One argument, championed by Richard Gameson, states that the book was brought to Exeter by Leofric, obtained either before he moved the episcopal see from Crediton to Exeter, or after the move in an effort to bolster a library depleted by recent and savage Viking raids.<sup>3</sup> Another argument, put forth by Patrick Conner, states that the book was produced at Exeter and never left.<sup>4</sup> This study will ascribe to the view proffered by Gameson that, ultimately, the site of production for the Exeter Book is unknown and perhaps

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<sup>1</sup> More on the history of the book, as well as scholarly debate about what we can ascertain will follow on page 27.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the inventory of the library at Exeter taken near the end Leofric's episcopacy or perhaps just after his death. There is room to question whether the "mycel bok in Englisc" mentioned in the inventory is in fact the Exeter Book, though most scholarly work accepts this.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Gameson, "The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry." *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996): 143. This article grew from an earlier review by Gameson of Patrick Conner's *Anglo-Saxon Exeter : a tenth-century cultural history* .

<sup>4</sup> Patrick Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter : a tenth-century cultural history*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993. 48-94.



unknowable. This view encourages us to consider the Christ poems in the broader context of Anglo-Saxon England as a whole. The content and themes of the Exeter Book would have touched on issues familiar to any audience in Anglo-Saxon England: fear of invasion, concerns about treatment if taken prisoner, the consequences of disobedience, and the threat of exile.

The Exeter Book, and the *Christ* poems in particular, contains examples of lawful and unlawful behavior, and encourages subjects to loyalty and obedience. Such texts would be valuable to any regime wanting to remain in power, even one so seemingly in command as Edgar's. Pauline Stafford states that Edgar faced as many challenges to his rule, such as Danish raids and attempts to dethrone him by his brother's supporters, as opportunities and she characterizes him as having the strength of will to "defer" whatever troubles his own actions engendered.<sup>5</sup> This ability to defer troubles created issues of control for his successor, Æthelred. Æthelred was faced with a number of challenges that Edgar managed to stave off for the most part, not the least of which were Danish raids and invasions. Ann Williams asserts that Æthelred's seemingly paranoid political moves become at least more understandable given the maneuverings of contemporary nobles.<sup>6</sup> The power of the kings of Anglo-Saxon England hinged in large part on the cooperation and support of powerful local rulers who pledged political loyalty to a given individual. A quick survey of political events during the tenth century demonstrates how easily that loyalty was given or taken away.

The term "Anglo-Saxon England," conjures images of a geo-political entity occupying the island of England up to 1066 and under the rule of a King of England. This term suggests a far more unified political entity than actually existed. Despite the potentially fickle nature of political support, however, there were increasing efforts, particularly in the later tenth century and early eleventh, to centralize power in one king by means of both secular and ecclesiastical forces. H. R. Loyn states, "steady progress toward centralization of government was made during the tenth century."<sup>7</sup> Such a move would stabilize the social order as a whole, and increase the power of those able to stay at the top of that order.

The Church had always been very assiduous in cultivating relationships with the ruling elites – doing so only made sense in terms of survivability and expansion. The ruling elites also

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<sup>5</sup> Pauline Stafford, *Unification and Conquest : A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*. (New York : E. Arnold, 1989), 50

<sup>6</sup> Ann Williams, *Aethelred the Unready: The Ill-Counselled King*. (London: Hambledon and London, 2003).

<sup>7</sup>H. R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500-1087*, (London: Edward Arnold, 1984), 81.

saw potential in a relationship with the Church, providing at the very least an easy means of legitimizing their role in positions of power. Lords, both spiritual and secular, were therefore concerned about religious loyalties. Wulfstan, in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, warned about the dangers involved in dealing with and living near the non-Christian Danes precisely because cultural similarities with Anglo-Saxons might induce God-fearing Christians to renounce their faith and revert to paganism.<sup>8</sup> This was a distinct threat to the existing social order.

In addition to sermons, the Church produced other texts, including the lives of saints, poems, and books collecting them. These texts, whatever their “original” intention, served as propaganda to bolster efforts to preserve that social order. Because the Church in England experienced remarkable growth during the tenth century, due to the Benedictine reforms initiated in part by Dunstan, it found itself in a position to exert political influence.<sup>9</sup> These were the conditions under which the *Christ* poems were collected to make up the contents of the Exeter Book – increasing influence, especially in the realm of law, by the Church; a move toward increased centralized political power in the office of the king; and the increasing threat of external invasion by a force hostile to both Church and the existing power structure. The poems reflect ideals of behavior for a variety of social strata – how the rulers should act, and most stringently how the ruled should act. These ideals were equally applicable to the ecclesiastical sphere as to the secular. There has been little study with regard to the audience of the *Christ* poems, much less on how that audience may have used the texts. By examining the potential consumption of these texts this study attempts to better understand the relationship between ruler and ruled in Anglo-Saxon England.

Most recent scholarship holds that the *Christ* poems, and the *Advent Lyrics* in particular, would have been too esoteric for general consumption by contemporary audiences. It has been argued that the source material for the antiphons upon which the *Lyrics* are based, as well as the supplementary material employed in expanding the Latin into Old English, would have been too arcane for people even fairly well educated in biblical matters to fully appreciate.<sup>10</sup> Hill states that the poems of the *Lyrics* are “characteristically elliptical and dense” and that the poems “were written for an audience which shared the biblical and patristic learning of the poet; without this

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<sup>8</sup> Please see below, particularly pages 83-5.

<sup>9</sup> Dunstan became the Archbishop of Canterbury due to the political support of Edgar.

<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the most visible proponents of this argument are Hill and Clayton. Hill proposes this idea in his article “Literary History and Old English Poetry: The Case of Christ I, II, and III” and Clayton echoes these sentiments in her book *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*.

back ground they would simply seem opaque and confusing.”<sup>11</sup> Further, he argues that while people who “entered or even simply participated” in Anglo-Saxon “monastic and canonical life” would have had “ample opportunity to acquire the kind of learning which would enable them to understand and appreciate” the *Lyrics*, one must question “how widely this kind of poetry could have been read and appreciated.”<sup>12</sup> Clayton states that, despite the author’s “deep familiarity with liturgical sources,” there is no evidence to support the notion that vernacular material was used in the liturgy. “It is hard to imagine such a meditative, allusive poem being intended for a wider audience than a religious community.”<sup>13</sup> Further, Clayton argues that, because “we have no evidence for the use of the vernacular in reading aloud in any formal context in the monasteries”, the *Lyrics* would have been read privately.<sup>14</sup>

Because of the dearth of evidence on how these poems may have been read, this project will maintain a conservative approach and adopt the view that readings of the poems, and the *Lyrics* in particular, would have been limited to relatively small groups. These groups probably would have consisted of people who were literate enough themselves to read the poems or who had the opportunity to hear someone read the poems aloud. This view points to an audience of wealthy secular people and to the clergy: in other words, those who were potentially better educated. Given extant historical evidence, and bearing in mind the relative paucity of records involving less wealthy members of society, the wealthier members of society seem to have been the most active in the legal system. This is not to say that less wealthy individuals or those who were not landowners would have had no knowledge of legal tradition or of the functioning of the legal system or would have been excluded from it, but wealthy secular people would have been better situated to take advantage of the legal system and potentially would have been more familiar with its intricacies.

In terms of Anglo-Saxon law, there has been a great deal of debate about the nature of the law codes and the impact they may have had on Anglo-Saxon society. Anglo-Saxon charters are particularly frustrating to legal scholars because there seems to be no standard form. In fact, a major portion of the debate surrounding charters is how to define them. Further, there are no

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Hill, "Literary History and Old English Poetry: The Case of Christ I, II, and III." *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture*. Edited by Paul E. Szarmach and V. D. Oggins. Kalamazoo, 1986. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Hill, "Literary History," 13.

<sup>13</sup> Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England. Eds. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge. Cambridge, 1990. 181.

<sup>14</sup> Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 181.

instances of charters citing a particular law, much less a code of laws. Deriving an understanding of Anglo-Saxon legal procedure therefore becomes an exercise in making out the shapes of objects in the dark. Patrick Wormald does a wonderful job describing what we know about Anglo-Saxon legal procedure in *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, adding insights gleaned from sources not previously considered strictly legal in nature and outlining the wealth of scholarly work done up to the publication of his volume.<sup>15</sup> Further his “Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits” is also valuable, building as it does upon the work of Sawyer and seeking to apply a more systematic set of standards for outlining and defining charters and lawsuits. The work of Paul Hyams provides a useful counterpoint to Wormald, who promotes the argument proffered by James Campbell and H. R. Loyn that Anglo-Saxon government was making strides toward centralization prior to the invasion of 1066.<sup>16</sup>

Other resources useful in developing an understanding of the larger system of governance of Anglo-Saxon England include Loyn’s *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500-1087*, Pauline Stafford’s *Unification and Conquest : A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries*, and Ann William’s *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500-1066*.<sup>17</sup> In terms of transcriptions of the law codes themselves, the standard is Libermann’s *Gesetze die Angelsachsen*. Attenborough and A. J. Robertson provide copies of the law codes, Attenborough of the earliest kings up to Alfred and Edward. Robertson covers the laws of Æthelstan to Cnut. Robertson’s transcription and translation of the Anglo-Saxon charters is also immensely valuable.

## **The Christ Poems**

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<sup>15</sup> Patrick Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999).

<sup>16</sup> Paul Hyams, “Feud and the State in Late Anglo-Saxon England.” *The Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (Jan., 2001), 1-43. Hyams states that “I simply mean that they tend to make more of the sparse and difficult evidence for kingship and royal government than I feel able to. My own preference leans toward skeptical caution.” 3.

<sup>17</sup> H. R. Loyn, *The Governance of Anglo-Saxon England, 500-1087* ( London: Edward Arnold, 1984); Pauline Stafford *Unification and Conquest : A Political and Social History of England in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries* (London; New York : E. Arnold, 1989); Ann William’s *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500-1066* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1999).

The *Christ* poems themselves comprise roughly 1664 lines. Scholars have struggled with the question of whether or not the three poems were a single unit.<sup>18</sup> Though the point was contested, prevailing opinion through the nineteenth century was that the poems were a single unit written by a poet named Cynewulf, especially after Thorpe's 1842 edition of the Exeter Book. Therefore, when discussed as a work separate from the Exeter Book, the three poems were known as the *Christ* of Cynewulf. After it became generally accepted that the *Christ* poems were three smaller rather than one large poem, toward the middle of the twentieth century, scholars retained the name *Christ*, though with added roman numerals for clarity: hence, *Christ I*, *Christ II*, and *Christ III*.

While the poems did refer to three distinct episodes in Christ's life, there has remained some scholarly dissatisfaction with the nondescript *Christ* appellations, and through the course of the twentieth century, new editorial titles were developed based on the subject matter of each poem. *Christ I* became known as the *Advent Lyrics* due to the composite sections being based on antiphons from the liturgical season of Advent. *Christ II* became known as the *Ascension*, based as it is on the scenes in the Gospel of Matthew of Christ's ascending into heaven. *Christ III* was renamed *Judgment* because it focused on the end of the world and Christ's coming again to judge the living and the dead.

These newer editorial titles are not without limitations of their own. Some dissatisfaction has been voiced about the title the *Advent Lyrics* because the constituent poems, if lyrical, are not precisely "lyrics" and they also stray from the material covered in the antiphons upon which they are based.<sup>19</sup> *Ascension*, for instance, deals with more than just Christ's ascending into heaven. It describes Christ's triumphant entry into heaven, as well as the glories of heaven. The poem also reminds readers of the gifts which God bestowed on humans, and enjoins its audience to be fearful of the day of judgment. *Judgment* covers more than just the scenes of Christ in the act of judging the living and the dead, but also describes the scouring of the planet by fire and the gathering of souls before the seat of judgment. This dissertation will refer to the various poems as the *Advent Lyrics*, *Judgment* and *Ascension*, whatever their limitations, as a matter of convenience and clarity.

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<sup>18</sup> Please see below, page 22.

<sup>19</sup> Jackson J. Campbell, "Structural Patterns in the Old English Advent Lyrics," *ELH* 23 (1956).

## **The Advent Lyrics**

The *Advent Lyrics* is so called because it is a collection of twelve shorter poems, similar in poetic form to lyrics. The beginning of the first extant lyric is missing, and numbering begins with the first extant line. Some scholars suggest that more, perhaps as many as three, lyrics existed, based on codicological evidence from the gatherings of the book.<sup>20</sup> 439 lines now remain.

Each of the lyrics is based, somewhat loosely, on at least one antiphon, which is a type of liturgical petition. Campbell described the form of the antiphon as being “an invocation or address, a reference to an item of Christian doctrine, and a petition.”<sup>21</sup> Antiphons are divided into two groups: Great Antiphons and Monastic Antiphons. The seven Great Antiphons, believed to be the first composed, are attributed to Gregory the Great. All other antiphons are considered Monastic Antiphons. Both groups were composed in Latin and begin with the vocative O; hence, the groups are sometimes called the Great O’s or Monastic O’s. Four of the *Advent Lyrics*, lyrics 1, 2, 5, 6, are based on Great Antiphons.

The poet of the *Advent Lyrics* retained the vocative; each lyric begins with “Eala,” roughly the Anglo-Saxon equivalent of “O.” For the most part, the poet also followed, more or less, the antiphonal form.<sup>22</sup> In all cases, the poet expanded on his source antiphons, elaborating and embellishing on the material provided. The antiphons are very short, running three to five lines long. In contrast, the lyrics range from 17 lines to as many as 73. Lyric Six illustrates this expansion. The source antiphon is relatively short, addressing Christ as “Emmanuel” and calling him “our king and lawgiver.” The petition is equally succinct: “O Lord, our God, come to save us.” In the Lyric, the poet inserts a reference to Melchisedech, an Old Testament prophet. He then expands the lyric to incorporate a scene of the patriarchs in hell awaiting Christ to come and take them to heaven. The poet uses the patriarchs to voice the petition of the lyric.<sup>23</sup> Another obvious change the poet made is the form of Lyric Seven. In the case of Lyric Seven, the source antiphon questions why Joseph believes his fears. The poet incorporated the antiphon’s question into his Lyric and provided an answer to it, building upon the scant Biblical evidence as well as

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<sup>20</sup> For instance see Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter*, 98-9, and Muir *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*, 8.

<sup>21</sup> Campbell, “Structural Patterns in the Old English Advent Lyrics,” 241.

<sup>22</sup> Campbell, “Structural Patterns in the Old English Advent Lyrics,” 241

<sup>23</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 208-9.

altering apocryphal material, to the point that the Lyric depicts an dialogue between Mary and Joseph.

**A Summary of the Lyrics.** Each entry below will provide a brief summary of the lyric, the source antiphon and a translation, the first line in Old English, as well as the number of lines the lyric comprises. For the various source antiphons, the Latin text and translation provided by Muir has been used. Where applicable, as when they differ substantially, Bradley's Latin translation is also provided. Muir's suggestions follow in line with one of the maincritical interpretations on sources, as proposed by Burlin. As a point of comparison, Bradley's suggestions for source antiphons, which echo Cook, are included when different than those provided by Muir. The Old English text comes from Muir's edition, and the translation from Bradley.

The first lyric begins somewhere toward the middle of the original, and now comprises 17 lines. The lyric begins with the final word of a line: "... cyninge. Ðu eart se weallstan þe ða wyrhtan iu wiðwurpon to weorce."<sup>24</sup> It uses architectural language to describe Christ. First, he is described as the cornerstone of the new temple, then as the chief architect. The source antiphon is "O Rex gentium et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis qui facis utraque unum: veni et salva hominem quem de limo formasti."<sup>25</sup>

Lyric Two depicts Christ as a judge and just king who is the keeper of the way to heaven or hell. It is based on the antiphon "O clavis David, et sceptrum domus Israel, qui aperis et nemo claudit; claudis et nemo aperit: veni et educ vincitum de domo carceris, sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis."<sup>26</sup> The first line reads: "Eala þu reccend ond þu riht cyning se þe locan healdeð, lif ontyneð, eadgu[m] upwegas, oþrum forwyrneð wlitigan wilsipes, gif his weorc ne deag."<sup>27</sup> The lyric is 32 lines long, running from line 18-49.

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<sup>24</sup> "... to the King. You are the wall-stone which the builders once rejected from the building."

<sup>25</sup> "O King of the people and their heart's desire; O Cornerstone, who make both things one: come and save humanity whom you have fashioned from clay." Bradley translates this as "O King of the nations and object of their longing and the cornerstone which makes both parts one: come and save man, whom you formed out of clay." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 205.

<sup>26</sup> "O key of David and Sceptre of the House of Israel; you who open and no one closes; who opens and no one closes: come and lead the captive sitting in darkness and the shadow of death from his prison-house."

<sup>27</sup> "O Judge and just King, you who guard the locks and lay open life and the blessed ways on high, and to another deny the lovely long-ed for road if his attainment does not suffice." Bradley suggests "O Jerusalem, city of the most exalted God: raise your eyes round about and see your Lord, for now he is coming to loose you from chains." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206.

The third lyric is based on the antiphon “O Hierusalem”: “O Hierusalem, civitas Dei summi: leva in circuitu oculos tuos, et vide Dominum tuum, quia iam veniet solvere te a vinculis.”<sup>28</sup> The first line is “Eala sibbe gesihð, sancta Hierusalem, cynestohla cyst, Cristes burglond, engla eþelstol, ond þa ane in þe saule soðfæstra simle gerestað, wuldrum hremge.”<sup>29</sup> The lyric addresses the city of Jerusalem, in expectation of the coming birth of Christ. It implicitly addresses Mary, drawing comparisons between the city and her pregnancy with Christ. The lyric is 21 lines long, from line 50 to 70.

Lyric Four begins at line 71 and continues to line 103, a total of 33 lines. It opens with “Eala wifa wynn geond wuldres þrym, fæmne feolicast ofer ealne foldan sceat þæs þe æfre sundbuend secgan hyrdon, arece us þæt geryne þæt þe roderum cwom, hu þu eacnunge æfre onfenge bearnes þurh gebyrde ond þone gebedscipe æfter monwisan mod ne cuðes.”<sup>30</sup> The lyric takes the form of a question and answer, in which the sons and daughters of Salem ask Mary about the mystery of the conception of Christ and her status as a virgin. Mary responds, at line 33, that through Christ’s birth the “sin of Eve” has been removed from women, and women are glorified. The source antiphon is “O Virgo virginum, quomodo fiet istud, quia nec primam similem visa es nec habere sequentem? Filiae Hierusalem, quid me admiramini? Divinum est mysterium hoc quod cernitis.”<sup>31</sup>

“O Oriens, splendor lucis aeternae et sol justitiae: veni et illumina sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis”<sup>32</sup> is the source antiphon for Lyric Five. The first line is “Eala earendel, engla beorhtast, ofer middangeard monnum sended, on soðfæsta sunnan leoma, torht ofer tunglas, þu

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<sup>28</sup> “O Jerusalem, city of God most High: raise up your eyes to heaven and behold your Lord, who comes now to release you from your shackles.”

<sup>29</sup> “O vision of peace, holy Jerusalem, unparagoned among royal thrones, city and realm of Christ, the angel’s patrimonial seat: the souls of those steadfast in truth, and they alone, shall rest in you for ever, gloriously jubilant.”

<sup>30</sup> “O delight among women throughout the glory of heaven, noblest virgin across the whole face of the earth of whom the sea-encircled world’s inhabitants ever heard tell of: expound to us the mystery which came to you from the heavens, how you ever conceived your pregnancy in the bearing of a child and did not know cohabitation according to mortal mind.”

<sup>31</sup> “O Virgin of virgins, how shall this come about? For one like you has never been seen before, nor will there be a successor. O daughters of Jerusalem, why are you amazed by my situation? The mystery which you perceive is divine in nature.” Bradley renders this as “O Virgin of virgins, how shall this be done? for you are seen to have no like, neither before nor after. Daughters of Jerusalem, why do you wonder at me? This is a divine mystery which you behold.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 207.

<sup>32</sup> “O Morning Star, Splendor of eternal Light and Sun of Justice: come and shine upon humanity sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.” Bradley translates this antiphon as “O Dayspring, Refulgence of eternal light and Sun of righteousness: come and illumine those who dwell in darkness and in the shadow of death.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 208.



tida gehwane of sylfum þe symle inlihtes.”<sup>33</sup> This lyric compares Christ to the Morningstar, which brings light and hope to the world. The lyric begins at line 104, and runs 26 lines.

Lyric Six finds its source in the Great Antiphon “O Emmanuel, Rex et Legifer noster, exspectatio gentium et salvator earum: veni ad salvandum nos, Dominus Deus noster.”<sup>34</sup> It runs for 34 lines, beginning at line 130. The lyric addresses Christ as the “bringer of law” and has the patriarchs, born before the birth of Christ and, though unable to be Christians, are yet worthy of salvation, encouraging Christ to have mercy and rescue them from hell. The lyric begins “Eala gæsta god, hu þu gleawlice mid noman ryhte nemned wære Emmanuhel, swa hit engel gecwæð ærest on Ebresc.”<sup>35</sup>

Lyric Seven has been a source of great intrigue for scholars due to its interesting form and, through most of the twentieth century, its apparent lack of a source in a liturgical antiphon. The form of the lyric is a dialogue between Joseph and Mary, as he confronts her about her pregnancy and she responds, assuring him of the holy nature of her condition. Because of this, there has been speculation that this lyric represents the first appearance of the dramatic form in English.<sup>36</sup> There has been difficulty in ascribing speeches, and in some cases delineating where one speech ends and another begins. The lyric gives the final word to Mary. The lyric comprises lines 164 through 213, a total of 50 lines. The source antiphon is “O Joseph, quomodo credidisti quod antea expavisti? Quid enim? In ea natum est de Spiritu Sancto quem Gabrihel annuncians Christum esse venturum.”<sup>37</sup> The lyric opens with the line, “Eala Ioseph min, Iacobes bearn, mæg Dauides, mæran cyninges, nu þu freode scealt fæste gedælan, alætan lufan mine.”<sup>38</sup>

Lyric Eight describes Christ as a victorious, peace-loving king and a judge, and asks him to come to his people, who are “weary exiles” beset upon by the devil, as sheep by wolves. The lyric also praises God for creation, comparing God to a builder without peer. The source

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<sup>33</sup> “O Dayspring, brightest of angels sent to men upon middle-earth, and by the sun’s righteous radiance, of a brilliance exceeding the stars; you by your own self continually illumine every hour.”

<sup>34</sup> “O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, Expectation of the peoples of the earth and their Saviour: O Lord, our God, come to save us.”

<sup>35</sup> “O God of spirits, how discerningly you were rightly named by the name Emmanuel, as the angel first pronounced it in Hebrew.”

<sup>36</sup> Cook, *The Crist of Cynewulf*

<sup>37</sup> “O Joseph, why did you believe what before you feared? Why indeed? The One whom Gabriel announced would be coming, Christ, is begotten in her by the Holy Spirit.” Bradley renders this “O Joseph, why did you believe what before you feared? Why indeed? The One whom Gabriel announced would be the coming Christ is begotten in her by the Holy Spirit.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 209.

<sup>38</sup> “O my Joseph, Jacob’s son, kinsman of David the renowned king, must you now feel bound to put quite asunder my love, to disown my devotion?”

antiphon for this lyric is “O Rex pacifice, tu ante saecula nate, per auream egredere portam: redemptos tuos visita et eos illuc revoca unde ruerunt per culpam.”<sup>39</sup> The lyric begins at line 214 and continues for 61 lines. “Eala þu soða ond þu sibsuma ealra cyninga cyning, Crist ælmihtig, hu þu ær wære eallum geworden worulde þrymmum mid þinne wuldorfæder cild acenned þurh his cræft ond meaht.”<sup>40</sup>

“O mundi Domina, regio ex semine orta, ex tuo iam Christus processit alvo, tanquam sponsus de thalamo; hic iacet in praeseptio qui sidera regit”<sup>41</sup> provides the antiphonal source of Lyric Nine. The lyric, 73 lines running from line 275 to line 347, is a petition to Mary, describing her as the mother and bride of God, and a miracle because of her being kept a virgin. The petition asks Mary to lead supplicants to salvation, so that they may look upon her with Christ at her breast. “Eala þu mæra middangeardges seo clæneste cwen ofer eorþan þara [þ]e gewurde to widan feore, hu þec mid ryhte ealle reordberend hatað ond secgað, hæleð geond foldan, bliþe mode, þæt þu bryd sie þæs selestan swegles bryttan.”<sup>42</sup>

The tenth lyric is 30 lines long, running from line 348 to 377. It is based on the antiphon “O cœlorum Domine, qui cum Patre sempiternus, es una cum Sancto Spiritu, audi nos famulos: veni ad salvandum nos; iam noli tardare.”<sup>43</sup> The lyric acknowledges the sinful nature of men and petitions Christ to come and save them. “Eala þu halga heofona dryhten, þu mid fæder þinne gefyrn wære efenwesende in þam æpelan ham.”<sup>44</sup>

Lyric Eleven has proven somewhat nettlesome in that, while the source antiphons for the other lyrics are generally accepted, there still seems to be some debate over the source antiphon for this lyric. The ending section of the lyric, from line 403 and continuing to the end of the lyric at line 415, unquestionably draws on the Sanctus as a source. The text for the Sanctus is “Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus dominus deus sabaoth; pleni sunt cœli terrae gloria tuae; hoasnna in

<sup>39</sup> “O King of Peace, you who were born before the ages, come forth through the golden gate: visit those you have redeemed, and summon them back to the place from which they rushed headlong through sin.”

<sup>40</sup> “O true and peace-loving King of all kings, almighty Christ: before all the world’s multitudes you were in being with your heavenly Father, begotten as his Son through his power and his might.”

<sup>41</sup> “O Lady of the universe, sprung from royal seed: Christ has now come forth from your womb like the groom from the bridal chamber; He lies in a manger who also rules the stars.” Bradleys offers this: “O Lady of the world, born from royal seed, from your womb Christ has now come forth like a bridegroom from the bedchamber; here in the manger lies he who also has dominion over the stars.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 212.

<sup>42</sup> “O splendor of the world, the purest woman on earth of those that have ever been: how rightly all people possessed of speech, men throughout the earth, joyful in mood, name you and say that you are the bride of the most excellent Lord of heaven.”

<sup>43</sup> “O Lord of the heavens, you who are eternal with the Father and one with the Holy Spirit, hear your servants: come and save us now; do not delay.”

<sup>44</sup> “O holy Lord of the heavens, you were of old in equal being with your Father in the noble home.”

excelsis. Benedictus qui venit in nomine domini. Hosanna in excelsis.”<sup>45</sup> The beginning section, from line 378 to line 402, has drawn differing suggestions. In his edition, Muir, following Burlin, offers the antiphon “Laudemus Dominum quem laudant angeli, quem Cherubim et Seraphim: Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus proclamant.”<sup>46</sup> Bradley, in his translation, uses Cook’s suggestion, an antiphon for Trinity Sunday: “O beata et benedicta et gloriosa Trinitas, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus. Te jure laudant, te adorant, te glorificant omnes creaturae tuae, o beata Trinitas.”<sup>47</sup> The lyric praises the Trinity and states that by doing so, humans are able to become closer to God, much like the angels who look on God and sing praises to him ceaselessly. “Eala seo wlitige, weorðmynda full, heah ond halig, heofoncund þrynes, brade geblissad geond brytenwongas þa mid ryhte sculon reordberende earne eorðware ealle mægene hergan healice, nu us hælend god wærfæst onwrah þæt we hine witan moton.”<sup>48</sup>

The source antiphon for the final lyric is “O admirabile commercium, Creator generis humani animatum corpus sumens, de virgine nasci dignatus est, et procedens homo sine semine, largitus est nobis suam deitatem.”<sup>49</sup> It begins at line 416 and runs through line 439. The first line is “Eala hwæt, þæt is wrætlic wrixl in wera life, þætte moncynnes milde scyppend onfeng æt fæmnan flæsc unwemme, ond sio weres friga wiht ne cuþe, ne þurh sæd ne cwom sigores agend monnes ofer moldan.”<sup>50</sup> The lyric reiterates the wonder over Mary’s miraculous conception and Christ’s generosity through grace toward humans. The lyric encourages the audience to be “eager for good repute” and to “faithfully praise him in words and deeds.”

## **The Ascension**

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<sup>45</sup> “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.”

<sup>46</sup> “Let us praise the Lord, whom the angels praise, whom the Cherubim and Seraphim proclaim ‘Holy, holy, holy.’”

<sup>47</sup> “O beatific and blessed and glorious Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit; rightly all your creatures praise you, adore you, glorify you, O beatific Trinity.”

<sup>48</sup> “O beautiful, celestial Trinity, replete with glories, exalted and holy, blessed abroad throughout the spacious plains, whom people possessed of speech, miserable earth-dwellers, must by right praise highly with all their might, now that God, true to his covenant, has revealed to us the Saviour, so that we may know him.”

<sup>49</sup> “O wonderful exchange: the Creator of the human race, assuming a living body, deigned to be born from a Virgin; and, becoming a man without seed, bestowed on us His divinity.” Bradley translates the antiphon as “O wondrous exchange: the Creator of mankind, assuming an animate body, has deigned to be born of a virgin and, without seed, becoming man has bestowed upon us his divinity.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 215.

<sup>50</sup> “O behold, this is a wondrous exchange in the way of the life of men, that mankind’s merciful Creator has received from a virgin immaculate flesh, and she has known nothing of a man’s love nor did the transcendent Lord come by means of the seed of any man on earth.”

The *Ascension* depicts Christ's Ascension into heaven at Pentecost. *Ascension* is a single poem of 427 lines, beginning at line 440 and running through 866. The poem is perhaps best known because it is one of the four "signed" poems of Cynewulf.<sup>51</sup> The name appears in runes toward the end of the poem, and is also remarkable in that it confesses the poet's fear of facing judgment. Whether the name refers to the actual poet or to an individual who inspired the style in which it was written is a matter of some debate. Fulk, for instance, mentions that some scholars have raised the possibility of the name being added into an existing poem written by another person. All that is known is the name itself, which is a fairly common one. Attempts to date and place the poem have sometimes focused on the name, and the runes used to spell it.<sup>52</sup>

The poem begins with Christ calling the disciples to Bethany, and relates their quick response to his call. The poem describes Christ and his disciples as a king and his thegns.<sup>53</sup> In fact, the disciples are called thegns at several points. At line 491, Christ ascends into heaven in triumph, met by the heavenly throng. Two angels stay behind, asking the disciples at line 510 why they linger looking so sad when Christ has given them a mission.

Before describing the scene of him entering into heaven, the poem lists some of the things that make Christ a glorious king, particularly the harrowing of hell, at line 558. After describing the joys of heaven, the poem shifts in tone at line 600, reminding the readers to be grateful to God for his creation, protection, and mercy. This section repeatedly describes God as a generous king who bestows gifts upon his followers. At line 664, the poet lists the gifts that God bestows on individuals, such as wisdom, musicality, writing, and the ability to recite the law. This section echoes a poem, *The Gifts of Men*, that appears later in the Exeter Book. At line 720, the section known as "The Leaps of Christ" begins, drawn from the sermon of Gregory I and expanded on by the poet.<sup>54</sup> According to the poem, Christ's first leap is into Mary's womb and the second is his birth. The third, fourth and fifth leaps are all related to the Crucifixion:

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<sup>51</sup> The appearance of Cynewulf's runic signature contributed to the confusion and debate surrounding whether the poem was actually several poems. Various scholars, such as Cook and Conybeare, used the signature as evidence of the unity of the three poems or as evidence for division, such as Philip believed, because of variation in style within the *Lyrics* and *Judgement* from other Cynewulfian works.

<sup>52</sup> R.D. Fulk, "Cynewulf: Canon Dialect and Date." In *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, Robert E. Bjork, ed. Garland, 1996, 3-21.

<sup>53</sup> Please see Peter Clemoes "Cynewulf's Image of the Ascension." In *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*. Ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes. Pages 293-304. Clemoes catalogs the various terms used to describe Christ and his disciples in *Christ II*.

<sup>54</sup> S. A. J Bradley, ed. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. 1982. Repr. London, 1998, 217.

Christ mounts the cross, enters the tomb and then goes to harrow hell, chaining Satan there forever. The sixth leap is Christ's ascension into heaven.

The poet follows this section with a smaller one in which the poet encourages the audience to imitate Christ by making leaps of their own. The poet enjoins the audience to "leap in the thoughts of our hearts from strength to strength and strive after glorious things, so that we may ascend by holy works to heaven."<sup>55</sup>

Cynewulf's runic signature begins at line 797, as part of a riddle. Runes not only acted as letters, but also had meanings attached to them. The runes appear in the poem as substitutes for words and together spell out "CYNWULF." The rune for "W" is *wynn* and represents *joy, pleasure or happiness*. Thus the text containing the *wynn* reads roughly "Fled will be the *pleasure* of earth's fineries."<sup>56</sup> Following the section with the runic signature, the poet draws the poem to a close with warnings about the impending Day of Judgment and a vivid passage comparing the travails of life to sailing on a storm-tossed sea, and describing God's grace as a pilot steering people to a safe haven.

Cook ascribes the main non-Biblical source of the poem to Gregory the Great's Ascension Day sermon and there is little contention about the papal sermon being a source. Chase, for instance, details the numerous connections in his article "God's presence through grace as the theme of Cynewulf's *Christ II* and the relationship of this theme to *Christ I* and *Christ II*."<sup>57</sup> Both pope Gregory and the poet begin by examining the biblical description, at Matthew 23.18-22, of the white robes worn by the angels at Christ's ascension. As Chase points out, the robes are indicative of the celebration in Heaven at Christ's Ascension.<sup>58</sup>

### **The Judgment**

*Christ III*, or the *Judgment*, focuses on the events of Christ's second coming and the end of the world. Like the *Ascension*, it is a single poem, comprised of 798 lines, beginning at line 867. The poem begins by describing the Day of Judgment as coming suddenly at midnight. People will gather at Mount Sion, and angels will appear at the four corners of the earth, blowing trumpets, at line 878. This shall raise the dead and they will make their way to Sion. The poet

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<sup>55</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. 225.

<sup>56</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 227.

<sup>57</sup> Colin Chase, "God's presence through grace as the theme of Cynewulf's *Christ II* and the relationship of this theme to *Christ I* and *Christ II*." *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974) 87-101.

<sup>58</sup> Chase, "The theme of *Christ II*," 87-8.

describes the coming of Christ and the effect his visage has on the obedient and the sinful. He is preceded by howling winds and then a storm of fire that will consume “eall ... woruldwidles wom.”<sup>59</sup>

After this destruction, Christ comes gloriously with his angels, his “halge herefedan.”<sup>60</sup> All humanity, the living and the dead, will take on bodies once again and stand to face judgment, as they are summoned by name. From line 1081, a long passage dealing with the terror of the sinful begins, describing their willful disobedience and how fearsome Christ looks to them. Christ appears as he did on the cross, bloody and beaten, and, according to the poet, the sinful realize the sacrifice that Christ made for them. This section also describes the scene at the Crucifixion, including the rending of the temple curtain as well as the tumult that the natural world felt at the death of Christ.

At 1199, the poet describes how the souls are divided, obedient on the right, sinful on the left, and then proceeds to describe three distinctions for each. The saved will have three joys: they will shine from within, know for themselves that they will be allowed into the presence of God, and will be able to watch the damned suffer in hell. Similarly, the damned will have three pains: they will see the torments of hell awaiting them, they will endure having their sins made known, and lastly, they will be able to watch the saved in their bliss in heaven.

At line 1344, Christ addresses the saved and welcomes them to heaven. In the poem this runs for some 18 lines. By contrast, Christ’s address to the sinners is somewhat longer: 144 lines. Christ’s address to each group is an elaboration on the scene described in the gospel of Matthew, in which Christ either commends or condemns the people for either feeding, clothing, or visiting him in prison, or not. The poet expands this theme for the damned, linking sin to physical attacks on Christ. Christ shows them the wounds in his hands and feet and, at lines 1487-8b, asks the damned “For hwon ahenge pu mec hefgor on pinra honda rode ponne iu hongade?”<sup>61</sup> The poem, after enjoining the readers to look after their souls and stressing the importance of this, closes with each group going off to their reward, with the Holy Ghost locking up hell behind the damned. The final lines of the poem describe the joys of the elect and the glories of heaven.

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<sup>59</sup> “all the pollution of worldly filth.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 233.

<sup>60</sup> “holy warrior-bands.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 233.

<sup>61</sup> “Why do you more grievously hang me on the cross of your hands than I hung before?” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 243.

Sources for the third poem are mainly biblical, though wide-ranging, including sources from the sermons of Ephraim the Syrian and from the Irish and Celtic-Latin homiletic tradition. The most complete study of the sources of *Christ III* is Frederick Biggs's "The Sources of *Christ III*," published in 1982. Biggs's article offers a line-by-line reexamination of the sources present in the poem. He deemphasizes Cook's claim that "the anonymous Latin hymn cited by Bede ... is the 'principal' source for the poem."<sup>62</sup> Biggs takes advantage of the work done since Cook's edition, particularly with regard to the dating of a previously rejected source, the writing of Ephraim the Syrian.<sup>63</sup> He also encourages further work into "Celtic-Latin and Irish works."<sup>64</sup> Thomas N. Hall pursues this point in his study "Medieval Traditions about the Site of Judgment."<sup>65</sup> In it, Hall links *Christ III* with Irish sources through, among other things, the naming of the site of Judgment as Mount Sion.

### **Christ I, II, and III in Their Scholarly Context**

#### **Editions of the Poems**

The Christ poems are the first three poems in the manuscript known as the Exeter Book, Exeter Library MS 3501. Although they are now beginning to gain a wider audience due to their inclusion in anthologies, the *Christ* poems remain relatively obscure. Irving lamented that students are more likely to be familiar with the *Dream of the Rood* than with the *Advent Lyrics*.<sup>66</sup> This was mainly because, until the middle of the twentieth century, the only place to find all three poems was either in one of four editions of the Exeter Book as a whole or in one of the collection of the three poems. Further, these were usually untranslated from the Old English, which hampered their accessibility to a general audience. Only two editions, the first by Whitman in 1900 and the second by Bradley in 1982, provided translations for all three poems in one collection.

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<sup>62</sup> Frederick M. Biggs, "The Sources of Christ III" *OEN* (A Revision of Cook's Notes to his edition of "Christ"), *Subsidia* 12 (1986) 1.

<sup>63</sup> Biggs, "The Sources of Christ III," 2-3. Biggs cites Bestul as stating that " 'English manuscript evidence for Ephraim is entirely eleventh century and later. Biggs references work by Patrick Sims-Williams that suggests that Ephraim was known as Ephraim Latinus in works in Anglo-Saxon England as early as the seventh century.

<sup>64</sup> Biggs, "The Sources of Christ III," 4.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas N. Hall, "Medieval Traditions about the Site of Judgment." *Essays in Medieval Studies* 10 (1993): 79-97.

<sup>66</sup> Irving, Edward B., Jr. "The Advent of Poetry: *Christ I*." *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996): 123-34. Irving made his complaint in 1993, and it still remains potent.

There are currently five editions of the Exeter Book as a complete work. The earliest was produced by Humphrey Wanley in 1705.<sup>67</sup> The next edition, by Benjamin Thorpe, appeared nearly 150 years later in 1842.<sup>68</sup> Another gap, of nearly one hundred years, separates Thorpe's edition from Max Förster's 1933 facsimile edition of *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*.<sup>69</sup> Krapp and Dobbie produced the most complete edition to that point in 1939, as volume three of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Record*. Due to its thoroughness, this edition still commands respect.<sup>70</sup> The most recent edition was produced by Bernard Muir in 1996 and revised in 2000. Muir's edition updates Krapp and Dobbie's, making use of technological advancements that arose in the intervening years.<sup>71</sup> Muir's edition appears in two volumes: the first a transcription of the Exeter Book, and the second containing textual notes and commentary. Muir's introduction is extremely valuable, in that he summarizes the scholarly work, as well as the various editions and their changes. Muir digitized his edition of the manuscript of the Exeter Book, and it was made available on DVD in 2006.

Several partial editions of the poems, whether collectively or individually, have been produced. John Conybeare included a transcription, in English and Latin, of several lines from what is now known as *Christ II* in his "Account of a Saxon MS. Preserved in the Cathedral Library at Exeter," published in 1814. Israel Gollancz published all three poems in his 1892 edition *Cynewulf's Christ: An Eighth Century English Epic*. Perhaps most influential is Albert S. Cook's seminal edition, *The Christ of Cynewulf: A Poem in Three Parts, The Advent, Ascension, and Last Judgment*, published in 1900 and reprinted in 1909. Cook accompanied his transcription of the poems with copious notes on the poems themselves and the Exeter manuscript in general. Although many of his conclusions about the authorship and dating of the poems have since been disproved, Cook's notes on the poems are still important, in part, because

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<sup>67</sup> Humphrey Wanley, *Antiquae litteraturae Septentrionalis liber Alter*, Oxford (1705).

<sup>68</sup> Thorpe, Benjamin, ed. *Codex Exoniensis. A Collection of Anglo-Saxon Poetry, from a Manuscript in the Library of the Dean and Chapter of Exeter, with an English Translation, Notes, and Indexes*. London: Society of Antiquaries of London, 1842.

<sup>69</sup> Max Förster, *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry*, ed. R. W. Chambers, Max Förster, and Robin Flower. London (1933).

<sup>70</sup> Krapp and Dobbie's edition of the Exeter Book is not without its quirks. Roy M. Liuzza, in "The Old English Christ and Guthlac Texts, Manuscripts, and Critics," *Review of English Studies*, 41.161 (1990) and Bernard J. Muir, ed. *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*. 2 ed. 2 vols. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000) discuss some of the discrepancies between the way Krapp and Dobbie subdivided the texts within the Exeter Book and the way the manuscript itself subdivides the texts.

<sup>71</sup> For instance, ultraviolet light and x-ray techniques for examining manuscripts. Bernard J. Muir, ed. *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*. 2 ed. 2 vols. (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), YY.



of the extensive work on sources he provides, especially with regard to *Christ II*. Cook not only gathered and presented what source work had been done to that time, but he also sifted through potential sources, suggesting several where none had been provided previously. A great deal, if not most, of later scholarly work on sources grows out of Cook's suggestions and has been carried out in relation to Cook, whether in pursuing further his ideas or in revising those he put forth. Many of his suggestions for sources for the *Advent Lyrics* still stand, and if not entirely disproved, several of his suggestions for *Ascension* provide current points of debate. Cook's edition was reprinted in 1964, with a preface written by John C. Pope.

Translations of the *Christ* poems by themselves began to appear in 1900, with Charles H. Whitman publishing a translation of all three poems, which bears the same name as Cook's 1900 untranslated edition of the poems.<sup>72</sup> Cook published a translation of part of *Christ III* in 1909.<sup>73</sup> The following year, in 1910, Charles W. Kennedy produced a translated edition of Cynewulf's poems.<sup>74</sup> Jackson J. Campbell prepared an edition of *Christ I*, called *The Advent Lyrics of the Exeter Book*, in 1959, which contained both text and translation. Robert Burlin also included a translation of the *Advent Lyrics* in his *The Old English Advent: A Typological Commentary* in 1968.<sup>75</sup> Both editions rely on Krapp and Dobbie's *ASPR* edition for the untranslated text of the poem. S. A. J. Bradley published a translation of the majority of the Exeter Book, including the *Christ* poems, in 1982 as part of his oft reprinted collection, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*.<sup>76</sup> Bradley bases his prose translations of the poems on the Krapp and Dobbie edition as well. Bradley chose to translate in prose as a means "of remaining recognizably close, if not rigidly so, to the syntax and vocabulary of the Old English texts."<sup>77</sup> Translations of portions of the poems, particularly individual lyrics of the *Advent Lyrics*, have been included most recently in *Old and Middle English: An Anthology*,<sup>78</sup> which contains a facing page translation of Seven and Eight. Seven is particularly captivating, due in no small part to the form of the lyric, which is a dialogue

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<sup>72</sup> Charles H. Whitman, *The Christ of Cynewulf: A Poem in Three Parts, The Advent, The Ascension, and The Last Judgment*. Boston (1900).

<sup>73</sup> Albert S. Cook, "Cynewulf, Christ 930-940." *Modern Language Notes* 24 (1909), 167.

<sup>74</sup> Charles W. Kennedy, *The Poems of Cynewulf, Translated into English Prose*. New York (1910).

<sup>75</sup> Robert B. Burlin, *The Old English Advent: A Typological Commentary*, New Haven, 1968.

<sup>76</sup> S. A. J. Bradley, ed. *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. 1982. Repr. London, 1998.

<sup>77</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, xxi.

<sup>78</sup> This anthology includes two of the *Lyrics*, VI and VII. Elaine M. Treharne, ed. *Old and Middle English: An Anthology*. Oxford, 2000, 36-41.

between Joseph and Mary, and furthermore the compact nature of the lyrics makes them attractive for inclusion in anthologies.

## Scholarship

Major areas of study have focused on the dates and places of production for the poems (or the manuscript that contains them), the sources of the poems, themes and motifs presented by the poems, or more “mechanical” areas such as structure, unity and the language of the poems. Several of these areas blend into others. For instance, studies of the language and wording of the poems have been used as a means of assessing dates of production. Similarly, language and structure have been used in attempts to determine where the poems (or even the Book itself) were produced. Language has also been used by some scholars to define structure, as have been themes and motifs. These areas of examination are not limited to a particular time period. Source study has been important throughout the scholarly examination of the poems. As specific literary theories have gained traction, the poems have been reexamined through those lenses, revisiting areas such as language, structure and theme. While attempts to date and place the production of the poems individually have fallen by the wayside, debate about the date and place of production of the Exeter Book itself has expanded.

Work from the early nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century concentrated mainly on the structure and unity of the poems, the language and wording, sources, and the runes found in what is now known as *Christ II*. Scholarly inquiry surrounding structure and unity focused mainly on whether or not there were three poems or one unified whole; if separate, how the poems should be divided; and, in terms of *Christ I*, assigning the speeches in what is now known as Lyric Seven. Studies involving language and wording examined questions dealing with the language used within the poems, such as parsing out areas of confusion in wording due to gaps in the text, such as missing words or lines from damage or potential scribal error, as well as dating the poems through linguistic means and locating where they might have been originally composed. This was perhaps the most lively area of debate, considering the amount of work required in determining the language of the scribe versus the language of possible intermediary manuscripts versus the language of the original text.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> R. D. Fulk provides an excellent overview in “Cynewulf: Canon Dialect and Date.” In *Cynewulf: Basic Readings*, Robert E. Bjork, ed. New York, 1996, 3-21.

Source work concentrated on identifying the major sources of the poems, with many believing that much of that work was completed by the time Cook published his edition of the *Christ* in 1900. Lyrics Seven and Eleven of the *Advent Lyrics* were the exceptions, in that there seemed to be no associations with known liturgical sources at that point. Scholars were able to suggest a liturgical source for Eleven, though the matter still seems to be somewhat unsettled.<sup>80</sup> Lyric Seven, in particular, was dismissed through most of the twentieth century as being a flight of fancy by the author of the *Lyrics*. Due to the difficulty of ascribing a source antiphon, as well as its decidedly different structure, Lyric Seven was taken to be something of an aberration and scholars have expressed disparate views on it. Cook in particular referred to Seven as the “Passus,” literally an “interlude,” “pause,” or “break” from the other lyrics. Coneybeare, according to Cook, stated flatly that the “subject, from its sacred and mysterious nature, is ill adapted to the purposes of poetry” and that “the general absence of taste and refinement which characterized the age in which the poem was originally written, may be fairly pleaded in defense of its author.”<sup>81</sup> Campbell deemed the lyric “good” and “competent” if something of an anomaly.<sup>82</sup>

The runic signature in what is now called *Christ II* attracted a great deal of attention. Runes representing the letters spelling “CYNWULF” appear between lines 797 and 815, and are integrated into the structure of the poem. These runes associate the poem with three other Anglo-Saxon poems, one of which appears later in the Exeter Book<sup>83</sup> and the other two in the Vercelli Book,<sup>84</sup> another collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry. The runes are incorporated in all four poems in similar ways, though with some variation in spelling. In *Elene* and in *Julianna*, the name is spelled “Cynewulf,” while in the *Fates of the Apostles*, as in *Christ II*, the name is spelled “Cynwulf.” The appearance of the name, as well as the variations in spelling, have given rise to scholarly debate dealing with conjecture about who Cynewulf may have been, whether the same person wrote all four poems, asking if there was a “Cynewulfian” style of poetry; dealing with

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<sup>80</sup> Cook suggested “Te jure laudant, Te adorant, Te glorificant,” as well as “O beata et benedicta et gloriosa Trinitas,” as antiphonal sources, for 11. Cook, *Crist*, 108. Burlin later challenged the suggestion of “O beata et benedicta”, stating that “this simple text is scarcely adequate to the Old English passage. Rather, Burlin suggested a composite source that blended the two. Robert B. Burlin, *The Old English Advent: A Typological Commentary*, New Haven, 1968, 163.

<sup>81</sup> Albert S. Cook, ed. *The Christ of Cynewulf: A Poem in Three Parts - the Advent, the Ascension, and the Last Judgment*. (1900). Freeport: Books for Libraries (1970) 96.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell, “Structural Patterns,” 252.

<sup>83</sup> The poem *Julianna*. Lines 703-8. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 319.

<sup>84</sup> The poems *Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene*. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 195-6, 157.

the significance of the variations in spelling as they may relate to dating the poems; or determining at which points in Cynewulf's career he may have written each poem. In terms of the *Christ* poems and scholarly work focusing on them, using the runes to date the poems was especially important regardless of whether a particular scholar prescribed to the notion that the poem was a unified whole or three separate poems.

The nature of scholarly examination of the poems shifted in nuance sometime around the middle of the twentieth century. This shift centers on the period when scholars accepted the argument that the poems were three and not one. Debate surrounding the unification theory, as it were, of the *Christ* poems was laid to rest at least as early as 1939-40, with the appearance of Krapp and Dobie's edition of the Exeter Book and Brother Augustine Philip's article "The Exeter Scribe and the Unity of the *Crist*."<sup>85</sup> Philip turns to the evidence in the manuscript to argue against both Cook's and Thorpe's assessment that the three poems were actually one poem. Philip concludes that "the MS itself affords not the slightest evidence" for combining the three into one.<sup>86</sup> Current scholarship accepts that there are three separate, though related poems, with *Christ I* subdivided into twelve separate "lyrics," each based on one or more liturgical antiphon. As Liuzza points out, Campbell stated in 1952 that the issue of whether or not there was one poem penned by Cynewulf or three was "dead."<sup>87</sup> Also from mid-century, at least for a time, scholarly work examining and identifying sources subsided, as many believed that source work as an avenue of study was for the most part finished. Attention shifted to examinations of theme and motif, and in particular to how these unified the poems.

Scholars have used studies of motifs and themes to address questions of thematic unity, not only of the individual poems internally, but also across the three poems. Individually, *Ascension* and *Judgment* were more easily seen as cohesive units, dealing as they do, primarily, with a more focused subject. The *Advent Lyrics* posed something of a challenge, being a collection of shorter poems. One of the major tasks was to simply define what they were. Scholars debated the structure of the lyrics, settling, somewhat unsatisfied, on the term "lyric" as a means to categorize them. Jackson J. Campbell, for instance, took up the issue, at least partly,

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<sup>85</sup> As noted by Roy M. Liuzza, in "The Old English Christ and Guthlac Texts, Manuscripts, and Critics," *Review of English Studies*, 41.161 (1990): 3.

<sup>86</sup> Philip, Brother Augustine. "The Exeter Scribe and the Unity of the *Crist*." *PMLA* 55.4 (1940): 909

<sup>87</sup> Roy M Liuzza, "The Old English Christ and Guthlac Texts, Manuscripts, and Critics." *The Review of English Studies* 41.161 (1990): 3.

in 1956.<sup>88</sup> In order to examine the structural patterns of the *Lyrics*, Campbell clarified the definition of “lyric” that governed his work and warned against using the term “lyric” in a more modern sense – a short, elegiac poem. Campbell broached a definition of “lyric” that rested more soundly on a musical basis. While he acknowledged that such a definition was not completely accurate, Campbell asserted that the *Advent Lyrics* resembled such hymn-like vernacular compositions as the metrical psalms and the “Kentish Hymn” in their “tone, subject matter, and song-like structure.”<sup>89</sup> In terms of the interrelatedness of the lyrics, Campbell saw connections through the poet’s use of “a state of exalted emotion” and Christian didacticism.

Greenfield also took up the question of the interrelatedness of the *Lyrics*. Similar to Campbell, Greenfield argued that the individual lyrics were related emotionally, through the poet’s use of the subjunctive mood. He stated that in rendering and expanding the antiphons in Anglo-Saxon, the poet dropped the imperative mood of the sources and replaced them with a combination of subjunctive and imperative that worked to heighten the emotional tension of the lyrics. For Greenfield, the poems reached an emotional climax in Lyric 6, signaled by the dropping of the subjunctive for the more forceful imperative in the petition, which is placed in the mouths of the patriarchs suffering in hell. Irving asserted that the use of Light and Darkness throughout the lyrics serves as a motif-driven means of unifying the *Lyrics*.<sup>90</sup> Other studies have focused on the *Lyrics* liturgical sources as a form of unity. Rankin examined the ordering of the *Lyrics* relative to the way the source antiphons were usually collected in breviaries. She concluded that the *Lyrics* were arranged to mirror the progression of the season of Advent into Christmas and just beyond.<sup>91</sup>

Thematic unity also has been a lens to examine the relationship of the poems to each other. This unity goes beyond the obvious connection of each poem having to do with some aspect of the life of Christ. Colin Chase suggested that the poems are bound by themes of God’s grace to humans. Chase compared *Christ II* to its predominant source, Gregory the Great’s Ascension Day homily. In doing so, he noted that the poet “substitutes his own theme of God’s

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<sup>88</sup> Jackson J. Campbell, “Structural Patterns in the Old English Advent Lyrics,” *ELH* 23 (1956):239-55.

<sup>89</sup> Campbell, “Structural Patterns in the Old English Advent Lyrics,” *ELH* 23 (1956):240.

<sup>90</sup> Edward B. Irving, Jr. “The Advent of Poetry: *Christ I*.” *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996): 123-34

<sup>91</sup> Susan Rankin, “The Liturgical Background of the Old English Advent Lyrics: a Reappraisal.” *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday*. Ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985. 317-40.

continuing presence with man since the ascension in his gifts of grace.”<sup>92</sup> This notion of gifts of grace, Chase believed, was present in all three of the poems. In *Christ I*, the emphasis was on the petitioning for the grace of God and understanding that God grants these petitions only through his grace. *Christ II* lists the gifts that God bestows on people through his grace, and reminds readers to be thankful for such grace as we receive. Finally *Christ III* illustrates what befalls those who do or do not adhere to God’s law. Those who obey are rewarded and therefore must show proper gratitude for the Lord’s protection. Because of the closeness in thematic unity, Chase proffered the idea that *Ascension* was written specifically as a means to bridge *Advent Lyrics* and *Judgment*.

Liuzza followed up Chase’s idea with further examination.<sup>93</sup> He was not convinced that *Ascension* was written specifically for the Exeter Book to serve as a thematic bridge between the *Lyrics* and *Judgment*. He felt it more likely that the compiler of the Exeter Book, recognizing the thematic relatedness of the poems, with each other as well as with the Guthlac texts, altered the beginnings of *Ascension* and *Guthlac* and the endings of *Advent Lyrics* and *Judgment* in order to fit the poems together more neatly and to drive this thematic unity home to readers.

Greenfield examined themes of exile in the poems, seeing this as a means of thematically unifying the three poems.<sup>94</sup> *Advent Lyrics* at several points describes the supplicants as exiles, separated from God. This operates on at least two levels, that of the world awaiting the birth of Christ and that of the world awaiting his return. The longing for spiritual reunion with God is taken up in *Ascension*, which begins with the apostles witnessing Christ ascending into heaven, and describes their sadness at being separated from him. *Judgment* closes the circle, illustrating the joys of faithful Christians as they are rewarded for their obedient service by joining Christ in heaven, while the sinful face the ultimate exile, being cast into hell.

While scholars have laid aside trying to date and place, in terms of composition, the individual poems, attempts have been made to establish the provenance of the Exeter Book itself. Most scholars now agree that the period in which the Exeter Book was compiled falls sometime

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<sup>92</sup> Colin Chase, “God’s presence through grace as the theme of Cynewulf’s *Christ II* and the relationship of this theme to *Christ I* and *Christ III*,” *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974):87.

<sup>93</sup> Liuzza, “The Old English Christ and Guthlac Texts, Manuscripts, and Critics.” *The Review of English Studies* 41.161 (1990): 1-11

<sup>94</sup> Stanley B. Greenfield, “The Petitions of the *Advent Lyrics* and the Question of Unity.” in *Hero and Exile: The Art of Old English Poetry*. Edited by George H. Brown. London, 1989. 209-14.

between roughly 940 and 970 A.D.<sup>95</sup> Where the Book was compiled, however is still open to debate. Two of the most notable attempts to establish the provenance of the Exeter Book, perhaps, have been put forth by Patrick Conner<sup>96</sup> on the one hand and Richard Gameson<sup>97</sup> on the other. Conner presents convincing arguments, following his in-depth paleographical and codicological examination of the manuscript, that the Exeter Book was produced at Exeter. Gameson presents an equally compelling argument, preferring Glastonbury or Canterbury over Exeter. Gameson argues that there is little evidence to suggest that if such a work as the Exeter Book had been produced at Exeter that it would have survived the devastating Viking raids on Exeter in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Both Conner and Gameson point to both the inventories of Exeter Cathedral as well as the document known as “The Gifts of Bishop Leofric to Exeter” to support their point. The “Gifts of Leofric” details what Bishop Leofric found at the Cathedral and what he added to it when he ascended to the episcopacy and moved the seat of his see to Exeter from Crediton.<sup>98</sup> This is also the inventory that mentions the “mycel englisc boc” taken to be the Exeter Book itself.

In terms of source study, especially for individual *Advent Lyrics*, much ground has been gained since the first half of the twentieth century. Hill suggested a liturgical antiphon found in a breviary by Alcuin as a possible source for Lyric Seven.<sup>99</sup> Further, scholarly work in the years since Cook, especially those of new discoveries, brought to light evidence that led to the reexamination of earlier suppositions. Biggs reexamined Cook’s notes on *Christ III* and published revisions and expansions to them in 1986.<sup>100</sup> The homiletic tradition has also proved fruitful as a source. Biggs and Hill have mined this area successfully and, more recently, Thomas N. Hall examined the naming of the scene of judgment in *Christ III* and his attribution of the location given in the poem to the Irish homiletic tradition.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> One of the appealing aspects of this period is that it encompasses much of the reign of Edgar, who ruled from 959 to 975, a time of relative peace in Anglo-Saxon England.

<sup>96</sup> Patrick W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: a tenth-century cultural history*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1993

<sup>97</sup> Richard Gameson, "The Origin of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry." *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996): 135-85

<sup>98</sup> A. J. Robertson, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Charters*. 1956. 2 ed. (Holmes Beach, FL: William W. Gaunt and Sons, 1986): 226-231.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas D. Hill, "A Liturgical Source for *Christ I* 164-213." *Medium Aevum* 46.1 (1970): 12-15

<sup>100</sup> Frederick M. Biggs, "The Sources of *Christ III*" *OEN* (A Revision of Cook’s Notes to his edition of “Christ”), *Old English Newsletter Subsidia* 12, 1986: 1-48.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas N. Hall, "Medieval Traditions about the Site of Judgement." *Essays in Medieval Studies* 10: 79-97

Perhaps the most important development, in terms of source study for *Christ III* was Biggs's reevaluation and revision of Cook's notes. Biggs states that the Bible remains the leading source for the poem, and also re-explores some of the suggestions made by earlier scholars. He discounts the belief, first proffered by Cook, that a Latin hymn cited by Bede is a major source for the poem, but acknowledges that similarities between the hymn and the poem are close enough that the hymn might have influenced the writing of the poem. Biggs also resurrects the idea, at one point dismissed, that the poet relied to some extent on the work of Ephraim the Syrian. Further, Biggs accentuates the similarities between the poem and Irish and Celtic-Latin sources and calls for further study in this area.<sup>102</sup>

Clayton examines the Marian cult in Anglo-Saxon England in her book, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, and provides a fine chapter exploring the role of Mary in Anglo-Saxon poetry, especially the *Advent Lyrics*.<sup>103</sup> The chapter explores many aspects of the lyrics focusing in some way on Mary, including a reexamination of source,<sup>104</sup> structure and theme. Clayton focuses particularly on Lyric Seven. As to structure, she reviews the various arguments as to who speaks when. She cites the "Doubting Mary" motif of the lyric, but points out the differences between the lyric and the tradition of the Latin Church. The "Doubting Mary" tradition stems mainly from the passages in the Gospel of Matthew that mention Joseph's plans to send Mary home to her family because she is pregnant. The Gospel of Matthew resolves the issue through an angel visiting Joseph in a dream and assuring him that Mary has not committed adultery and that her pregnancy is holy. Lyric Seven relies on apocryphal sources, particularly Latin sources, to flesh out the story. These apocryphal sources, according to Clayton, include scenes in which Joseph confronts Mary, but she highlights some major differences.<sup>105</sup> The Latin tradition keeps Mary mute, either allowing a group of virgins to come to her defense, which is then authoritatively bolstered by the angel's visit, or by relying solely on the angelic visitation. The lyric, in contrast, not only allows Mary to answer Joseph's questions, but also allows her word to be the resolution. Clayton also explores the Greek tradition of the "Doubting Mary" motif, but finds only one potential source, a sermon, which allows Mary to

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<sup>102</sup> Something he and others, notably Thomas Hill, John C. Pope, and more recently Thomas N. Hall, subsequently did. See above, notes 30 and 32.

<sup>103</sup> Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England. Eds. Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge. Cambridge, 1990.

<sup>104</sup> That is, sources beyond the antiphons, including apocryphal and homiletic sources.

<sup>105</sup> Including the "Gospel of Thomas" as well as sources from the Latin homiletic tradition.



speak at all. Again, the sermon relies on an angel to provide proof that Mary has not been unfaithful and that her pregnancy is holy.

Thomas Hill's article, "Literary History and Old English Poetry: The Case of *Christ I, II, and III*," presents an important overview of the three poems, as well as a brief survey of the sources and styles of each. Hill assesses the level of difficulty of each, based on how arcane the sources seem to have been, and speculates about the audience of the poems.<sup>106</sup> He does this by way of arguing for the importance of continued source study for the three poems, linking arguments in the above areas to source.

As Irving laments in his article, "The advent of poetry: *Christ I*," the majority of scholarly work on the *Advent Lyrics* is confined mainly to strict interpretations "of traditional Christian symbolism," or to "tweezer[ing] out bits of the poem, [and] match[ing] them off against the appropriate Latin statements, and plac[ing] them into sorted compartments." His statements also hold true for *Christ II* and *III*. Scholars have focused on portions of the poem and examined them through a particular theoretical lens. This is valuable work, but limited in scope. This study will place the poems within their historical and cultural milieu, and attempt to better understand the interplay between the poems – and other works – and the culture that produced them.

### **Methodology**

This project will approach the question of how the texts interact with the larger culture that produced it in two main ways. First, elements of a particular segment of the larger culture, in this case legal culture, will be identified within the poems. These elements, in part, outline behaviors acceptable and unacceptable to those people in positions of power. This identification and exploration of legal elements in turn help with the second main portion of the project, which is to build a speculative model of the audience of the poems and to posit ways this audience may have consumed the texts meant to influence and control their behavior. How the texts were consumed by its audience may have been at odds with the reasons the poems were initially produced and later compiled together. The poems illustrate and emphasize the ideal relationship between lord and thegn, from the viewpoint of religious and secular rulers. The poems list the

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<sup>106</sup> Thomas D. Hill, "Literary History and Old English Poetry: The Case of *Christ I, II, and III*." Sources of Anglo-Saxon Culture. Eds. Paul E. Szarmach and V. D. Oggins. Kalamazoo, 1986.

benefits of pursuing that ideal, which include rewards and recognition from one's lord and loyalty and obedience from one's subjects. The poems also describe the dangers of not pursuing that ideal, outlining the punishments awaiting those who break the law.

The theories of reading as productive consumption of Michel de Certeau are helpful in building this speculative model of an audience and the ways in which that audience may have interpreted the poems. De Certeau, in his book *The Practice of Everyday Living*, posits a product-less production, i.e. consumption, that involves the material of culture and the people who "read" it. De Certeau states that the dominant economic order imposes on its subjects ideological constructs, such as representations, laws, and rituals which "inform the population and 'give form' to social practices."<sup>107</sup> While de Certeau developed his theories regarding reader production in the second half of the twentieth century, his ideas are applicable to the Middle Ages. In both eras, the ruling elites are in positions of power and are intent on staying there. To do so, these elites employ systems of representations geared toward suppression and repression of those under their control. These systems of representations include codes of law intended to control behavior by directly outlining prohibited behaviors, as well as the punishments incurred by committing those behaviors, and propaganda designed to illustrate accepted behavior.

The term de Certeau uses to describe this process of establishing representations is "strategy." A strategy according to de Certeau is the "calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated." This 'subject' then "postulates a *place* which can be delimited as its *own* and serve as the base from which relations with an *exteriority* composed of targets or threats . . . can be managed."<sup>108</sup> Thus, strategies are employed from a position of power. Conversely, a tactic "is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy." Tactics are employed from a position of weakness. "The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power."<sup>109</sup> In terms of the *Christ* poems, the poems can be seen as strategies used by those in positions of power to delimit the space of their subjects. In order to operate

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<sup>107</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 166.

<sup>108</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 35-6.

<sup>109</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. 36-7.

within that space, the audience of the poems must employ tactics in their interactions with the texts presented to them.

De Certeau explores the ways in which those oppressed by these representations consume them, thereby at least sometimes creating something different than what was intended. This is because, according to de Certeau,

[T]he discourse that makes people believe is the one that takes away what it urges them to believe in, or it never delivers what it promises. Far from *expressing* a void or describing a lack, it creates such. It makes room for a void. In that way it opens up clearings, it ‘allows’ a certain play within a system of defined places. It ‘authorizes’ the production of an area of free play (Spielraum) on a checkerboard that analyzes and classifies identities.<sup>110</sup>

For instance, when someone reads a behavior manual, the producer of the manual provides a construct in an attempt to corral the reader in particular behavioral patterns. However, the flow of influence is not one way only, from manual to reader. The reader uses an editorial process when he reads the manual by which he picks, borrows, and reinterprets the information and ideological constructs presented to him, creating something new. Thus the text the reader creates for himself in some cases may be vastly different from the one produced by the author.

We can gather from a variety of Old English texts that subjects found ways to slip around the prohibitions and to manipulate received representations in order to better achieve their own desires. It is extremely useful, therefore, to point out the cracks and niches in the ideologies presented in a text so that we may better understand how it could have been used by its audience, whoever that may have been. For instance, a secular ruler may focus on the relationships between Christ and his apostles, using them as a model for the “proper” behavior owed a lord by his subjects. Similarly, a thegn may focus on the same material in a slightly different way, emphasizing the “proper” behavior of a lord toward his thegns and measuring his lord by those standards.

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<sup>110</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 105-6.

De Certeau likens the process of reader production to a “rented apartment” that the reader constructs in order to make these ideological representations “habitable.” In outlining his ideas, de Certeau uses a colonial example – the success of the colonizers is in part judged by how effectively they impose their own culture on the indigenous peoples.<sup>111</sup> He goes on to point out that what the colonized make of that culture – how they use “the rituals, representations, and laws imposed on them” - is often “something quite different from what their conquerors had in mind,” such as creating variations on religious ethics that are in some cases antithetical to the imposed ethics.<sup>112</sup>

De Certeau asserts that, when given a particular socio-economic situation, users within that system will bend it as much as possible in order to get from it what they want. Certainly the extent to which people are able to bend the system to their aims depends “upon the possibilities offered by circumstances.”<sup>113</sup> Even so, consumers can find themselves remarkably empowered even in the most restrictive of systems. De Certeau studies a capitalist socio-economic model in which workers are exploited by dominant powers. Ruling elites produce representations meant to subjugate workers by reinforcing models of expected behavior. This order is established by “*strategies* that seek to create places in conformity with abstract models.”<sup>114</sup> Conversely, subjugated peoples are more often relegated to the use of tactics, which “can only use, manipulate, and divert these spaces.”<sup>115</sup>

De Certeau illustrates the ways in which workers manipulate this established space. He borrows the term “la perruque” – literally “the wig” – from French popular culture to describe the practice. The term refers to the practice of workers disguising their own work as their employer’s work, such as writing personal letters on company time or using company equipment for personal use. These acts are not strictly theft according to de Certeau as nothing of material value is stolen, nor is it absenteeism, as the workers are officially on the job. Management in these cases either penalizes these acts, or ignores them. Evidence of manipulation on the part of Anglo-Saxon consumers is sometimes hard to identify. Usually evidence exists in the legal record through laws attempting to control behavior by stemming undesirable behavior. Thus, we can ascertain that an undesirable behavior was being exhibited in part because there is a law

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<sup>111</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

<sup>112</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, xiii.

<sup>113</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29.

<sup>114</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29.

<sup>115</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 29.

addressing it. For example, Edward issued laws forbidding reeves from taking bribes or abusing their position, such as by using areas designated for common usage, for example grazing lands, as their own personal property.<sup>116</sup>

The tensions between the secular and ecclesiastical courts in Anglo-Saxon England, at least in theory, allowed people the possibility to pursue the legal course that would give them the most favorable outcome. There are several constraints on this, of course, such as knowledge of their options, financial means to pursue them, et cetera. “People have to make do with what they have” in order to “get along in a network of already established forces and representations.”<sup>117</sup> De Certeau outlines several ways consumers “make do,” shaping the system through their productless production. In making do, consumers use whatever means are at hand to bring about a more favorable outcome with regard to themselves, which might even come from the texts meant to illustrate the obligations and expected behaviors in the first place. For instance, by witnessing the editorial choices made on the part of the writer or the compiler, readers might find authorization to make similar “editorial” choices regarding their own behavior within those same obligations and expectations. When the texts emphasize the obedience and loyalty expected of subjects toward lords, as well as the reward given to such subjects, a person may come to question not whether his own behavior is lacking, but, in considering himself a loyal and obedient subject, whether the behavior of his lord is lacking. Likewise, readers may begin to form their own expectations and obligations of the people and institutions that produced the texts meant to corral the readers and to control their behavior in the first place.

## **Chapter One: The *Christs* and the Law**

The first chapter of this dissertation examines the relationship between the three *Christs* and Anglo-Saxon law. This chapter identifies the various ways in which the poems use legal constructions to present religious and cultural models of behavior. Each poem accomplishes this in different ways. The *Advent Lyrics*, as a series of poems based on liturgical petitions, echoes the language used in contracts. The *Lyrics* also seem to explain a gap in the Gospels using a model provided by Anglo-Saxon law. Both the *Ascension* and the *Judgment* focus more on social obligations between lord and subject, with less overt emphasis on the contractual

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<sup>116</sup> Please see below, pages 76-7 and note 247 for the text of these laws.

<sup>117</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 18.

obligations of the involved parties. However, *Ascension* accentuates reasons for upholding the terms of a contract and *Judgment* illustrates the dangers of failure. *Ascension* and *Judgment* further reflect laws governing the upholding of one's oath of loyalty to one's lord or king, keeping the king's peace, as well as laws protecting the body of the king, and his property rights. Inclusion of legal references in religious poems would be to some extent desirable to those in positions of power. First, such references give Christian ethics a greater cultural resonance, both to congregants in danger of lapsing and to potential new converts. Second, these references lend spiritual and doctrinal support to secular attempts to control behavior.

## **Chapter Two: In Deeds and In Words**

Chapter Two explores how the *Christ* poems outline various social roles and provide examples of acceptable role models. The poems, as mentioned above, seek to reinscribe lawful behavior within the audience and to establish parameters for the ideal ruler/subject relationship. Because the poems are religious texts first and foremost, these legal parallels evoke obligations and expectations held by the Church as an institution. By extension, due to the close relationship between the Church and secular ruling elites, the poems reflect the expectations of the populace held by those ruling parties. According to the hegemonic discourse of the time, in a rightly ordered society, Christian subjects obey the just laws of their Christian kings. They praise their lords in "deeds and in words," following the law and abiding by their oaths.<sup>118</sup> Those godly kings repay their obedient subjects for their lawful behavior with security and prosperity – i.e. their just rewards.

*Ascension* opens describing the scene as the apostles watch Christ ascending into the heavens. Throughout the poem, both Christ and his disciples are described in militaristic terms which define the relationship between lords and thegns. Christ is the epitome of kingship, an image that emerges in both *Advent Lyrics* and in *Judgment*. The disciples are presented as model subjects, ready to do their lord's bidding. These models of behavior illustrate the societal roles expected of rulers and their subjects and reflect examples of the attempts by rulers to constrain the behavior of their people and the rewards of obedient behavior contained in the record of Anglo-Saxon charters.

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<sup>118</sup> The phrase, "dædum ond wordum hergen holdlice," "faithfully praise [him] in deeds and in words," appears in Lyric 12, lines 429b-430a.

### Chapter Three: Breaking the King's Peace

Chapter Three examines the consequences of failing to follow the examples within the *Christ* poems. These consequences mirror those found in Anglo-Saxon law codes for breaking oaths and attacking the person of a king or lord. All law codes address behavior disruptive to the existing power structure and work to preserve a functioning order in society that favors that structure. Accordingly, there are laws designating fines for theft, injury and unlawful death. Law codes prior to those of Alfred addressed breaking the king's peace in general terms, and tended to concentrate on physical areas immediately surrounding the king. Laws did not specifically address crimes against the king himself, nor against lords.

Beginning with Alfred's law codes, these types of statutes grew to be more specific, especially in terms of application. Also, laws regarding breaking the king's peace were increasingly placed on an equal standing with those prohibiting personal attacks on the king, drawing the same severe punishments. These types of laws appeared first as an injunction in Alfred, binding people to their oaths and outlining specific fines for breaking them. They built to their most stringent, and perhaps most strident, pitch in the law codes of Æthelred. In essence, by the end of the tenth century, breaking a king's law, however minor, could be construed as a personal attack on the king, and therefore an act of treason, punishable by forfeiture of property, exile, and death.

This equation of law-breaking with personal attack on a lord appears in one of the most striking scenes in the *Judgment*, when Christ addresses the saved and the damned. Christ takes two different visages, appearing to the saved as beautiful and benevolent, whereas to the damned he appears frightful and bloody, as he did during the Passion. The poet equates the blows and beatings Christ received prior to the crucifixion with the sins the damned committed during their life. Christ tells them explicitly that every time they sinned, they spat in his face or opened another cut on him. Because of their sin, the damned are exiled from Christ's presence and sent to hell. This imagery creates opportunities for those in positions of power, linked metaphorically to Christ, to view "sins" against them as personal attacks. The punishment of the damned, as mentioned, is directly related to physical harm done to Christ. The consequence of these actions parallels the consequences for attacking a king or even breaking the king's *mund* or peace.

## **Chapter Four: They Cannot Shake His Yoke From Their Necks**

Chapter Four argues that the combination of secular law and church ethics, the one flexible and open to interpretation, the other believed to be immutable, creates a tension within the poems that could be exploited by the Anglo-Saxon audience of the poems, potentially affecting the ways that audience viewed their social relationships. This is particularly tantalizing given that the period debated about for the dating of the three *Christs* – at its extremes from 750-950, or even 1050 – spans several periods of upheaval, whether from external invasion or from internal dissent and religious recidivism. Exploring the tensions created by fusing two seemingly similar yet different ideologies not only begins to challenge dichotomies between Christian and non-Christian, but between religious and secular as well. The Christian Church, in order to strengthen its grip on Anglo-Saxon England as the dominant religion, could not ignore Anglo-Saxon culture. Borrowing aspects of an indigenous culture to create in-roads for any organized group is a common missionary technique, but one that becomes fraught depending on the elements borrowed.

In this case, by using legalistic parallels, the Church makes its ethics more familiar and helps to establish ideals for societal order. Ruling elites would accept this because it would tie their position of power to something professed to be fixed and unchanging. By doing so, however, such borrowing encourages the people within society to view and use those ethics and ideals as they do the legal system. For instance, in echoing, however faintly, contractual language, the Anglo-Saxon audience may begin to view the relationship between Lord and subject in contractual terms. Similarly, they may view their relationship to their lord in contractual terms. Behaviors are expected from both parties. When one or the other of the parties fails to act as specified, the contract is broken.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE *CHRISTS* AND THE LAW

From subject matter to imagery, the *Christ* poems are based firmly in and staunchly promote Christian ethics. The poems encode expected behavior from kings and lords to the poorest of their subjects, framing them in Christian and Anglo-Saxon ideals. One of the ways the *Christ* poems frame these Anglo-Saxon ideals is by reflecting Anglo-Saxon law, whether in echoing legal procedure or by referencing statutes recorded in extant law codes. Such a framing would serve to strengthen attempts to influence and shape social practice.<sup>119</sup> Three episodes in the poems illustrate these echoes. Lyric Seven of *Advent*, in which Joseph confronts Mary about rumors that she is pregnant, references Anglo-Saxon legal procedure. The interplay between the two shares similarities with a lawsuit recorded in the charters about contested land. Further, the linguistic choices of the poet throughout *Advent* echo secular contractual language. Finally, in *Judgment*, Christ's address to the damned equates their sins with physical attacks on him. This reflects statutes in late Anglo-Saxon laws that prohibit breaking lawful oaths and attacking or plotting against king or lord.

These larger examinations and collections of Anglo-Saxon law provided insight into the particulars of analyzing the different Christ poems. An understanding of the legal status of women, for instance, was important to examining the *Advent Lyrics*, particularly Lyric Seven. While Anglo-Saxon England decidedly was not a feminist paradise, women were persons in the legal sense. Women had rights ascribed to them by the law which allowed them some standing within the community. They were assigned *wergild*, according to their social status; similarly, their social standing determined the nature and severity of the fines and punishment for crimes

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<sup>119</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 166.

committed against them. Women could be called on to present evidence and to answer, for themselves rather than through a male family member, charges in court and could bring lawsuits or be sued. Further, women could own property and determine and name inheritors.<sup>120</sup>

Robertson supplies an example that illustrates these legal rights and processes in action in the “Herefordshire Lawsuit,” from the early eleventh century. In it, “Edwin, *Enneawnes* son” appeared before the court and “spæc þær on his agene modor æfter summon dæle landes.”<sup>121</sup> The court sent representatives to his mother, unnamed in the document, who angrily denied her son’s suit. “þa sæde heo [that] heo nan land næfde þe him aht to gebyrede 7 gebealh heo swiðe eorlice wið hire sunu.”<sup>122</sup> Summoning her kinswoman Leofflæd, the mother, in the presence of the court representatives, then named Leofflæd her sole beneficiary. The mother then enjoined the men to “don þegnlice 7 wel abeodað mine ærende to ðam gemote beforan eallon þam godan mannum 7 cyðað heom hwæm ic mines landes geunnen hæbbe 7 ealre minre æhte 7 minon agenan suna næfre nan þingc 7 biddað heom eallum beon þisses to gewitnesse.”<sup>123</sup>

In this example, a man brings suit against a woman, his own mother. In an effort to resolve the issue, the court sends representatives to the woman for her testimony so that they might sort out the business. She not only answers their questions about the claims against her, but also disowns her son and reapportions her estate. The court readily accepts the mother’s testimony, and the husband of Leofflæd, after reporting her statement to the court, immediately went “to sce Æðelberhtes mynstre be ealles þæs folces leafe 7 gewitnesse 7 let settan on ane Cristes boc.”<sup>124</sup> The unnamed woman is of sufficient stature and repute that her word trumps that of her son.

Lyric Seven, in exploring the confrontation between Mary and Joseph with regard to her pregnancy, bears certain similarities to this lawsuit. Although it is sometimes unclear from the structure of the text who is speaking when, the text leaves no question that Joseph finds himself

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<sup>120</sup> Anne L. Klinck, “Anglo-Saxon women and the law,” *Journal of Medieval History* 8(1982), 107-121. Klinck notes that qualifications, such as a reliance on male family members to bring suit in certain instances, need to be kept in mind when considering the status of women in Anglo-Saxon England.

<sup>121</sup> “sued his own mother for a certain piece of land.” A. J. Robertson, ed. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*. 1956. 2 ed. (Holmes Beach, FL: William W. Gaunt and Sons, 1986), 150-3.

<sup>122</sup> “Then she said that she had no land that in any way belonged to him and was strongly incensed against her son.” Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 150-3.

<sup>123</sup> “Act rightly and like thegns; announce my message to the meeting before all the worthy men, and tell them to whom I have granted my land and all my property, and not a thing to my own son, and ask them all to be witnesses to this.” Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 150-3.

<sup>124</sup> “to St Æthelbert’s minster, with the consent and cognizance of the whole assembly, and had it recorded in a gospel book.” Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 152-3.

in a difficult legal situation. In the Lyric, there are claims made against a woman, though the charges are indistinct and mainly through rumor. Rather than a panel, a single judge is faced with a legal and moral dilemma should the woman prove guilty. In the end, the testimony of the woman is solicited and on the basis of her testimony, the matter is resolved.

Mary is pregnant and Joseph wonders how to answer the rumors he is hearing about Mary and her pregnancy. He ponders his course of action, weighing the consequences of telling the truth, “Gif ic soð sprece, þonne sceal Dauides dohtor sweltan stanum astyrfed,”<sup>125</sup> against quietly sending his wife home to her family, as mentioned in the Bible.<sup>126</sup> Mary begins her testimony with an appeal to authority: “Soð ic secge þurh sunu meotudes, gæsta geocend.”<sup>127</sup> She continues, stating that “ic gen ne conn þurh gemæscipe monnes ower, ænges on eorðan, ... sceolde ic lifes þrym geberan, beorhtne sunu, bearn eacen godes, torhtes tirfruma.”<sup>128</sup>

These legal echoes help to explain the form of the Lyric. In the charter containing the law suit, there is an emphasis on the spoken testimony of the mother. Certainly, it is not a transcript, but some of the dramatic and emotional force of the charter is contained in the descriptions of the woman’s words. In the case of Lyric Seven, the source antiphon is an address to Joseph, by the angel who, in the biblical account, appeared to Joseph in a dream. Further, source material from the Bible for an imagined conversation between Joseph and Mary is scanty, almost to the point of nonexistence. Very little is said about the situation except that Joseph was troubled, and had decided to send Mary quietly back to her family.<sup>129</sup> Implicit in this is Joseph’s decision *not* to adhere to Old Testament law, referenced in the Lyric, which required adulterous women and their lovers to be stoned at the town gates.<sup>130</sup> In the Gospel of Matthew, after Joseph

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<sup>125</sup> “If I tell the truth [by stating that Mary is pregnant, but not by him] then the daughter of David must die, killed with stones.” S.A.J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*. 1982. London: Everyman-J. M. Dent, 1998, 210.

<sup>126</sup> Mt 1:23. Please see above, page 10.

<sup>127</sup> “Truly, I will tell the truth by the son of the Lord, the Helper of souls.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 210

<sup>128</sup> “I know no man by way of intercourse anywhere upon earth; ... I was to give birth to the Life-force, the sublime Son, the mighty Child of God, the illustrious King of glory.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 210

<sup>129</sup> Mat 1:19: “Ioseph autem vir eius cum esset iustus, et nollet eam traducere, voluit occulte dimittere eam.”

<sup>130</sup> Lev 20:10, which states “Si moechatus quis fuerit cum uxore alterius, et adulterim perpetraverit cum coniuge proximi sui, morte moriantur et moechus et adultera.” Similarly, Deut 22:22-4 states “Si dormierit vir cum uxore alterius, uterque morietur, id est, adulter et aduletera, et auferes malum Israel. Si puellam virginem desponderit vir, et invenerit eam aliquis in civitate, et concubuerit cum ea, educes utrumque ad portam civitatis illius, et lapidibus obruentur: puella, quia non clamavit, cum esset in civitate: vir, quia humiliavit uxorem proximi sui: et auferes malum de medio tui.”

decides to quietly divorce Mary, an angel visits Joseph in a dream and reveals the holy nature of her pregnancy, whereupon he changes his mind and keeps his wife.<sup>131</sup>

Apocryphal sources were in some ways more expansive than the biblical narrative; however, in terms of Lyric Seven, they were also limited artistically, in the sense that they required the poet to almost completely imagine a confrontation between Joseph and Mary. Mary Clayton states that of all the apocryphal versions of the life of Mary, only one, the *Protevangelium Iacobi* written in Greek, contains a confrontation between Joseph and Mary in which Mary answers Joseph.<sup>132</sup> According to Clayton, the text recounts Joseph returning “from an absence to find a pregnant Mary who has, surprisingly, forgotten Gabriel’s annunciation and is ignorant of the origin of the child.”<sup>133</sup> Further, the *Protevangelium* has Mary weep “‘bitterly’” in the face of Joseph’s questioning, though she does say “‘I am pure and I know not a man.’”<sup>134</sup> Unfortunately, the more immediate apocryphal source for Lyric Seven, Clayton asserts, was the *Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, a Latin translation of the *Protevangelium* which edits out Mary’s testimony. In both texts, Clayton states, any question about the nature of Mary’s pregnancy is settled only when the angel Gabriel visits Joseph and confirms that Mary’s pregnancy is holy and not adulterous.

Homilies were also valuable sources of inspiration for the *Christ* poems.<sup>135</sup> Here, too, difficulties arise in explaining the nature of the changes the poet made to the source material. Accounts of Joseph confronting Mary about the rumors of her pregnancy exist almost entirely in the Greek homiletic tradition. There is only one known Latin example, Pseudo-Augustine’s *Sermo cxcv*.<sup>136</sup> Further, it is only in the Greek homiletic tradition, not the Latin, that Mary answers Joseph’s questions. Even then, Mary’s testimony does not settle the matter. In Latin, all sources remove any testimony by Mary. In both the Greek and the Latin tradition, Joseph’s fears

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<sup>131</sup> Mat 1:20-1: “Haec autem eo in cogitante, ecce angelus Domini apparuit in somnis ei, dicens: Ioseph fili David, noli timere accipere Mariam coniugem tuam: quo denim in ea natum est, de Spiritu sancto est. Pariet autem filium: et vocabis nomen eius Iesum: ipse enim salvum faciet populum suum a peccatis eorum.”

<sup>132</sup> Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, 188-9.

<sup>133</sup> Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, 188-9.

<sup>134</sup> Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, 188-9.

<sup>135</sup> Chase, “The theme of *Christ II*,” 87-8; Biggs, “The Sources of *Christ III*,” 2-3; Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, 188-9.

<sup>136</sup> Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, 188-9. Clayton allows for the possibility of the existence of other texts, now lost, which may have been similar to Pseudo Augustine’s *Sermo*.

are only allayed by “the biblical annunciation to Joseph by the angel.”<sup>137</sup> Mary, while protected, is placed to the side, while the main transaction occurs between Joseph and God, or his agent.

In Lyric Seven, however, Mary is the one to allay Joseph’s doubts and confirm the holiness of her pregnancy and yet as far as we know no biblical or apocryphal source material would have been available to the poet on which to base such a conclusion. With Biblical and apocryphal source material so sparse, it seems likely that the poet of the *Advent Lyrics* may have turned to something familiar on which to base his conception of the conversation between Joseph and Mary. Anglo-Saxon culture and legal tradition would have expected that Joseph would confront his wife about possible indiscretions. Further, it would have expected her to answer them.<sup>138</sup>

In contrast to the mother of the lawsuit, Mary, in Lyric Seven, must invoke the authority of God and God’s son in order to assure the authenticity of what she is about to say. There is no question of whether or not Joseph will accept her testimony. The significant limitation placed on the lyric by the Biblical source is that the outcome cannot be altered without directly challenging the divinity of Christ, much less the Bible and Church doctrine. The outcome is therefore preordained. Mary’s pregnancy is holy and Joseph’s reputation as a good man is not impugned.

Granted, there is a great deal unsaid within the laws, as Rivers notes in writing about the law codes of Æthelberht, and husbands may have been held unaccountable if they beat or killed their wives, particularly in situations of adultery or sexual misconduct.<sup>139</sup> Depicting such a scene involving the Holy Couple, however, would not be possible without provoking accusations of blasphemy. Rivers goes on to state that, compared to various examples of Continental law, Anglo-Saxon law is alone in providing an alternative to violence toward the wife and her lover. In search of an outcome other than violent confrontation between Joseph and Mary, Anglo-Saxon legal culture seems to have provided the poet with an attractive alternative. Joseph’s actions could be cast in context that would be familiar and acceptable to the audience. Joseph is

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<sup>137</sup> Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England.*, 188

<sup>138</sup> Depending on the era in which the poem was first composed, there was legal recourse for a husband in Joseph’s situation to sue the man who had sex with his wife. Interestingly, the penalty for the offending man would have included having to provide a new wife for the husband. Theodore John Rivers, "Adultery in Early Anglo-Saxon Society: Aethelberht 31 in Comparison with Continental Germanic Law." *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1991): 19-25.

<sup>139</sup> Rivers, “Adultery in Early Anglo-Saxon Society: Aethelberht 31 in Comparison with Continental Germanic Law,” 24. Aethelberht 31 states “Gif friman wið fries mannes wif geligeþ, his wergelde abicge, I oðer wif his agenum scætte begete I ðæm oðrum æt ham gebrenge”, Attenborough, 9.

well within his rights and the law to act as he does, with the added benefit of supporting the Church's emphasis on preserving marriages.

While we can never explain exactly why these particular alterations were made, these changes and additions, especially regarding Mary's testimony, take on a new light when viewed in conjunction with the Anglo-Saxon law codes. We can surmise that Joseph's reaction, as well as Mary's testimony, would have been familiar and to some extent acceptable to an Anglo-Saxon audience, even if we cannot determine how exactly his reaction, in not beating his wife or abandoning her, would have been viewed by Anglo-Saxon society. It may well have been more acceptable to beat and leave his wife or just as easily to reconcile with her. The ways in which certain scenes in the *Christ* poems, especially Lyric Seven and the judgment scene in *Judgment*, are constructed suggest that Anglo-Saxon legal tradition influenced the making of the poems. As the poems are informed by social practice, so too do they "inform the population and 'give form' to social practices."<sup>140</sup> This influence from the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition would have been useful as a means of familiarizing the audience of the *Christ* poems with church ethics and to reassert the expectations and obligations of that audience. It reminds the audience of their social roles. Wives are subject to husbands, servants to their lords; they are to obey their lords faithfully and loyally. Similarly, husbands and lords are to provide for their dependents and subjects, to maintain order, to reward lawful behavior and to punish unlawful.

Underscoring this emphasis on social roles is a grammatical change the poet makes that calls to mind the contractual nature of Anglo-Saxon wills. The antiphons upon which the *Lyrics* were based contain a petition in the imperative mood.<sup>141</sup> In *Advent*, the poet used the subjunctive mood in the petition sections of Lyrics One, Two, Five, Six, Eight, Nine, and Ten.<sup>142</sup> Because the subjunctive mood indicates contingent or potential action, it echoes the sanction of the will or the binding force of the contract.

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<sup>140</sup> de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 166.

<sup>141</sup> Most of the *Advent Lyrics* roughly employ the form of their source antiphons, to varying degrees. Jackson J. Campbell, in "Structural Patterns," characterizes the antiphon as having "three parts: an invocation or address, a reference to an item of Christian doctrine, and a petition" (241). Almost all of the extant lyrics use this form, with considerable expansion of the item of doctrine.

<sup>142</sup> Lyrics One, Two, Five, and Six are the only ones based on the Great Antiphons. Stanley B. Greenfield, "The Petitions of the Advent Lyrics and the Question of Unity," in *Hero and Exile: The Art of Old English Poetry*. Edited by George H. Brown. London: Hambledon, 1989,

The contract, according to Greenfield and Calder, provides the basis for Anglo-Saxon law and this “contractual basis . . . provides a key to many aspects of their life and society.”<sup>143</sup> Contractual language, which makes use of the subjunctive, is prevalent in many different types of documents, especially wills. According to Greenfield and Calder, “nearly all wills contain a notification of the circumstance, a disposition of property, and a sanction meant to bind the survivors to the will’s terms.”<sup>144</sup> Greenfield and Calder emphasize the “contractual nature” of wills, requiring “counter-gifts or counter-performances” on the part of the beneficiaries.<sup>145</sup>

An excellent example of the requirement of a counter-performance occurs in the “Bequest of Ceolwin,” which outlines the wishes of a woman concerning a piece of land after her death.<sup>146</sup> The land, on her death, is to be given to the religious community at Winchester for use as its refectory. The “Bequest of Ceolwin” is a relatively short document, roughly 39 lines long, of which the last 27 lines delineate the boundaries of the property in question. The initial 12 lines cover the business of the bequest, outlining Ceolwin’s wishes for the property. In it Ceolwin grants:

Pæs landes æt Aweltune to Witanceastre æfter hire dege into hærre  
beddarn æt þam biseopstole mid swelcan yrfe swelcan hi thenne  
to gehagaþ on ða gerað ðe hi gemunen hi 7 osmodes saulæ swa  
him rihtlic 7 cynlic þince to his gemunde dege þæt beoþ seofan  
nihtan ær gangdagan.<sup>147</sup>

The document further declares that the community at Winchester has promised her that “Wulfstan hire brothor sunu hæbbe an hwiſſce ægefæles landæs þa wile þe hæ libbe.”<sup>148</sup>

Another clause prohibits the community from selling the estate “with nanan feo buton hi hit with othre lande sullan thæ him gehændre beo 7 behfre.”<sup>149</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Stanley B., Greenfield, and Daniel G. Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*. (New York: New York University Press, 1986), 115.

<sup>144</sup> Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 114

<sup>145</sup> Greenfield and Calder, *A New Critical History of Old English Literature*, 114.

<sup>146</sup> Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 30-33

<sup>147</sup> “The estate of 15 hides at Alton . . . to the community at Winchester after her death for their refectory at the Episcopal see, with such stock as is fitting at the time, on condition that they remember her and Osmod’s soul as seems right and fitting to them, on his commemoration day which is seven days before the Rogation Days.”

Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 30-31

<sup>148</sup> “Wulfstan, her brother’s son, shall have a hide of rent-free land as long as he lives.” Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 32-33

<sup>149</sup> “For money, unless they give it in return for another estate which is nearer and more convenient for them.” Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 30-31

Of particular interest here is the phrase “on condition that they remember her and Osmod’s soul,” phrased in the text as “on ða gerað ðe hi gemunen hi 7 Osmodes saulæ.” This presents the sanction of the will, the counteraction to be performed in order to complete the transaction. The phrase “on ða gerað ðe” is followed by the third person plural verb in the subjunctive, “gemunen,” indicating that this is potential or conditional action. In exchange for the lands, the Winchester religious community is to pray for and remember the souls of Ceolwin and her husband Osmod. Ostensibly, if the community does not, then they lose any claim to the estate. Further, and perhaps more easily actionable, is the clause stating that the Winchester religious community will allow her nephew, in this case her brother’s son, to cultivate one hide of the land rent-free during his life. There seems to be no apparatus within the document outlining any consequences if the community reneges on the deal.

Greenfield and Moffat comment separately on the use of the subjunctive in the Advent Lyrics. Both note that the source antiphons, particularly those attributed to Gregory, use the imperative in the petition. Greenfield suggests the poet changed the verb forms in the petition sections of the lyrics to the subjunctive, or a mix of subjunctive and imperative, in order to heighten emotional tension within the Lyrics, building to a crescendo in Lyric Six.<sup>150</sup> It certainly does this, but this use of the subjunctive also underscores the obligations of the relationship between ruler and ruled. For instance, Lyric One refers to the need for the builder Christ to return in order to repair the house and the temple. The Latin antiphon reads “O Rex gentium et desideratus earum, lapisque angularis qui facis utraque unum: veni et salva hominem quem de limo formasti.”<sup>151</sup>

The poet of the *Lyrics* altered the petition of the antiphon, *veni et salva*, to read “Nu is þam weorce þearf þæt se craftga *cume* ond se cyning sylfa, ond þonne *gebete*, nu gebrosnad is, hus under hrofe. He þæt hra gescop, leomo læmena; nu *sceal* liffrea þone wergan heap wrapum *ahreddan*, earme from egsan, swa he oft dyde.”<sup>152</sup> As Greenfield points out, the imperatives *veni*

<sup>150</sup> “The Petitions of the Advent Lyrics and the Question of Unity,” in Greenfield, Stanley B. *Hero and Exile: The Art of Old English Poetry*. Edited by George H. Brown. London: Hambledon, 1989.

<sup>151</sup> “O King of the nations and object of their longing and the cornerstone which makes both parts one: come and save man, whom you formed out of clay.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 205.

<sup>152</sup> Greenfield translated this as “Now for that work there is need that the Craftsman come, and the King Himself, and then repair—now (that) it is ruined—the house beneath the roof. He shaped that body, limbs of clay; now must the Lord of life save the weary throng from the wrathful, the wretched from terror, as He has often done.” Greenfield, “The Petitions of the *Advent Lyrics* and the Question of Unity,” in *Hero and Exile*, 205-13. Greenfield’s translation does not differ greatly from Bradley’s: “Now the building is in need of it, that the Craftsman and the King should come himself and so make good, now it is reduced to ruin, the house beneath its roof. He created the



and *salva* become the subjunctives *cume* and *sceal ... ahreddan*, and the poet includes a third subjunctive, *gebete*. The last line reiterates this call. “Now he, the Lord of life, shall save this wearied multitude from its enemies and wretched men from terror, as he has often done.” Lyric Two contains a petition to “Him who created man that He be mindful not to allow to come to ruin the state of (us) care-full ones, we who in prison sit sorrowing.”

The stipulation in Ceolwin’s will for a counter-action of spiritual support is remarkably similar to the conditions present in a land lease. A charter detailing a lease of land by Ealdred, Bishop of Worcester, to Wulfgeat contains a telling clause. Under the terms of the lease, Wulfgeat and his inheritors may use the land for three lives, as long as “hig syn æfre underpeodde 7 gehersumne 7 ðam hlafordscipe folhgien ðe ðonne bisceop beo.”<sup>153</sup> However, “gif hig ænigne frambyge don ðolian ære are.”<sup>154</sup> If the tenants of the land are obedient, submissive, and loyal, they have full use of the land. If the tenants show any sign of fractiousness, whatever that may be, the land reverts back to the episcopacy.

The emphasis of these stipulatory sections is mainly on the behavior of the beneficiaries. In order for the beneficiaries to gain whatever inheritance they are in line for, they must uphold their end of the bargain. Certainly there is an endeavor on the part of the lyrics to shape the response of the lord to be generous and just, but the burden of expectation falls on the subjects. Subjects are to be helped if their behavior is deemed acceptable; their claim will be denied “gif his weorc ne deag.”<sup>155</sup> This echoes the stipulations placed on the Winchester community and on Wulfgeat and his heirs. Ostensibly, if they lose access to land, or freedom, or whatever, then somehow it is their own fault.

Perhaps the most concrete references to Anglo-Saxon law appear in the judgment scenes in *Judgment*. In *Christ III*, we see that God can be moved to anger during the scene of judgment.<sup>156</sup> In fact, the moment of judgment is the major set-piece of the poem, with imagery of the end of the world providing the setting. Most of the poem relates the wrath of God toward sinners as well as the horrors of hell awaiting them. Responsibility for their exile from the

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body and the limbs of clay. Now he, the Lord of life, shall save this wearied multitude from its enemies and wretched men from terror, as he has often done.” *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 205.

<sup>153</sup> “They shall always be submissive and obedient and acknowledge the lordship of whoever is bishop at the time.” Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 208 & 209.

<sup>154</sup> “if they are guilty of any defection, they shall forfeit the property.” Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 208 & 209. The definition of “any defection” is of course open ended.

<sup>155</sup> From Lyric 2, line 21b. “if his attainment does not suffice.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206.

<sup>156</sup> These ideas of God as a wrathful lord judging his subjects will be delved into in Chapter Three.

presence of God is placed squarely on the shoulders of the sinners. Christ calls attention to the wounds he suffered during Crucifixion to the wicked, in lines 1454 and following. He states “Geseoð nu þa feorhdolg þe ge gefremedun ær on minum folmum ond on fotum swa some.”<sup>157</sup> Christ draws a parallel between the sins of the damned and the wounds on his body, telling the damned that by sinning without remorse they have failed in their duty. He accuses them, saying, “You broke my behest at the word of your slayer.”<sup>158</sup> Christ died for them, in essence giving them a second chance; in return, they were to have lived obedient and faithful lives. By point of comparison, the saved are described as those “who had previously, during the days of their life, fulfilled his decree with zeal and with delight” (1221ff). By failing to honor their obligation, the sinners are subject to punishment. Christ commands “þæs ge sceolon hearde adreogan wite to widan ealdre, wræc mid deoflum gepolian.”<sup>159</sup>

The scenes involving Christ’s address to the sinners parallels Anglo-Saxon law beginning with Alfred.<sup>160</sup> Alfred 1 enjoins the people to uphold lawful oaths. It states, “Æt ærestan we læreð, þæt mæst ðearf is, þæt æghwelc mon his að 7 his wed wærlice healeð.”<sup>161</sup> The law continues, at 1.2, to state:

Gif he þonne þæs weddige þe him riht sie to gelæstanne 7 þæt  
aleoge, selle mid eadmedum his wæpn 7 his æhta his freondum to  
gehealdanne 7 beo feowertig nihta on carcerne on cyniges tune,  
ðrowige ðær swa bisecep him scrife, 7 his mægas hine feden, gif he  
self mete næbbe.<sup>162</sup>

Alfred’s code also specifically outlaws plotting against the king, or his thegns, the punishment of which is forfeiture of property and death. Alfred 4 states, “Gif hwa ymb cyninges feorh sierwe ðurh hine oððe ðurh wreccena feormunge oððe his manna, sie he his feores scyldig

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<sup>157</sup> See now the mortal wounds which you once made in my hands and in my feet the same.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 243.

<sup>158</sup> “You broke my behest at the word of your slayer” after line 1379

<sup>159</sup> “you shall cruelly endure torment to existence infinite, and suffer banishment with the devils.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 244.

<sup>160</sup> Injunctions restating the prohibition against oath-breaking, restating the prohibition of plotting against one’s lord, and/or calling for loyalty to the one true king appear in all extant Anglo-Saxon law codes through Cnut.

<sup>161</sup> “In the first place we enjoin you, as a matter of supreme importance, that every man shall abide carefully by his oath and pledge.” Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-3.

<sup>162</sup> “If, however, he pledges himself to something which it is lawful to carry out and proves false to his pledge, he shall humbly give his weapons and his possessions to his friends to keep and remain 40 days in prison at a royal manor, and undergo there whatever [sentence] the bishop prescribes for him; and his relatives shall feed him if he himself has no food.” Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-3.

7 ealles þæs he age.”<sup>163</sup> This law goes on, in 4.2, to forbid plotting against one’s lord: “Swa we eac settað be eallum hadum ge ceorle ge eorle: se ðe ymb his hlafordes fiorh sierwe, sie he wið ðone his feores scyldig 7 ealles ðæs ðe he age oððe be his hlafordes, were hine getriowe.”<sup>164</sup>

Alfred used the laws prohibiting oath-breaking to set-up the laws addressing plots against king or lord. By establishing such stiff penalties for oath-breaking, Alfred created, in essence, a link between oath-breaking and attacks on the king. Breaking one’s oath, especially an oath of loyalty to the king, introduced instability into the social order because the oath-breaker was refusing to fulfill his social role. Such action undermined the authority of the king, and might encourage others to commit other, equally serious breaches. Undermining the king’s authority obviously jeopardized the king’s position and, by extension, his life. The penalties for oath-breaking were therefore dire: complete forfeiture of property and execution, though apparently exile sufficed in some cases.<sup>165</sup>

The nature of the social relationships, especially between subject and lord, is a recurring motif within the *Christ* poems. At one point, Lyric Twelve enjoins “Forþon we hine domhwate dædum ond wordum/hergen holdlice.”<sup>166</sup> A little later, within the same lyric, appears the reason “He him þære lisse lean forgildeð,/se gehalgoda hælend sylfa.”<sup>167</sup> The Lyric encapsulates one of the guiding principles of Anglo-Saxon culture, stressing loyalty and reward for that loyalty. More to the point, Lyric Two states in its petition “gedo usic þæs wyrpe, þe he to wuldre forlet,/ þa we heanlice hweorfan sceoldan/ on þis enge lond, eðle bescyrede.”<sup>168</sup> At its base, this point-counterpoint mimics the interplay in a contract, or a will in many cases. A contract establishes

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<sup>163</sup> “If anyone plots against the life of the king, either on his own account or by harboring outlaws or men belonging to the king himself, he shall forfeit his life and all he possesses.” Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-3.

<sup>164</sup> “He who plots against the life of his lord shall forfeit his life to him and all he possesses or he shall clear himself by [an oath equal to] his lord’s wergild.” Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-3.

<sup>165</sup> Alfred 1-1.8 states “we enjoin you as a matter of supreme importance that every man shall abide carefully by his oath and pledge.” Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-3. Alfred’s codes include increasingly severe punishments for those who do not adhere to their oaths, as well as for those who do not submit to the prescribed punishments. Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-5. Also, see below, page 87. From Alfred to Æthelred, the laws would grapple with situations involving nobles who were locally too powerful to execute, namely those of Æthelstan (see below, page 87-8). Statutes specifically addressing this situation began to crop up in the law codes, authorizing the king to exile the offending noble to another part of the realm. Rivers mentions cases in which ealdormen were accused of treason, through oath-breaking, during Æthelred’s reign, and being exiled.

<sup>166</sup> “Therefore let us eager for good repute faithfully praise him in deeds and in words.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 216.

<sup>167</sup> “He the hallowed Saviour, himself, will give him the reward.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 216.

<sup>168</sup> “make us thus worthy, that he should admit into heaven us who have had to come into this confining world, cut off from the homeland.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206.

the actions to be taken by one party, the responses or corresponding actions that should be taken by the receiving party. It also contains stipulations about what should happen if one or the other of the parties should fail in their required duties.

Listing the explicit consequences for breaking a will was common and a typical example occurs in the bequest of Bishop Leofric to Exeter, which includes the mention of the “mycel englisc boc be gehwiltum þingum on leoðwisan geworht,” the “large English book about various things composed in verse.”<sup>169</sup> Line 66, in Robertson’s edition, contains the warning that “se þe ðas gyfu 7 þisne unnan wille Gode 7 Sce Petre ætbredan si him heofena rice ætbroden 7 si he ecelice geniðerod into helle wite.”<sup>170</sup> Grants and charters, particularly those granting lands to the Church, usually stipulate that the consequence for breaking or impeding the grant is excommunication and damnation. The spiritual sanctions were strengthened by statutes in the civil law codes prohibiting theft and holding ecclesiastical property particularly inviolate. Usually, crimes against the Church carry both excommunication and exile as punishments. Through excommunication and exile, the offender would be cut-off spiritually and physically from the community. Should the offender return to the region from which he was exiled, he could justifiably be killed.<sup>171</sup>

Use of contractual language, or even legalistic language, would appear to be at least somewhat at odds with the religious message contained in the poems. The idea of actions or prowess earning the favor of one’s lord was an important component in Anglo-Saxon society, as was the notion of loyalty to one’s lord. As a sign of one’s loyalty, one completed tasks for one’s lord, which encouraged the lord’s continued support. As such, the emphasis on lawful behavior or rather behavior which upholds the subjects’ end of the agreement would be familiar; however, this emphasis would seem to undermine the religious doctrine of grace. The relationship between God and subject was non-negotiable.

To combat any appearance of deviation, the *Lyrics* go out of their way, at least to modern eyes, to establish their adherence to Church doctrine, mainly the belief in the supremacy of the triune Christian God over everything, as well as the thoroughly cemented belief in the Augustinian idea that grace issues from God when and as he wills it, beyond the influence of

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<sup>169</sup> Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 228-9.

<sup>170</sup> “If anyone attempts to deprive God and St Peter of this gift and this grant, he shall be deprived of the kingdom of heaven and condemned for ever to the torment of hell.” Robertson. *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 230-1

<sup>171</sup> For the text of these laws issued by Æthelstan, please see Chapter Three, pages 86-7, notes 269 and 270.

mankind or his actions. Orthodoxy seeks to solidify the hierarchical structure of an institution by dictating the roles and behavior of the various social strata. With regard to the Church, this is seen first and foremost in the matter of grace. Salvation is explicitly stated in the *Advent Lyrics* to be given only by God at his discretion. Therefore we see throughout the *Lyrics* appeals to “þu reccend ond þu riht cyning”<sup>172</sup> and to “þu soða ond þu sibsuma ... cyning”<sup>173</sup> calling on him to “ara nu ohbehtum.”<sup>174</sup> On the other hand, the people are characterized as a “scattered flock” and as “wergum wreccan”<sup>175</sup> who should ask for salvation and mercy so that the servants “þæt we siþþan forð þa sellan þing symle moten geþeon on þeode, þinne willan”.<sup>176</sup>

In some ways, however, this push for orthodoxy does not clash with certain aspects of contracts. The relationship between God and human, and further between lord and subject, is described in terms of the lord’s reaction to the behavior of the people. If the people sin, they deservedly draw the ire of their lord. If they follow the dictates of their lord, there is peace, and perhaps the people are even rewarded. The reaction of the lord, however, is completely at the discretion of the lord.

The *Christ* poems, in echoing Anglo-Saxon law codes, establish a model for social relationships acceptable to earthly rulers and to the Church. As a means to bolster this model of the ideal lord/subject relationship, the *Christ* poems also provide models of appropriate behavior to be expected from lords and subjects. Legalistic echoes and examples of idealized behavior within the poems establish a framework for society by attempting “to *inform* the population and ‘give form’ to social practices.”<sup>177</sup> The poems therefore reinforce a societal ideal of a generous, martially powerful, king or lord, who acts as a judge, meting out justice according to the merits or crimes of his subjects, and as a protector of his followers, guaranteeing peaceful prosperity. As kings and lords are to be generous and just to their people, so the people, whatever their station, are to be loyal, faithful, and ready to serve in any capacity required of them. Lords could be strict or lenient according to their judgment, and subjects were expected to be thankful for any grace shown them by their lords.

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<sup>172</sup> “you judge and just king” From Lyric 2. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206. ,

<sup>173</sup> “you true and peace-loving king” Lyric 8. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 211. ,

<sup>174</sup> “have mercy on your servants” Lyric 10. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 214.

<sup>175</sup> “weary exiles” Lyric 8. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 212.

<sup>176</sup> “that we ever after do better things – your will” Lyric 10. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 214.

<sup>177</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 166.

Subjects who are loyal and obedient to their lord could also expect to be rewarded with treasure, grants of lands, and positions of power, as well as support in their claims. On the other hand, law-breakers were punished through fines, imprisonment, mutilation, forfeiture of property, death, and/or exile. A chain of duty, as it were, was established in which subjects were beholden to lords, and lords were beholden to some higher power, whether an over-king or a spiritual lord. Loyalty and obedience go up the chain; rewards and punishments come down.

Contracts defined the expectations of all parties involved and outlined the parameters under which the terms of the contract would be met. The *Advent Lyrics* states that kings will protect their servants if the servants are lawful and faithful. *Judgment* describes Christ, the perfect king, in glorious terms, and, with *Ascension*, illustrates that king in action. We are shown concretely why we should follow and obey him. He richly rewards those who obey his commands, his hall is immense and wondrous, and he utterly vanquishes his foes. Because he does these things, he deserves our obedience. This relationship corresponds to de Certeau's idea of the "economy of the gift." In the "economy of the gift," a person performs a "generosity" in the expectation of receiving one in return. Anglo-Saxon society was predicated on this, and over time, the practice became incorporated into the fabric of the dominant social order, as exhibited by the will. Grants also incorporated this aspect. And even though this tactic was subsumed into the dominant order, it was no less potent as a tactic for manipulating the organized space of that order.

As the tenth century progressed, increasingly vigorous attempts were made to more firmly subsume this "economy" within the dominant order and to remove its potentially upsetting ramifications. Beginning with Alfred, and carried over in nearly extant law code after, statutes required subjects to be loyal and obedient to their lords. In the context of the lord/subject relationship, subjects gift their lord with their loyal, faithful service, while lords gift their subjects with peace, prosperity, and successful leadership. By codifying this behavior, the attempt is made to alter the nature of this relationship. Loyal, faithful service are now required of subjects, whereas peace, prosperity, and successful leadership are gifts of grace, given at the lord's discretion. The *Christ* poems operate, in part, as a means to illustrate the behavior expected of subjects, and of the potential rewards awaiting them, should their "gift" prove adequate.

The legalistic echoes that appear in the Christ poems helped to make Christian ethics familiar and to bolster the strength of Christianity's appeal. Doing so would have eased concerns about potential or new converts to the religion, and would have helped encourage those already confirmed in the faith who may have been wavering. This inclusion of secular cultural elements also would have the countereffect of opening the door to reinterpretation of material that the Church would have wanted to be accepted wholesale and unquestioned.

## CHAPTER TWO

### IN DEEDS AND IN WORDS

The *Christ* poems use religious imagery in order to set forth secular ideals of obedient behavior. Similarly, the poems use secular ideals to familiarize their audience with religious ethics and to create a bond between religious and secular ideals. As de Certeau observes, writing, regardless of type, and the law, whether written or not, are engaged in similar activities, “to *inform* the population and ‘give form’ to social practices.”<sup>178</sup> Texts do this by reestablishing and reinforcing social roles and obligations in an attempt to promote a particular social order.

Lawful behavior is encouraged by legal statute primarily through the delineation of unlawful behavior and by outlining its consequences. Anglo-Saxon law codes therefore do not specify the rewards for following the law and obeying the commands of one’s lord. Rather, they enumerate fines and punishments incurred for breaking the law. The value placed on lawful behavior, at least through the law codes, can be garnered negatively and implicitly. One will *not* suffer fines or increasingly terrible punishments if one obeys the laws, and any behavior not expressly prohibited at the least would perhaps be tolerated.

Positive examples for proper behavior were therefore found elsewhere, for instance in sermons, poetry, hagiographies, and gnomic wisdom. The examples contained in each source are in general similar to one another. Religious examples, of course, focus more on spiritually obedient behavior, emphasizing adherence to Christian law and obedience to the Church, as well as advocating peace by active means. The New Testament calls for Christians to be active in their faith, and they were encouraged to go out and battle for their Lord, spreading his word (and

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<sup>178</sup> *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 166.



rule and influence) by achieving great deeds in his name.<sup>179</sup> In the *Christ* poems, Christ serves as the model king/lord, while the disciples and saved are ideal subjects. The relationship between a good lord and his subjects is presented as a cycle of generosity (in terms of physical reward and in just and successful leadership) and loyal obedience. This model is not strictly secular, in the sense of pertaining only to relationships between earthly lords and subjects, but could also apply to the relationship existing between a bishop and his subject priests and monks.

The explicit model of a good king or lord in the *Christ* poems is, of course, Christ. Descriptions of Christ in the Bible portray him as generous, just, fierce in anger against those who flout the law, and resplendent in glory. These images merge well with the Anglo-Saxon cultural ideals of kingship. In the poems, Christ is presented as a resplendent king in three major areas – provider, protector, and judge. A good king or lord in Anglo-Saxon England was expected to be many things. He recognized the loyalty of his subjects and rewarded or punished according to what the situation required. Williams makes the point that “Lordship was based upon rewarding faithful service, and kings especially were expected to be generous . . . Successful kings gathered treasure and ensured further success by distributing it among their followers, who would then serve them in future wars to acquire more treasure.”<sup>180</sup>

According to Loyn:

A king was expected to be active in defence of his people, to be victorious in battle against encroaching neighbours, to extend the living-space of his community. In old age he might sit back and trust the younger men (whom he had rewarded well) to bear the brunt of the active fighting. Involvement in war and control of warriors was a basic and formative element in royal authority.<sup>181</sup>

Peter Clemons catalogues the kingly descriptions of Christ in *Ascension*, stating that the poet established a “metaphorical connection” between “the narrative of the Ascension and the

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<sup>179</sup> 1 Peter 1:13 enjoins Christians to “succincti lumbos mentis vestrae,” “gird the loins of your mind,” and 2 Timothy 4:1-2,5 contains the command “Testificor coram Deo, et Iesu Christo, qui iudicaturus est vivos et mortuos, per adventum ipsius, et regnum eius: praedica verbum, insta opportune, importune: argue, obsecra, increpa in omni patientia, et doctrina . . . Tu vero vigilia, in omnibus labora, opus fac evangelistae, ministerium tuum imple,” “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season, convince, rebuke, and exhort . . . As for you, always be steady, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.”

<sup>180</sup> Ann Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500-1066*. New York: St. Martin’s, 1999, 32.

<sup>181</sup> Loyn, *Governance of Anglo-Saxon England*, 31.

elements of heroic society” which “stresses primarily the relationship between Christ the *brega* (456a), *þeoden* (457a), *hlaford* (461a) and the apostles, his *þegena* (457b), *hæleð* (461a), *gesipas* (473a).”<sup>182</sup> Clemoes further points out the militaristic terms used to describe the entire relationship between Christ and his disciples. Christ is a “sincgiefan,” a giver of treasure who rewards his followers for their service while his disciples are sent out to destroy enemy idols. Further, his disciples protect him, and grieve upon Christ’s death.<sup>183</sup>

These images of Christ as king appear throughout the *Christ* poems. According to Lyric 1, Christ is the one who must return to fix the house in disrepair. “Nu is þam weorce þearf þæt se cræftga cume, ond se cyning sylfa, ond þonne gebete, nu gebrosnad is, hus under hrofe.”<sup>184</sup> The lyric asks that Christ come to restore the damaged world to glory. In this instance, he is the king and chief architect of the house or hall who must repair its damage. The imagery invoked here echoes that found later in the Exeter Book in the poem called “The Wanderer.” The poem describes the transitory nature of the things of this world, and describes the ruins left behind when the lord has died, the people dispersed and the hall abandoned. Religiously, the two poems argue for placing faith in Christ and heaven, rather than in worldly things. But they offer striking examples of how integral a strong king is to maintaining the central building to Anglo-Saxon life – the hall.

In Lyric Six, the Patriarchs in hell, who voice the plea of faithful Christians on earth, call on Christ to “Bring us hælo lif werigum witeþeowum, wope forcymenum, bitrum brynetearum.”<sup>185</sup> Here Christ is the avenging lord rescuing his loyal subjects, people taken prisoner in a raid. They plead for him to come and relieve them of their torment. Christ as lord defending his subjects recurs throughout the Lyrics, as in Lyric Eight, where Christ is a “helm alwhita” called on to protect his people from “se wites bona.”<sup>186</sup>

Passages detailing the generosity of Christ and those describing Christ as judge at times operate together in the poems. For instance, in *Judgment*, Christ acting as judge demonstrates

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<sup>182</sup> Peter Clemoes, “Cynewulf’s Image of the Ascension.” In *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources presented to Dorothy Whitelock*. Ed. Peter Clemoes and Kathleen Hughes. Pages 293-304.

<sup>183</sup> Clemoes, “Cynewulf’s Image of the Ascension,” 295.

<sup>184</sup> Lines 11b – 14a. “Now the building is in need of it, that the Craftsman and the King should come himself and so make good, now it is reduced to ruin, the house beneath its roof.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 205.

<sup>185</sup> Lines 150b – 152a. “Bring salvation, life, to us weary thralls to torment, overcome by weeping, by bitter salt tears.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 209.

<sup>186</sup> Lyric 8, line 274a. “Protector of all creatures” and line 264b “the cruel slayer.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 212.

not only the justness of his decisions but also his mercy. Similarly, the petition portion of the Lyrics appeals to Christ's mercy because he is Judge of all. All of the lyrics acknowledge the distance existing between God and man, and the petitions operate from both the viewpoint of those expecting the Advent and those expecting the Second Coming. As such, the lyrics often use imagery of prisoners or those in exile to address Christ. The prisoners/exiles call on Christ to save them from their circumstances, which have been placed on them unfairly. In *Advent*, Lyric Two states that Christ is “þu reccend ond þu riht cyning se þe locan healdeð, lif ontyneð, eadgu[m] upwegas, oþrum forwyrneð wlitigan wilsipes, gif his weorc ne deag.”<sup>187</sup> As a judge, Christ is cognizant of the power he holds over life and death, freedom and confinement. In the context of the lyric, this king is the one who proclaims a punishment only to those who deserve it, based on whether or not they adhere to his law. The petitioners, by extension the audience of the lyrics, through their faith, work to prove that they are not deserving of punishment.

The image of judge is carried over more subtly in Lyric Seven, which offers perhaps an outline of a trial, at least in the sense of a person answering charges against her. This scene is also important in that we see a judge considering the details of a particular case, and the process by which the case proceeds. Here, Joseph, rather than Christ, stands as judge, because he is the husband and therefore the lord of the family. He asks his wife to answer the charges of adultery arrayed against her. Joseph knows that he did not impregnate Mary. Joseph acts as a judge should, as one who is aware of the consequences of his decision. Certainly he is confronted by the possibility of restoring his reputation by ridding himself of an apparently adulterous wife, but this comes at a cost which he weighs in the poem. “Me nawþer deag, secge ne swige. Gif ic soð sprece, þonne sceal Dauides dohtor sweltan stanum astyrfed. Gen strengre is þæt ic morþor hele; scyle manswara laþ leoda gehwam lifgan siþþan fracod in folcum.”<sup>188</sup> He understands that if he voices his concerns, she will die. Conversely, he would be considered a criminal as well if he remains silent. If he does not reveal the crime, he would be labeled a perjurer.

Mary swears she will tell the truth and that she is innocent of the charges against her. The “trial” could go in a number of directions at this point. The husband could resort to

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<sup>187</sup> Lines 18-21 “Judge and just King, you who guard the locks and lay open life and the blessed ways on high, and to another deny the lovely longed-for road if his attainment does not suffice.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206.

<sup>188</sup> Lines 189b-195a. “Neither will benefit me, that I speak nor that I keep silent. If I tell the truth, then the daughter of David must die, killed with stones. It is still worse that I should cover up a crime: the perjurer must thereafter live loathed by every man, abominated by the people.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206.

violence, or he could abandon her. The husband could also return his wife to her family or, if the wife confessed, he could seek out her lover and demand redress from him. Either of these last two options could take place either informally or formally, that is between the parties or before the local lord. Strictly speaking, cases involving marriage or sexual behavior at this time would more strictly fall under the jurisdiction of a church court, but there is evidence to suggest that people still took matters into their own hands or resorted to local courts rather than going before the bishop's court. For instance, Alfred's laws outline various circumstances, such as when a man kills his wife and lover if he catches them having sex, when people are not subject to feuds. Edmund's laws attempt to outlaw feuds themselves, presumably because so many people were instigating and pursuing them.<sup>189</sup> In the case of Lyric Seven, the wife's word is enough to assure her innocence, and ostensibly the husband/judge acknowledges this.

According to Old Testament law, Mary's pregnancy is proof enough against her, and following the law, she must be stoned at the city gates. Her lover, if he could be found, would be stoned with her.<sup>190</sup> In tenth century England, the matter could be a little more complicated. While adultery could be grounds for a divorce according to canon law, gaining a divorce would still be difficult and subject to several conditions, such as whether or not the marriage was consummated or if degrees of consanguinity had been violated. Such cases at this time might still be pursued in a civil court, such as the court of the local lord. Further, there is some evidence that husbands, if they found their wives in the act of having sex with another man, could kill both without repercussion.<sup>191</sup> It is hard to say how often this might have happened; however, it was within the letter of Anglo-Saxon law for a judge to allow the accused to answer the charges against her, and in the case of Mary, she does so easily and with authority. Further, this illustrates the leeway practicable within the law, and further shows the encouragement the Church gave to kings toward mercy, so long as the testimony and evidence supported it. Events

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<sup>189</sup> Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 82&3. A. J. Robertson, ed. and trans. *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*. Cambridge: UP, 1925. New York City: AMS, 1974, 6 & 32.

<sup>190</sup> Please see above, page 44, note 123.

<sup>191</sup> This matter is covered, somewhat, by Rivers in his article "Adultery in Early Anglo-Saxon Society: Aethelberht 31 in Comparison with Continental Germanic Law," *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1991): 19-25. Although Aethelberht produced his laws considerably earlier than the tenth century, there is evidence that a husband, or presumably a wife, could kill his spouse and her lover if caught in the act or at least under the same blanket without having to pay wergild or being charged with murder. The reasoning would be that the lover was committing an act of theft. Divorce under canon law would be contingent, in part, on whether or not the marriage was consummated before the spouse took a lover.

that appeared criminal and threatening to the social order were not always so, and should be investigated first before being dealt with harshly.

Countering this image of a merciful judge are the depictions of Christ as a wrathful judge in both *Ascension* and *Judgment*. Christ's act of judgment in *Ascension* is confined mainly to a reference of his condemnation of Satan to hell, and to an admonition to the poem's audience to be mindful that their actions will reflect well on them when he decides who will join him in heaven. At line 600, *Ascension* begins a section detailing the myriad gifts which Christ has bestowed on humanity. The list is fairly general at the beginning, stating that "He us æt giefed̥ ond æhta sped, welan ofer widlond, ond weder liþe under swegles hleo."<sup>192</sup> At line 656, the audience is reminded of the gifts bestowed on humanity by God. "Ða us geweorðade se þas world gescop, godes gæstsunu, ond us giefe sealde, uppe mid englum ece staþelas, ond eac monigfealde modes snyttru seow ond sette geond sefan monna."<sup>193</sup> For instance, "Sum mæg godcunde reccan ryhte æ"<sup>194</sup> while another "mæg searlice wordcwide writan"<sup>195</sup> and "sumum wiges sped giefed̥ æt guþe"<sup>196</sup> To be sure, some of the gifts given by Christ are strictly in the realm of the supernatural, as no human king could rightly claim to directly affect the weather or to have created the world. But just as Christ displayed generosity, kings and lords were responsible for and called on to provide wealth, security and peace for their people.

*Judgment*, on the other hand, culminates in a scene that explicitly presents the king as judging the behavior of his subjects. Christ appears as distributor of both reward and punishment, a judge who is stern, yet just. Christ, in speaking to both sinners and saved, refers to his own generosity in sacrificing his life for their sins and his gift to all people of a soul. Christ is just in that he recognizes those who are innocent of wrong-doing and does not falsely accuse them. To the saved, he refers to their service and adherence to his laws in welcoming them to heaven. With regard to the guilty, he treats those who have broken his law harshly but punishes them according to their crime. The guiltless, in recognition for their faithful service, he welcomes into heaven to share in its joys and wonders. *Judgment* shows the reward of the saved

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<sup>192</sup> Line 604-6a. "He gives us food and the prosperity of possessions, wealth across the wide earth and mild weather beneath the shelter of the sky." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 222.

<sup>193</sup> Lines 659-663. "He dignified us at that time — he who created this world, the spiritual Son of God — and gave us gifts, everlasting mansions among the angels on high; and also he sowed and planted abundantly throughout men's minds wisdom of intellect." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 223.

<sup>194</sup> Lines 670b-671a. "One is enabled to recite the true divine law." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 224.

<sup>195</sup> Lines 672b-673a. "enabled skilfully to write down language." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 224.

<sup>196</sup> Lines 673b-74a "To one he grants martial success in battle." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 224.

at the Last Day, and details the joys they will experience in return for their lawful behavior. It is the culminating bliss and peace, acknowledgement and gratitude, illustrated in *Ascension*, and anticipated by the *Advent Lyrics*.

Rounding out the model of an ideal lord are the illustrations of Christ's generosity. In the *Christ* poems, there are three separate episodes that illustrate, or at least allude to, Christ's generosity. The *Advent Lyrics* speak of how Christ "bringeð blisse þe, benda onlyseð niþum genedde."<sup>197</sup> In terms of Church propaganda, the image of Christ the king as splendid conqueror and giver of treasure provides important reasons for following him, and by extension an earthly king who exhibits those traits. The image of Christ as a magnificent earthly king would be particularly useful in Anglo-Saxon England in establishing an equation in earthly terms of the spiritual magnificence of Christ. In return for gifts and protection, "Ðæt is þæs wyrde þætte werþeode secgen dryhtne þonc duguða gehwylcre þe us sið ond ær simle gefremede þurh monig fealdan mægne geryno."<sup>198</sup>

*Ascension* describes Christ's exploits in the harrowing of hell, with the souls of the pre-Christian faithful treated as plunder. Christ is a magnificent and powerful king; his kingdom flourishes, he and his mighty armies of apostles and angels plunder his enemies bringing back heaps of gold to his splendid hall. In return for their service, his followers are richly rewarded. Thus the relationship between lord and people is outlined. Later in *Ascension*, after the "Leaps of Christ" section,<sup>199</sup> we read:

Swa we men sculon heortan gehydum hlypum styllan of mægne in  
mægen mærpum tilgan þæt we to þam hyhsten hrofe gestigan  
halgum weorcum þær is hyht ond blis geþungen þegnweorud<sup>200</sup>

*Ascension* also looks forward to the final judgment, linking thematically with *Judgment*. In anticipation of the rewards, or perhaps punishments, to be doled out, the poet reminds us that:

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<sup>197</sup> Lyric 3, lines 68-9a." brings you bliss; he unlooses the bonds evilly forced upon you." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 207.

<sup>198</sup> Lines 600 – 603 "It is fitting that the peoples should speak their gratitude to the Lord for each one of the benefits which he, in the mystery of his manifold powers, has always achieved for us early and late." *Ascension*, Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 222

<sup>199</sup> Lines 720 - 743. This section is described above, on page 14.

<sup>200</sup> lines 746b – 751a. "So must we men spring in leaps in the thoughts of our heart from strength to strength and strive after glorious things, so that we may ascend by holy works to the highest heaven where there is joy and bliss and the virtuous company of God's servants." *Ascension*, Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 225

Is þam dome neah þæt we gelice sceolon leanum hleotan swa we  
widefeorh weorcum hlodun geond sidne grund.<sup>201</sup>

Just as a just lord must aid and protect his followers; so too must the people demonstrate good faith by following the laws established for them by their ruler. As Christ was the premier example of a just and generous lord, the apostles were the paragons of loyal and obedient subjects and thegns. Throughout the *Cynewulfian* poem, the *Fates of the Apostles*, the various disciples are described in militaristic ways and commended for their bravery and strength of faith. At line 4, they are “assured of fame for their accomplishments. . . The repute, the power and the glory of the Prince’s servants spread across the earth, and their more than modest might.”<sup>202</sup> Each of them is depicted as a loyal and brave thegn who attempts great and difficult tasks for their lord. Peter and Paul, “on Romebyrig, frame, fyrdhwate, feorh ofgefon”<sup>203</sup> Bartholomew is described as “beaducræftig beorn”<sup>204</sup> Simeon and Thaddeus “naeron tohtan saene lindgelaces”<sup>205</sup> Even as they were persecuted and killed for their beliefs, they never faltered in their loyalty. For instance, James dies at the hands of mob wielding clubs, “þurg stenges sweng stiðmod gecrang eadig for æfestum.”<sup>206</sup>

This theme of loyalty is closely paralleled in *Ascension*. *Ascension* opens with the relationship between Christ, the perfect king, and his apostles characterized in militaristic terms.<sup>207</sup> Christ summoned his “þegna gedryht” to Bethany and:

Hy þæs lareowes on þam wildæge word ne gehyrwdon, hyra  
singiefan. Sona wæron gearwe, hæleð mid hlaford, to þære  
halgan byrg.<sup>208</sup>

The apostles are also characterized as “chosen servants.”<sup>209</sup> These “thegns praised and extolled the Lord of life Father of things created.” They are “beloved companions” who are given the

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<sup>201</sup> Lines 782b – 785a. “It is close to that judgment at which we shall obtain commensurate rewards, according as we gave laid up for ourselves by our works over the span of our lives throughout the wide world.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 226.

<sup>202</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 154-5.

<sup>203</sup> Lines 11b-12. “bold, warrior-like, gave up their lives in the city of Rome.” Treharne *Old and Middle English*, 93.

<sup>204</sup> Line 44a. “the warlike warrior.” Treharne *Old and Middle English*, 93

<sup>205</sup> Lines 75-76a. “were not cowardly in the campaign of this battle.” Treharne *Old and Middle English*, 93

<sup>206</sup> Lines 72-3a. “Resolute, he fell through the cudgel’s blow, happy despite the malice.” Treharne *Old and Middle English*, 93

<sup>207</sup> Clemons, “Cynewulf’s Image of the Ascension,” 294.

<sup>208</sup> “They did not, on that longed-for day, despise the word of the Master, their Dispenser of treasure. They were ready to go at once, heroes with their Lord, to that holy city.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 219. The manuscript uses the word “byrg” or “burh,” words for towns specifically chosen to be fortified.

“handsome reward”<sup>210</sup> of life eternal in heaven for their service. Appropriately, “their spirit was sad, smouldering about their heart; their mind was mournful because they would no longer be able, here below heaven, to see him [who was] held so dear”<sup>211</sup> as they watch their lord ascend.

This scene is followed closely by one in which two angels question the apostles about their behavior. The angels ask the apostles “why do you stand waiting in a circle?” Implicit in their question is the biblical injunction that Christ gave to the apostles – to go forth and spread the Gospel.<sup>212</sup> In an Anglo-Saxon sense, acting on this injunction would thus fulfill the apostles’ duties of as obedient thegns, echoing the sentiment in Lyrics Ten and Twelve. Both lyrics have sections encouraging the audience to do good works for their lord and to do better things, in this case, the will of their lord. In *Ascension*, in order to fulfill their roles as loyal and faithful thegns, the disciples must go out into the world seeking personal glory because their exploits reflect on their lord as well. In Anglo-Saxon secular life, this would be paralleled by the tasks set by the king for his thegns to accomplish, or even the expectation that thegns undertake when they swear fidelity and obedience to a lord or king, which would carry the weight of an oath. For instance, in the *Battle of Maldon*, after Byrtnoth died in the battle, Ælfwine urges his comrades to “Gemunaþ þa mæla þe we oft æt meodo spræcon, þonne we on bence beot ahofon, hæleð on healle, ymbe heard gewynn; nu mæg cunnian hwa cene sy.”<sup>213</sup> Another example of thegns refusing to abandon their duty even after the death of their respective lords occurs in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* account of the feud between Cynewulf and Cyneheard. In 755, Cyneheard surrounded Cynewulf and a small band of his thegns. Cynewulf is killed, and when his thegns are offered “feoh ond feorh,” “ond hiera naenig hit gepicgean nolde.”<sup>214</sup> In a reversal, Cyneheard is surrounded by the remainder of Cynewulf’s force. Cyneheard made a similar offer to these

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<sup>209</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 220. Bradley supplies a more general translation for the manuscript’s “þegnas,” or “thegns.”

<sup>210</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 219.

<sup>211</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 220.

<sup>212</sup> Acts 1:8 Jesus tells the apostles “sed accipietis virtutem supervenietis Spiritus sancti in vos, et eritis mihi testes in Ierusalem, et omni Iudaea, et Samaria, et usque ad ultimum terrae.” “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” Immediately afterward, Jesus ascends into heaven.

<sup>213</sup> “Remember the words that we often spoke over mead, when we raised a vow at our bench, heroes in the hall, about the hard battle; now it will be tested who is brave.” Lines 212-5. Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 150-1.

<sup>214</sup> “money and life;” “but not one of them would accept it.” Treharne, *Old and Middle English*, 22-3.



men, revealing that kinsmen of theirs were serving in his force, only to be rebuffed with the answer “þæt nænig mæg leofra nære þonne hlaford, ond hie næfre his banan folgian noldon.”<sup>215</sup>

Each of the poems provides examples for model behavior. *Ascension* presents the disciples as the paragon of obedient thegns. The saved are the examples of obedient subjects in *Judgment*. In each case, the people profiled are described as loyal to their lord and obedient to their oaths. They are manly thegns, swift and strong in battle for their lord, whatever the odds. Further, they are grateful for what they receive from their king and lord. In *Advent*, the prophets and patriarchs in hell are presented as worthy of emulation. Also, the adjectives describing the audience in the petitional sections of the Lyrics provide clues to the behavior expected of subjects. The audience members are described as loyal subjects, patient, long suffering, eager for good repute in word and deeds. They should strive for glorious deeds so that they may be rewarded. The Lyrics serve as prayers made in the knowledge that God will hear the voices of the righteous – even those in pre-Christian times<sup>216</sup> – and that their obedient behavior will be rewarded in heaven. In *Advent Lyrics* we have the admonition:

Forþþon we hine domhwate dædum ond wordum hergen holdlice.  
þæt is healic ræd monna gehwylcum þe gemynd hafað, þæt he  
symle oftost ond inlocast ond geornlicost god weorþige. He him  
þære lisse lean forgildeð, se halgoda hælend sylfa.<sup>217</sup>

In addition to praising their lord through words and deeds, subjects must “by right praise highly with all their might.”<sup>218</sup> This is an example of rendering what is due to a lord. Here, praising God means rendering unto one’s lord the service due him. The service given a secular lord might vary from subject to subject – bards would probably be more apt literally to “praise highly” – but the expectation would be similar. In the passage from *Advent*, the expected service is praise through adherence to God’s laws, “in deeds and words.” Ideally, warriors would serve as soldiers to the best of their ability, unstinting in their effort and unwavering in their loyalty. Farmers would dutifully tend their fields and obediently follow the laws, paying their rents and

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<sup>215</sup> “that no kinsman could be dearer to them than their lord and that they would not follow his murderer.” Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> The petition of Lyric Six is made by the Patriarchs in hell who lived before Christ and did not have the opportunity to accept him as Lord. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 209.

<sup>217</sup> “Therefore let us, eager for good repute, faithfully praise him in deeds and in words. It is high wisdom in every person who has recall, that he should always most frequently, most heartily and most eagerly worship God. He, the hallowed Saviour himself, will give him the reward of this love.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 216.

<sup>218</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 215.

tithes on time and in full. And certainly, subjects, upon being rewarded for their loyalty, would thank their lord graciously.

At the base of this relationship of just, generous lords and respectful, obedient subjects is the system of rewards. By rewarding lawful behavior, lords could expect a peaceful and receptive group of subjects who would support their rule. Thegns could expect a generous lord who would protect their interests and ensure stability and prosperity. A poem exemplifying this relationship appears later in the Exeter Book. This poem, “Widsith,” demonstrates obedient behavior on the part of a subject. Widsith, in the context of the poem, states that he traveled and sang and told tales for many kings. When, in appreciation for his service, Eormanric, the king of the Goths, rewards Widsith with a beautiful “collar in which there was six hundred coins’ worth of pure gold,” Widsith dutifully presents the necklace to his king, Eadgils, for “my lord and protector to keep when I arrived home.”<sup>219</sup> Eadgils is also singled out for praise, for when Widsith returns home, Eadgils rewards him with a gift of lands, which his queen, Ealhild, increases with another gift. The final lines of the poem particularly drive home the nature of the relationship between ruler and subject, echoing lines found in the Christ poems – The “people’s entertainers” go forth into the world and “declare their need and speak words of thanks.” They seek out someone “discerning of song” and generous with gifts. In return, they will sing “to exalt his repute and sustain his heroic standing until everything passes away, light and life together.”<sup>220</sup> Again this passage speaks primarily about the specific duties of a specific role in society, but the larger implication is that, in order to express gratitude for the opportunities and blessings bestowed on them by their lord, a person must fulfill the expectations of their social role.

For illustrations of direct rewards for lawful behavior in real terms, it is useful to turn to the evidence provided by charters. The charters mainly contain records of land transactions, rather than documenting gift exchange, but they do stipulate when a transaction takes place because of loyal service. In the transaction, the recipient is granted access to lands and the profits thereof. An example of this is the charter detailing a lease of land by Ealdred, Bishop of Worcester, to Wulfgeat.<sup>221</sup> The lease itself does not commend Wulfgeat for his service, but it does stipulate conditions for the usage of the land. Wulfgeat and his inheritors must “syn æfre

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<sup>219</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 339.

<sup>220</sup> Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 340.

<sup>221</sup> Please see above page 49.

underþeodde 7 gehersumne 7 ðam hlaforðscipe folhgien ðe ðonne bisceop beo” in order to have access to the land.<sup>222</sup> One can imagine that Wulfgeat was initially granted the land because of his obedience and subservience, and so long as he and his inheritors continue to fulfill that role, they will continue to have access to it. Another example is contained in the lease of land by Lyfing, Bishop of Worcester to his “holdan 7 getreowan þegene” Æthelric, dated 1042.<sup>223</sup> The Bishop “gebocige summe dæl landes,” leases the land to Æþelric “for his eadmodre gehersumnyse” as well as “for his licwurðan sceatte.”<sup>224</sup> Æþelric was granted use of the land for his lifetime and may leave it to two of his heirs, “who please him best and are willing to earn it from him most deservedly.”<sup>225</sup>

The promises of Christ’s generosity in the *Christ* poems echo the conditions and stipulations found in both of these examples. If God so chooses, those who demonstrate obedience during life will gain access to spiritual land. Lyric Two explicitly states that Christ “ontyneð” heaven to loyal subjects while denying admittance to those whose “weorc ne deag.”<sup>226</sup> In *Judgment*, Christ welcomes the saved into heaven with the words “Onfoð nu mid freondum mines fæder rice” and “ge fægre sceolon lean mid leofum lange brucan.”<sup>227</sup> The reward of heaven is presented as being contingent on the work and faith of Christians in this life, demonstrating their loyalty and obedience to their spiritual lord.

Loyalty was rewarded in other ways as well. Obedient subjects received influential positions at court or perhaps the support of people in high stations to call upon in times of need. Williams recounts Edgar’s actions after ascending the throne in 959.<sup>228</sup> In an effort to cement the support of those who bolstered his claims, Edgar appointed these men to high positions, including *ealdordoms*. In some cases, this meant removing the people placed in those positions by his predecessor and rival, Eadwig. Perhaps most notably, this political jockeying involved the position of Archbishop of Canterbury. Eadwig had appointed a man to the post, but Eadwig died

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<sup>222</sup> “They shall always be submissive and obedient and acknowledge the lordship of whoever is bishop at the time.” Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 208 & 209.

<sup>223</sup> “loyal and faithful thegn.” Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 180 & 181. See above, p. 48

<sup>224</sup> “grant by charter a certain piece of land.” Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 180 & 181

<sup>225</sup> Though whether they were to use the land concurrently or successively is unclear. It was common for people and institutions to grant land for several lifetimes, after which the land reverted back to the grantor.

<sup>226</sup> Lines 19b & 21b. “lays open” and “attainment does not suffice.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206.

<sup>227</sup> Lines 1344 & 1360b-1361. “Now amidst friends receive the kingdom of my Father” and “you shall long and happily enjoy the reward amid my Beloved.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 240.

<sup>228</sup> In fact if not in ritual; he was not officially consecrated until 973. Ann Williams, *Kingship and Government in Pre-Conquest England, c. 500-1066*. British History in Perspective. Ed. Jeremy Black. New York: St. Martin’s, 1999. 26.

before the man received the symbol of his status as archbishop, his pallium from Rome. When Edgar took power, he removed the man from the post and appointed Dunstan.

The lawsuit concerning Wynflæd and Leofwine offers a good example of this. This particular case dealt with a dispute over lands claimed by both parties. When Wynflæd made her initial claim, Leofwine asked, in a bit of legal wrangling, that the matter be held over to the shire court. Wynflæd, on two separate instances, was able to produce a body of supporting witnesses that included Ælfðryð, the queen mother of the reigning king Æþelred, an archbishop, an ealdorman, three bishops, two abbesses, an abbot, a priest, members of the royal household, and “many a good thegn and good woman” throughout the course of the case. Wormald suggests that a great deal of the strength of Wynflæd’s case rested in the witnesses who supported her claim. Wormald states “there is reason to think that Queen Ælfðryð was patron to her [Wynflæd] and several of her supporters” and that “it may have been the extent of her support that entitled Wynflæd to make her case.”<sup>229</sup>

Similarly, Christ promises support to his disciples in their endeavors in *Ascension*. After calling them to him in Bethany, he announces that he will leave them soon; however, “Næfre ic from hweorfe, ac ic lufan symle læste wið eowic, ond eow meht giefe ond mid wunige, awo to ealdre, þæt eow æfre ne bið þurh gife mine godes onsien.”<sup>230</sup> The implication is that because Christ will support them, the disciples will be able to accomplish the very tall tasks he assigns them – travelling to far-off lands, stamping out idols, sowing peace, and spreading the gospel. The poems differ from their Biblical sources in that, while Christ, in the gospel texts, reminds the disciples of their duties, the nature of their duties is less militaristic and, though the source texts mention that Christ will be with them, the implication that they will succeed *because* Christ will support them is missing.<sup>231</sup>

The *Christ* poems illustrate the ideals the Church wanted its followers to display – obedience, loyalty, and stability. By encouraging this behavior in subjects in particular, the

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<sup>229</sup> Patrick Wormald. *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*. Vol 1. Legislation and its Limits. Oxford: Blackwell, 1999. 152.

<sup>230</sup> Lines 476b-480. “I shall never leave you, but I shall always continue in love towards you and give you power and remain with you for ever and ever so that by my grace you will never be wanting in virtue.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 219.

<sup>231</sup> Matthew 28:19-20: “euntes ergo docete omnes gentes: baptizantes eos in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus sancti: docentes eos servare omnia quaecumque mandavi vobis: et ecce ego vobiscum sum omnibus diebus, usque ad consummationem saeculi.” “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.” Similar passages appear at Mark 16:15-20, and at Luke 24:47-53.

Church may have helped to secure its position with the ruling elite, who in turn were more apt to support the Church in its endeavors. There were real benefits to be had by striving toward these ideals on the part of subjects, such as financial gain, appointment to positions of power, and support in legal claims. But despite these enticements, unacceptable behavior still occurred. In an effort to stem this, law codes, canonical and secular, listed the fines and punishments associated with such action. Just as the *Christ* poems illustrated lawful behavior and its rewards, they also warn against breaking the law.

Offering examples of lawful behavior was a means of exerting social control. The repetition of the examples and the veneration of those held up for emulation would act as training, reinforcing notions of proper behavior and societal relationships. Those who met these standards of behavior could expect at the very least to be left alone and potentially to be rewarded for the mindfulness and obedience.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BREAKING THE KING'S PEACE

Through their veneration of Christ, the *Christ* poems provide examples of proper behavior expected of lords and subjects. Campbell states that tenth-century Anglo-Saxon church reformers equated “the role of Christian kings with that of Christ himself, thus at once hedging the decrees of a ‘good’ king with a kind of vicarious divinity.”<sup>232</sup> Further, by describing the relationship between the disciples and Christ in glowing idealistic terms of lord and thegn, the poems work to emphasize the rewards of such behavior. In order to strengthen their message extolling the virtues of obedient behavior, the *Christ* poems also illustrate the consequences of disobedience. If Christ and his disciples are examples of lawful lords and subjects, then devils and sinners are prime examples of disloyal, disobedient and ungrateful lords and subjects. All of the poems operate from a standpoint that the audience has sinned and will sin again, and each poem emphasizes slightly different aspects of how this peccant nature affects the relationship between the audience and its spiritual lord. *Advent* describes the plight of its audience, guilty of sin, and their need to call upon the heavenly lord for aid and mercy. *Ascension* illustrates how those who continue to sin, after Christ has given them the opportunity to follow his law by harrowing of hell and singlehandedly defeating Satan, will face their lord’s wrath at judgment. The strongest calls for repentance and right living emerge in *Ascension*, coupled with Cynewulf’s own admissions of his failings.<sup>233</sup>

The *Christ* poems, in providing examples of the dangers that people face in the secular realm of breaking the law and their oath to their lord, operate as tools of social control. The

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<sup>232</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 203.

<sup>233</sup> Lines 789b-793a. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 226.

poems work, as the law codes do, to establish a relationship between ruler and ruled in which the ruled are to be loyal and obedient and in which rulers are right to punish law-breaking stringently. This mode of thinking culminates in *Judgment*. This poem not only explicitly demonstrates Christ's wrath, but also equates the sinners' actions with physical attacks on him. This echoes Anglo-Saxon law that prohibits plotting against and attacking one's lord, as well as harboring those who do so. At one stroke, the authors and potentially, through them, the Anglo-Saxon Church provide examples of unacceptable behavior, and, by echoing Anglo-Saxon law, reinforce the notion that secular authorities have the justification to punish such behavior as a direct threat to their continued rule.

Reinforcing acceptable social norms was important for any lord or king, but was especially so during the reign of Æthelred. The period of Æthelred's kingship, from approximately 978-1016, provides an excellent backdrop against which the role of the Christ poems can be examined. Æthelred's reign falls within the period accepted for the production of the Exeter Book, and the internal strife and external invasion continually faced by Æthelred throughout his reign provide examples of the pressures that fueled the feeling that such regulation of socially acceptable behavior was imperative to the ruling elite in order to remain in power. One illustrative case involves the actions of a certain Wulfbold, recorded in a charter dated to about 996. Wulfbold was apparently a property owner of some stature, and proved himself a menace by raiding the estate of his stepmother sometime between 978 and 990. He took "þær eal [þæt] he þær funde inne 7 ute læsse 7 mare."<sup>234</sup> Wulfbold then pointedly ignored the order to surrender what he stole. Later, Wulfbold compounded his crime by seizing the estate of "his mæges . . . Bryhtmæres æt Burnan."<sup>235</sup> Ultimately, King Æthelred commanded Wulfbold four times to return what he had taken, and four times Wulfbold ignored the king. At a council meeting in London, the King's councilors, "ge gehadode ge læwide," stripped Wulfbold of his property and remanded it all to the king.<sup>236</sup> The council also declared Wulfbold's life forfeit and at the discretion of the king.

At some point in all this, Wulfbold died, by some undetermined cause, though the problems did not end with his death. The property at Bourne was seized and given to one of Æthelred's thegns, Eadmær. Wulfbold's widow and her son, therefore, went to the estate at

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<sup>234</sup> "all that he found there, within and without, less and more." Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* 129.

<sup>235</sup> "his kinsman, Brihtmær at Bourne." Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* 129.

<sup>236</sup> "both ecclesiastics and laymen." Robertson, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* 129.

Bourne and killed Eadmær and fifteen of his companions. In response to these actions, the unnamed son and Wulfbold's widow were also condemned to death and forfeiture.<sup>237</sup>

In terms of a person of rank or stature who proves to be nettlesome to the king, Wulfbold's case echoes that of one Æthelsige, who was not only a thegn of Æthelred's, but also a "particular favourite" of his, who attests charters from approximately 987 to roughly 997.<sup>238</sup> Æthelsige was a party in a contentious land dispute involving the Bishop of Rochester in 986. Apparently, Æthelred granted Æthelsige a portion of the lands held by the see of Rochester. The Bishop, who later claimed ignorance, summarily evicted Æthelsige, provoking the ire of the young king, who demonstrated his anger by ravaging Rochester. Æthelsige apparently fell out of Æthelred's favor later, because, sometime from 995 to 998, he is charged with "exploiting [Æthelred's] youth and inexperience."<sup>239</sup> In the charter condemning Æthelsige, the king describes him as an enemy of Almighty God and all the people" and "is accused of unspecified acts of theft of plunder and specifically the murder of a loyal reeve who had tried to oppose" Æthelsige.<sup>240</sup> As a result, Æthelsige was "deprived of his lands and his *dignitas*." Wormald, in his "Handlist," questions whether or not an earlier charter, from 995, declaring the "forfeiture and outlawry" of one Æthelsige "for the theft of swine" involves the same person.

In these cases, we see people willfully and repeatedly flaunting the rule of the king. Wulfbold committed some serious crimes, including raiding and theft, and compounded them by ignoring Æthelred's order to desist in his wrongdoing, pay the (by this time steep) fines, and restore the stolen property. Wulfbold's crimes were therefore extremely threatening: he repeated offences he had been ordered by his lord to cease. In essence, Wulfbold was guilty of personally threatening the king's position as his overlord. The witan therefore deemed that Wulfbold should be executed and his property forfeited to the king. Æthelsige, by the same token, also committed serious crimes, including theft and murder. Somehow, he was able to stave off the sort of response that Wulfbold received, which allowed him to remain in the king's favor to some extent for a time, but in the end, Æthelsige proved to be too much of a liability.<sup>241</sup> These individuals were potentially setting an undesirable precedent, in that they were committing

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<sup>237</sup> Patrick Wormald, "A Handlist of Anglo-Saxon Lawsuits." *Legal Culture in the Medieval West: law as text, image, and experience*. London: Hambledon, 1999. 268.

<sup>238</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 26

<sup>239</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 27.

<sup>240</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 27.

<sup>241</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 27.



crimes and either flaunting authority outright or trusting in goodwill they had garnered earlier in their career to excuse their behavior.

Instances such as those involving Wulfbold and Æthelsige illustrate the extent to which Æthelred viewed any lawbreaking as potentially threatening to his continued reign. He seemed to be particularly concerned with asserting his supremacy as king and his law codes are filled with statutes that seek to cement his rule. This desire is illustrated by statutes such as VI Æthelred 28 and following, which require all subjects to “strictly abide by his oath and pledge.”<sup>242</sup> Later, statute 37 states “If anyone plots against the king’s life, he shall forfeit his life and all he possesses.”<sup>243</sup>

Æthelred used the courts to control behavior and to punish other disobedient subjects. In the charter evidence, Wormald records at least twelve instances of forfeiture judgments being made against individuals for law-breaking during the reign of Æthelred. This includes the “exile and outlawry of Leofsig, *dux*, for killing Æfic, a royal reeve, in his own home” in about 1007 and, in 1012, the “forfeiture of Æthelflæd, sister of Leofsig, for ignoring his outlawry and doing everything to assist him.”<sup>244</sup> Æthelred created boundaries beyond which his subjects could not stray without facing severe penalties.

Cases such as these, involving Wulfbold, Æthelsige and Lefosige, offer a point of comparison to the episodes in the *Christ* poems describing the serious nature of oath-breaking and disobedience. These episodes focus on Satan’s crimes which appear in *Ascension* and *Judgment*. Lines 558 through 560 in *Ascension* describe the harrowing of hell. In establishing the scene, the poem states “hafað nu se halga helle bireafod ealles þæs gafoles þe hi geardagum in þæt orlege unryhte swealg.”<sup>245</sup> Satan’s attempt at usurping the kingdom of heaven is implied, but it is noteworthy that the charge specifically leveled against him in *Ascension* is stealing plunder, in this case the souls of the patriarchs, that rightly belongs to his overlord, God. Certainly, Wulfbold and Æthelsige were not, perhaps, attempting to remove Æthelred from power, but their disloyalty and disobedience posed a threat to Æthelred. Further, while Wulfbold and Æthelsige more than likely were not sources for the episodes presented in the poems,

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<sup>242</sup> A.J. Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England from Edmund to Henry I*. Cambridge: UP, 1925. New York City: AMS, 1974. 98-9. These laws echo similar statutes first codified by Alfred.

<sup>243</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 106-7.

<sup>244</sup> Wormald, “Handlist,” 269

<sup>245</sup> “Now has the Holy One robbed hell of all the spoil which it wrongfully swallowed up during the strife in days of old” Lines 558-60. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 221.

referring to Satan's oath-breaking, and the similarities between the two men and the crimes of Satan would have resonated with the poem's audience.

Disloyalty and oath-breaking obviously were serious breaches of conduct. The loyalty of the members of the nobility was not steadfast and unflinching. At times it seemed as if they viewed their oath of loyalty to their lord and king as being determined by the situation. Ælfric of Hampshire provides a good example of this. The ealdorman is blamed for warning the Danes of a warfleet sent by Æthelred against them. Williams quotes the *Chronicle* that Ælfric then "absconded by night from the army."<sup>246</sup> Such an attitude was not acceptable in a time rife with raids and invasions. Æthelred therefore issued laws against it. Desertion from an army under the direction of the king was punishable by death.<sup>247</sup> VIII Æthelred 44.1 states, "and uton ænne cynehlaford holdlice healdan."<sup>248</sup>

Political pressures to more firmly establish the various ranks of nobility, with the king at the top, were building in the tenth century. Part of this agenda was shifting the set of obligations to rest more firmly on the subjects. Certainly, expectations for how a sovereign was supposed to act were still in effect, but attempts were made to minimize the consequences or to shift blame onto subjects. For instance, the code of IV Edgar takes his subjects to task for failing to pay their rents and taxes and thus inviting God to punish them with plague.<sup>249</sup> Later, Wulfstan included in his homilies similar sentiments, particularly in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*. Wulfstan states, in the *Sermo*, that the sins of the people, especially those sins and crimes that flout social order, bring about social discord and strife. One of Wulfstan's examples is the obedience with which the "hæthenum" worship their gods. "Ne dear man forhealdan lytel ne micel þæs þe gelagod is to gedwolgoda weorðunge."<sup>250</sup> By contrast, the Anglo-Saxons "forhealdað æghwær Godes gerihtes ealles to gelome."<sup>251</sup> Wulfstan goes on to state that the two greatest treacheries a man can commit are that he "his hlafordes saule beswice" and that he "his hlaford of life forræde, oððon of lande lifiende drife."<sup>252</sup> Because of these, and other sins, "fela ungelimpa glimpð þysse

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<sup>246</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 52.

<sup>247</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 100-01.

<sup>248</sup> "And let us loyally support one royal lord." Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*. 128-9.

<sup>249</sup> Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 29.

<sup>250</sup> "No man dares to withhold little or much of that which is ordained in the worship of false gods." Treharne, ed. *Old and Middle English*, 228-9.

<sup>251</sup> "withhold God's dues all too often." Treharne, ed. *Old and Middle English*, 228-9

<sup>252</sup> "should betray his lord's soul," "should treacherously kill his lord or drive his lord, living, from the land." Treharne, ed. *Old and Middle English*, 228-9

peode oft and gelome.”<sup>253</sup> The hardship of the people was therefore the fault of the people.<sup>254</sup> Breaking laws regarding maintenance of oaths carried a wide range of ramifications, including legal, social and spiritual.

Wulfstan represents a nexus where the secular and the religious intermingle. Church members were highly influential with many Anglo-Saxon kings, perhaps none more so than Wulfstan with Æthelred. The relationship between the post-Benedictine reform Church in Anglo-Saxon England and the secular Anglo-Saxon rulers of England is exemplified by the relationship between Archbishop Wulfstan and king Æthelred. The relationship between these two men is illustrative of the mutual interests and inter-connectedness of the Anglo-Saxon Church and the Anglo-Saxon ruling elite.

Wulfstan held considerable influence on Æthelred, which Williams describes as “crucial,” to the point of composing his later law codes, particularly V, VI, and VII.<sup>255</sup> In exchange, Wulfstan produced sermons and laws that upheld the authority of the king. Wulfstan was a famed sermon writer in his day, and his most famous one, the *Sermo Lupi*, was “clearly directed at a lay audience.”<sup>256</sup> In it he “attributes the sufferings of the English . . . to their neglect of religion, the ruin of some of the monasteries, and the unpunished murder of Edward the Martyr.”<sup>257</sup> According to Wulfstan, “it is not their king, but the English themselves whose inadequacies have brought miseries upon them.”<sup>258</sup> Williams states that to understand Wulfstan’s legal texts requires scholars to view them in relation to his sermons, because they “express the same sentiments and share the same aims; the moral and spiritual regeneration of England.”<sup>259</sup>

Texts such as the *Christ* poems could have helped in this moral and spiritual regeneration. In echoing the law codes, the poems outline undesirable behavior as well as the punishments to be expected from performing such behavior. Because the poems express sentiments that align with Church attitudes, they adhere to the idea that their audience was sinful and in need of reconciliation with their lord. Any mercy from God, however, comes because of

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<sup>253</sup> “many misfortunes occur to this nation often and frequently.” Treharne, ed. *Old and Middle English*, 230-1.

<sup>254</sup> By extension, if a thegn felt that his king or lord had not adequately rewarded him for his actions, the fault did not lie with the king; rather, there was something lacking in the way the thegn behaved.

<sup>255</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 85, 92.

<sup>256</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 202.

<sup>257</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 202.

<sup>258</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 202.

<sup>259</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 202.

his grace and is beyond expectation. Christians were to obey God’s law and perform good works in gratitude for whatever blessings befell them in this life. Lyric Six states “Is seo bot gelong eal set þe anum he[r fo]r oferþearfum.”<sup>260</sup> *Advent* asserts the audience’s status as sinners/criminals and the classification of all people as sinners is reflected in the poem’s descriptions of its audience and their plight. Through the use of the first person plural, especially in the petition sections, the poem classifies even the faithful and law abiding as sinners. For instance, Lyric Ten, at lines 370-372a, pleads “Ara nu onbehtum ond usse yrmþa geþenc, hu we tealtrigað tydran mode, hwearfiað heanlice.”<sup>261</sup> The *Lyrics* also state in various places throughout that the Lord “þone wergan heap wraþum ahreddan, earne from egsan,”<sup>262</sup> and that the audience members are “wergum wreccan,”<sup>263</sup> “þe we in carcerne sittað sorgende, sunnan wenað,”<sup>264</sup> because “hafað se awyrgda wulf tostenced, deor dædscua, dryhten, þin eowde, wide towrecene.”<sup>265</sup>

Yet throughout *Advent* the feeling is that sometimes the circumstances experienced by those calling out for aid are not of their own making. In Lyric Six, the Patriarchs in hell are there not because they sinned but because they did not have the opportunity to know and follow Christ in their lifetimes. The audience is presented as a people beset by enemies. This allows them the right to call upon their lord for help. Ultimately, though, the contemporary audience of the poems does not have the excuse of having died before the birth of Christ. They are troubled by their own lack of discipline and loyalty.<sup>266</sup> Because of their failings, they call out, in need of their lord to protect them and to bring them again to glory.

*Advent* operates both in the past and in the contemporaneous present, comparing the anticipation of a people for arrival of their savior with the anticipation of a Christian people for the return of their savior. *Ascension* moves out of a past anticipating Christ, whose glory is

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<sup>260</sup> “The cure for our excessive hardships belongs wholly with you alone.” Lines 152b-153. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 209.

<sup>261</sup> “Have mercy now upon your servants and think upon our miseries, how we stumble along faint of heart and wander about in abjection.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 214.

<sup>262</sup> From Lyric One. “shall save this wearied multitude from its enemies and wretched men from terror.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 205. Lines 16-17a.

<sup>263</sup> From Lyric 8, line 264a. “us weary exiles” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 212.

<sup>264</sup> From Lyric 2, lines 25b-26. “for we sit sorrowing in prison. We look forward to the sun.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206.

<sup>265</sup> From Lyric 8, lines 256-8a. “the accursed wolf, the beast and agent of darkness, has scattered your, flock, Lord, and driven it widely asunder.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 212

<sup>266</sup> “the swarthy spirit once seduced and misled us in our lust for things sinful, so that we, bereft of glory, will have to suffer misery for ever without end.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 206

expected but unknown, to a present in which Christians need to be mindful of the sacrifice of Christ and to live their lives accordingly. The distinction lies in Christ's teachings being available to humanity, and therefore offering little leeway for not following them. *Ascension*, like *Advent*, is based in the belief that humans are sinners, but because they now have the gift of Christ's sacrifice, the poem encourages its audience to avoid making matters worse by continuing to sin. Any sins committed by the people after the Crucifixion are compounded because the people know of Christ's sacrifice and the gifts he bestowed on them. The poem balances the images of the good Christ and worthy disciple/thegns with illustrations of law-breakers and the consequences for failing to abide by Christ's law.

*Ascension* contains two examples of disloyal subjects, Satan and sinners. Both are portrayed as directly striving against God and his law. Satan's willful breaking of God's law is signaled in the description of the souls who reside in hell. They are "þæs gafoles þe hi geardagum in þæt orlege unryhte swealg."<sup>267</sup> Satan is guilty of taking what rightfully belongs to God, the souls of those who died before the birth of Christ. Christ descends to hell and reclaims those souls. He completely overthrows the warriors of hell: "Nu sind forcumene ond in cwicsusle gehynde ond gehæfte, in helle grund duguþum bidæled, deofla cempan."<sup>268</sup> Finally, Christ's dominance is secured when he has "cyning inne gebond feonda foresprecan, fyrnum teagum gromhydigne, þær he gen ligeð in carcerne clommum gefæstnad, synnum gesæled."<sup>269</sup> The usurping rebel has been dealt with in a decisive fashion. Satan, for his treason, has been exiled forever from heaven.

Satan's initial treachery in trying to usurp heaven, breaking his oath of loyalty to God, and his continued rebellion against God would have especially resonated with an Anglo-Saxon audience due to the heavy cultural emphasis on abiding by one's oaths, and the dire penalties for breaking them. While swearing allegiance and loyalty to a particular lord was an important societal force prior to Alfred, Alfred introduced "the first reference to the oath of fidelity which all subjects had to take to later Anglo-Saxon kings" as well as laws specifically prohibiting

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<sup>267</sup> "the spoil which it wrongfully swallowed up during the strife in days of old." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 221. Lines 559-560.

<sup>268</sup> "Now the devils' champions are overcome and humiliated and enchained in living torment, stripped of blessings in the abyss of hell." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 221. Lines 561-563.

<sup>269</sup> "enchained the King within, the malignant mouthpiece of the fiends, in fiery fetters, where he still lies, fastened with shackles in prison, pinioned by his sins." Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 225. Lines 732b-36a.

attacks against the king.<sup>270</sup> Alfred's law code begins with an injunction, stating "we lærað þæt mæst dearf is þæt æghwælc mon hi að 7 his wed wærlice healde."<sup>271</sup> Each subject must abide by their oaths, especially those to lord and king, so long as those oaths are lawful. The law states that two situations make it permissible to break an oath: first, when someone is forced to promise something unlawful or, second, when someone is forced to betray his lord. Anyone failing to uphold a lawful oath was required to surrender his weapons, submit to imprisonment for forty days, and to do whatever else the bishop might deem necessary.

Breaking one's oath brought about strict consequences. Alfred mandated the use of force to capture the recalcitrant subject who refused to atone for oath-breaking. Attempts to escape the impending prison sentence could result in the offender being stripped of his property.<sup>272</sup> Further, if the escapee could not be caught, "sie he afliemed 7 sie amænsumod of eallum Cristes ciricum."<sup>273</sup> Later kings would strengthen these laws. IV Æthelstan 3 stated that an exiled person who returns to their "native district" should be "treated as a thief caught in the act."<sup>274</sup> In other words the accused is to be killed on sight, and the person who kills him will be held blameless, and not subject to paying the *wergild* of the exile.

Æthelstan's codes further attempted to dissuade families or friends from helping law-breakers. The Preamble to V Æthelstan prescribes death for anyone caught harboring an exile.<sup>275</sup> In the mid-tenth century, Edgar declared the property of an oath-breaker immediately forfeit. The offender's property would be divided into ten parts: one part would serve as a tithe; eight parts would be divided between king and Church, and the remaining tenth given to the offender's lord. Laws like these, outlining the penalties of oath-breaking and disloyalty as well as harboring those under punishment for doing so, appear in at least one extant law code for nearly every king in the tenth century. For whatever reason, and there were many, kings and lords felt the tenuousness of their status and tried to strengthen their position. Because the kings attempted

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<sup>270</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 155.

<sup>271</sup> 1-1.8 "we enjoin you as a matter of supreme importance that every man shall abide carefully by his oath and pledge." Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-3.

<sup>272</sup> Alfred's code states that the oath-breaker should "beo feowertig nihta on carcerne on cyninges tune," which Attenborough translates as "remain 40 days in prison at a royal manor." *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 62-3.

<sup>273</sup> "he shall be banished, and excommunicated from all the churches of Christ." Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 64-5.

<sup>274</sup> Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 146-7.

<sup>275</sup> Preamble V Æthelstan 3 "And he who harbours them, or any of their men, or sends men to them, shall forfeit his life and all he possesses." "7 se ðe hy feormige oþþe hyra manna ænigne oððe ænigne man him tosænde, sy he scyldig his sylfes 7 ealles þæs þe he age." Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 152-3.

to concentrate power on themselves, “steady progress toward centralization of government was made” during the tenth century.<sup>276</sup> The *Christ* poems, which were religious in nature, may be seen to seek to make absolutely clear the expected secular roles and behavior of members of society. As such, the *Christ* poems, because they illustrated the severe consequences for socially unacceptable behavior enumerated in legal texts, could have been effective tools in the attempt to stabilize royal power and the social order.

The scenes describing those consequences are graphic. Because of Christ’s sacrifice, people are given the choice of whether to take advantage of the opportunity to live by Christ’s law or to break it. Those who choose to sin therefore compound their crime, and they must face their Lord at the judgment, when “bið nu eorneste þonne eft cymeð, reðe ond ryhtwis.”<sup>277</sup> Heaven and earth will lament “þonne beorht cyning leanað þæs þe hy on eorþan eargum dædum lifdon leahtrum fa.”<sup>278</sup> The reward awaiting sinners will be “wraþlic ondlean.”<sup>279</sup> The sinners in the poem are aware of their plight. They stand before the judge, quailing in fear and wishing for some place to hide. As they await his judgment:

“Cerge reotað fore onsyne eces deman, þa þe hyra weorcum wace truwiað. Ðær bið oðywed egða mara þonne from frumgesceape gefrægen wurde æfre on eorðan. Ðær bið æghwylcum synwycendra on þa snudan tid leofra micle þonne eall þeos læne gesceaft, þær he hine sylfne on þam sigepreate behydan mæge, þonne herga fruma, æpelinga ord, eallum demedð, leofum ge laðum, lean æfter ryhte þeoda gehwylcre.”<sup>280</sup>

The *Christ* poems could have served someone like Wulfstan with someone like Æthelred as king not only as a means of frightening the audience of the poems to perform desired behavior with exquisite descriptions of the punishments awaiting those who break the law, but also as a means to call law-breakers to repent their actions, accept responsibility, and face punishment in order to, hopefully, be accepted back into society. Cynewulf, toward the end of *Ascension*

<sup>276</sup> Loyn, *Anglo-Saxon Governance*, 89.

<sup>277</sup> “he will be rigorous, angry, and righteous.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 227. Lines 824-25a.

<sup>278</sup> “when the radiant King rewards them for having lived on earth in slothful deeds, stained with vices.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 227. Lines 827-29a.

<sup>279</sup> “a bitter retribution.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 227. Line 831b.

<sup>280</sup> “they will weep before the face of the eternal Judge, those who have feeble faith in their achievements. Greater terror will be disclosed there than ever was heard tell of upon earth from its first creation. To every one of the evil-doers there in that imminent hour, much more desirable than this whole ephemeral creation will be somewhere that he may hide himself in that triumphant crush, when the Lord of hosts, Paragon of princes will adjudge to all, to the loved and the loathed, reward according to right for every person.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 227-8. Lines 833b-847a.

reminded his audience that “is us þearf micel þæt we gæstes wlite ær þam gryrebrogan on þas gæsnan tid georne biþencen.”<sup>281</sup> The poet of *Judgment* stated that “mæg mon swa þeah gelacnigan leahtra gehwylcne, yfel unclæne, gif he hit anum gesegð, ond nænig bihelan mæg on þam heardan dæge worn unbeted, dær hit þa weorud geseoð.”<sup>282</sup>

With such open calls to repent and correct one’s life, there is an obvious link between the poems and penitentials. The *Christ* poems, particularly *Judgment* and *Ascension*, strongly stress the need to confess and repent of one’s sins. Allen Frantzen states that the nature of penance as being something more than punitive, stating “penance was not a punishment: it was a cure.”<sup>283</sup> In support of this claim, Frantzen emphasizes the catechetical nature of penance, due to the repetition of phrases and ideas in order to cement belief. It is a form of training, reminiscent of Foucault’s theories expressed in his book *Discipline and Punish*. What we see in all this is an attempt to capture what Foucault calls “the obedient subject.” This individual is “subjected to habits, rules, orders, an authority that is exercised continually around him and upon him, and which he must allow to function automatically in him.”<sup>284</sup> According to Foucault, “the corrective effect . . . is obtained directly through the mechanics of a training.”<sup>285</sup> Through constant repetition, in this case of confessing and undertaking penance, the congregant becomes a disciplined body, ideally reacting without thought to the values which dictate right and wrong, proper and improper.<sup>286</sup> With repetition, the expectations of the Church, and the social order it espouses, become internalized by the congregants and seen as something natural.

So penance is not strictly punitive, but it is a corrective measure used as part of a program of social control, similar to the attempts to affect behavior in the *Christ* poems. It helps to establish a conditioned response, though not necessarily through fear of a particular punishment. Rather, by its very repetitiveness, penance helps to define socially unacceptable behavior, and further gives reasons why that behavior should be seen as unacceptable. Certainly, the specter of an unfavorable consequence looms, but the goal of penance, according to Frantzen, seems to be

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<sup>281</sup> “A great need is ours: that we earnestly reflect upon our soul’s appearance during this barren time before that appalling event.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 227-8. Lines 847b-849.

<sup>282</sup> “Even so a man may cure every vice and unclean evil if he tells it to it to one single person; and no one will be able to hide a blemish unatoned on that harsh day, where the multitude will see it.” Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 239. Lines 1308-1311.

<sup>283</sup> Allen J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England*. New Brunswick: Rutgers, 1983, 3.

<sup>284</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. trans. Alan Sheridan. (New York: Vintage-Random House, 1977) 129.

<sup>285</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 180.

<sup>286</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 166.



more of instruction than punishment. This method of inscription and reinscription serves, according to Foucault, two purposes: to constitute an individual as “a describable, analysable object” under “the gaze of a permanent corpus of knowledge” and to establish norms with which these identifiable groups could be tracked.<sup>287</sup>

How the penitentials exert social control can be illustrated in how they address sexual relationships. As Frantzen states, they do this not through direct influence or force. Rather, the penance prescribed by them acts as a form of re-education. Penitentials, and the canons they reference and sometimes contain, outline a variety of behaviors, including sexual behavior, unacceptable to the Church and followed by the proper penance for engaging in those behaviors. These rules affected not only the behaviors they sought to stem, but also decisions perhaps tangentially related to them. Canons prohibiting incest impacted marriage decisions, for instance, and canons prohibiting adultery were influenced by rules governing divorce.<sup>288</sup>

Frantzen states that the theory of penance as social control “is unsatisfactory because it equates penitential practice with behavior modification and manipulation, exaggerating its restrictive influence.”<sup>289</sup> Frantzen is correct in that scholars need to be mindful of the larger role of penance, and a view of penance as only punishment is perhaps incomplete. That penance is part of a program of the exertion of social control, though, cannot be disregarded entirely. Penance is consequential in nature, much like a punishment. Someone who does not commit a particular sin is unlikely to perform penance for it.

This is not to say that penance operated strictly in a non-punitive way. The commission of sin makes a person unacceptable to Christian society or to the community of Heaven. There is a danger in someone who breaks a social code and does not somehow reaffirm his willingness to rectify his behavior and conform again to that code. Frantzen states “The laws define an intricate network of duties linking members of Anglo-Saxon society, inside the kinship unit (a father and son) or outside it (a retainer and his lord). Infidelity to one’s loyalties – oathbreaking, desertion

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<sup>287</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 190.

<sup>288</sup> The canons pertaining to incest outlined proper sexual partners based, in part, on degrees of consanguinity. According to Pierre Payer, in earlier penitentials in Latin tended to concern themselves solely with the nuclear family, while later penitentials expanded their definitions. Payer cites the *Merseburg Penitential* as an example of this expansion, which includes the usual prohibitions against sex between mother and son and between siblings (male or female). The section on incest also prohibits having sexual relations with one’s “father’s widow, or with the widow of his paternal uncle, or with his sister, or with a female relation,” as well as with “one’s step-daughter.” Pierre J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code, 550-1150*. Toronto, UToronto: 1984, 32.

<sup>289</sup> Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 3.

of one's husband, failure to pay church dues – was severely punished.”<sup>290</sup> Sometimes examples had to be made. Frantzen reports that “the penitential of Egbert advised the priest to mete out stiff penances to hardened sinners so that others, seeing them suffer, would have fear and cease their own sinning.”<sup>291</sup> Within the Christian community, a sinner must confess his sin and truly repent for having committed it. The process of penance is the sinner's way of acknowledging wrongdoing and repaying the debt incurred by his sin.

The *Christ* poems served as a warning about the dangers of deviant behavior as well as a call to repent and return to the modes of behavior deemed acceptable. The poems directly called their audience to be mindful of their sins and to rectify their behavior through penance. Penance offers a way toward social acceptability. The commission of a sin set a person at odds with Christian society, and confession and penance helped him clear his record, rather like paying a fine for a criminal offense. Implicit in this action is the acknowledgment on the part of the sinner or the criminal that their actions were wrong according to societal standards and that an authority existed over them to whom they owed obedience. Disobedience set them at odds with that authority: accepting the prescribed consequences helped to set them aright.

The difference between penance and law, as Anglo-Saxon law was practiced, is that there is less likely to be any room for negotiation with regard to punishment in penance. If, as Frantzen suggests, the thrust of penance was to reeducate people and to put them right with God, then there is less reason for negotiation. Certainly a priest could presumably exercise some lenience in assigning penance – there was the injunction that the priest should know his congregants and the situation well enough to be able to assign an appropriate penance; however, if one believes in an all-seeing, all-powerful God, the situation comes down to a matter of delayed consequence. Within the law, there was considerable room for authorized negotiation, whether in terms of wrangling over requirements in a contract or over the terms of a fine, even though the law, like penance, is set up as an exchange, such that a given crime incurs a particular fine or punishment much like a given sin incurs a certain penance. While there may be some doubt as to whether one's human lord may learn of a crime or even of the fudging of a penalty, there is no question of whether or not one's spiritual lord will learn of the deception, because he already knows.

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<sup>290</sup> Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 177.

<sup>291</sup> Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance*, 178.

As Stephen Harris argues, social instability was of immense concern to the Anglo-Saxon ruling elite. Harris states that Wulfstan in his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* invoked “Old Testament logic” when he informed his congregation that the Viking raids they were suffering were in part because the people were disloyal and disobedient to their king. Wulfstan likened the situation to that faced by the Britons as recounted in Gildas, that “the English people [will be displaced] by a heathen invader sent as scourge”.<sup>292</sup> Harris and others assert that Gildas and Wulfstan believe that this “scourge” was brought on by collective sin, which disrupted the social order.<sup>293</sup>

This social order was fragile. Brooke, quoted in Harris, states that loyalty was shifty and that “a number of leading thegns and jarls were prepared to support a monarch from either side, if he proved more competent than [A]Ethelred.”<sup>294</sup> James Campbell notes that even in Alfred’s time, English nobility “preferred the Danes to the new masters of southern England ... if it suited their interests.”<sup>295</sup> Thus the implicit question of what happens if the king is not generous or just arises. If obedient and faithful servants should be protected, what happens when they are not? Servants are punished for their faithlessness; should kings be as well? Even as these texts work to define the institutional expectations of the people who read them, they raise the specter of the expectations of the reader toward those the texts seek to bolster and protect.

The *Christ* poems would have shared a similar function to the penitentials, in that the poems each repeat and reinforce such motifs as models of lawful and unlawful behavior or the audience’s dependence on the grace of their spiritual lord. As Frantzen argues, the repetitive nature of the penitentials worked as a means of reeducating the penitent over time. The internal repetition of the poems works in a similar way, though on a smaller temporal scale. Each of the Lyrics emphasizes the need for loyalty and obedience to one’s lord and the dependence of the people on their ruler. *Ascension* and *Judgment* also reiterate and reemphasize these same ideals. The repetition of these ideals within the poems would have been quite apparent in a program that allowed for reading aloud at meal times or as an educational tool. Echoes and references to secular law could have served as a point for exploration or clarification of the more rarified areas pertaining to the poems, such as the source material of *Advent*.

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<sup>292</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England*, 118

<sup>293</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England*, 119

<sup>294</sup> Harris, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England*, 112

<sup>295</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 155.

The examples of unlawful behavior increase in intensity throughout the course of the *Christ* poems. The first vestiges involve general references to the sinfulness of the audience, and they grow to detailed examples of the sins that send people to hell and of the punishments that await them there. The poems also emphasize the importance of acknowledging one's lawlessness and of taking measures to redeem one and to allow one to return to the larger community. The repetition of the examples works as a means of training, helping to ingrain, reinforce, and in some cases redefine social norms. By illustrating the punishments of sin, and by extension lawbreaking, the poems also seek to influence the behavior of the audience more dramatically, exerting at once both subtle and direct social control. These examples, side by side with the examples of expected, acceptable behavior, and coupled with the legal references throughout the poem, open to the audience new space that they can manipulate to their advantage, and potentially in ways contrary to the expectations of the institutions that authorized the collection and composition of the poems, a subject which will be explored in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEY CANNOT SHAKE HIS YOKE FROM THEIR NECKS

Thus far, we have seen the legalistic echoes contained in the *Christ* poems, and the ways in which these echoes work to strengthen the religious message of the poems. The Anglo-Saxon Church in the tenth and eleventh century used non-religious material to make their message more familiar and therefore more readily acceptable, by referencing things such as secular law and social tradition. We have also seen that these religious poems, through reflecting secular laws and other legalistic texts, also encourage or discourage certain types of behavior, as well as enumerate the benefits or costs involved in those behaviors. The *Christ* poems are texts which prescribe socially ideal behavior, placing the onus of responsibility on the subjects, and linking what consequences or circumstances arise to their behavior. While the poems reference the behavior of kings and lords, it is the subjects who should remain patient, law-abiding, and loyal, and grateful for what their lords deign to give them in return. That the poems express ideas about acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and link them to secular cultural elements in an attempt to make the religious material seem more appealing or familiar, should come as no surprise. And yet the inclusion of these secular cultural elements works in some ways to undermine this message of quiet faithful obedience.

A message of social stability through observing social obligation would have been especially welcome in Anglo-Saxon England in the later tenth and early eleventh centuries. Men such as Dunstan and Wulfstan worked very hard to strengthen the role of the Church in Anglo-Saxon England as well as to cement the influence of the Church on the ruling classes. Wulfstan, for example, wrote sermons denouncing the lack of active faith in Christianity and of loyalty to lord and king, advised the king on laws to the point of writing at least two of Æthelred's codes

and one of Cnut's and collected his thoughts on leadership.<sup>296</sup> Wulfstan was alarmed by the increasing instability due to political turmoil and the pressure of the Danish attacks, and texts emphasizing "loyalty to one royal lord" and obedience to law would have been attractive to the Anglo-Saxon Church, to the ruling elites and to the reigning king.<sup>297</sup>

This message of fulfilling social roles was in a sense one way, in that the focus was on how subjects should behave, rather than their lords. Texts, whether religious like the *Christ* poems or secular such as law codes or contracts and wills, establish what de Certeau describes as "sidewalks" and "paths" meant to constrain and direct the movement of the people. Such constraint was meant to afford the tenth century, post-Benedictine reform Anglo-Saxon Church stability in which to expand and conduct business and to grant legitimacy to supportive secular rulers seeking ways to bolster their own grip on power. The general populace, in theory, benefited by having a strong group of spiritual leaders to guide them through the moral complexities of this world, while their leaders established a social order that gave them sound and merciful judgment, strong leadership, and peace in which to prosper.

By referencing Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, the *Christ* poems reiterate religious constraints on behavior within a more familiar cultural context whether the audience was someone listening to it being read aloud or reading the poems privately. The religious model centers on the belief in the supremacy of the triune God as expressed in the Creed, especially in the figure of Christ as lord; the belief that while God is generous, his bounty is entirely at his own discretion and we receive his bounty by his grace alone; and that his wrath is justified because his subjects sin. The secular model places the human lord in the position of Christ, as an authority figure who awards and punishes at his discretion, and whose subjects owe him loyalty and obedience.<sup>298</sup> Through emphasizing loyalty and obedience, texts, such as the *Christ* poems and law codes, illustrate pushes by both the post-reform Anglo-Saxon Church's and secular rulers for a more centralized government under one king.

Emphasizing social hierarchy would have been important in tenth century England, in particular because of the non-Christian forces threatening the existing social order, most notably the invasion of the predominantly pagan Danes. The Church in England made significant strides

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<sup>296</sup> Please see above, especially pages 83-4, 90 & 94, and below, pages 99-100 and 105, for more on Wulfstan's work, particularly his *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* and his work on the lawcodes.

<sup>297</sup> Cf the law codes of Æthelred, especially the later codes, and those of Cnut. Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 128-9.

<sup>298</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxons*, 202.

in shoring up its influence on the kings of England during the tenth century. A major threat to the Church's continued influence was, of course, the pagan Danes and their armies conducting raids and later actively invading England, especially in the latter part of the tenth century. The Church in England was therefore concerned about converting the invaders to Christianity and about recidivism, as evidenced by Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi*.<sup>299</sup> The success of the Viking invaders presented a potent argument for people who had once been pagan to return to non-Christian belief, and Wulfstan admonished his congregants for how poorly they show their loyalty and obedience to God.

In terms of converting the invaders to Christianity, some beliefs, such as the Christian ideal of turning the other cheek versus the Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian acceptance of blood feud, would seem unfamiliar or at odds with cultural norms, thus lessening the attractiveness of Christian belief. Presenting these religious ideas, that were seemingly at odds with cultural norms, within a more familiar secular framework, would help make those potentially uncomfortable ideas more understandable. Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian culture viewed a blood feud as an acceptable, if destructive, means of resolving a serious dispute, such as over responsibility for a killing. Showing mercy by refusing to continue the feud may also have been culturally acceptable, but Alfred and later Edmund introduced laws prohibiting blood feud, favoring the payment of *wergild* instead, and protecting those who pay the *wergild* from further retribution.<sup>300</sup>

Describing Christ and his disciples in terms of the ideal lord/retainer relationship demonstrates how rewarding following such an example would be. Such a framework is also helpful in attempting to form a model for the audience of the *Christ* poems. Sadly, we can never know the precise make-up of the audience of the *Christ* poems. There are no documents citing their usage in particular circumstances, nor are there any references to the poems in other works. That said, we may be able to speculate about the audience of the poems from the way the poems were written, and perhaps even because of their placement in the Exeter Book. In general terms, the Exeter Book is a collection of both religious and secular wisdom, evidenced by the inclusion of ostensible praise poems such as the *Christ* poems, saint's lives such as *The Life of St. Guthlac*, as well as the *Riddles* and *Maxims*. The *Riddles* include examples with bawdy set-ups or

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<sup>299</sup> Please see above, in Chapter Three, page 81-2 and 92.

<sup>300</sup> Attenborough, *Laws of the Earliest English Kings*, 82&3 and Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 6 & 32.

answers, such as the riddles for bread dough or piece of leather, that probably would have been frowned upon in a religious setting. The *Maxims* include gnomic wisdom that would have no direct bearing in a monastery, for instance on a king buying a queen. The inclusion of these seemingly disparate pieces suggests an awareness of a broader audience than that which resided in a monastery.

On a more microcosmic scale, the poems themselves contain references to secular material, namely Anglo-Saxon law. Again, as mentioned in Chapter One, these references are not direct citations of the law or other legalistic texts. The poems do, however, invoke echoes and reflections of legal texts through the language they use, as with the use of the subjunctive voice in the Advent which echoes Anglo-Saxon contracts, and in the description of the scenes of judgment in which sinners are condemned, in terms reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon law, for their law-breaking and oath-breaking. Again, this suggests that the compilers of the Book were aware of an audience beyond the members of the clergy. This notion is strengthened by the presence of men such as Wulfstan, who worked vigorously to shape Anglo-Saxon England into an entity he considered fitting morally and ethically.

Law codes, charters, contracts, wills and the like may not have served as direct sources for the poems, but the terms and language conveyed ideals and forms of acceptable behavior within the law codes that are championed in the poems. Hill and Clayton both state that such material would have made reading/listening to the poems difficult and therefore more than likely to be beyond the grasp of even fairly educated clergy much less uneducated laity, yet legalistic echoes would have established a point of familiarity. If the intended audience of the poems and the Exeter Book as a whole were members of the Church, whether as clergy or as members of a monastic order, the legal references would have acted as a means of ingesting the relatively arcane source material of the poems.<sup>301</sup> In terms of de Certeau's theories, elements of an existing social order stand as potential obstructions to the imposition of a new order by colonizers. Secular law, because it was such an important element of Anglo-Saxon secular culture, could potentially obstruct the Church's attempt to establish a preferred model of behavior. Using cultural elements, such as legal references, indicates an attempt by the poets, at least in part, to channel secular elements in the desired direction, supporting the Church's models and opening the poems to a wider audience. The main arguments against a wider audience for

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<sup>301</sup> See above, pages 17 *ff* and 30 *ff*.



the poems are the source material, and references to this material contained in the poem.<sup>302</sup> Within the poems, legal references to charters, wills, law codes, contracts and the like, would have given a wider audience a basis for appreciating and understanding the poems as a whole. The audience need not understand the techniques of producing a stained glass window in order to grasp the marvel of it. If a wider audience were expected, then such a point of insertion would have been invaluable if not essential.

Legal references would have been useful in outlining acceptable and unacceptable behavior. Descriptions of lawful and unlawful behavior are strengthened through internal repetition. The internal repetition of these examples establishes a kind of Foucauldian training within the texts. In addition, *Advent*, *Ascension*, and *Judgment* compiled together echo an important religious text, the Creed, which states:

se for us mannum and for ure hæle niðer-astah of heofenum, and wearð geflæschamod of ðam Halgan Gaste and of Marian ðam mædene, and wearð mann geworden. He ðrowode eac swylce on rode ahangen for us, and he wæs bebyrged, and he aras on ðam ðriddan dæge, swa swa gewritu seðað, and he astah to heofonum, and he sitt æt swiðiran his Fæder, and he eft cymð mid wuldre to demenne ðam cucum and ðam deadum, and his rices ne bið nan ende.<sup>303</sup>

Grouped together, the poems, in reflecting the Creed, further serve to strengthen aspects of social control. This emphasis on social control calls to mind the penitentials. Whether or not the penitentials are punitive, they serve, as Frantzen states, as a training to prepare people for (re)entry into proper Christian society.<sup>304</sup> By echoing the Creed and paralleling the penitentials, the *Christ* poems take part in this training.

In texts like the *Christ* poems, the author/text offers something of value to the reader/consumer: in this case, examples and advice on how to live a righteous and obedient life so that the reader/consumer will reap rewards and avoid punishment. *Ascension*, for instance, opens by encouraging the reader to “geornlice gæstgerynum . . . modcræfte sec þurh sefan

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<sup>302</sup> Hill, “Literary History,” 12-3; Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 181.

<sup>303</sup> Aelfric. *The Homilies of the Anglo-Saxon Church: The First Part Containing the Sermones Catholici, or Homilies of Aelfric*. 1844. Trans. Benjamin Thorpe. vol. 2. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1971. 596-599. “who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnated by the Holy Ghost and by Mary the maiden, and became man. He suffered also, hanged on a rood for us, and he was buried, and he arose on the third day, as writings verify, and he went up to heaven, and he sitteth at his Father's right, and he will come again with glory to doom the quick and the dead, and of his kingdom there will be no end.” Emphasis mine.

<sup>304</sup> Please see above, Chapter Three, page 90.

snyttro.”<sup>305</sup> The reader/consumer expects and trusts that the information contained in the text is correct and will adjust their behavior accordingly. Yet, even as the *Christ* poems take part in an agenda of social control, especially by the referencing secular legal texts to establish “paths” and “sidewalks” to guide the people, the very inclusion of these texts would have worked to undermine that agenda. Legalistic echoes within the poems also would have introduced the first openings for reinterpretation of social obligation and expectation, especially because of references to contracts. Contracts emphasize actions required of all parties – even in wills, reciprocal action on the part of the beneficiary was customary and expected. This type of contractual relationship, in that expectations are outlined and consequences specified, is used in the *Christ* poems, but the poems emphasize only the actions required of one party, not both. The poems mention obliquely the expectations with regard to the behavior of kings and lords, but really describe the punishments awaiting subjects who fail to meet their obligations.

The poems therefore reflect part of an attempt by the Church, and indirectly by the elites who supported the Church in its efforts, to create a social space outlining and limiting the behavior of the people. Attempting to establish a space, in this case by the tenth and eleventh century Anglo-Saxon Church and ruling elites, within which people are to operate, “makes room for a void. In that way it opens up clearings, it ‘allows’ a certain play within a system of defined places. It ‘authorizes’ the production of an area of free play (Spielraum) on a checkerboard that analyzes and classifies identities.”<sup>306</sup> In echoing, however faintly, contractual language, people could begin to view the relationship between (L)ord and subject in contractual terms. Behaviors were expected from *both* parties. When one or the other of the parties fails to act as specified, the contract is broken. In order to operate within a space, in this case a social space, not of their making, the people will attempt to manipulate that space as best they can, taking advantage of any leverage they can find.<sup>307</sup>

Thus the implicit question of what happens if a lord is not these things arises. Servants are punished for failing to meet their social obligations; should kings be as well? Even as these texts work to define the institutional expectations of the people who read them, they open space for the expectations of the reader toward those the texts seek to bolster and protect. There is no

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<sup>305</sup> “with strength of mind and sagacity of spirit, seek earnestly into spiritual mysteries.” Lines 1-3a. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, 219.

<sup>306</sup> De Certeau, *The Art of Everyday Life*, 105-6.

<sup>307</sup> De Certeau, *The Art of Everyday Life*, 105.

direct contemporary evidence of the ways in which any Anglo-Saxon text was received by its audience or how it was used within society as a whole. Indirect evidence, however, offers us the basis of a speculative model. Statutes within the law codes prohibit behaviors, such as oath-breaking and plotting against one's lord or king, that mentioned within the texts of the poems. This indicates that there was concern by secular officials about those behaviors, such that laws were issued to address them, and also that the Anglo-Saxon Church was concerned enough to denounce the behaviors within religious texts. Most charter evidence records the behavior of wealthy citizens, but there exists some indication of the behavior of the general populace as well.

Campbell, in *The Anglo-Saxon State*, states that regarding direct evidence of popular uprisings, the Chronicles were discreet nearly to the point of silence. However Campbell does recount "an interesting case of a minor peasant rebellion" in the Ramsey Chronicle. In this instance, "a local landowner, a Dane, . . . was on such bad terms with his rustici that he had to have his house guarded night and day." Campbell states that finally the matter "became too much for him and he had to sell up and go."<sup>308</sup> The most prominent examples of resistance and tension against the king involve members of the nobility. Perhaps it was easier for nobles to act on perceptions of failure on the part of their lords to meet expectation. Æthelred's reign is, again, particularly illustrative as a speculative model for the kinds of tensions present in a king's rule.

Despite his problems, Æthelred's kingship lasted almost forty years, from approximately 978 to 1016. This is not, however, to gloss over the distinct dissatisfaction expressed with his policies, exemplified in part by attempts, whether real or imagined, on his life.<sup>309</sup> An example of a text that illustrates this is a *Promissio Regis* dated to the time of Æthelred. Robertson notes that this *promissio* was probably relatively standard in terms of form, and that some version of this oath was given by kings upon their ascension to the throne. In the *promissio*, the king promises that he will follow God's laws, protect the kingdom and use "justice and mercy in the decision of all cases."<sup>310</sup>

What stands out with regard to Æthelred is the phrase promising "justice and mercy" because the phrase, interestingly enough, appears a number of times in several of Æthelred's

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<sup>308</sup> Campbell, *The Anglo-Saxon State*, 167-8

<sup>309</sup> Williams states, for instance, that Sigeforth and Morcar were murdered at Æthelred's order, in part because he viewed them as a threat to his life and kingship. Williams, *Æthelred the Unready*, 132.

<sup>310</sup> Robertson, *Laws of the English Kings*, 42&3.

later law codes, namely Æthelred V, VI, and VIII. These codes, incidentally, were engineered by Wulfstan and seem to indicate an attempt to address complaints about the fairness and mercy of Æthelred's judgments or those of his representative courts. Even as this promise of mercy and justice makes a frequent appearance in Æthelred's codes, nearly every extant law code of his also reiterates the injunction against plotting against one's lord, as well as the necessity to abide by one's oath of loyalty. So even as Æthelred in some way acknowledges that he has not held to this particular ideal, the emphasis remains that those who may seek to do anything about it will come to a bad end.

Frequent occurrence of the importance of abiding by one's oath and the particular sanctity of the king's life and position may have grown out of the fact that one of the most destabilizing factors in Æthelred's reign was the fickle nature of his own loyalty to his supporters. The clearest examples of this usually involve thegns and advisers who had been with Æthelred when he first ascended to the throne. According to Williams, Æthelred could not have been more than 12 at his coronation, and that his earliest witan was made up of those who had served his father. Consequently, "Æthelred's first surviving diplomas are in favour of those who had been his most consistent supporters, Bishop Æthelwold and Ealdorman Ælfhere."<sup>311</sup>

While membership in the witan was prestigious, because members "could not only proffer aid and counsel to their king, but also gain access to his patronage and its rewards," it was also tenuous if not dangerous.<sup>312</sup> The rewards could be tremendous, but they also came, at times, with tremendous risks. Perhaps the greatest of these was "incurring the king's ill-will." The "northern thegns Sigferth and Morcar" fell out of Æthelred's favor, in part for their connections with the king's enemies and "were murdered at the 'great assembly at Oxford' clearly at the king's orders" in 1015.<sup>313</sup> Further, "it seems Æthelred came to regret some of the favours he bestowed in the first decade of his reign."<sup>314</sup> In the 990s, Æthelred began to complain "of false counselors who took advantage of his youth and inexperience and obtained from him lands belonging to Abingdon Abbey, the Old Minster, Winchester, and the episcopal church of Rochester."<sup>315</sup> Æthelsige was one such "false counselor."<sup>316</sup> Æthelred "accuse[d] Æthelsige of

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<sup>311</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 22.

<sup>312</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 20.

<sup>313</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 29.

<sup>314</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 26.

<sup>315</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 26.

<sup>316</sup> Please see above, Chapter Three, page 78.

exploiting his youth and inexperience” in 995. In a charter condemning Æthelsige, the king describes him as an “enemy of Almighty God and all the people” and “is accused of unspecified acts of theft of plunder and specifically the murder of a loyal reeve who had tried to oppose” Æthelsige.<sup>317</sup> Æthelsige was therefore “deprived of his lands and his *dignitas*.”

Ealdorman Ælfhere, who was one of Æthelred’s earliest supporters and is believed to have been behind the death of Edward Martyr, died in 983, and was eventually succeeded by his son Ælfric.<sup>318</sup> Though Ælfric at times ran afoul of Æthelred, he was able to remain Ealdorman of Hampshire, Winchester, and Wiltshire until his death in the late 990s. Perhaps as a means to encourage Ælfric to lawful behavior, in 995, “the King had Ælfgar, son of Ealdorman Ælfric, blinded,” though no reason is given in the Chronicle.<sup>319</sup>

Given the close relationship between the Anglo-Saxon Church and civil authorities, it is not surprising to find that religious figures produced texts advocating patience on the part of the people, regardless of social status. Wulfstan and Ælfric, in their sermons, reminded their congregations that they must bear up under the yoke of the king, once chosen, no matter how oppressive it may seem. The *Christ* poems encourage their audience to patiently wait for a lord to come (or come again) to alleviate the burden of the people. The *Christ* poems and texts like them were produced by the Church to establish and reinforce forms of acceptable behavior, castigate unacceptable behavior and the consequences of each with a two-fold goal. First these texts encouraged obedient behavior within the Church. This fostered stability within the Church and a unity of message. If the members of the Church were well behaved and well trained in the ideals and expectations of the Church, then those members would be less likely to leave the system, much less seek its overthrow. Second, these texts emphasized lawful behavior toward secular lords who protect the Church. Secular lords in turn issued laws that reinforced an obedient attitude toward the Church.

In promising these rights and this stability, the leaders worked just as hard to deny the populace these very things. Religious and secular leaders did what they could to shift blame for whatever misfortunes the state faced onto the people, as in IV Edgar 1 and 1.1, which states that the root of the “færcwealme” which afflicted the people “mid synnum 7 mid oferhyrnysse godes

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<sup>317</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 27.

<sup>318</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 26.

<sup>319</sup> Williams, *Aethelred the Unready*, 26.

beboda gearnod wære, 7 swyðost mid þam oftige neadgafoles.”<sup>320</sup> VIII Æthelred 38 states that because people have not been remitting their tithes and taxes, “things have continually gone from bad to worse.”<sup>321</sup> Similarly, the *Christ* poems establish the preexisting guilt of their audience, and reemphasize how this guilt and sinfulness affects their day-to-day lives and their spiritual afterlife. The thrust of these texts is to establish the notion that whatever threats or harshness occurs in their life, the cause of this lies in their fault, not with their rulers, who are charged with bringing peace and prosperity to them. These laws show precisely where the blame for whatever ills are besetting Anglo-Saxon society solidly lies.

The emphasis within the *Christ* poems on the importance, even necessity, of remaining loyal and obedient to one’s lord, whether spiritual or earthly was not without a price. Certainly, the texts suggest that a king or lord should have the fidelity and support of his subjects, but just the same, the king or lord needed to perform certain duties for his people. The *Advent Lyrics* contain references to the role of kings as judges, and the power and responsibility that come with such a role. The petitional sections of the various *Lyrics* model subjects asking their king for aid and recognition of service. *Ascension* provides an illustration of the relationship between a king and his loyal subjects, emphasizing the prosperity that accompanies lawful and loyal service as well as beneficent and just leadership. *Ascension* also reinforces evidence found in the collection of Anglo-Saxon charters and grants, illustrating the benefits associated with loyally obeying one’s lord. It ends with a supplicatory section which echoes a contract, in which the poet reminds his audience of the coming judgment and encourages the readers to actions that will gain them “commensurate rewards.” Remaining loyal and obedient was especially crucial even when a lord seemed to be failing as an effective leader. Consequences could be harsh for the individual and dire for the society as a whole, according to texts like the *Christ* poems. Social order could be thrown off balance, opening the door to a multitude of plagues and punishments until matters were put right again.

Even as the poems seek to affirm ecclesiastical and social stability, space is opened for the reader to construct ideas of their own as to their personal role within society and the roles of the institutions which govern them. Contrary to the emphasis on reward being at the discretion

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<sup>320</sup> “plague.” “has been merited because of sin and disregard of God’s commands, and especially through the withholding of tribute.” Robertson, *The Laws of the Kings of England*, 28 & 29. For instance, Æthelstan’s statute calling for fasting and penance. Æthelstan blamed various ills occurring at the time, including pestilence, on the people’s refusal to pay taxes and obey their lords.

<sup>321</sup> Robertson, *Laws of the Kings of England*, 128-9.

of the lord, the poems raise notions of being able to earn the kingdom of heaven through good deeds. When Christ rewards the obedient in *Judgment* he explicitly tells them that they have earned heaven through their lawful behavior, as the damned have earned hell and damnation by their sins. In *Ascension*, the disciples are described as thegns and are enjoined first by Christ and then by the two angels who accompany Christ to heaven to go forth and do good deeds. In the minds of the readers, social roles, presented as being supported by canon and secular law and therefore beyond question, become more open to interpretation, contrary to the wishes of those who fashioned those laws.

By providing examples of lawful and unlawful behavior, texts such as the *Christ* poems attempt to inform the audience of not only their proper role in society but also to present an ideal model of social relationships. Lords are to be generous and just, and active in the defense of their people. Subjects should be grateful for the gifts given to them by their lord, such as prosperity and protection, and should be loyal to their lord and faithful to his laws. The social model is presented as a pyramidal hierarchy with the king at the top, most power consolidated in his office and loyalty focused on him through the nobility. This model is based, in part, on Christian ethics and Anglo-Saxon social tradition as preserved in the law codes.

Part of the aim of the *Christ* poems was to help maintain social order through social control. In order to accomplish this, tools were needed to their agenda. As mentioned, homilies preaching against disloyalty to leader and people helped, serving as social commentary. Saints' lives described the saints and apostles in martial terms that were familiar and heroic in Anglo-Saxon culture. Other religious poetry, such as the *Christ* poems, also employed these techniques, employing cultural references to make Christian ethics more accessible to as large an audience as possible. These cultural influences included echoes of the secular law codes.

The texts promised certain things, such as obedient servants would be rewarded, and lawful and just lords could count on their subjects to be faithful. But the terms of these promises were such that the results were conditional. Subject could expect rewards only by the grace of their lords. Such would reward would be such and to an extent that the lord deemed right. Lords could count on faithful subjects, because the subjects were required to do so by law and sermon. If lords were not just and merciful, then it was the fault of the people. This was the message of the texts. And yet the cultural echoes the poems captured did not entirely support this.

References to secular law, and contracts in particular carried strong connotations in Anglo-Saxon culture. Expectations were held of all parties to the contract and failure to meet those stipulations meant that the contract was void. By employing these legalistic echoes, the texts themselves opened space for their audience to manipulate, to shape the representations in ways that better suited their desires, rather than the desires of the producers and compilers of the *Christ* poems. If lords failed to be just, to the perception of their subjects, then they were not worthy of the loyalty of those subjects. If someone felt that they could be better served by a non-Christian culture, then they should shift their loyalty and rightly so. If a king needed to incorporate in his law codes a renewal, as it were, of the words he spoke at his coronation, promising just and fair decisions at court, then perhaps that king was not to be believed and perhaps not entirely worthy of his position.

Ultimately, the matter of social obligation in Anglo-Saxon society is potentially more complex than it might appear. Similarly, so too are the *Christ* poems. The poems have been viewed as simply veneration poems, exalting the glory of the Lord. They certainly do this. But the echoes in the poems which reference Anglo-Saxon law expand the potential for their use as instruments of social control. It is not impossible to see these poems used by a churchman of similar nature to Wulfstan to help cement a social stability beneficial to the Anglo-Saxon Church and to those lords who supported it.



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