The *Gifstol*:
Almsgiving and Christian Lordship in the *Exeter Book*

by

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For my family.

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ABSTRACT

The poems in the Old English *Exeter Book* (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501) are purposely didactic tools, particularly of a catechetical nature, used to promote and reinforce ideal Christian Anglo-Saxon lordship. The primary mode by which these ideals are transmitted is through the poems' depiction of the giving, or lack of giving, of gifts and alms by lords to the less fortunate. The *Exeter Book* was intended to be read along a central theme uniting the poems in the manuscript: the importance of Christian lords to imitate Christ, the ultimate King and greatest Almsgiver, by giving alms to their people. The Germanic focus on gift-giving, continuously present in Anglo-Saxon culture, would have syncretized easily with Christian almsgiving, united along the central purpose of both giving systems: care of the people by those with more resources, whether God-given or otherwise. The scribe(s) who compiled the *Exeter Book* did not merely anthologize these Old English poems haphazardly, or for purposes of preservation alone. Analysis of several exemplar poems within the manuscript (*Almsgiving, Widsið, The Wanderer, The Seafarer, Guthlac A, The Phoenix, The Advent Lyrics, The Ascension*, and *Christ in Judgment*) demonstrates the central motif of almsgiving as necessary for ideal Christian lordship, and that this collection of poems was deliberately constructed to transmit appropriate modes of lordship for Christian Anglo-Saxon lords to follow.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABR	*American Benedictine Review*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
AM	*Annuale Mediaevale*
ANQ	*American Notes & Queries*
ASE	*Anglo-Saxon England*
BSVO	*Biblia Sacra Vulgata Online*
CCEL	*Christian Classics Ethereal Library*
DRBO	*Douay-Rheims Bible Online*
ELN	*English Language Notes*
ES	*English Studies*
EX	*Exemplaria*
IG	*In Geardagum*
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
MÆ	*Medium Ævum*
MH	*Medievalia et Humanistica*
MLN	*Modern Language Notes*
MLQ	*Modern Language Quarterly*
MLR	*Modern Language Review*
MP	*Modern Philology*
Neo	*Neophilologus*
NM	*Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*
NQ	*Notes and Queries*
PG	*Patrologia Graeca*
PhG	*Philological Quarterly*
PL	*Patrologia Latina*

PLL	*Papers on Language and Literature*
PR	*Psychocultural Review*
PT	*Poetics Today*
RES	*Review of English Studies*
RPL	*Res Publica Litterarum*
SLI	*Studies in the Literary Imagination*
SN	*Studia Neophilologica*
SPh	*Studies in Philology*
TSLL	*Texas Studies in Literature and Language*

I: BACKGROUND OF THE EXETER BOOK

Although there is a long history of scholarship on the poems contained in the

manuscript known as the *Exeter Book* (Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS 3501, also known

as the *Codex Exoniensis* and *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*), including

readings of both a Christian and secular nature, and thorough studies of the possible

origins of the manuscript, there has been little work done on the manuscript as a

collection of poetry with a central theme. Most scholarship in the field, if it examines the

manuscript as an anthology, instead of as a miscellany with no central purpose behind the

seemingly unrelated poems, takes the stance that the manuscript is organized for a

generalized Christian purpose. However, there has rarely been a specific central Christian

theme proposed which unites the poems of the *Exeter Book* as part of a cohesive

collection. Yet, the *Exeter Book* can be and was intended by the compilers to be read

along a central theme uniting the poems in the manuscript: the importance of Christian

lords to imitate Christ, the ultimate King and giver of alms, by giving alms to their

people. The poems in the *Exeter Book* are purposely didactic tools, particularly of a

catechetical nature, to promote and reinforce ideal Christian Anglo-Saxon lordship. The

primary mode by which these ideals are transmitted is through the poems' depiction of

the giving, or lack of giving, of gifts and alms by lords to the both warriors or thanes who

merit reward, or the less fortunate who require alms. The Germanic focus on gift-giving,

continuously present in Anglo-Saxon culture, would have syncretized easily with

Christian almsgiving, united along the central purpose of both giving systems: care of the

people by those with more resources, whether God-given or otherwise.

In this study I argue that the *Exeter Book* compilers/poet(s) used a Germanic, secular system of gift exchange as a link to the Christian system of giving under the mantle of almsgiving. Pre-Christian and secular Anglo-Saxon giving was situated on a system of exchange between lords and thanes which focused on thanes serving lords in exchange for gifts (treasure and other resources); the lord likewise received gifts from his thanes to ensure his continued protection and maintenance of the people. However, the Christian system of almsgiving was not measured by a similar reciprocal relationship between God and humanity, but instead was a religious obligation expected of those Christians, especially those with the most resources, who wished to follow the teachings of Christ and His disciples by showing mercy through merciful works. In turn, these works could aid in their salvation, but only if they gave in the appropriate spirit of charity. As these are two different systems of giving, superficially it would seem that an audience of the *Exeter Book* would see secular giving between a lord and his people, and the Christian acts of almsgiving or charity between the Lord and humanity as entirely separate obligatory systems. However, as Church Fathers explain, gifts and other acts which are given in the "spirit of mercy" are also considered alms. In 1:72 of the *Enchiridion*, Augustine of Hippo explains this concept: "And on this principle of interpretation, our Lord's saying, 'Give alms of such things as ye have, and behold, all things are clean unto you,' applies to every useful act that a man does in mercy" (Shaw). Therefore, for a thoroughly Christian compiler and audience, the idea of a "merciful" gift as a type of almsgiving would have been readily understood and accepted. Although I will cover the distinctions and intersections between secular gifts and Christian alms in

Chapter II, it is important to clarify my reading of gifts-as-alms at the start of this study,

as it is a central component of my analysis of the *Exeter Book* as a cohesive, planned

collection with a central, didactic purpose. The scribe(s) who compiled the *Exeter Book*

did not merely anthologize these Old English poems haphazardly, or for purposes of

preservation alone. Rather, as the central motif of almsgiving throughout the manuscript

demonstrates, this collection of poems was deliberately constructed to transmit

appropriate modes of lordship, modeled on Christ as the King of kings, for which

Christian Anglo-Saxon lords to aspire.

Before this study can progress to an examination of several poems in the

manuscript which exemplify this central theme, multi-faceted and long-standing

questions over the history of the *Exeter Book* must be considered, because the central

proof of my thesis, other than the text itself, is that historical circumstance warranted the

didactic nature of the manuscript. What is the origin of the manuscript and its subsequent

provenance? Who were the possible audiences for this text? How do we date this

manuscript, and from this dating how do we examine the cultural influences that could

have been a factor in the anthologist's choice of poems?

The *Exeter Book* in its present condition has been reduced by the passage of time,

damaged by burns, stains, and exposure to liquid (Conner 236-54). It is comprised of

parchment of inconsistent quality throughout the manuscript. Patrick W. Conner's

codicological examination in *Anglo-Saxon Exeter* of the manuscript leads him to describe

consecutive gatherings which demonstrate increasingly inferior materials, if the quires

are read as collated:

It seems to be at its best in the first six gatherings, where it is of a uniform

medium weight, and well scraped so that it is not always easy to tell hair

from flesh. The Insular membrane of the second six gatherings is also

generally well prepared, but more often than not it shows a greyness of the

flesh-side which is lacking in the first six gatherings. The Insular

membrane of quires XIV-XVII tends to be somewhat thicker, greasy, and

badly coloured, although this could be due to conditions attending the fate

which that booklet suffered. (126-7)

Conner uses this codicological evidence to support his theory that the *Exeter Book* was

originally comprised of three separate booklets (110-28), and indeed, the sudsden change

in quality of parchment used does seem incongruous to how a manuscript of that period

would be planned and executed.

Conner's study of the manuscript shows that there are a total of seventeen quires,

with most quires containing eight to ten folios each (Conner 98-110). There are some

important exceptions to the number of folios in each quire, however, because some

damage has occurred to certain pages, while other pages that should have theoretically

been in a quire have been lost. Significantly for this study, Conner explains that the first

quire is missing its first folio, and thus up to "forty-six manuscript lines" which were the

beginning of the *Exeter Book* as it exists now (98). The analysis of the poems contained

in this first quire, particularly *The Advent Lyrics*, is hampered by the loss of the first lines

of the text. After the damage to the manuscript, the remaining extant folios total 122,

according to my manual count based on Conner's Quire diagramming (98-110). The

leaves are unnumbered, leaving room for speculation on whether the extant order of

quires was the original order of arrangement in the manuscript.

The *Exeter Book*, solely comprised of poetry, contains poems in a variety of

genres as assigned throughout its critical history: wisdom/gnomic poems, elegies,

hagiographies, riddles, catechetical poems, eschatological poems, allegories, poems on

the life of Christ, and poems which seem to resist any one genre classification. The varied

nature of this collection has led to the critical view that it is a miscellany, not a cohesive

collection with a central purpose.

Bernard Muir, in his introduction to his edition of the *Exeter Book* (which he calls

The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry, suggests that the history of the manuscript is

more clear cut than many other scholars would allow: "The combined codicological and

literary evidence indicates that the anthology was designed and copied out *circa* 965-75,

making it perhaps the oldest surviving book of vernacular poetry from Anglo-Saxon

England" (1). Structurally, the extant manuscript is missing the first folio, and after the

addition of seven folios to the front of the current binding of the book (added at later

dates), the text of the original manuscript now contains folios 8-130 (8-11). Muir also

explains that scholars over the past sixty years have determined that at two places in the

manuscript complete gatherings are now missing: from *Guthlac (B)* to *Canticles* and at

Riddle 69.4 (11).

Muir also reports that "recent work on the Exeter scriptorium by Conner, Drage,

Hill and myself suggests that it is one of a number of extant manuscripts which can be

confidently associated with each other. It has been at Exeter at least since the time of

Bishop Leofric, who was responsible for moving the episcopal see from Crediton to

Exeter in 1050" (1). When summarized in this fashion by Muir, it appears as though the

origin and subsequent travels of the *Exeter Book* are established; yet other prominent

scholars argue compellingly for alternative interpretations of the extant evidence. Muir's

summative assessment of the *Exeter Book*'s known history does not fully explain the

multiple problematic issues in tracing the manuscript from one particular point of

creation to the book's eventual confirmed home at eleventh-century Exeter. It is generally

assumed that the *Exeter Book* manuscript, as we know it today, can be positively

identified with a library list by Bishop Leofric in the late 11th century, whose list

included not only books, but other items of value to the religious community. As Muir

explains, "Sometime before his death Leofric had a donation list drawn up which

itemizes the books and religious objects he intended to leave to the Cathedral and its

community" (Muir 2). Additionally, Conner provides some indication of when Leofric's

donation may have been created, as well as what was included in the list:

> Bishop Leofric had an inventory drawn up of the lands, church-
>
> accoutrements, and books belonging to the new cathedral church at Exeter
>
> during the period 1069 x 1072. The *terminus post quem* was established
>
> by Max Förster on the basis that a royal document of 1069 [. . .] granted
>
> the bishop the right to give his lands [. . .] and the *terminus ante quem* is
>
> established by his death in 1072. (226)

The *Exeter* Book, throughout most of its critical history, has been associated with

Leofric's donation list, and thus not attributing its creation to the Exeter scriptorium, due

to a specific description of one of the manuscripts in the list. Conner thoroughly explains

the attribution of the *Exeter Book* to Leofric's donation list:

> That this book was the *.i. mycel englisc boc be gehwilcum þingum on*
>
> *leoðwisan geworht,* 'one large English book with everything cast as
>
> poetry', which is named in Leofric's inventory has been assumed—and
>
> reasonably so—since the 1560s when John Joscelyn annotated a transcript
>
> of the inventory at this point with the comment *[Hic] Liber Saxonicus*
>
> *[habe]t quaternionem [in] sutam in principio [que] continet hanc*
>
> *[ca]rtam cum aliis,* 'this Saxon book has a gathering sewn in at the
>
> beginning which contains this document with others'. He was no doubt
>
> referring to the eight folios of preliminary material which has been bound
>
> with the Exeter Book since the early fifteenth century. (34)

This is a specific history of the attribution of the *Exeter Book* to Leofric's

donation-list inscription, and the evidence which Conner summarizes is difficult to

dispute. This does not, however, prove definitively that the *Exeter Book*, although

"donated" by Leofric according to this inventory/donation list, is the manuscript brought

to Exeter from another location when Leofric moved his See to Exeter in 1050. As Muir

further explains, "Scholars today identify *The Exeter Anthology* with the volume

described in that list as *i mycel englisc boc be gehwilcu(m) þingu(m) on leoðwisan*

geworht (on folio 1v of MS 3501); though it is impossible to be absolutely certain of this

identification, it seems reasonable" (3).

However, Conner, in his seminal work on the *Exeter Book* manuscript, argues that the *Exeter* Book could likely have been created at Exeter scriptorium, although he notes that examining and identifying the origins of the manuscripts of tenth-century Exeter is "not a simple task" (1). This is because we must identify which manuscripts could have possibly been at Exeter in the tenth century, before Leofric's arrival and library reshaping in 1050, and which of those texts may have been written there:

> In 1050, Leofric, bishop of Devon and Cornwall, moved the episcopal see from Crediton to Exeter, and thus took charge of whatever remained of Exeter's earlier history. Leofric rearranged the archives and manuscripts at Exeter as he laid claim to both lands and books, forging a charter here, writing his name into a book there, and generally reshaping Exeter to fit its new, mid-eleventh-century episcopal role. (1)

Additionally, Conner disagrees with the critical consensus that the Leofric donation list is indeed a "donation" list, arguing instead that the list is more likely an inventory, and that "this is unfortunate because the word leads the modern reader to assume that, if Leofric could bequeath these items to St. Peter's minster at Exeter, he might just as well have bequeathed them elsewhere" (226). Specifically, Conner argues against the idea of the Leofric list as a donation or bequest because "the document's structure and rhetoric is in fact quite clear in showing it to be an accounting or inventory of the church's possessions, in line with Leofric's administrative and spiritual duties as a bishop" (226). However, several critics disagree with Conner on this point, including Richard Gameson who, in his discussion of Leofric's donation inscription argues that the

correct interpretation of the inscription is that "Leofric 'placed in' or 'bestowed on' (*gedón*)" the episcopal see the volume in question (137). This is in direct contrast to Conner's argument that this verb means "acquired" (Conner 231).[1]

Conner also asserts that not only does the donation list not indicate a donation, but that it could be a fabricated "inventory" which does not actually record what volumes were already at Exeter, and which were donated by Leofric, in order to inflate Leofric's contribution, and which could hide the fact that the *Exeter Book* was already present at Exeter when Leofric arrived (46). Conner's argument here, particularly regarding Leofric's donation inscription, is denied by the general critical consensus because it is largely hypothetical, and is specifically refuted by Gameson, who directly addresses Conner's argument about the tricky nature of Leofric's "donation" list:

> But even if one were to argue that the text simply ignored non-liturgical books, it remains a devastating indictment, for if this was the state of Exeter's service books, the foundation can barely have been able to function liturgically. One might reasonably conclude that if Exeter's liturgical books—its crucial resources—were so very unsatisfactory, then any (hypothetical) other volumes are unlikely to have amounted to very much or to have been in better condition. (137)

Gameson's refutation is hard to argue against, if his characterizations of Exeter's meager holdings by the date of Leofric's arrival, in 1050, are accurate. However, the possibility

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[1] According to the *Bosworth-Toller Old English Dictionary*, the definition of *gedón* includes "*To do, make, put, cause, effect, reach a place*" These definitions all could indicate that Leofric, in his inventory/donation list, intended that he himself placed or gave the items to Exeter

which Conner raises of a flawed inventory list cannot be easily dismissed, given the other evidence with Conner provides throughout *Anglo-Saxon Exeter* to argue for an Exeter provenance for the manuscript.

Conner makes the point that even if his central argument about the donation-list not being a technical donation is incorrect, Exeter can still be considered as a possible origin for the *Exeter Book:* "Regardless of Leofric's intentions in his donation-list, Exeter seems already in the mid-eleventh century, even after the fires and invasions, to have been a wealthy and potentially powerful institution; that is why Leofric wanted to move the see to Exeter. It had the potential to be greater than Crediton" (Conner 46). This is a logically safe assumption. If Exeter was completely worthless as a foundation, including in material holdings such as essential liturgical documents, why would Leofric request to move the See there, instead of maintaining it at Crediton? This removal of the see to Exeter could indicate that Exeter was capable of creating and maintaining a manuscript such as the *Exeter Book.*

Conner also correctly notes that, based on historical sources, particularly John of Worcester's records in the early twelfth century, Exeter was reformed in 968 as part of the Benedictine Revival (13), which introduced a reformed monastery structure based on the *Rule of St. Benedict*, and which encouraged learning and increased manuscript production. Conner argues that because of the usual increase in scribal work that naturally accompanied the Benedictine Revival, along with manuscripts that some have argued may have an Exeter origin, there is proof of active manuscript production before Leofric's arrival (13). Thus it is not out of the question that a manuscript such as the

Exeter Book could have been planned and produced at Exeter, for specific Exeter-focused purposes, such as the counsel and education of lords or kings.

According to Conner, "sixty-seven extant manuscripts share an attribution of Exeter provenance earlier than the twelfth century" (2), among which thirty-two are also listed on Leofric's donation list (11), although this is not indicative of where these manuscripts were actually produced. However, the fact that all of the attributed manuscripts do not also have a matching inscription on Leofric's list does not mean that "selective destruction" was practiced on the Exeter Library collection, but rather that these thirty-two books can be viewed as a general representation of what Exeter's library was like (11). The extant manuscripts with definite Exeter provenance may lead to some ideas of the type of library it was, and what sorts of volumes it contained, and thus why the *Exeter Book* manuscript would find a place in that library, although without proof of a Leofric connection to this larger manuscript list, the connection must remain hypothetical.

Conner specifies that the Exeter library collection is comprised of segments, one containing works from the latter half of the tenth century, and the other containing works from the latter half of the eleventh century. There are "three times as many 'Exeter' manuscripts [. . .] preserved from the second half of the tenth century as are extant in the whole corpus of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts" (11). However, the record indicates a rise in Exeter scribal activity in the second half of the eleventh century, which is a direct result of Leofric's arrival in 1050, and the subsequent work of his scriptorium (12). Of particular importance to Conner's theories for an Exeter origin for the *Exeter Book* is the

script used in the Exeter scriptorium under Leofric, which Conner argues is unique to

Exeter's scriptorium:

> An indication of the extensive attention given to these activities in
>
> Leofric's scriptorium may be observed in the distinctive, calligraphic
>
> scripts(s), seemingly based on Square-miniscule forms, which were
>
> developed there. A scriptorium capable of developing its own script must
>
> also have both acquired and produced many books of a very high quality,
>
> and we should not be surprised, then, that Exeter can be associated with
>
> more manuscripts made during this period than was normal at most other
>
> places in England. (12)

Despite Conner's argument for Exeter's distinctive script, other scholars, such as

Gameson, disagree, and argue rather that the "square-miniscule" was a common script in

Anglo-Saxon England, with a creation point most likely located at a more prestigious and

productive scriptorium than Exeter.

Gameson agrees that tenth-century Exeter did have scribal activity and seconds

the historical proof for an active monastery: "there was certainly a community at Exeter

in the tenth century, reputedly founded by Athelstan," and also presents the same

evidence as Conner that John of Worcester records the reformation of Exeter by King

Edgar in 968 and the appointment of Sidemann as abbot of the newly reformed

monastery (138). However, Gameson posits that none of these things, if even true, would

necessarily indicate a learned community or a full scriptorium at Exeter during this time,

and argues that it is illogical to suggest that "monastic reform in the tenth century

inevitably brought impressive libraries and scriptoria in its wake, and particularly so in relation to a house like Exeter which was on the fringes of the movement. There is no reason to presume that the reformed late-tenth-century community at Exeter required more than a basic book collection" (138-9). Could it be logical, however, that the *Exeter Book* might have been deemed an essential "basic book" for the newly reformed, tenth-century Exeter community? Conner and Gameson both make important points for their arguments, but at present there is no certainty of the actual level of Exeter's scriptorium in the tenth century, and thus neither argument can be proven.

Gameson, who argues in his study that Leofric quite deliberately built up Exeter's library after his arrival, makes a few observations about the nature of the Leofric donation list, which contribute to my hypothesis that the *Exeter Book* was intended as a practical book for the use of either monks or canons (whichever the case may be in the history of the Exeter Book's reader reception). First, Gameson explains that the organization of the donation list is based around Christian works (which is surely no surprise given that this is a monastic and episcopal foundation), and that also,

> considering the inventoried texts as a whole, one is struck by the fact that they represent the coherent foundation of a reasonable Christian library. The first and second groups comprise the literary *sine qua non* of ecclesiastical life; the third section offers a selection of standard reading texts, the only slightly exotic items being the Persius, and the Statius—as well as the *Exeter Book* itself. (143)

Gameson then argues that this donation list proves that "this is hardly the library of a dilettante bibliophile; rather it is the basic working collection of a bishop [Leofric] served by a community of canons" and that the characteristics of this sparse group of manuscripts suggest "a collection built from nothing" (143). Gameson adds that "the main point that strikes one about these texts as a group is their unadventurous nature" and that these texts reflect what would be needed as basic required texts for a foundation (147). If Gameson is correct here in his characterization of the nature of the items that Leofric included on this list as emblematic of the Exeter library collection at this time, then the *Exeter Book* should also be considered a "working" text, but what work exactly would this manuscript have been expected to perform as part of the collection? Gameson notes that "the presence of a handsome 'large English book about various things written in verse' in such a collection is all the more intriguing. However, as the circumstances surrounding Leofric's acquisition of the Exeter Book of Old English Poetry are irrevocably lost to us, intriguing it must remain" (184). One very plausible answer, in any of the possible audiences, be they Benedictine monks or, in the case of Leofric's new episcopal establishment, secular canons following the Rule of Chrodegang, would be that the *Exeter Book* was seen as an important and essential didactic and catechetical resource.

A consensus for the exact date and location of the creation of the manuscript has not been reached by scholars, but examining the active debate on these issues may help shed some light on the difficulties in this study with determining audience and intention of the *Exeter Book.* Muir speculates on the mysterious origin of the manuscript, concluding that not much can be known about the authorship of the poems, "except that

Ascension and *Juliana* contain Cyn(e)wulfian runic signatures, and that *Deor* may recount the experiences of a real poet-philosopher. Otherwise the texts are anonymous and even lack titles in the manuscript" (40). Muir agrees with Norman F. Blake on the probable dating of the poems, and argues that: "there is little reason to believe that any of the poems in the anthology dates from much before the Alfredian period, perhaps with the exception of the three lists embedded in *Widsith*" (40). Muir argues that the combined evidence for the location of origin as presented by Conner (dating, affiliation, inclusion in Leofric's list) is the most valid—and that the manuscript was most likely written at Crediton or Exeter (3).

Conner theorizes that the Leofric donation inscriptions prove a pre-conquest library at Exeter, which included the *Exeter Book* manuscript in its holdings. It is certainly plausible that the manuscript could have been created at Exeter's scriptorium, and Leofric (or someone after Leofric's death who was either unsure or did not care about the actual origin of the manuscript) placed it in the inventory. However, Conner explains that "the donation-inscriptions lead us to two important pieces of information about the pre-Conquest library at Exeter: a fairly large group of books was singled out to be especially identified with the new cathedral community; furthermore, the books in that group had all been written before Leofric took charge at Exeter" (17). Conner bases the last part of this assertion on his reading of evidence that the *Exeter Book* shares paleographical allegiance to another group of manuscripts which some have identified as associated with Exeter and which Conner argues were created at Exeter before 1050.

Conner bases a significant amount of his argument on the paleographical correlation between the *Exeter Book* and other Exeter-attributed manuscripts; in particular his analysis of letter forms leads him to conclude that not only do all of these manuscripts share a common "square-miniscule" scribal style, but that this particular style was one developed at Exeter in the second half of the tenth century and used in the Exeter Scriptorium: "the text-hand of the 'Exeter Book' best accords with a date *ca* 950 x 970; it is not likely to be earlier and it can be dated later only if the evidence of other facets of the manuscript, such as the initial and display-capitals,—or indeed, the text— require a later dating" (77). Conner groups several other manuscripts with the *Exeter Book* manuscript, including London, Lambeth Palace, MS. 149; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 319; and the Sherbourne Pontifical (20-33). Especially significant in this grouping is the famous Sherbourne Pontifical, which, as Conner explains, "has never been considered to have an Exeter provenance, although it is written in the same hand as Exeter, Cathedral Library, MS. 3507 and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Bodley 718" (20). On these associated manuscripts, Conner explains that Kenneth Sisam also recognized "a similarity between the 'Exeter Book' and London, Lambeth Palace Library, MS. 149" (80). He goes on to assert that "there can be little doubt on the basis of letter-forms that the scribe of Lambeth 149 was the same as the scribe of the 'Exeter Book'" (81). Conner concludes from his paleographical analysis that all of these manuscripts were not only written at the same scriptorium, but that they were all created at Exeter "between the time of Exeter's Benedictine reform in 968 and King Swegn's destructive raid in 1003 (recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle)" (20).

Gameson argues that the overall character of the books, their known histories, Leofric's inventory list, and "the testimony of the extant early manuscripts of Exeter provenance, all argue against an Exeter origin for the Exeter Book" (136). However, as Gameson's refutation of Conner's arguments regarding the paleographical comparisons between the *Exeter Book* and other manuscripts indicates, this shared paleographical style (which Conner presumes is unique to Exeter) does not necessarily indicate that these manuscripts originated at Exeter. When looking at the manuscript grouping that Conner argues shares the same hand, Gameson suggests that the scribal hand is not consistent across these manuscripts, and that "considered in the broad context of late Anglo-Saxon book production as a whole, these six volumes do not form a coherent, self-sufficient group; and the scribal styles represented in them are demonstrably not localizable to Exeter" (162). Gameson contends that the "square-miniscule" script attributable to the group of manuscripts (which includes the *Exeter Book*) that Conner discusses at length, was a common type of script in England during the late 10th century, and that other manuscripts with more certain origin points, not including Exeter, have this same script (162-166). Moreover Gameson, by way of this evidence located using the same methodology as Conner, is able to provide some information on a possible dating of the *Exeter Book*, which could provide more historical context for the manuscript's contents:

> Comparison with charters suggests outer limits of the late 950s and the 990s for such hands; and the evidence of the Sherborne Pontifical, which is datable on internal grounds to 960 x 993, is concordant with this range. The general historical context for these books is, therefore, the reign of

Edgar, and the earlier years of Ethelred's reign; this was the time that saw

the ascendancy of the monastic reform movement, and subsequently the

return of the Vikings. (166)

Conner argues that while Exeter was sacked in 1003, the *Exeter Book* may have

been saved from the fire (21). Also, the sacking and plundering at Exeter could show the

monastery's wealth (21-22). However, all of this is circumstantial at best, and does not

prove an Exeter origin for the *Exeter Book*. Conner does make a very logical point that it

would not make much sense for the Viking Swegn to destroy Exeter during his raid as a

retaliation if Exeter has little value. Conner explains that scholars have assumed that

Exeter was impoverished and stunted as a monastery because of their interpretations of

Leofric's donation/inventory list—and because of how scholars want to imagine Exeter

of that period:

> we know so little about Exeter *ca* 950 x 1050 that the image gleaned from
>
> the inventory of a place with but seven head of skinny cattle on the other
>
> side of town, six mouldy old books, and one grubby vestment for all
>
> seasons is the seemingly appropriate portrait of early eleventh-century
>
> Exeter, because it reinforces what we imagine the place must have been
>
> like [. . .] when King Swegn, in retaliation for King Æthelred's having
>
> murdered his sister, swept down on Exeter and, reportedly, 'burnt the
>
> churches, in which numerous and precious libraries were kept, with their
>
> books.' (21)

While early eleventh-century Exeter was in bad shape, the fifty years preceding

Swegn's raid were excellent for the monastery. A good library and scriptorium may have

existed up until the raid—and the state of the scriptorium and library after Swegn's raid

has little recorded history, mostly from Leofric. Conner provides evidence for a long-

standing establishment at Exeter, including archeological evidence for three consecutive

cemeteries, which indicate an important Church-established presence on site starting in

the fifth century (22). Conner further hypothesizes that if Exeter did indeed have a

Church establishment at such an early date, then it could be presumed that the historical

record would indicate the presence of a monastery, with accompanying opportunities for

education.

> It may be presumed, then, that this was also the site of Abbot Wulfhard's
>
> monastery where Boniface fulfilled his novitiate, according to Willibald's
>
> Life of Boniface. This discovery is important to identifying an early
>
> library at Exeter, because Willibald's work tells us that the young
>
> Boniface's purpose in becoming a religious was 'to join himself to the
>
> study of sacred letters.' His subsequent career shows that he was
>
> successful in getting at least the rudiments of a christian education at
>
> Exeter, and his having done so means that books were necessarily
>
> available. (22)

Conner extends his argument for Exeter's place in Anglo-Saxon society as a long-

standing religious establishment by relying on a leaf from an eighth-century gospel book

(London, British Library, MS. Cotton Tiberius B.v, vol. 1, f. 75), which includes a guild-

assembly record that dates from the tenth century. This record indicates that this gospel

book was at Exeter in the tenth century, which, according to Conner, implies that it was a

long-standing member of a library at Exeter, and thus that there was a "continuing

religious house at Exeter with a library, and [. . .] a scriptorium (29). Conner's argument

raises the possibility that Exeter had a continuing religious house of the same caliber as it

apparently was before Swegn's raid, but his proof is far from certain, and while there may

have been an active scriptorium at Exeter up until Leofric's arrival and the creation of his

donation list, there cannot be any certainty that the scriptorium existed or that the *Exeter*

Book manuscript was created at Exeter.

Apart from the debate surrounding Exeter as the point of creation for the

manuscript, there are other places identified within the critical literature as possible

scriptoria likely to have created the *Exeter Book*. Robert M. Butler's "Glastonbury and

the Early History of the Exeter Book" advances the theory that the *Exeter Book* was

created at the Glastonbury scriptorium in the 10th century, under the supervision of the

influential abbot Dunstan. Butler argues that, because of a lack of historical or

paleographical proof, Crediton does not have any case at all for being the origin point of

the manuscript (176), and he agrees with Gameson's refutation of Conner's evidence for

an Exeter origin (176-178). The central foundation of Butler's argument is the

aforementioned relation between Lambeth MS 149 and the *Exeter Book*, particularly how

the Lambeth manuscript's provenance (and donation history) link it to Glastonbury, and

thus possibly the *Exeter Book* as well (181-195). Butler does not adequately prove that

these two manuscripts were necessarily made, grouped, or donated together, therefore his

arguments for a Glastonbury origin are circumstantial. He does, however provide some

compelling evidence, via historical records, of Dunstan's love of riddles and secular

poetry, which in turn could indicate a possible connection between Dunstan's literary

interests and the Exeter Book (197-99), as well as the veneration of St. Guthlac at

Glastonbury as a plausible impetus for the inclusion of the *Guthlac* poems in the *Exeter*

Book (200-204).

Conner, on the other hand, argues that one "reason to eschew the notion that the

scribe of the 'Exeter Book' came from Glastonbury is that the manuscript evidence

indicates no tradition of copying vernacular texts there, not even of adding glosses in Old

English" (86). Gameson also rejects Glastonbury as a possible origin, and concludes that

really, there can be no positive identification for the origin point of the *Exeter Book*, but

that "the hypotheses which seem most compatible with the scanty facts at our disposal are

production at Glastonbury or Christ Church, Canterbury; but these, it must be stressed,

are little more than educated guesses" (179). The various hypotheses of origin for the

Exeter Book (Exeter, Crediton, Glastonbury, Canterbury) may all be considered

reasonable points of origin. However, if this manuscript was intended as a practical,

"working" book (as Gameson characterizes it), with some central purpose behind the

manuscript's creation, such as teaching lords and nobles the importance of giving—

particularly in the Christian form of almsgiving—as central to Christian lordship, then a

monastery which was known for educating the nobility stands as a reasonable point of

origin. Any of the four monasteries mentioned could have found value in this text, but

Canterbury and Exeter in particular could have used this text specifically as a didactic

instrument, as they were locations most intimately associated with the education of lords and kings. Exeter, recorded as the site for the education of Edward the Martyr (c. 962-978), would fit Conner's hypothesis best. The *Exeter Book* also would have retained a significant place in Leofric's library, as the need for almsgiving by nobility transcended divisions within the Church. Leofric's secular canons, engaged in daily pastoral work with lay people, would have found helpful the theme of almsgiving as essential to good Christian living, as expressed in the *Exeter Book* poems.

Many critics have suggested that the Exeter Book is a random miscellany, a reminiscent collection of well-loved relics of the cultural and religious past. But a number of prominent critics have argued that instead this is an organized anthology with a Christian purpose, particularly focused on Christian cycles of redemption and salvation. Seth Lerer, in "Medieval English Literature and the Idea of the Anthology," explains the fundamental difference between these two definitions of manuscript construction: miscellanies are disorganized and random, but anthologies are "manuscripts guided by a controlling literary intelligence" (1255). I concur that the *Exeter Book* is a Christian anthology, but go farther and suggest that a major theme that links the poems in the collection together is better Christian lordship through almsgiving.

If this anthology was created with specific purposes in mind, then the *Exeter Book*'s audiences, both intended and accidental, are crucial. Roy M. Liuzza, in "Who Read the Gospels in Old English?," discusses the issues present when trying to determine the audience and purpose of any Old English text:

The problem of intention and audience is particularly acute in Old English

studies; a corpus of mostly undated and anonymous works offers only the

sketchiest indications of context, and allows the modern reader to forget at

times that meaning (at least as we must look at it, historically) is a

conspiracy between intention and reception. One may be tempted to

imagine a homogenous and relatively static audience—in the aristocratic

hall or the monastic refectory—for a given work; it is easy to overlook the

possibility that the same text may be differently understood by different

groups of people and at different times in its history. (3)

To add to this, more than one particular Anglo-Saxon audience could have

received this manuscript, with the same purpose intended by the anthologist, in a variety

of different ecclesiastical situations. Liuzza also explains that even if an intended

audience for an Old English text can be constructed based on manuscript and rhetorical

evidence, "this intended audience forms only one part of the equation that makes up the

meaning of a text; the actual reception and use of the work by a real audience may be

quite different from what its author intended" (3). Thus, multiple possible audiences may

have received and interpreted the intended message differently, but given the repetitive

nature of alms references within this primarily religious manuscript, the fundamental

message is that lords must give alms in order to receive salvation, and should be models

in almsgiving.

Conner, joining the general critical consensus throughout the early history of

criticism on the manuscript, argues that the *Exeter Book* is composed of both secular and

religious poems, and that these two types of poems based on different cultural views (Germanic and Christian) in turn indicate different periods of manuscript creation (33). He posits that the poetry which constitutes the *Exeter Book* "must be viewed as a literary collection whose formation may have bridged the periods before and after the Benedictine reform of Exeter Abbey, and—unlike copies of the works of Augustine, Bede and Isidore—may incorporate local preferences in its compilation, and perhaps in the composition of the poems themselves" (95). Conner stands here in a long line of scholars who have argued for individual poems as composites and for the apparent mismatched nature of the manuscript as a whole. While the root sources of many of the *Exeter Book* poems are undoubtedly Germanic, prominently in the case of *Widsið,* I and others argue that the poems as we have them extant in this manuscript are either totally religious in nature or are syncretic poems, whose supposed "Germanic" elements speak to a different purpose, one which is wholeheartedly Christian.

Along with considerable debate about the essentially secular or religious (or composite or syncretic) natures of the individual poems, there is wide-ranging speculation about the scribes or anthologists who created the *Exeter Book.* Scholars have debated the number of scribes of the *Exeter Book*, including Robin Flowers, who argues for multiple scribes, and Conner, who originally argued for three different scribes, based on his three-booklet theory.[2] Conner later argues that

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[2] Robin Flowers theorizes multiple scribes in "The Script of the Exeter Book." *The Exeter Book of Old English Poetry.* Facs Ed R W Chambers et al London 1933 55-67 Print Conner presented his three-scribes theory in a conference paper, which he later refutes in *Anglo-Saxon Exeter* The conference paper was "The Exeter Book not one manuscript but three booklets?" ISAS Biennial Meeting, Cambridge, England, 1985

it is more probable that a single scribe wrote the 'Exeter Book' than that

three scribes did, for, if there were three, we are led to an astonishing

conclusion about the place of vernacular poetry at Exeter. If there were

three scribes, their hands are so closely matched that the production of the

manuscript must immediately be viewed as an anomaly among

tenth-century vernacular manuscripts, and we significantly increase the

number of hypotheses which must be tested if we assert the inordinate

concern for vernacular poetry implied by the training of several scribes to

the nearly unvarying reproduction of a single model. (117-118)

Conner is right that "vernacular poetry" would not merit as much concern from a

scriptorium. However, it is not unlikely that elements from the vernacular would be used

for Christian purposes.

Conner argues that the extant manuscript is not what the scribe intended—but

rather a compilation of booklets scarred by missing folios:

The collation suggests that the Exeter Book, as we now have it, is not the

volume envisaged by the scribe who wrote it. Assuming that the

seventeenth quire had eight leaves, as conjectured, and assuming a

missing gathering (after quire VI) which contained the end of 'Guthlac', a

missing gathering (before quire VII) which contained the beginning of

'Azarias', and a missing gathering (before quire XIII) which contained the

beginning of 'Homiletic Fragment III', the codex in its ideal state would

have contained twenty gatherings, all in eights, giving 160 folios total. If

that is correct, the present poetic volume of 123 folios (8-130) represents

about 77 per cent of the original number of leaves. The extant 'Exeter

Book' would want, then, some thirty-seven folios by comparison with its

condition at the time of its pristine assembly as a *micel englisc boc*.

(109-110)

The ramifications of Conner's booklet theory (that the *Exeter Book* is formed from

individual units of poetic manuscript creation) may shed additional light on the purposes

behind the creation of the *Exeter Book*. Conner speculates that the manuscript was

created in three separate booklets, and that each of these sections were written at different

times in history, but that all of the booklets were written by one scribe, who developed his

skills over time (118-19). However, Conner surmises that if his intensive study and

resulting conclusions about the progressive nature of the one scribe's work is correct,

then the *Exeter Book* as we have it was planned not as one collection, but as several, that

were then pieced together at a later date:

> If a single scribe wrote the manuscript at three different times, as an
>
> analysis of the ligatures strongly suggests, then—given the relegations of
>
> the riddles to one of these booklets and the ordered grouping of the
>
> 'Christ' / 'Guthlac' poems in another—we must have three separately
>
> planned collections, that is, we have three distinct booklets. (119)

Conner's theory about the three-booklet nature of the manuscript leads him to argue that

each of the three booklets has a different thematic aim, yet each booklet concerns a set of

issues from the Benedictine Revival. Conner believes that the oldest booklet, or Booklet

II, comprised of ff. 53r-97v, "represent[s] a collection derived from Continental models and composed within a monastic environment before the Benedictine revolution" and runs from *Azarias* through to the beginning of *The Partridge* (148).[3] The next booklet chronologically, according to Conner, is the third booklet in the manuscript, ff. 98r-130v, which he suggests includes "compositions both in the Continental style of the pre-Reform period and compositions which focus on the issues important in the Benedictine monastery during and immediately after the process of reform" and includes the poems Homiletic Fragment III through the riddles, or the end of the manuscript (148). Lastly, the first part of the manuscript, ff. 1r-52v (containing the "Christ" and "Guthlac" poems) is believed by Conner to have been the last booklet written, and that these poems are "long, rhetorically complex compositions, all concerning issues important to the Reform, and all employing techniques of structure and style appropriate to the artistic habits of the reformers" (148). Conner's argument for three independent booklets instead of a cohesive collection is founded on several types of evidence: "differences among scribes, decorations, soiled outer leaves, distribution of identifiable types of membrane, and ruling procedures" (128). However, both Muir and Gameson disagree with this theory. Whereas Conner argues that the *Exeter Book* is a composite volume constructed over time, Muir, supported by his own set of codicological evidence, argues that the entire book was copied out start to finish in the order we have it today (6). Muir also explains, not in disagreement with Conner, that the anthologist is not necessarily the same person as the scribe, but that they can be separate people or one person who determined both the

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[3] All identifications of folios for each of the three booklets is found in Conner, 111.

selection of texts and the layout (17). This idea of a single scribe/anthologist is significant

for my study here, because if Muir and Conner are correct, then it is likely that the *Exeter*

Book compiler created the whole manuscript with a specific purpose and intent, and not

as a random miscellany.

Muir (with support from Williamson, Berkhout, and Liuzza in his footnotes),

suggests that the scribe/anthologist adapted his material to give the collection cohesion,

and "arranged it in a meaningful manner" (7). If the poems in the manuscript were not

arranged by the anthologist, then "it is to be attributed to the anthologist of its exemplar

(s)" (7). To aid his argument, Muir points out a few instances of the poems in the *Exeter*

Book having similar wording or signal phrases, for example, the "wording of 1.30 of

Guthlac (A) is identical to the opening line of *The Panther*, which suggests that 11. 1-29

were at some time attached to a poem which already had a traditional opening" (22).

Muir demonstrates that this particular link between *Guthlac (A)* and *The Panther* is

important evidence for the hand of the anthologist, instead of the mere scribe or

miscellany-maker, because "this is evidence that either the anthologist or the scribe

participated actively in the manipulation and transmission of the texts as we have them

[. . .] It follows that at some stage in the transmission of these texts someone wrote this

linking passage to develop thematic unity in the sequence of poems" (22). While one

matching line does not necessarily prove an anthologist revised the poems to compliment

a central purpose for the manuscript, there are other multiple instances within the *Exeter*

Book which illustrate this feature of the texts.

Muir also provides additional proof that an anthologist actively organized the

Exeter Book with a central purpose in mind; he argues convincingly that the first eight

poems of the manuscript were "placed together because they are related thematically in

their concern with different models for Christian living" (23). As Muir details in his

theory of how and why the *Exeter Book* is arranged,

> Christ's life comes first, in a trinity of poems defining his rôles as
>
> Almighty God, Son, Savior, King and Judge; his life is the model for all
>
> Christians, whose lives are ordered by the Liturgical Year (itself an annual
>
> re-enactment of the events of Christ's life). The *Guthlac* poems and
>
> *Juliana* respectively offer exemplary models for contemporary male and
>
> female Christian witnesses to emulate. *Canticles* shows how the Christian
>
> faith was practised and adhered to by a representative group of the Old
>
> Testament Just in time of trial. And *Phoenix* describes the afterlife
>
> promised to all the Faithful, which they will receive for honouring the
>
> Covenant established when God's people were first chosen. (23)

Muir's continued speculation on the order of the poems in the manuscript leads him to

examine the critical debate surrounding the two separated groups of riddles in the

manuscript. He explains that many earlier scholars have suggested that this separation of

the riddles encourages "the notion that the ordering of the poems is haphazard" yet

because there was a second set of riddles added after other poems within the manuscript,

"the number of surviving riddles suggests a century was intended [. . .] evidence of the

anthologist at work" (23). (Muir refers here to the classical grouping of riddles in blocks

of one-hundred, known as a *century*). Muir also sees a thematic link in the poems from *Judgement Day I* to *Homiletic Fragment II*, "all of which are concerned with aspects of the Easter liturgical season" (23). He argues specifically that these poems reflect the Easter Season's liturgical concerns with "reflection, penance and renewal" (23). All three of these Easter liturgical foci support my idea of the thematic link of almsgiving, particularly since the poems in *Exeter Book* encourage almsgiving both as a penitential method and as a means of assisting in one's own salvation.

Thus, this is a planned collection and the "progressive" nature of the booklets does not discount that the codex was created in this fashion over time with a larger, cohesive anthology in mind. Indeed, the literary features that indicate a consistent Christian thematic focus, particularly in the very distinct organization patterns as argued by Muir, also suggest an anthologist who intentionally created this codex in much the same form we have it today, allowing for the few lost folios.

Muir's conclusions about the central Christian nature of the *Exeter Book* are both borne out in the text of the manuscript itself. My argument extends his discussion of the Christian purpose of the manuscript to examine one specific thematic element that exemplifies the Exeter Book's Christian aims. This study argues that the *Exeter Book* was a text that reflected the importance of generosity as a quality necessary for a good Christian lord, and that this manuscript may possibly be intended for didactic purposes, either as material for the monks and canons to draw from when preparing homilies (supporting Muir's argument for an Easter liturgical theme) or to be used in pedagogical practice.

Muir utilizes the work of Norman F. Blake to address the critical consensus that

the quality of poetry in Old English declined over time, arguing that the reality instead

points to a rise in literary excellence as Old English approached its final period: "He

[Blake] points out that if there had been a decline in Old English poetry in the tenth

century, it would have been peculiar for Ælfric to adopt the alliterative style in writing his

homilies; he [Blake] concludes,

> The most reasonable explanation is that in Ælfric's time the alliterative
>
> style was a recognized medium of religious instruction, which in its turn
>
> implies that the use of vernacular poetry for religious ends was a common
>
> feature in the tenth century. (p.18) (qtd. in Muir 40)

Diane Silver, in her dissertation "Making the Good Christian Journey: The Poetics

of Wisdom in *Widsith* and Its Manuscript Context," theorizes that the purpose of the

Exeter Book is that it "teaches, by positive and negative example, the wisdom necessary

for the good Christian journey" (101). Likewise, Roberta Frank, in her essay "When

Lexicography Met the *Exeter Book*," argues that a "major theme in the Exeter Book from

the opening Advent antiphons to the final riddles is the importance of wonder and the

wondrous in accessing the divine. The poetic adverb *wundrum* occurs twenty-five times

in the manuscript" (215). Similarly, George Krapp and Eliott Van Kirk Dobbie, in the

introduction to their edition of the *Exeter Book*, at an early date in the scholarship of the

anthology, characterize the manuscript as essentially religious:

> It is in fact surprising to find a book of this character listed among the
>
> service books and other edifying works in Latin and English with which

Leofric enriched his cathedral library. Its inclusion may well have been

due not to any interest on the part of Leofric in English poetry, but to the

fact that the content of the volume was in large part religious and that the

first text in it was CHRIST. (x)

All of these arguments are in line with Muir's (and likewise, my) reasoning that the

Exeter Book is centrally and most importantly a Christian text.

But why and how would a collection of poems, in themselves exemplars of

various genres both secular and religious, possibly be viewed as an adequate vehicle for

Christian instruction? Was this a common technique in late Anglo-Saxon pedagogy or

catechism?

Liuzza points out that the nature of the vernacular literacy program encouraged

by Alfred the Great is "easy to overrate" and that the use and promotion of English as a

written language had more than one purpose—but primarily it was because the lack of

adequate Latin necessitated it. "Men wrote books in English out of necessity, and only

secondarily, if at all, as a matter of national pride or literary ambition; translations,

particularly of the major liturgical or monastic texts, are concessions, not

accomplishments" ("Who Read?" 7). But, as Liuzza explains, using English as the

literary vernacular also aided "instruction of secular clergy, whose latinity was apparently

always doubtful [. . .] As well as providing clerical education, the monastic revival

fostered lay patronage and lay devotion; the need for English books among the clergy

was paralleled by a demand for religious works from pious ealdormen and

women" ("Who Read?" 7), which would have increased the reach of important cultural

and religious teachings.

If the poems in the *Exeter Book* are didactic, then they should also, by their

didactic nature, be intended as "wisdom" poems. Silver undertakes the difficult task of

defining wisdom literature as a genre in Old English. Her succinct critical review

provides us here with a working definition from which to focus on the Christian

didacticism present in the *Exeter Book*:

> Collectively, [. . .] scholars define wisdom literature as a super-genre,
>
> subsuming a variety of forms and consisting of essentially didactic
>
> material that conveys information to its audience about the nature of life,
>
> this world, and the next one [. . .] wisdom literature ultimately teaches its
>
> audience how to navigate human existence. (89-90)[4]

Silver, aware of the problems inherent in viewing the *Exeter Book* as a religious and

didactic collection, particularly in light of the so-called "secular" poems within, explains

some basic truths about the Anglo-Saxon cultural view of what constituted religious as

opposed to the secular, a line more blurred in their time than in our own:

> Certainly critics attempting to classify the *Exeter Book* as an essentially
>
> religious collection might find reason to pause when they come upon the
>
> six units of verse in the manuscript that appear to be secular pieces:

---

[4] The scholars that Silver references here are numerous "the literature comes from a variety of sources, including heroic tales, biblical or Christian stories (Campbell and Rossier 8-12), ethics (Bloomfield 23), and morality Primarily, however, the literature derives from practical experience (Kennedy 157) and from God (Larrington 221) While divine revelations may impart wisdom, it is more often arrived at through contemplation of the divine order in God's created universe (see, for example, Larrington 33, 73, 331)" (89-90)

Widsith, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message,

The Ruin, and some of the riddles. Much of the hesitancy these critics

might feel, however, can likely be assuaged by the recollection of a basic

truth of Anglo-Saxon literature: Anglo-Saxon religious poetry often

conflates the sacred and the secular. With only these six exceptions, all the

units of verse in the Exeter Book are overtly religious. The quantitative

reality alone encourages reassessment of the manuscript as a religious

anthology. (96-7)

Silver's argument for the overall central theme of the *Exeter Book* is a logical one, and

fits in as well with Muir's proposed organizational principle of the Exeter Book as

demonstrating the Christian journey. As Silver suggests, the *Exeter Book* "mimics the

journey of the Christian soul from revelation and acceptance of the divine plan (as

featured in the first movement) to anticipation of redemption and homecoming (as

featured in the tenth movement)." These poems also move "the lessons of Christ's life

into the lives of everyday mortals by redefining life on earth as the good Christian

journey, redirecting the focus of that journey to life in the next world, and exposing the

folly of the heroic age by comparing it to the wisdom of the Christian era" (132).

As for the intended audience of the *Exeter Book*, I theorize that various possible

owners of the manuscript, from Benedictine monks to secular canons under Leofric could

have used this collection as a means of teaching lords that almsgiving was an essential

component of being good Christian rulers. Historical evidence concerning Exeter during

the 10th century (at the height of the Benedictine Revival) indicates that the monastery

was a location for the education of princes and nobles. Likewise, there is evidence that a

community of secular canons who followed the Rule of Chrodegang (as the members of

Leofric's Episcopal see did once it moved to Exeter) would have found such a text useful

in their pastoral roles, ministering to lords and possibly kings.

Conner explains the history of Exeter's tenth-century Benedictine reformation,

aided by King Edgar: "According to a twelfth-century chronicler, in 968 King Edgar sent

a colony of monks from Glastonbury to Exeter in one of the early reforming efforts of

English Benedictine monasticism. This group was headed by a monk named Sidemann

who became abbot of the monastery at Exeter" (Conner 29).[5] Interestingly, as Conner

explains, King Edgar's son Edward, later to be king himself, is noted in historical record

to have been educated under the supervision of this same abbot:

> Byrhtferth's Life of St. Oswald [*Vita s. Oswaldi*], written in 997 x 1005,
>
> states unequivocally that King Edward 'was learned in divine law, having
>
> been taught by Bishop Sidemann'. If Edward, who was born *ca* 962,
>
> received his tutor at the usual age of seven, then he would presumably
>
> have been educated by Sidemann at Exeter. Whether one is to understand
>
> from Byrhtferth's phrase, *docente episcopo Sidemanno*, that Sidemann
>
> himself provided the boy's instruction, or rather that Sidemann's
>
> monastery undertook to educate the prince, the institution probably
>
> provided the context. Although I cannot prove the assertion, it may be that

---

[5] See John of Worcester's Chronicle, s.a. (ed. Petrie and Sharpe in *Monumenta* p. 577) for the backstory on this.

Swegn deliberately chose to destroy Exeter in 1003 (in retaliation for

Æthelred's having executed his sister) because the sons of Edgar had been

known to favor the city and minster. (29-30)[6]

If this source is reliable, then it shows that there was significant royal favor before

Swegn's raid for Exeter, which in turn could indicate a reason for the didactic/

catechetical nature of the *Exeter Book*. Even without more reliable proof of this

connection with Edgar's sons, Leofric is recorded as a royal chaplain before his

appointment as bishop of Crediton (Treharne 159), which implies that not only did he

have experience providing catechetical instruction to royalty, but that he would have had

need of texts which explained the connection between lords and Christian acts.

Additional evidence shows that the relationship between King Edgar and the

Church was significant, in that this is the first time in England that a king was styled as

anointed by God Himself:

In 968, Sidemann was one of the new-style, reforming abbots, and it is

probably significant that he was promoted in 973, the same year as

Edgar's coronation at Bath, for, as Eric John has argued, that coronation,

designed by Dunstan and carried out fourteen years after the king's

accession to all England in 959 on the death of Eadwig, was the ritualistic

signification of the beginning of Edgar's reign as *Christus Domini*, 'the

Lord's Anointed.' (Conner 30)

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[6] According to Conner, the source for this segment of the Life of St. Oswald can be found in: 'Erat doctus Diuina lege, docente episcopo Sidemanno...' *Vita s. Oswaldi* (ed. Raine, *The Historians of the Church of York*, I. lxv, 449).

Conner continues to explain that Sidemann was an important influence on Exeter, and that his influence transformed the Exeter establishment into a reformed Benedictine monastery "with a restored sense of mission and certainly a well developed library and scriptorium, since the Benedictine Rule assumes a literate brotherhood" (31). It is certainly plausible that Conner's assertion that at least through the time of Sidemann, the library (and possibly a scriptorium) should have been developed. Yet, that does not mean it was in good shape when Leofric arrived. Conner's only evidence that other important manuscripts were created at Exeter in the time period after Sidemann until Leofric is based on his understanding of the "Exeter script" which other scholars have disputed as unique to Exeter. Therefore, he does not (and we do not) have substantial enough proof for a continuing and flourishing scriptorium, nor that the *Exeter Book* was in fact created at Exeter.

Four chapters comprise the remainder of this study. Chapter II, "Almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon Lordship," examines the historical and theological evidence for the importance of almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon society, within the cultural framework of how an ideal Anglo-Saxon lord would be expected to give appropriately. Chapter III, "Syncretic Wisdom" begins the textual analysis of poems within the *Exeter Book*, and covers the "secular" poem *Widsið*, followed by the famous elegiac poems *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. I argue that these poems, while encouraging almsgiving, also provide negative exempla which indicate to the audience how worldly wealth fails, whereas wealth given in hope of eternal life does not. Chapter IV, "The Saint and the Symbol," analyzes and compares an exemplary hagiography from the *Exeter Book*, *Guthlac A*, with

the allegorical *Phoenix*, both serving as models for righteous, noble almsgiving and renunciation of the evil, material world. Finally, Chapter V, "Christ as Model King and Almsgiver," addresses the three *Christ* poems *The Advent Lyrics*, *The Ascension*, and *Christ in Judgment* and shows how Christ is depicted in these three poems as the Greatest of Kings, and thus also the Greatest of Almsgivers. These poems are representative of the collection as a whole, although by necessity of the scope of this study some genres, particularly the riddles (which shall be addressed in the future) are excluded.

II: ALMSGIVING IN ANGLO-SAXON LORDSHIP

There are different facets, secular and Christian, which influenced the formation of an Anglo-Saxon lord's behavior, particularly when it came to the act of giving. Did a good Anglo-Saxon lord give only to his retainers, who in turn would support him in battle? Or, would he also honor spiritual obligations to give alms, in order to win the battle for his soul? And in what manners of instruction might a lord or king be educated in both the proper and improper courses of action when it came to his responsibilities as holder of a *gifstol*? These are questions which may never be definitively answered by the extant corpus. However, some strong hypotheses can be advanced when looking at the *Exeter Book* manuscript as a cohesive, planned collection, with an agenda of teaching about appropriate generosity.

Anglo-Saxon lords, in their most fundamental sense, are a study in apparent contrasts. Many critics and historians have often debated the "true" nature of the Anglo-Saxon lord, which they have seen as "Germanic" (pagan/barbarian/pre-Christian) and only later "Christian." Most scholars now recognize Anglo-Saxon lordship as a syncretic construct, with elements of earlier Germanic modes of kingly behavior, but dominated by the conversion to Christianity. To understand better both sides of the Anglo-Saxon ideal of lordship, I shall address each, particularly as it relates to lordly generosity.

Anglo-Saxon lordship is generally viewed as rooted in Germanic lordship, due to the Germanic origins of the Angles, Saxons and Jutes who colonized Roman Britain and eventually became the group known to us now as the Anglo-Saxons. Even though some scholars disagree as to the actual origin of pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon noble and royal

characteristics, according to Barbara Yorke it is likely that "even if Anglo-Saxon kings

were not descended from European royal houses they may have been influenced by

inherited traditions of Germanic kingship" (15). The elements that comprise a "good" or

ideal Germanic lord were fairly straightforward, and revolved around the care the people

of his hall, particularly by participation in gift-exchange. As Yorke explains, the central

organizing principle was the relationship between the lord and his warband, or *comitatus,*

in which "the followers fought loyally for their lord, but the loyalty had been purchased

beforehand by the upkeep the king provided for his warriors and by the giving of gifts;

conspicuous acts of loyalty in battle would be rewarded by further gifts—appropriate

generosity was what made a 'good king'" (17). The ability of a lord or king to attract and

maintain a sizable military was essential, because that was the only way to "prevent

conquest from other kingdoms"; however, the method followed by kings to keep their

armies and kingdoms was "by constant war and the giving of gifts, the former being

necessary to acquire the means of providing the latter" (Yorke 166-67). Thus, even from

its pre-Christian beginnings, the concept of what made an Anglo-Saxon lord a good

leader was centrally focused on the giving of gifts to those who fought for the lord, as

well as those whose well-being the lord was responsible for, which included the thanes,

women and children of his hall. As Adelheid Thieme summarizes, Anglo-Saxon society

was at its base a feudal system, in which a series of successive subjections eventually

leads up to a lord, who in turn is in service to a king. And, throughout the system, "All

these relationships are strengthened and maintained by means of gift-giving" (110).

Anglo-Saxon society, like its nearest Germanic cousins, was based on personal

relationships held fast with treasure and other "gifts," such as food and other necessities, which all eventually filtered to (but mostly from) the lords. The king, as head of the feudal system, would thus be the model for appropriate gift-giving throughout Anglo-Saxon society, giving rise to a need for appropriate education for all lords in how, why, and to whom things should be given.

Rachel S. Anderson summarizes the role of "Germanic" culture in Anglo-Saxon lordship by explaining that the so-called "Germanic" is not essentially unique, and truly that "no element of the political structure of these societies differs greatly from the major elements of any king-led society. Essentially, by the time we have records (which are all Christian), the Germanic societies had had enough contact with Rome to have incorporated many elements of imperial societal and political structure into their own traditions" (39). Anderson's argument here does not take the historian Tacitus into account, although his observations of Germanic culture from a (possibly prejudiced) Roman point-of-view are well-known and pre-Christian. Yet, Anderson's observations on Anglo-Saxon lordship seem valid, and she explains that the only specially Germanic aspects of medieval kingship, which are not also reflected in the imperial model, are "the *comitatus* warband structure [. . .] and the central position of treasure/gift exchange" (39). This is significant, in that if Anglo-Saxon lordship is not as Germanic as earlier scholarship attests, at least one very important component *was* unique to Germanic lordship: gift-giving. If the Germanic lords were dedicated gift-givers before the advent of Christianity, then demonstrations of charity within the Christian faith, including

almsgiving, would be an easily adaptable cultural expression for later Anglo-Saxon

Christian lords.

Of primary concern is the nature of the gift, in particular the implications of

Germanic/Anglo-Saxon gift-giving as it is transformed by Christianity into almsgiving,

and the demonstration of this cultural construct in what is often argued as more secular

literature. Gift-giving is a common feature in Old English literature—whether heroic,

secular, or religious. As Thieme explains in her examination of the role of gift-giving in

salvation in *Dream of the Rood*

> Literary sources, in particular the Old English *Maxims* and *Beowulf*, as
>
> well as historical and contemporary anthropological studies, reveal
>
> that gift giving played an important role. In Anglo-Saxon society, the
>
> gift serves as a means of creating a firm bond between lord and
>
> retainer. While the lord recognizes his retainer's service by the gift of
>
> gold, the retainer is bound by his honor to reciprocate by unfaltering
>
> service. (108)

A good Anglo-Saxon lord is one who gives, but, as Erin Mullally explains, "rejecting

the custom of gift-giving causes one to be a negative exemplum" (9), a characteristic also

shown alongside examples of positive exempla throughout the *Exeter Book.* Lords were

particularly expected, as the holders of the most treasure, to give the most and best gifts.

As John M. Hill explains, kingly gift-giving is a central aspect of Old English literature:

"When commenting on gifts, the Old English *Maxims I* and *II* focus on aristocratic

liberality as an unalloyed good—a necessary and proper state of things. Elsewhere,

munificence in a king is also praiseworthy—whether the king is important to Bede for his

humility or to the *Widsith* poet for his "patronage" ("*Beowulf*" 178). On the premise that

Anglo-Saxon literature served to inspire, teach, and record cultural ideals, the repeated

depictions of the multifaceted nature of lordly giving is indicative of the great importance

placed on the giving of gifts, and later, alms, by the Anglo-Saxons.

According to Richard Abels, although other scholars such as Marcel Mauss and

Jacques Derrida "have most often explained asymmetrical and unbalanced gift giving as

agonistic and hostile, the asymmetrical gift exchanges between an Anglo-Saxon lord and

his man in the time of Bede were neither" (550). Instead, each member of the gift

exchange gave to each other out of "love and loyalty" (550). The gift exchange was a

fundamental component of the Anglo-Saxon lord's realm, because it was the chief way

the lord obtained and distributed resources, as was his central responsibility. In one of the

digressions in the adaption of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae* [*Consolation of*

Philosophy] sometimes attributed to Alfred, the Anglo-Saxon author provides these

observations about the resources which every king and likewise every lord needed:

> [Then the material for a king and his tools for ruling with are that he has
>
> his land fully manned. He must have prayer-men and army-men and
>
> work-men. You know that without these tools no king can show his skill.
>
> His material is also that he must have for these tools sustenance for
>
> the three communities. This then is their sustenance: land to inhabit, and
>
> gifts, and weapons, and food, and ale, and clothes, and everything that the
>
> three communities need. He cannot without these things keep the tools,

nor without these tools perform any of the things that he is commanded to

perform]. (Godden and Irvine 26)[1]

It is this giving out of love that eased the evolution of secular gift-giving to a type of

Christian giving which centered on love for one's fellow humans. Thieme sees the role of

gift-giving in Germanic societies, including Anglo-Saxon society, as essential to "the

stability and cohesion of secular society" and that Anglo-Saxon poetry demonstrates an

attention to applying this understanding of "moral principle" to the relationships between

God and His Son, and His Son and humanity (108-9). When analyzing *Dream of the*

Rood, Thieme argues for this focus on gift-giving as similar to the gift-reciprocity

required in the Christian faith, and that this central theme "emphasizes the magnitude of

God's gift of redemption to mankind and the duty of of each believer to reciprocate by a

countergift," and that it is "deliberately used by the poet "in order to establish the

continuity of pre-Christian and Christian values" (109). Thieme's theory for the primacy

of gift-giving *Dream of the Rood* is also demonstrated throughout the poems of the

Exeter Book, particularly poems covered in this study, which focus on the nature of the

God-human relationship. This similarity between *Dream of the Rood* and the poems of

the *Exeter Book* shows the popularity of gift-giving as a topic in Old English poetry.

What makes the *Exeter Book* stand out is that focused examination and interpretation of

the nature of this gift-giving, particularly under the label of alms-giving, is found

throughout the collection, whereas in other manuscripts this is demonstrably not the case.

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[1] The Alfredian authorship of the OE *Boethius* is a topic of debate. For more information on this debate, please see Malcolm Godden's and Susan Irvine's edition, *The Old English Boethius*. For a more traditional view, see Discenza's *The King's English* and Keynes. The translation provided here is from the "B" text, Chapter 17, in Godden and Irvine.

Thus, the role of the gift is central to the concept of Anglo-Saxon secular lordship.

It is the proverbial glue which holds the society together, and without the gift system it

would be difficult for Anglo-Saxon lords to attract and retain loyal followers who are

drawn by treasure to fight for their lord. Yet, even with the prominence of these secular,

Germanic values within Anglo-Saxon society, it is impossible to divorce Christianity

from later Anglo-Saxon lordship, which is the focus here as the *Exeter Book* as the extant

collection was created no earlier than the tenth century. The earlier heroic epics, and their

accompanying societal values, were implemented by the *Exeter Book* poets in order to

teach lords aspiring to the heroic ideal to instead aspire to a newer, Christian, heroic

ideal. As John M. Hill notes, the syncretic use of heroic concepts with Christian ideals, in

poems such as *Beowulf*, illustrates the "sameness of values [. . .] through which the

heroic past becomes an arena for noble depictions and for man's relationship to

God" (*The Cultural World* 62). Although of a later date, the poems included in the *Exeter*

Book manuscript by very intentional compilation also build upon this syncretic tradition,

mixing the loss of earthly lords and wealth with the hope for the Heavenly Lord and

heavenly treasures, through appropriate giving of lordly wealth to those in need via

almsgiving.

As lordship evolved in the early middle ages, moving from the primarily pagan to

the primarily Christian, other political ideology shifts also took place within the

discussion of lordship and specifically, kingship. Walter Ullmann argues that Christian

kingship shifted from "ascending," wherein a king is approved and given power by those

he governs, to a "descending" type of power, which is the idea of the "divine right" of

kings to rule, as their power is given by God. As Anderson summarizes, "from the time

of the first Christian emperor, Constantine, medieval thinkers have been writing about

what a 'good king' is, how a ruler should behave, and, most importantly to many of the

authors, how that ruler should deal with the Christian church" (2).[2] Patrick Wormald

widens this view, naming Bede and Gregory of Tours for their "historical celebrations of

kingship" but further explaining that the "early medieval Western Church produced a

very considerable 'kingly literature'" which consisted of "formal and informal 'mirrors of

princes,' conciliar decrees and coronation liturgies" (154). Among the scholars who

heavily influenced these "medieval thinkers" is the venerated Augustine of Hippo, who

argues in the widely influential *De civitate dei* that the work of Christian writers should

be focused on heaven rather than earthly, transitory politics. Yet, even in this work,

Augustine gives advice to all Christians, particularly the rich, on the importance of

almsgiving, as well as the limitations for almsgiving to assist one in reaching salvation.

In the overall medieval tradition of political writing, the role of a lord's religious

devotion to Christianity was paramount. According to Anderson, how a lord was

perceived by his society affected how a contemporary writer would discuss the nature of

lordship and kingship:

> Simply put, a powerful king who supported the Church usually
>
> prompted medieval political thinkers to promote monarchal thought

---

[2] In her dissertation, "Ælfric's kings Political Hagiography in Anglo-Saxon England," Anderson extensively surveys the development of Christian kingship in the early Middle Ages (especially in Ch 2, "Christian Kingship from the Third through Tenth Centuries") I am primarily focused in this study on the one aspect of almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon lordship and kingship, and as such will only briefly detail the usual ideal characteristics of early medieval Christian kingship here.

and assign the king divine tendencies. Conversely, a weak king or a

king whose actions usurped Church power tended to prompt authors to

write treatises that limited a king's power and to highlight the

subjective nature of the king's role. (21)

To help instruct lords on acceptable behavior, many of those in the Church concerned

with their lord or king wrote "advice manuals for these rulers" and/or created texts

focused on qualities of good lordship (29). For example, Yorke notes that "Churchmen

like Bede wrote with a very clear idea of what the king's role within the Christian church

should be and of the impact which they wished to have upon contemporary rulers" (173).

Bede is well known for his portrayals of good and not so good lords in *Historia*

ecclesiastica gentis anglorum, in which he promotes those lords who have ideally shown

good Christian values, which are demonstrated later in this chapter by Bede's version of

the legend of Oswald as a good almsgiver. With the trend of "advice manuals" promoted

by no less than the Venerable Bede, the *Exeter Book* may also be viewed in this light, as a

catechetical document in the genre of "mirrors of princes."

These duties of a Christian lord were not far removed from the duties of a

responsible pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon lord, and were rooted in care of the people.

As Anderson reads in Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity* and throughout the work of Ælfric,

"a king is first and foremost a Christian king; his actions and motivations must spring

from his faith. His main duties are to protect his (Christian) people" (2). Among the ways

that he must protect his people are the same war leadership and giving of treasure, but

under the new helm of Christianity, these actions become defense of the faith/faithful and

almsgiving, and the care of the people is now a responsibility on behalf of God.

Christian lordship eventually evolved in the later Anglo-Saxon period to promote

lords (at least the good ones, in any event), as the agents of God, given the right to rule by

the Lord. This served the lords well, particularly in conflicts with their people, be they

clergy or laypersons. Likewise, the strong role of the king within Anglo-Saxon culture

before the introduction of Christianity assisted in the conversion efforts and ongoing

catechetical teaching. As William Chaney argues,

> In the transition from paganism to Christianity, the new theology was
>
> translated into terms of northern life, and crucial to this was the royal
>
> nature of God. The concept of God or Christ as King of Heaven is, of
>
> course, common to many theological metaphors besides those of
>
> Germanic peoples [. . .]. The fundamental basis of Anglo-Saxon
>
> kennings for God is the concept of God as heavenly
>
> monarch. (46)

Furthermore, the prominent word for God in Old English became "cyning" (46), and

within the corpus, "Besides these general terms of lordship, other principal categories of

kennings for God also parallel those for the king [. . .]. In a third major division of

kennings, the kinglike Deity is gift-giver, the dispenser of divine rewards to his band of

followers" (Chaney 47). Thus, God Himself and Christ His Son, acting as His agent,

serve as mirrors to earthly kings, and are the ideal models of good lordship for Anglo-

Saxons to aspire to. This focus on God, and particularly Christ, as good kings is

evidenced throughout the *Exeter Book* poems, as well as other extant Old English poetry.

Within this aspect of God as High Lord is the accompanying aspect of God as Giver, who

in His own giving models the way earthly lords should give: with mercy and Christian

charity. As depicted particularly in the *Christ* poems, which are examined in Chapter V of

this study, Christ is the greatest of Almsgivers, and serves within this construct to teach

and admonish kings who wish to be rewarded eternal life.

The Old English corpus mentions gifts, giving, alms, and almsgiving quite

frequently as a topic of discussion, both in secular and religious works. When searching

the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* for instances of the usual Old English word

for alms, *ælmesse*, no fewer than forty-six instances of the word appear (Healey). It is

evident that alms and the giving of alms were an important part of Old English Christian

writings. Prominently, the word *lac,* which is defined generally as "gift," is used in a

number of homilies in Old English, particularly those of Ælfric.[3] However, the

Bosworth-Toller has several other definitions for this small, seemingly simple word, and

these definitions imply a meaning other than a simple gift: offering, sacrifice, oblation to

God. It seems probable, therefore, that the Anglo-Saxon understanding of *lac* could also

encompass those gifts which were of a higher order, and not just gifts in a tangible,

material sense. Throughout the *Exeter Book*, the role of the lord as the giver of resources

is exemplified in the image of the good lord as a great bestower of gifts, with the bad lord

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[3] The incredibly large number of hits when searching the *DOE Web Corpus* for this and other words related to gifts and alms [gafol, lean, gastgifu, gærsun, giefan, gifola, ælms, ælmsgifu, ælmessyn (-an)] indicates that a much wider study would be needed to explain the encompassing use of these topoi in Anglo-Saxon literature The word *lac*, for example, is found in twenty-five of Ælfric's homilies, according to a *DOE Web Corpus* search

condemned for his lack of generosity. For example, the *Advent Lyrics* describe the Virgin Mary's virginity as her *lac* which she gives to God. In exchange, as is shown in *The Ascension*, she is given Christ to bear, in that particular poem described as a "goldhord" which God has placed in her womb. Through such depictions of a spiritual or metaphysical gift exchange throughout the poems of the *Exeter Book,* the poet(s) or compilers indicate that the Savior is a gift which, characterized as alms, is a sacrifice and an offering to help all of mankind gain eternal life.[4]

Other than scripture, the most consistent resource for Anglo-Saxon Christian writers was the work of the Church Fathers, both Eastern and Western, as attested to in Michael Lapidge's *The Anglo-Saxon Library.* According to Conner's list of the contents of Leofric's scriptorium and Library, from *Anglo-Saxon Exeter* (a list which is based on the work of Gneuss), the majority of the rest of the known library at the time of the *Exeter Book*'s creation and/or donation was religious in nature, consisting of gospels, homilies, and a variety of patristic sources (2-10). As mentioned previously in Chapter I, since the actual origin and provenance for the *Exeter Book* cannot be firmly established, Conner's reconstruction of the library (and thus, the sources available to the Exeter Book scribe) is not necessarily accurate. Yet, by examining certain patristic sources' popularity in Anglo-Saxon England, it is possible to determine some probable influences on the *Exeter Book* scribe's vision for the collection, particularly in the case of almsgiving and ideal Christian lordship.

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[4] This will be discussed further in Chapter V.

Lapidge, in a survey of the scope of Anglo-Saxon library holdings, notes that

there were a number of patristic works available to Anglo-Saxon readers and writers for

possible inspiration or source material: "*many* classical and *most* patristic writings are

preserved in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, and hence were available for study at some time

or place in pre-Conquest England" (65). However, Lapidge, referencing the work of R.

M. Thomson and Theresa Weber, argues that

> the major patristic authors are well represented. (It must be stressed,
>
> however, that many of the manuscripts in question date only from the last
>
> quarter of the eleventh century, suggesting that is was Norman rather than
>
> Anglo-Saxon scholars who saw to the provision of extensive holdings of
>
> patristic writings.) (Lapidge 69)

Even if this is the case with the patristic texts quoted in this study, undoubtedly

the central ideas about charity expressed in the examples provided here, as they were

profoundly influential throughout the Church, would have filtered down to Anglo-Saxon

England, a country not cut off or isolated from the rest of Christendom.

Alms and the giving of alms were a significant part of the medieval Christian

experience across all regions that the Church's hand touched, including Anglo-Saxon

England, from the arrival of Augustine in Canterbury in the late sixth century through to

the creation of the *Exeter Book* in the late tenth or early eleventh century. Our current

view of almsgiving is of a cursory nature, defined as the act of giving assistance, usually

in monetary fashion or property, to those in need. However, the scope of this particular

act of charity was quite broad for the medieval Church and encompassed far more than

just giving money to the poor. As illustrated by the large number of Biblical references to almsgiving and the vast extant patristic material on the subject, including encyclicals, homilies, hagiography and other writings, alms and almsgiving were a central concern in the early Church—and this same concern was also expressed in Anglo-Saxon religious materials, and as this study argues, is also a central theme of the *Exeter Book.*

According to Louis J. Swift in *The Encyclopedia of Early Christianity*, almsgiving is defined as "gifts of charity" and is mentioned, along with the importance of generosity, in the Old and New Testaments. Early Christians, in similar practice to Jewish culture, "tied almsgiving to prayer and fasting and viewed such activity both as a form of penance and as a means of gaining eternal reward" (38). Significantly for this discussion, Swift explains that as Christian conversion grew, particularly among aristocrats, the needs of the poor were more amply provided for, yet the need for support was still so great that "almsgiving became a common sermon topic, particularly in connection with ecclesiastical efforts to control material excesses among the rich" (38). The number of sermons, both in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts and other works of the early Christian era, that mention alms, almsgiving, or gifting, is staggering: for example, a search through the *Christian Classics Ethereal Library* website turned up 1,516 mentions of alms or almsgiving in the works of the Church Fathers included in the database.[5] Likewise,

---

[5] The scope of patristic works which deal with the subject of almsgiving is extensive, the majority of the early Church fathers do address this as a topic of importance Some prominent examples of fathers whose work mentions alms, as per a *CCEL* search, are as follows Ante-Nicene Cyprian, Pseudo-Clementine, Tatian, Clement, Tertullian, Ignatius of Antioch Nicene and Post-Nicene Augustine, Gregory the Great, Gennadius, Jerome, Basil, Ambrose, and Leo the Great Even if these were not known widely in Anglo-Saxon England, they share many of the same ideas regarding the necessity of almsgiving, which would have filtered down to Anglo-Saxon thinkers via the most prominent patristic authors, such as Augustine and Gregory

searches through the *Dictionary of Old English Web Corpus* provided numerous examples of homilies and other religious works in Old English that deal with giving gifts and giving alms in particular, some of which will be discussed here as exemplars of Anglo-Saxon thoughts and teachings on almsgiving.

Alms, according to the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, are "a religious act, inspired by compassion and a desire for justice, whereby an individual who possesses the economic means helps in a material way his less fortunate neighbor" ("(In the Bible)" 300). Both the Old and New Testaments place repeated emphasis on the giving of alms: Job points out his efforts at helping the poor (Job 31.16-23); alms can remove sins and "deliver" sinners from death (Tob. 12.9 and Dan. 4.24), "and bring God's favor on the giver" (Tob. 4.7). Also, "refusing to give alms to the poor" causes God to seek vengeance (Prov. 21.13). And, giving alms leads to the reward of eternal life (Matt. 6.4, 20; 19.27-29; 25.40; Luke 12.33; 16.1-9) (300). Scripture itself is the primary source for how Christians are to give alms appropriately. It should be no surprise then that countless references to the Bible have already been identified for many of the poems within the *Exeter Book*.

Yet, how do these Biblical mandates to give alms translate for the lords in the *Exeter Book*? In the Bible, Daniel advises King Nebuchadnezzar: "peccata tua eleemosynis redime et iniquitates tuas misericordiis pauperum forsitan ignoscet delictis tuis" (Dan 4.24) [Atone for your sins by good deeds and for your misdeeds by kindness

to the poor, then your posterity will be long].[6] Note that the book of Daniel does not

specify what sort of "posterity" one could expect from the giving of alms: earthly and

temporal, or spiritual and eternal, or both? Several poems in the *Exeter Book*, such as

Widsith, most definitely reflect this urge for posterity (also known as "fame-gaining") on

behalf of lords. But why so much emphasis on the responsibility of lords to do all of the

giving? According to Paul in 2 Cor. 8.12, there was an obligation for the rich to supply

the needs of the poor. Thus, as the lead treasure holder in his respective community, the

lord was more responsible for helping the poor than someone without as many resources.

The subject of alms-giving, and the importance of the act in one's redemption, is

more than once discussed at length in the Gospels, with Christ expounding on the method

and reason for giving alms. For example, in Luke 11.37-41 Christ reprimands a Pharisee

who values material goods and physical cleanliness in people (and Christ) more than the

true measure of worth found inside people's natures:

> et cum loqueretur rogavit illum quidam Pharisaeus ut pranderet apud
>
> se et ingressus recubuit. Pharisaeus autem coepit intra se reputans
>
> dicere quare non baptizatus esset ante prandium. et ait Dominus ad
>
> illum nunc vos Pharisaei quod de foris est calicis et catini mundatis
>
> quod autem intus est vestrum plenum est rapina et iniquitate. stulti
>
> nonne qui fecit quod de foris est etiam id quod de intus est fecit.

---

[6] All quotations from the Bible are from the *Latin Vulgate*. All translations, for familiarity's sake, are from the *Douay-Rheims* standard translation of the *Latin Vulgate*.

verumtamen quod superest date elemosynam et ecce omnia munda

sunt vobis.

[And as he was speaking, a certain Pharisee prayed him, that he would

dine with him. And he going in, sat down to eat. And the Pharisee

began to say, thinking within himself, why he was not washed before

dinner. And the Lord said to him: Now you Pharisees make clean the

outside of the cup and of the platter; but your inside is full of rapine

and iniquity. Ye fools, did not he that made that which is without,

make also that which is within? But yet that which remaineth, give

alms; and behold, all things are clean unto you].

In this passage Christ references the giving of alms as a method for the Pharisee, and any

other wealthy person concerned more for appearances than for the ways of God, to

redeem himself, or become "clean." This concern for the wealthy to change focus from

their selfish needs and refocus on helping those less fortunate was a concern that carried

from the Gospels into fruitful contemplation for the Early Church. As such, the need for

almsgiving is also a central concern in Old English literature inspired by earlier patristic

writing, which includes the *Exeter Book*.

John Chrysostom is one of many patristic writers who specifically points to the

wealthy as responsible for care of their fellow humans through almsgiving. In "John

Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money," Blake Leyerle explains that "few

themes so dominate the homilies of John Chrysostom (ca. 347-407 CE) as the plight of

the poor and the necessity of almsgiving" (29). The particular focus of Chrysostom's

indicting homilies were the wealthy of Antioch, who went out of their way to flaunt their

wealth and to avoid the unwashed, poor masses. As Leyerle carefully argues with

references directly to Chrysostom's numerous homilies,

> The wealthy, however, were not readily abashed. They excused
>
> themselves by saying that almsgiving was the church's responsibility—
>
> and they had already given to the church—besides, who knew what the
>
> priests did with that money. Or, they claimed that the poor were
>
> indolent and simply faking their distress. Chrysostom was outraged by
>
> such sentiments. To those among his congregation who felt obliged to
>
> carry out an interrogation before parting with their cash he insisted,
>
> "You must not demand an audit of a person's life—just correct the
>
> poverty and supply the need." (33)

One example of Chrysostom's focus on almsgiving, particularly as a responsibility of the

rich, is found in *On Wealth and Poverty*, a set of homilies which explains all of the ways

Christians should deal with the issues of having wealth and appropriately disposing of it:

> The almsgiver is a harbor for those in necessity: a harbor receives all who
>
> have encountered shipwreck, and frees them from danger; whether they
>
> are bad or good or whatever they are who are in danger, it escorts them
>
> into his own shelter. So you likewise, when you see on earth the man who
>
> has encountered the shipwreck of poverty, do not judge him, do not seek
>
> an account of his life, but free him from his misfortune. (52)

Here Chrysostom seems to be especially instructing those who would "demand an audit"

or would not provide alms to someone whom they did not deem "worthy." To a secular-

based power structure, this idea of giving to anyone who is in need, no matter their

station or perceived taint, is after the example of Christ and is radical and challenges the

status quo. It is not surprising, then, that well into the Christian era of Anglo-Saxon

lordship, there would still be a need for an instructional text to teach the rich and noble

that they *must* give alms, or risk their place in heaven. Furthermore, as the nobility up to

and including the king were engaged in their idea of a lord-thane relationship with Christ

as the King over all, they were not themselves the possessors of wealth, as their only

claim to earthly or heavenly wealth was given by God. As Chrysostom argues in a later

homily in *On Wealth and Poverty*, "Not to share our own wealth with the poor is theft

from the poor and deprivation of their means of life; we do not possess our own wealth,

but theirs" (55). Just as easily as God gives wealth and power to one person, He may take

it away and grant it to another, as the trappings of the world are not necessarily our

"possessions" but things which God gives to us for our own use.

I would also suggest here that other Eastern authors, such as Theodore of Tarsus

and Basil, as well as Augustine (who, although Roman, was born, raised, and preached in

the East), also could have been part of the transmission of these ideas to the West and

hence the Anglo-Saxon Church. According to Lapidge in *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, the

texts of these Eastern writers, including Chrysostom and Basil, were known in Anglo-

Saxon England, primarily because of the influence of Theodore of Tarsus as Archbishop

of Canterbury and Hadrian, Abbot of SS Peter and Paul at Canterbury, whose biblical

commentaries "quote verbatim and *in extenso* from large numbers of books, in Greek and

Latin. Of Greek authors, the following are quoted by name: Basil [. . .] John

Chrysostom" (31-32). Additionally, as Lapidge details throughout his cataloging, there

are several extant manuscripts from each of these three authors, attesting to Anglo-Saxon

knowledge and interest in their ideas. Clearly, these ideas about the nature and

importance of almsgiving are not unique to Chrysostom, Basil, and Augustine, but were

rather widespread.

     Another example of the centrality of almsgiving to the tradition of Christian

writing, particularly homilies, is found throughout the work of Basil, such as in *Homilia*

in illud dictum evangelii secundum Lucam: (Destruam horrea mea, et majora ædificabo):

itemque de avaritia [Homily on the Sayings of the *Gospel According to Luke*, 'I will pull

down my barns and build bigger ones,' and on greed]: "Τοῦ πεινῶντός ἐστιν ὁ ἄρτος, ὃν

σὺ κατέχεις· τοῦ γυμνητεύοντος τὸ ἱμάτιον, ὃ σὺ φυλάσσεις ἐν ἀποθήκαις· τοῦ

ἀνυποδέτου τὸ ὑπόδημα, ὃ παρὰ σοὶ κατασήπεται· τοῦ χρῄζοντος τὸ ἀργύριον, ὃ

κατορύξας ἔχεις. Ὥστε τοσούτους ἀδικεῖς, ὅσοις παρέχειν ἐδύνασο" (276-77) [The bread

which you do not use is the bread of the hungry; the garment hanging in your wardrobe is

the garment of him who is naked; the shoes that you do not wear are the shoes of the one

who is barefoot; the money that you keep locked away is the money of the poor; the acts

of charity that you do not perform are so many injustices that you commit] (Gilbert). This

is an indictment of hoarding wealth, a common trope throughout Old English literature.

This practice is prominently maligned in the *Exeter Book* poems, particularly *The*

Seafarer, in which one who hoards wealth or uses gold in burial goods is wasting treasure that could help the poor.

Augustine of Hippo frequently comments on the necessity of almsgiving for one's salvation, particularly in Book One, Chapter Seventy-Two of the *Enchiridion ad Laurentium seu de fide, spe et caritate* [*Handbook on Faith, Hope, and Love*]. This chapter from Augustine's catechesis is titled in the English translation as "There are Many Kind of Alms, the Giving of Which Assists to Procure Pardon for Our Sins," which thoroughly explains the content of the chapter, covering all of the various activities that constitute alms, and is worth quoting in its entirety here:

> Ac per hoc ad omnia quæ utili misericordia fiunt, valet quod Dominus ait, Date eleemosynam, et ecce omnia munda sunt vobis. Non solum ergo qui dat esurienti cibum, sitienti potum, nudo vestimentum, peregrinanti hospitium, fugienti latibulum, ægroto vel incluso visitationem, captivo redemptionem, debili subvectionem, cæco deductionem, tristi consolationem, non sano medelam, erranti viam, deliberanti consilium, et quod cuique necessarium est indigenti; verum etiam qui dat veniam peccanti, eleemosynam dat; et qui emendat verbere in quem potestas datur, vel coercet aliqua disciplina, et tamen peccatum eius, quo ab illo læsus aut offensus est, dimittit ex corde, vel orat, ut ei dimittatur, non solum in eo quod dimittit, atque orat, verum etiam in eo quod corripit, et aliqua emendatoria pæna plectit, eleemosynam dat, quia misericordiam præstat. Multa enim bona

præstantur invitis, quando eorum consulitur utilitati, non voluntati:
quia ipsi sibi inveniuntur esse inimici, amici vero eorum potius illi
quos inimicos putant; et reddunt errando mala pro bonis, cum reddere
mala christianus non debeat nec pro malis. Multa itaque genera sunt
eleemosynarum, quæ cum facimus, adiuvamur, ut dimittantur nostra
peccata. (266)

[And on this principle of interpretation, our Lord's saying, "Give alms
of such things as ye have, and, behold, all things are clean unto you,"
applies to every useful act that a man does in mercy. Not only, then,
the man who gives food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to
the naked, hospitality to the stranger, shelter to the fugitive, who visits
the sick and the imprisoned, ransoms the captive, assists the weak,
leads the blind, comforts the sorrowful, heals the sick, puts the
wanderer on the right path, gives advice to the perplexed, and supplies
the wants of the needy,—not this man only, but the man who pardons
the sinner also gives alms; and the man who corrects with blows, or
restrains by any kind of discipline one over whom he has power, and
who at the same time forgives from the heart the sin by which he was
injured, or prays that it may be forgiven, is also a giver of alms, not
only in that he forgives, or prays for forgiveness for the sin, but also in
that he rebukes and corrects the sinner: for in this, too, he shows
mercy. Now much good is bestowed upon unwilling recipients, when

their advantage and not their pleasure is consulted; and they

themselves frequently prove to be their own enemies, while their true

friends are those whom they take for their enemies, and to whom in

their blindness they return evil for good. (A Christian, indeed, is not

permitted to return evil even for evil.)And thus there are many kinds of

alms, by giving of which we assist to procure the pardon of our sins].

(Shaw)

According to Lapidge, this text was well-known to the Anglo-Saxons. In extant

lists and inventories of manuscripts, it was found in eight different manuscripts, each of

Anglo-Saxon origin, and is also cited in the works of Bede, Asser and Ælfric (*Anglo-

Saxon Library* 288-9). Augustine's explanation leads me to conclude that one prominent

interpretation of the nature of almsgiving was that the fundamental action that constitutes

almsgiving is the act of giving itself, be it in time or help or rebuke of the sinner or the

usually discussed money or property. This changes the perspective of what could and

could not constitute an act of giving alms in the Church, including in the Anglo-Saxon

church, which was established in a country which already had, as previously discussed, a

long Germanic-based tradition of giving as a means of honor, support, and loyalty

between lord and people. The transformation of traditional Germanic gift-giving into

almsgiving would have likely been an easy adjustment for a Christianized England.

If we take Augustine's definitions, however, as indicative of general patristic

attitudes toward the central purpose behind almsgiving and the acts that could constitute

almsgiving, then a different theme than has previously been discussed in the poems'

scholarship is suggested for the *Exeter Book*: giving alms to anyone who is needy, and

not just in the form of money or wealth, but also by service, love, and defense of people,

is essential to doing the good work necessary for salvation. Likewise, those in the best

position to give alms in all of its permutations are those with the most resources and

power: lords.

Another work of Augustine provides significant commentary on the nature of

almsgiving: *De civitate dei* [*The City of God*]. This was a work surely known to the

Anglo-Saxons, and most likely also known by the *Exeter Book* scribe. As Anderson

summarizes, "the profound popularity of the *De civitate dei* during the Middle Ages

cannot be ignored" (43); this was a work which the general critical consensus sees as

fundamental to Western Christian civilization.

In Book 21, Chapter 22 of *De civitate dei*, Augustine chastises those who think

that by almsgiving they are automatically rewarded heaven; however, as Augustine

explains, it is whether or not the gift of alms has been given with the correct motivation

of mercy for those who are in need of the alms:

> Comperi etiam quosdam putare eos tantummode arsuros illius
>
> æternitate supplicii, qui pro peccatis suis facere dignas eleemosynas
>
> negligunt, juxta illud apostoli Jacobi: *Judicium autem sine*
>
> *misericordia illi qui non fecit misericordium.* Qui ergo fecerit,
>
> inquiunt, quamvis mores in melius non mutaverit, sed inter ipsas suas
>
> eleemosynas nefarie ac nequiter vixerit, judicium illi cum misericordia
>
> futurum est, ut aut nulla damnatione plectatur, aut post aliquod tempus

sive parvum, sive prolixum, ab illa damnatione liberetur. Ideo Judicem

ipsum vivorum atque mortuorum noluisse existimant aliud

commemorare se esse dicturum, sive dextris quibus est vitam daturus

æternam, sive sinistris quos æterno supplicio damnaturus, nisi

eleemosynas sive factas, sive non factas. (734-35)

[I have also met with some who are of opinion that such only as

neglect to cover their sins with alms-deeds shall be punished in

everlasting fire; and they cite the words of the Apostle James, "He

shall have judgment without mercy who hath shown no mercy.

Therefore, say they, he who has not amended his ways, but yet has

intermingled his profligate and wicked actions with works of mercy,

shall receive mercy in the judgment, so that he shall either quite escape

condemnation, or shall be liberated from his doom after some time

shorter or longer. They suppose that this was the reason why the Judge

Himself of quick and dead declined to mention anything else than

works of mercy done or omitted, when awarding to those on His right

hand life eternal life, and to those on His left everlasting punishment].

(Dods)

Note that within the translation provided, the word for alms, "eleemosynas," is often

and accurately translated as [works of mercy], which is used as the word in Latin for

alms, and which which expands the usual modern understanding of what constitutes alms.

Augustine's wider view of alms as acts of mercy, including this text, was relatively well-

known in Anglo-Saxon England at the time of the *Exeter Book*'s creation. Lapidge

documents in *The Anglo-Saxon Library* that Augustine's *De civitate dei* is found in four

extant Old English manuscripts, including one (Oxford Bodley 691) which is believed to

be of Exeter provenance; in addition, references to this text have been identified in

Aldhelm, Bede, Lantfred, Ælfric, and Byrhtferth (284), illustrating effectively the wide

reach of Augustine's ideas regarding how alms should be given. Augustine continues this

condemnation of those who do almsgiving for their own personal gain (meaning, they

think that it is a method by which to sin, yet still achieve salvation) in Book 21, Chapter

27 of *De civitate dei*, "Against the Belief of Those Who Think that the Sins Which Have

Been Accompanied with Almsgiving Will Do Them No Harm":

> Propter hoc ergo eleemosynæ faciendæ sunt, ut cum de præteritis
>
> peccatis deprecamur, exaudiamur, non ut in eis perseverantes,
>
> licentiam malefaciendi nos per eleemosynas comparare credamus [. . .]
>
> ostendit eos non facere etiam quando se facere existimant. Si enim
>
> Christiano esurienti panem tanquam Christiano darent, profecto sibi
>
> panem justitiæ, quod ipse Christus est, non negarent: quoniam Deus,
>
> nos cui detur, sed quo animo detur, attendit. (747-48)
>
> [We ought therefore to do alms that we may be heard when we
>
> pray that our past sins may be forgiven, not that while we continue in
>
> them we may think to provide ourselves with a license for wickedness
>
> by alms-deeds [. . .] they do not perform charitable actions even when
>
> they think they are doing so. For if they gave bread to a hungering

Christian because he is a Christian, assuredly they would not deny to

themselves the bread of righteousness, that is, Christ Himself; for God

considers not the person to whom the gift is made, but the spirit in

which it is made] (Dods).

Augustine argues that the central focus of the action of almsgiving is the spirit of the

giving and of the giver, which is what actually determines how such "alms-deeds" will be

judged by God. This could explain why in poems throughout the *Exeter Book*,

particularly in *Guthlac A* and the *Christ* poems, the audience is advised not only to give

alms in profusion, but also repeatedly exhorted to show *mercy* to those who are in need,

no matter who it is that is needful of their help. Yet, those who would give alms to salve

sins are warned against doing so with the idea that they might continue in wickedness, an

Augustinian distinction which further separates secularly-motivated giving, such as from

lords to thanes in order to maintain a warband, from Christian giving, which centers of

providing necessities to whomever needs them, out of charity and kindness rather than

self-serving agendas.

Since the scope of this study is to examine the theme of almsgiving with the

Exeter Book, a text which many consider as created during the time period of the

Benedictine Reform, a search of the primary Benedictine document, the *Regula*

Benedicti [The Rule of St. Benedict], might be expected to include some discussion on the

role of alms within the Benedictine monasteries. There is little discussion of the role alms

are to serve in supporting the Benedictine brethren; however, in Chapter 33, there is an

indication of how followers of the rule should handle property and wealth: "The vice of

personal ownership must by all means be cut out in the monastery by the very root, so

that no one may presume to give or receive anything without the command of the

abbot" (Benedict). This rule against the desire for material things would have limited how

Benedictine monks handled alms, at least on the lower level. Abbots, of course, would

have been in charge of supplying their monasteries with all that they required, and to do

so they would have needed support by way of alms from the king and other nobles with

the resources to provide for the monks and thereby provide for their souls.

In contrast, the *Rule of Chrodegang*, which Leofric's lay canons would have

followed, has specific advice regarding alms, particularly how they are to be received. In

the Old English version of the *Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang*, a later version which

Leofric and his lay canons would have followed as their set of rules, there are two

specific rules (40 and 41) which directly address how to receive alms, and when a canon

could receive alms. For example, if a canon is promised money for confessions or

"psalm-singing" then the rule commands "let the canon or the cleric take what he gives

him."[7] If the alms are for the whole community, then they must share it equally. However,

canons should not accept alms if they are forced to "bear the guilt of capital sin alone,

because God's mercy can be obtained more easily by many men than one" (Cocchiarelli

205-6). This is a compelling rule, in that it seems to argue against hoarding alms and

promotes the sharing of confession duties in order to likewise share the wealth of alms.

Surely, this is also intended to stave off greed or excess by the canons, so that they might

---

[7] The two translations provided here from the *Rule of Chrodegang* are by Joseph John Cocchiarelli, from his dissertation "The Old English Version of the Enlarged Rule of Chrodegang."

not end up like the monks of *Guthlac A*, whose extravagant indiscretions in their youth

are viewed as shameful by the poet, although possibly excusable.

Anglo-Saxon Christian leaders and writers also had distinct opinions on the nature

of generosity, including much to say when it came to the generosity of lords. As Eric G.

Stanley explains, the concept of almsgiving and charity were central to Anglo-Saxon

society and consciousness, and were reflected in various types of extant documents:

> Our evidence for matters of Anglo-Saxon conscience, social and
>
> otherwise, is chiefly filtered through monastic manuscripts, and
>
> therefore primarily religious, rather than strictly judicial record, and
>
> on all sides, even when legal records are involved, the weight of
>
> almsgiving and Christian charity and the resultant hope of heaven lie
>
> heavily in doing good. (244)

It is not surprising that the religious records would put so much weight on the

accomplishments of those who gave alms appropriately: not only was it their pastoral

mission to ensure people acted generously according to God's will, but it was also in their

best interest, as frequent recipients of alms, to promote almsgiving as not only desired but

demanded by God. Those who had the most money and resources, such as land, were

expected to contribute not necessarily to any poor beggar on the street, but specifically

were directed by the writings and homilies of clergy and monks to give a large amount

directly to churches and monasteries to support them, under the view that the monks in

turn would pray for the sinners' souls. As Stanley explains, "Often wills and gifts to

churches include such provision. In the legislation of pre-Conquest England almsgiving is

several times enjoined. [. . .] They were zealous in laying up treasure in heaven for themselves, and they hoped to do so by giving worldly treasure to those in need" ("Did the Anglo-Saxons" 263-4). This desire of lords and lesser nobility to give lavishly to the Church was for fame-gaining, worldly and eternal, but it was also a byproduct of fear induced in the "guilty" among them to give *enough* alms and in the correct spirit of mercy, or risk eternal damnation. This propagandistic use of fear to promote almsgiving, especially among lords, is at work in the *Exeter Book*, prominently in *Christ in Judgement*, where Christ specifically praises the saved only for their almsgiving, and damns the sinners because of their lack of almsgiving. Whether motivated by love, pride, or fear, Anglo-Saxons were primed to give alms by the teachings of the Church, and a literature which continued the Church's catechetical mission.

One of the earliest and most influential Anglo-Saxon writers to broach the subject of almsgiving, particularly in relation to lordship, is the Venerable Bede. Bede's eighth-century *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* [*Ecclesiastical History of the English People]* provides us with a view of how the converted Anglo-Saxon lords before the period of the *Exeter Book* behaved and ruled. Bede's influence cannot be understated; as Anderson notes, "As the author of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede defined Christian kingship by example more clearly than almost any other early medieval writer" (47). Bede focuses his attention on several lords throughout the history, which is unsurprising given the close nature of lordship to the conversion and ecclesiastical narrative in Anglo-Saxon England. One thread unites all of these lords, however: Bede's focus on their behavior as emblematic of good or bad Christians. While this may cause

modern students of history to question Bede's objectivity in his portraits of lords, it

should be expected of an Anglo-Saxon clergyman promoting Christianity.

Bede presents King Oswald (d. 641) as a central example of ideal Christian

lordship. As Marianne Malo Chenard details, "In this text, Bede portrays the

Northumbrian monarch as a holy warrior-king; both benevolent and battle-ready, humble

and fierce, Oswald represents the ideal type of ruler in conversion-age England" (33). I

would go further and argue that Oswald represents the ideal Christian Anglo-Saxon ruler

of later years as well, and served as a model for lords wishing to uphold the traditions of

Anglo-Saxon lordship. As Chenard further explains, the *Historia ecclesiastica* centrally

regards the Church and kings as "symbiotically connected: each institution relies on the

other for its perpetuation and expansion. A continuously harmonious relationship between

church and monarchy certainly contributed to Oswald's apparent success as king, and

was crucial to Bede's portrayal of him as a saintly figure" (34). In one episode from Book

3, Chapter 7, St. Oswald (as King Oswald) is depicted giving to the poor from his own

table, and illustrates how Bede used exemplary lords to teach the necessity of almsgiving:

> Quo regni culmine sublimatus, nihilominus (quod mirum dictu est)
>
> pauperibus et peregrinus semper humilis benignus et largus fuit.
>
> Denique fertur quia tempore quodam, cum die sancto paschae cum
>
> praefato episcopo consedisset ad prandium, positusque esset in mensa
>
> coram eo discus argenteus regalibus epulis refertus, et iamiamque
>
> essent manus ad panem benedicendum missuri, intrasse subito
>
> ministrum ipsius, cui suscipiendorum inopum erat cura deligata, et

indicasse regi quia multitudo pauperum undecumque adueniens

maxima per plateas sederet, postulans aliquid elimosynae a rege. Qui

mox dapes sibimet adpositas deferri pauperibus, sed et discum

confringi, atque eisdem minutatim diudi praecepit (Colgrave 230).

[Though he wielded supreme power over the whole land, he was

always wonderfully humble, kind, and generous to the poor and to

strangers. For example, the story is told that on a certain occasion, one

Easter Day, when he had sat down to dinner with Bishop Aidan, a

silver dish was placed on the table before him full of rich foods. They

had just raised their hands to ask a blessing on the bread when there

came in an officer of the king, whose duty it was to relieve the needy,

telling him that a very great multitude of poor people from every

district were sitting in the precincts and asking alms of the king. He at

once ordered the dainties which had been set in front of him to be

carried to the poor, the dish to be broken up, and the pieces divided

amongst them]. (Colgrave 231)

Aidan, Oswald's Irish bishop, is so overcome by the king's "piety" that he blesses the

king's hand, which Bede records as never decaying and staying preserved and venerated

into his own day. The act of almsgiving is central to Oswald's later canonization—it is

through his generosity that demonstrates his model piety, inspiring not only his secular

subjects, but also clergy and monks. By Bede's record, this is a king who has achieved

"fame" on earth as well as in heaven, a feat aspired to by fame-gaining Anglo-Saxons.

Even though it is not possible to connect the famous "Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos"

directly with the creation of the *Exeter Book*, Wulfstan could have been a possible

contemporary of the scribes who produced the manuscript (if one sides with a later date

for the manuscript's composition); in any event, Wulfstan's ideas about the nature of

good versus bad lordship are concurrent with tenth-century views. It is not unlikely that

many of the same cultural thoughts of sinfulness and redemption were present in the

Widsið poet's mind as well as Wulfstan's. In the "Sermo," Wulfstan addresses the sins of

his countrymen, writing "La hwæt, we witan ful georne þæt to miclan bryce sceal micel

bot nyde and to miclan brine wæter unlytel, gif man þæt fyr sceal to ahte

acwencan" (17-18) [Listen, we know full well that for a great breach there must be a

great remedy, and for great burning no little water, if one shall at all quench that fire]. It is

likely that here Wulfstan was alluding to a passage from Ecclesiasticus, which states that

"ignem ardentem extinguit aqua et elemosyna resistit peccatis" (Ecclus. 3:33) [Water

quencheth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins]. This same passage referenced by

Wulfstan was evidently popular as a touchstone for teaching about almsgiving, as the

poem *Almsgiving* in the *Exeter Book* clearly also references it. As the poem is short, it

bears full inclusion here:

> Wel bið þam eorle   þe him on innan hafað,
>
> reþehygdig wer,   rume heortan;
>
> þæt him biþ for worulde   weorðmynda mæst,
>
> ond for ussum dryhtne   doma selast.
>
> Efne swa he mid wætre   þone weallendan

leg adwæsce,   þæt he leng ne mæg

blac byrnende   burgum sceððan,

swa he mid ælmessan   ealle toscufeð

synna wunde,   sawla lacnað. (1-9)

[It shall be well for the noble,   man severe of mind,

who within him has   an ample heart;

so that to him shall be the greatest of honors   before the world,

and the most excellent of dignities   before the Lord.

Even as he with water   the raging

flame quenches,   so that this fire, pale-burning,

may no longer   injure cities,

so he with alms   shall repel

the wounds of sin,   and heal his soul].[8]

This little poem encapsulates the central theme of almsgiving as essential to good

Christian living, particularly in the case of lords and other nobles, found throughout the

Exeter Book. The noble who has the most ample heart, and gives alms, like the passage

from Ecclesiasticus and Wulfstan's "Sermo Lupi ad Anglos," will be able to extinguish

the fire of his sins and be closer to gaining heavenly treasure. As this study continues, the

other *Exeter Book* poems discussed will also demonstrate this concern for nobles to give

appropriately for their station and thus be given eternal life by God.

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[8] All references to the poems of the *Exeter Book* are from Muir's edition, *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry*. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of *Exeter Book* poems are mine.

Even though almsgiving is meant to be a generous, unselfish act which is dependent on the giver maintaining the true spirit of mercy, lords also frequently used appropriate Church giving for temporal, political concerns. As the multiple kingdoms of Anglo-Saxon England eventually ceded to the power of Wessex under the reigns of King Alfred the Great and his immediate successors, giving to the Church in England became a tactical move. For example, Yorke explains that kings gave money and land to create new monasteries "in newly conquered territories" as "part of the consolidation process through which subjected areas were brought to identify themselves with the main kingdom and its royal house" (174). Furthermore, because of giving so greatly to the Church, lords and kings "figure prominently in the archives of religious communities both through the records of their benefactions and in 'historical' records, such as saints' *Lives* and annals, produced by individual religious houses" (20). Thus, lords had much to gain from following the proscribed rules for giving alms; likewise, the Church received enough funds, land, and other goods to care for its monasteries and convents and provide for the needy of the kingdom.

However, as England moved into the middle of the tenth century, the stability of the kingdom slowly declined which finally resulted in another wave of Viking invaders, followed by the Norman Conquest in 1066. Brian McFadden describes the political environment of this period as shifting "from disorder to order and then back again" ("Raiding" 329). This perceived instability could have led to increased promotion of almsgiving for a number of reasons. A lack of stability in the monarchy would have caused people to look for security somewhere, including the network of religious houses

which depended on nobles' whims in order to be properly funded. The promotion of almsgiving by Church communications, liturgical or otherwise, often centered on fear and retribution. (One such idea is that humanity's sins and lack of almsgiving has led to God's retribution via the renewed Viking attacks, as exemplified in "Sermo Lupi ad Anglos"). As the church gained alms in the form of money and land, and thereby more earthly power in addition to their power to mediate between Heaven and earth, they became a source of security and stability, even when the monarchy was not reliable. This cycle of alms and power exchanges played out in several forms during the reigns of King Edgar, his heirs, and the Viking-turned-Anglo-Saxon King Cnut, who used the power of the Church to reinforce his identity as rightful monarch.

After the glorious and pious reign of King Alfred the Great (r. 871-899), David Rollason notes that there was some decline in the reach of the Wessex kings and lesser lords, and none matched the ability of their predecessor (135). However, King Edgar (r. 959-975) brought the house of Wessex's power to a level higher than some previous generations, particularly because of his emphasis on reforming churches via the Benedictine Revival. McFadden notes that importantly, "viking activity diminished" during the reign of Edgar, "which led to the recognition of Edgar as overlord of England in 973 until his unexpected death in 975" ("Raiding" 330). Edgar's most important contribution to history, however, was his significant role in the tenth century Benedictine Reform in England, which revitalized the monasteries and changed the power structure between Church and State. McFadden notes that this reform "attempted to shift the loyalties of monks to the order and to Benedictine practices and away from the lay

landowners and extra-regular life, in addition to improving the overall educational level and Latinity of the monasteries" ("Raiding" 330-31). This not only moved power from the lay noble landowners to the monasteries, but also in turn gave more power to the king and queen. As McFadden summarizes, "nobles who owned land with unreformed monasteries lost their property to the king, and those with monasteries that did reform lost their influence over the monks; either way, the landowners' loss of wealth and prestige assisted Edgar's consolidation of power as well as the Church's revival of monastic learning and piety" ("Raiding" 331). In response to the king's generous gifts of material wealth, the Church reciprocated with segments in the *Regularis Concordia* which "mandated prayer for and support of the king and his family, both unifying the monks and reminding them of what they owed the crown" ("Raiding" 331). Edgar exemplifies the Anglo-Saxon king who has given alms to the Church effectively. This is significant because of the evidence discussed in Chapter I of this study that Bishop Sidemann educated Edgar's sons, particularly Edward, at Exeter, and by Conner's estimation that the *Exeter Book* could have been in use at Exeter during that time. It is likely that the sons of such a prominent almsgiver and champion of the Church would receive catechetical instruction specifically on how and why they would need to give alms.

Edgar did not stop at just giving alms to support the Church, but directly contributed to the maintenance of the alms given to churches and the enforcement of tithes and other "giving" which he mandated. As John Blair notes, Edgar "overhauled the legal basis of church finance and—crucially—updated it to meet new conditions" (442),

with sections of this new code specific to the issue of enforced giving. As Blair translates

these sections on "required" giving, they specify that if people do not give the required

amount in their tithing, then the king and the minster may seize by force the tithes which

they are owed (442). According to Blair, "the explicit penalty for withholding tithes is

new" (442), and in this case is a surprising and prominent example of Edgar's role in the

Benedictine reforms.

According to Christopher Brooke's research into documents from Edgar's reign,

the Church was grateful to to King Edgar for his contributions, and the religious leaders

of the Benedictine Revival attributed their success to him in a religious document, which

was unusual:

> the *Regularis Concordia*, the *Monastic Agreement*, was probably written
>
> by St. Ethelwold; it clearly reflects both his views and Dunstan's. By
>
> invoking royal authority it attempts to weaken the grip of secular lords on
>
> monastic property and to plaster over cracks of disagreement between the
>
> monasteries. But it is perfectly clear that its author really believed, as did
>
> most churchmen in northern Europe in the tenth century, that the king was
>
> Christ's vicar on earth, chief repository of divine authority. (117-18)

This focus on the importance of the earthly king as Christ's representative reinforced the

concept that the good Christian king should follow the example of Christ's mercy and

care for the people in his charge, with the added benefit of gaining earthly and heavenly

fame for these moral deeds.

These reforms by Edgar, and his favoritism towards the Church, were not without a price, however; McFadden argues that "this upheaval engendered anti-Edgar sentiment thinly disguised as anti-monasticism" ("Raiding" 331). In turn, when Edgar died and the question of which of his two sons would inherit his throne arose, this anti-monastic faction influenced how events played out between Edgar's two sons.

When Edgar died in 975, his monarchy had revitalized England. As H. R. Loyn explains, "Church and State were closely knit together. Full recognition had been given to the legal traditions of the Danelaw, but the Danish population settled in England were Christian and recognized the Christian king Edgar as their overlord," a considerable set of achievements for such a young king. Unfortunately, after Edgar's death in his thirties, "dynastic weakness coupled with internal dissension partly attributable to the endowments and nature of the new Benedictine monasteries revealed flaws in the English political condition" (81-82). The result was disaster. Edward, the first to succeed his father, was murdered, and Æthelred become known in popular history as a terrible king, responsible for allowing the Vikings to conquer England.

The new power of the monasteries, thanks to significant alms by King Edgar and reforms which stripped land from landed nobility and provided it to the monasteries, led to a backlash against these religious houses. The Benedictine Reform built up and encouraged the relationship between monastics and kings. However, Edgar and Edward, by instituting reforms which supported the Church in England, brought about a cultural rebellion by lesser lords and nobles against the monasteries, which surely did not help the Church's need for nobly-given resources.

Edward (r. 975-8), this first to succeed his father, did so because of his equal support of the monasteries and the mission of the Benedictine Revival. As McFadden explains, Edgar's sons Edward and Æthelred could both claim the throne after his death, but Edward won out because the support of "the monastic and royal party, led by Æthelwine [. . .] favored Edward; the anti-monastic party, led by Ælfhere, ealdorman of Mercia, supported Æthelred" ("Raiding" 331). Edward won, but the nobles who had lost power with the reform of the monasteries did not take it lightly. This anti-monastic sentiment could also have given the monks who held the *Exeter Book,* a book that encouraged nobles *who would be like lords* to continue to support the Church,, a very good reason to use it in the monastery. McFadden notes that Edward held the throne for only a short time, until he was murdered in 978, presumably by his own brother's men ("Raiding" 300-32). Edward did not have much time as king to demonstrate how he would be a good almsgiver, but his death serves as a reminder of the tenuous argument the Church had for the importance of almsgiving—too much emphasis on almsgiving, to the detriment of nobles' earthly concerns, apparently had a limit.

Under the dark cloud of his brother's death, Æthelred (r. 978-1016) became king and held a long reign generally criticized for its problems. McFadden summarizes the historical opinion of Æthelred's rise to power and his reputation, both of which are negatively colored: "although Æthelred could now legitimately claim the throne, part of his reputation as 'ill-counseled' [. . .] arose from lingering suspicion about his having benefited from the murder. The rest of this reputation came from his inability to control the Vikings" ("Raiding" 330). Indeed, after the death of Edgar, the whole of England's

political system was subject to crisis, with Vikings from abroad and dissension at home

causing problems for the new kings.

When Æthelred became king in 978, he was still in his minority, but as "he

reached his late teens (around 983) Æthelred took the reins of the kingdom into his own

hands. It is at this point another, more minor crisis of kingship occurred" (Anderson 12).

This crisis, as Anderson summarizes, referencing the work by Simon Keynes on the

diplomas of Æthelred, entailed a time period where Æthelred made a general mess of

things, including destroying the Rochester diocese in 986 (Anderson 12). He also, most

importantly to this study, "did not support the Church in the ways it had become

accustomed to under the reign of his father, Edgar" (12). Luckily, Æthelred did eventually

return to a more positive relationship with the Church, probably because of his failed

attempts at paying off the Vikings to stop invasions, and his eventual loss of his throne to

the Vikings, represented by Sweyn and his son, Cnut.

Æthelred was hardly a good almsgiver, instead focusing much of his resources on

his own private whims and to pay tribute to the Vikings. Also, as a supporter of the anti-

monastic movement against the Benedictine Revival, he was surely not a favorite of the

Church establishment. Yet, Æthelred did try to accomplish some positive merciful acts,

such as sponsoring the Norwegian King Olaf at his baptism in 995. As Loyn details, at

the baptism Æthelred "bestowed great gifts on him" and more importantly, "the

conversion was genuine and deep. Olaf promised that he would not return to England in

hostility; and he kept that promise" (85). Æthelred had succeeded, through persuading

this leading Viking to become Christian and providing him with appropriate gifts, to stop

terrorizing England. This is a redemptive act of Æthelred, as he is by this action attempting to care for his people.

Yet, despite his meager efforts, England was seen by its people as in a horrible state, and as Loyn specifies, "England's collapse was a moral collapse, cause negatively by wavering loyalties and positively in Church and State by great treachery" (82). And, after such turmoil, the worst fears of the English people came to fruition: a Viking had finally taken the throne from an heir of England, in this case Cnut taking all of England from Æthelred's heir, Edmund Ironside.

Cnut (r. 1016-35), as an outsider, was primarily concerned with legitimizing his reign, and he did this by linking himself to his predecessors and showing appropriate Anglo-Saxon methods of giving, particularly to English monasteries which, post-Edgar, had faced dire hardship and instability. Chris Dennis argues that "the most effective way for an eleventh-century king to legitimize his accession in the eyes of his own people and improve his own reputation was by performing acts of generosity toward the Church," which Cnut did by providing amply for Christ Church, Canterbury and Winchester. Cnut also made a pilgrimage to the Holy See in Rome, and on behalf of England made "gifts to foreign churches" which "helped to associate his reign with that tradition of Christian kingship to which his Anglo-Saxon predecessors belonged" (34-5). This concerted effort by Cnut to act the part of the good, Christian, Anglo-Saxon lord was appreciated by his new subjects, and he was popular, even if, as Dennis suggests, his "popularity owed much to Æthelred's appalling reputation." (46). Cnut, despite being an invader and representative of what Anglo-Saxons feared most, became the exemplar of ideal Christian

lordship, who Brooke argues "strove to emphasize his position as the successor to the dynasty of Alfred, and especially to King Edgar the peaceful, and as a pious man who fostered the Church" (125-26). As Cnut grew in his adherence to the Christian faith, his giving to the Church also grew, and as Loyn assesses, "Cnut's public image in England was consistently to represent the fervor of the convert, more Christian than the Christians, more true a representative of the Christian kingship of Edgar than Edgar's own blood descendants" (93). As Cnut's reign continued and he increased love for the Church throughout his kingdom, his efforts would reverberate through to the last Anglo-Saxon kings, including Edward the Confessor, who would be renowned for his great piety, following the ideal mold exemplified by Cnut.

An interesting historical side note related to these kings may help to explain further a more intimate royal connection to the Church which also produced considerable giving to the Church by the kings: saints of the royal line. As Rollason has examined, several saints came from the Anglo-Saxon royal line, particularly the house of Wessex. These usually female saints were sisters, daughters, and wives of kings, and their association with the Church (and upon sainthood, God) lent credibility to the kings' association with the divine. These saints include Ælfgifu, wife of King Edmund (r. 939-46) and Eadburg, daughter of King Edward the Elder (r. 899-924), "the king who had completed the foundation at Winchester of the nunnery of St. Mary, known as Nunnaminster" (Rollason 138). Eadburg is particularly significant, according to Rollason, because her cult was "exploited to bolster the ambitions and pretensions of English kings" (139). This particular saint is also shown to be on the side of the Church more than

the monarchy: "she is represented as persuading the king to give the nuns the estate of All Cannings, which the nuns very much wanted to acquire" (Rollason 139). In hagiographical records such as these, a noblewoman is in the unique position to speak as an expert of experience to other nobles and convince them to forgo worldly goods and give richly in alms.

The most popular and significant royal saint, and whom is especially pertinent to my discussion here, is Edith of Wilton, who was the daughter of King Edgar (r. 957-75), and who lived much of her very short life in the nunnery of Wilton (Rollason 139). Contrary to the evidence for some other royal saints, "There is clear evidence of royal involvement in Edith's cult. Her translation thirteen years after her death was undertaken partly on the initiative of King Æthelred (r. 978-1016) and the cult was patronized by King Cnut and his queen, and by Queen Edith, wife of Edward the Confessor" (Rollason 140). The patronization of Edith by Cnut is especially intriguing, given that he was not of the Wessex line. Rollason explains the reasons for Cnut's participation in the cult of Edith by noting that "Edith's cult therefore may well have been politically expedient for the English kings and for Cnut too, who may have seen advantage in strengthening the link between himself and the West Saxon royal house already established by his marriage to Æthelred's widow" (140). Cnut also participated in the cults of Edmund and Ælfheah, which may have been "to heal the rift between Danes and English" (158). Connecting in this way through royal saints was a way for kings to either strengthen their role as king with divine approval, or in the case of Cnut, legitimize their place on the throne (Rollason 158). It follows that the royal patronage of monasteries was important to lords not just for

prestige in heaven, but also for prestige and validation of legitimacy as lord on earth, as aided by the Church's support.

Several lords of the tenth and eleventh centuries also emphasized their connections to the Church and expanded their giving to monasteries by obtaining and collecting saints' relics. King Athelstan [r. 925-39], for one, collected a large amount of relics which he then gave to Exeter, and which are recorded (along with a prodigious donation inscription honoring the beneficent king) in the Old English relics list for Exeter (Rollason 159). As Rollason further explains, a royal collection of saints' relics "could serve the interests of the kings in a variety of ways. It could provide suitable gifts for churches, as when Athelstan gave a third of his collection of relics to Exeter" (160). In addition, "whether in the possession of ecclesiastical recipients or still in royal hands, such relics could be a source of considerable prestige and kudos for the kings" (Rollason 160). The need for fame, both worldly and heavenly, was central to this amassing, then giving, of relics. As an illustration of this principle, the Exeter relic list from Athelstan's donation "takes the form of a homily and was clearly intended for recitation in a church, perhaps at the feast of the relics [. . .] As the recitation worked its way through the 138 items [. . .] who could have doubted that the king who had assembled this stupendous collection was a ruler of great wealth, power and piety" (160). These relic collections, and their role as "gifts," are significant indicators of how gift-giving (particularly in the form of almsgiving, as seen here) was actively used by Anglo-Saxon lords as a marker of good Christian lordship.

The use of kingly religious giving to legitimize monarchies, strengthen royal ties to other nobles and to society through the Church, and to conquer invaders by conversion and adaption is clearly recorded throughout the extant Anglo-Saxon historical records. Yet, the poetry is often seen as just another art at which the Anglo-Saxons excelled, rather than a vehicle by which they communicated their sense of what constitutes a good Christian lord. In the following chapters, this study will demonstrate how one collection served to educate nobles on the value of appropriate giving, if not for the promises of heaven, then for the worldly gains to be had in giving to the Church and those in need through alms.

III: SYNCRETIC WISDOM

To begin the exploration of how the central theme of almsgiving as integral to

ideal Anglo-Saxon Christian kingship carries through the poems in the *Exeter Book*, I will

examine a set of poems that have been characterized as exemplary of secular or syncretic/

religious wisdom poetry found in the manuscript: *Widsið*, *The Wanderer*, and *The*

Seafarer. While *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are often paired in critical discussion,

Widsið at first seems to be a contrary addition to this list of poems, as it is usually viewed

as either a historical miscellany or a demonstration of the role of *scops* in Anglo-Saxon

society. However, what unites these three poems is the thematic focus on the generosity

(or lack thereof) of lords and kings portrayed in the poems, and how the actions of these

same nobles in giving, not giving, or giving inappropriately, are used to teach lessons

about the transience of worldly wealth and the surety of treasure in heaven.

T. A. Shippey, in his summation of the current critical view regarding much of

how the Old English poetic canon should be viewed, notes that "many critics, in short,

now feel that a definite corpus exists within the larger corpus of Old English verse as a

whole, for which no better title has been found than 'wisdom poetry.' But no two critics

agree on exactly how that corpus or genre should be defined" (146). As each of these

three poems (and indeed most of the poems in the *Exeter Book*) centrally focus on the

transmission of wisdom of one sort or another, then these poems may be classified as

belonging to this wisdom, or gnomic genre, in addition to any other genre classifications

which may be assigned to them. Another possible path that these three superficially

secular poems take is catechesis, or Christian teaching, demonstrated through textual

analysis and contextual manuscript placement.

According to Stanley B. Greenfield and Daniel G. Calder, in *A New Critical

History of Old English Literature*, the group of nine poems generally characterized as

fitting the elegy genre are all found in the *Exeter Book*. Included among these poems are

The Wanderer and *The Seafarer*, which critics connect to each other for a variety of

reasons. Greenfield and Calder explain that although these poems are "labelled *elegies*,

they are neither in the classical mold of being composed in a specific meter nor in the

post-Renaissance sense of being lamentations for the loss of specific persons or

communities" (280). The so-called Old English form of the elegy, rather, focuses on the

transitoriness of the world, and is structured primarily as a mix of individual musings and

more generalized wisdom-giving. According to John M. Hill's summation, "Much of

elegiac poetry especially reflects processes of transformation and redirection, perhaps

because much of it is dedicated both to urging and dramatizing conversion, involving

transformation from an ignoble to a glorious state" ("The Good Field" 28). Similarly,

Gwendolyn Morgan argues that both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, even if they

provide consolation, "*are* primarily elegies and, as such, express the loss of something of

value. That loss is the mead-hall society" (15). She further explains that the speakers in

these two poems must undergo their exile because it is essential for their experience of

Christianity, and, thus, "Christianity is both the cause of and the consolation for

exile" (16). In other words, the speakers in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* must be

exiled in order to undertake the Christian journey, and the resulting Christian wisdom they achieve is their consolation.

Melanie Heyworth defines the purpose of the Old English elegies as essentially that of nostalgia, despite what other purposes these poems might have, explaining that "whatever the motivation and purpose of the elegy (for example, Christian didacticism or *consolatio*), all the elegies in some way mourn and yearn for a better, yet lost, past, whilst presenting the inadequacies of the present" (4-5). Liuzza, in "The Tower of Babel: *The Wanderer* and the Ruins of History," also suggests that "the sense that the world is hastening in a downward spiral toward a dismal end, or that we must rebuild the present in the image of the past, may be thought of as a characteristic historical reflection among the Anglo-Saxons" (14). Yet in these poems, perhaps especially illustrated by *The Wanderer*, the past which is yearned for is not necessarily shown by the poet as better than the present, but rather as an example of what was troubling with the past, the failure of earthly things; and, in all three poems covered here, what might be done as Christian remedy.

Other critics characterize these poems as solely in the genre of wisdom literature, rather than simply united by a sense of elegiac loss. Indeed, as Peter Orton summarizes in "Form & Structure of *The Seafarer*," most recent criticism has abandoned the notion of grouping/characterizing these poems as belonging to a united genre of elegy: "it is no longer generally held that all [. . .] of these poems belong to the same literary genre, or even that the term 'elegy' is properly applied to any of them" (354). In my analysis of

these poems, I will explore further this ambiguity of genre, an ambiguity that invites more flexible interpretations of the purposes and themes intended by the poets.

Shippey explores the complex identification of these two poems as belonging to a "wisdom" genre and how these two poems are traditionally seen as functioning together within the manuscript:

> *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* are by any definition close to the core
> of this group. Most 'wisdom poems' come from the *Exeter Book*, and there
> is a particularly clear sequence of ten of them running from
> folios 76b to 95b of that manuscript. Of these *The Wanderer* is first,
> starting a fresh page immediately after the manuscript's first sequence
> of five narrative poems. *The Seafarer* does not follow it directly in the
> list, coming fourth instead: nevertheless it and *The Wanderer* have
> long been seen, and with reason, as similar or even companion
> pieces. (146)

Shippey speculates that these poems occupy a border space, bridging the poems commonly considered elegies and "the more recently seen and larger category of 'wisdom poems'" (146). This reclassification presents a possibility that these poems served as other liminal vehicles in the manuscript, providing a space to segue from more straightforwardly Christian poems to superficially secular poems which shared the same Christian teachings.

Widsið, however, is not generally placed in the elegy or wisdom genres, but it could technically have a place in each of these classifications. First, the poem deals with

remembrances of times past, and while the speaker does not necessarily mourn the loss of benefactors, the tone is nostalgic. Likewise, the roll call of lords and famous gift-givers is not necessarily a simple history lesson, but rather is intended to provide examples of both positive and negative noble generosity.

Widsið is extant only in the *Exeter Book*. Countless critics over the past 150 years have examined nearly every part of this 143-line poem in great detail, but the implicit or explicit Christian elements are rarely discussed outside of their supposed status as "interpolations" in what is deemed essentially a secular poem, a stance refuted by scholars such as Silver, who argues that *Widsið* is about making the Christian journey. The reason the few explicit Christian elements of the poem are often not read as integral to the poem, and instead as "interpolations," is because the majority of the poem reads as a catalogue through history's notable lords, with the focus on the scop-to-lord relationship However, *Widsið* is intended in part as a Christian teaching poem, and is focused on instructing lords about their requirement of almsgiving and thus their redemption from sins. The poem's inclusion in the *Exeter Book* may not have been only because it was a relic of the pagan past, but also because it shares similar themes of transience and penitence with many other poems in the *Exeter Book*, such as *Deor* and *The Seafarer*. Perhaps it is not only ideal secular lords presented in this poem, but also ideal religious lords.

The scop, who in *Widsið* is identified as an ancient scop and the speaker of the poem, carried the role in secular Anglo-Saxon society of influencing opinions on lordship by being a "teacher" of the ideal virtues and actions of the "good" Anglo-Saxon lord,

which he did through the gift of traditional oral poetry and song performance. A

fundamental characteristic of the good lord as taught by the scop in *Widsið* is that of the

gift-giver. Gift-giving occurs repeatedly in the poem and symbolizes how the wealthy and

powerful are obligated to give to those in need, not only for secular purposes (fame and

thane gaining) but also religious ones under the guise of alms.

While the importance of alms in late Anglo-Saxon society is certain, it is

unknown whether *Widsið* was written during this same period as the compilation of the

Exeter Book, and thus whether the cultural importance placed on lords giving alms could

be expected within the poem. There can be no certainty, as is true with most Anglo-Saxon

poetry, on the transmission of *Widsið*. It is unknown whether or not the poem was

previously transcribed from an earlier oral version, as sung by a scop, nor how it could

have possibly been altered in transmission. R.W. Chambers, in his foundational study

Widsith, dates the creation of the original form of the poem as late sixth or early seventh

century: "The Catalogue of Kings is older than *Widsith* proper, yet on account of the

names it contains it can hardly be earlier than the middle of the sixth century, and may be

considerably later. *Widsith* seems to belong to a period later than this, but earlier than

Beowulf or *Genesis*: that is to the seventh century" (178). Using contextual clues such as

the lords mentioned, and events and lords not mentioned or alluded to, Chambers' classic

study of *Widsið* remains the strongest argument for an approximate dating for the lists, or

thulas. However, several parts of the poem are deemed "interpolations" by other scholars,

because of the poem's seeming switch from general listing to specific analysis of

characters. Perhaps these same scribes responsible for the creation of the *Exeter Book* are

also responsible for creating the version of the poem that has survived. It is not that far-fetched to imagine that someone learned enough to accurately create a manuscript from copies of other works could also create, expand, or patch together these same works to suit particular agendas. As discussed previously in Chapters I and II, it is likely that the agenda behind the creation of this version of *Widsið* for the *Exeter Book* lay in synchronizing Germanic heroic literature with Christian principles in order to spread the Christian message using a mode familiar and beloved to the English people.

Catalogues of lords comprise the poem, and very early critics, predating Krapp and Dobbie's edition of the *Exeter Book,* argue that the sections of the poem that break these catalogues may be interpolations. Krapp and Dobbie, for example, address the possible interpolations in *Widsið*, suggesting it is obvious even on the first reading that the poem is "uneven both in contents and style" (xliii). They also comment how early scholars have argued over how the poem should read, which sections or lays should be taken out, and how the "original text" should have read; but as Krapp and Dobbie point out, "it is generally agreed that the original poem grew under the hands of successful revisers and interpolators [. . .] The *Widsið* which we have is a conglomerate, and in the course of time, from the original composition of the poem to the final redaction [. . .] the stratification has become obscured" (xliv). Various reasons are given for the use of these catalogues in the poem, including that they are older fragments or misplaced pieces of other poems, among other possibilities, which the poet saw fit to include for some specific purpose. Joyce Hill posits that many of the catalogues were included to induce an "encyclopedic effect" (310), and I concur. For what purpose was this encyclopedic

effect? This large group of lords from various periods was probably meant to allude to the

passage of time and transience found throughout the *Exeter Book*, which presents as

another complimentary theme of the manuscript. The catalogue of lords that Widsið had

formerly served is not just a sign of bragging, or not realistic; rather, perhaps the purpose

of the catalogue is to indicate that many leaders through time were subject to these same

moral standards that the contemporary Anglo-Saxon "Christian" lords were. The critical

consensus of the poem indicates that *Widsið* is a mix of two or more separate, earlier

poems, and I concur. However, my conclusion as to why this is a composite of multiple

poems differs from earlier criticism: several interpolations were made with a specific

Christian purpose in mind. By the repeated motif of the "gift-giver," the final redactors of

Widsið were sending a message to Anglo-Saxon rulers: it was vitally important to give

alms appropriately and to be charitable in order to live a Christian life and ensure fame,

both in this world and the next.

In order to communicate the didactic message that almsgiving is essential to

salvation, the *Widsið* poet chose a character identified as a scop. The central role of the

poet or scop figure in *Widsið* is that of a teacher, a role well-supported in Anglo-Saxon

society, and it is through this role that the fictionalized character of the speaker is able to

convey specific teachings to lords about Christian charity and almsgiving. All of the

important attributes of lords in *Widsið* are told in the voice of this one speaker. Who is

this central character, who seemingly navigates hundreds of years and has knowledge

beyond a single lifetime of experience? A central problem in the body of *Widsið* criticism

has been the characterization of the scop in the poem. Is he Widsið? An alternate speaker

who is imitating a famous poet? Or is he something else entirely, not even worthy of the title of scop?

The role of the poet across early societies was not always easily defined. A few attributes of the early poet figure are conjectured from historical roots, particularly when it comes to the pedagogical role of poets, as well as their power over royalty, all which define the speaker in *Widsið* as a scop. Some *Widsið* scholars choose to disregard any possible significance of the scop in relation to lords in the poem, other than his role in "begging." W. H. French argues that "the writer was a scop; that his learning was merely professional; that his object in displaying it was not to teach or to construct a rhapsody on heroic themes; [. . .] his ultimate aim in composing the poem or in reciting it subsequently was to interest a patron in supporting him" (623). But why would a figure who spent an entire poem discussing the good and bad qualities of lords do so only for selfish reasons? Robert P. Creed quotes Kemp Malone in his assertion of the role of the scop in *Widsið*: "the ideal scop was more than a teller of stories. He was a historian and a sage, and his words were words of wisdom. The speech of Widsith begins and ends with well-considered reflections on royal rule" (382). The scop of *Widsið* is a reliable source of knowledge, a reputable narrator, and an Anglo-Saxon audience have trusted him because the text of the poem does suggest a larger picture: the scop in *Widsið* was also concerned with the transmission, or teaching, of ideals. In particular, *Widsið* is mainly concerned with teaching about the virtues good lords should exhibit.

Morton W. Bloomfield and Charles W. Dunn comment upon basic, cross-cultural attributes of early poets, including those in Anglo-Saxon society: "Teaching has always

been recognized as an important function of poetry. Early poets were teachers, diviners, prophets, and preservers of tradition. Part of their sacred office was to admonish and warn rulers and subjects alike, and to hand on the accumulated wisdom of the past" (4). All of these characteristics of the early poets are reflected in Widsið's own self-reflection —particularly as one who has the power to teach and admonish lords. John D. Niles argues similarly, particularly referencing the oral transmission and 'teaching' present in the poem: the poem's style is similar to other Anglo-Saxon educational literature (174). David Rollman alludes to this aspect of *Widsið,* supporting the idea that the scop in the poem is teaching his audience about the ideals of kingship, which is reminiscent of the genre of gnomic, or teaching, poetry. Referencing lines 10a-13b of *Widsið*, Rollman notes that "The language of the statement, of course, consciously echoes gnomic poetry; it is, in fact, a maxim, such as might have been plucked from elsewhere in the *Exeter Book*" (434). These lines refer to the ideal qualities of lordship, particularly those of governance and virtue or piety, all qualities expounded upon as *Widsið* progresses:

> Fela ic monna gefrægn   mægþum wealdan—
>
> sceal þeodna gehwylc   þeawum lifgan,
>
> eorl æfter oþrum   eðel rædan,
>
> se þe his þeodenstol   geþeon wile. (10-13)
>
> [I have heard of many men   ruling nations—
>
> Every prince should   live righteously,
>
> one lord after another,   lend for his native land,

      if he wishes his throne   to prosper.[1]]

  It is highly likely, with this textual evidence of the use of a maxim, that the

compiler of the *Exeter Book* included *Widsið* as another "gnomic poem" in a collection of

similar poems intended as educational instruments. If this is the case, which is probable

despite our modern classifications that group these poems as heroic or gnomic, then what

wisdom is *Widsið* teaching to the Anglo-Saxon audience? Given the long lists of lords

and the emphasis on the scop-speaker, then *Widsið* serves as a model for not only what

Anglo-Saxons expected of their lords, but also what information they expected the poet to

provide regarding history and lordly ideals.

  Widsið himself tells us why he can be trusted as an authority: at the outset Widsið

informs the audience how far and wide he has traveled (lines 1-4b). This is meant as

travel in a metaphorical sense. Rather, as a scop he is well versed in the history of his

people and also of the other nations of the world known to the Anglo-Saxons. It is not

only, however, his position as a scop in Anglo-Saxon society that grants him the authority

to teach about lordship; his travel and service to various courts and lords confer on him

the authority to teach those qualities an ideal lord should strive to attain:

      Swa ic geondferde fela   fremdra londa

      geond ginne grund—   godes ond yfles

      þær ic cunnade   cnosle bidæled,

      freomægum feor   folgade wide.

      Forþon ic mæg singan   ond secgan spell,

---

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

mænan fore mengo   in meoduhealle

hu me cynegode   cystum dohten. (50-56)

So I have traveled many   foreign lands

across the wide earth—   I knew both good

and evil, and was deprived   of my family,

my free kinsmen   far distant.

Therefore I may sing   and tell stories,

declare before the company   in the meadhall

how noble people   were generous to me.

A number of scholars debate whether the *scop* in the poem was a historical figure or just intended as a fictional character. Creed acknowledges that the speaker of *Widsið* claims to have traveled farther than any human possibly could. However, Creed later assesses that the *Widsið* poet is not "a fiction in our sense of the word," but rather that as a scop sang the poem, he in effect 'became' Widsið (384). This taking on and off of a persona, much like one changes clothes during a theatrical performance in order to make a character 'live,' seems complicated, but may be used to recall how earlier poets sang pre-Christian germanic poems, enforcing the believability in the speaker as a genuine scop. However, the answer may also be simpler than the layered, exaggerated, and centuries-old, 'unbelievable' character of the *scop* that has been repeatedly presented and argued over in the criticism of this poem: the *scop* in *Widsið* is meant simply as an archetype of the *scop*. If this is the case, then the role of the *scop* as a character in the poem is grounded in historical as well as mythological significance, and thus his lays

may also have their foundation in a body of historical knowledge; this underlying importance could have influenced how seriously the opinions expressed about lordship and society by scops were to be taken by Anglo-Saxon audiences.

Widsið is in some ways a study in contradictions, or rather how seeming contradictions can actually be used for similar purposes. Of major concern to my argument is the mix of Germanic, heroic culture of the sort that *Widsið* has traditionally been associated with, and Christian culture. The scribe (and possible poet) of the poem, being both Anglo-Saxon and also probably a clergyman, may have been familiar with both sets of values, pagan Germanic and Christian; he also could have used the knowledge of both of these values in the composition and/or transcription of the poem. Christine Fell informs us that anthropologists might consider an "obsession with reputation" an element of shame culture while "reliance" on God's judgment would be an element of guilt culture. But, "for the Anglo-Saxons, having inherited one set of values through secular Germanic thought and acquired another through Christian Latin teaching, the one does not preclude the other" (176). This idea is not farfetched in light of *Widsið*. It is not improbable that our educated scribe/poet would deliberately employ familiar Germanic elements, stories, and figures to convey a message which is both at points essentially Germanic and essentially Christian.

Through one critical view, one sees that many of the features of the ideal Germanic lord are well-covered in *Widsið*. As detailed previously in Chapter II of this study, according to Yorke an Anglo-Saxon lord or king was responsible for three things: defense, the collection of tribute combined with the giving of gifts, and the care of his

people (157-165). This last attribute, the care of his people, was something a lord

accomplished by way of the other two qualities, e.g. a lord defended his people and was

responsible for their basic needs, such as food and shelter, which he doled out according

to his collected resources, including, according to Yorke, the gifts of land and title (159).

Throughout *Widsið* the role of the lord as the giver of resources is exemplified in the

image of the lord as a great bestower of gifts This lordly generosity, as symbolized by

gift-giving, is mentioned frequently in *Widsið*; four out of the thirteen major lords are

noted by the poet as having generous qualities, as well as a queen. Michael D. Cherniss

points out the significance of generosity in *Widsið*: "If one ignores for the moment the

antiquarian interest of the various catalogues, he is immediately struck by the heavy

emphasis upon the virtue of generosity in the kings singled out for special praise" (*Ingeld*

13). For example, Ælfwine, in lines seventy through seventy-four, is quick to gain

renown because of his generosity: "heortan unhneaweste hringa gedales" (73) [the most

generous heart in giving out rings]. In yet another section, Guthere receives more than

mere mention in the lists solely because of his generosity: "næs þæt sæne cyning" (67b)

[that king was not stingy]. Yet one particular reference to Eormanric from the poem

stands out, as it implies that *scops* as well as the rest of the court, in order to remain

faithful, expected and required gifts from the king:

> Ond ic wæs mid Eormanrice   ealle þrage—
>
> þær me Gotena cyning   gode dohte;
>
> se me beag forgeaf,   burgwarena fruma,
>
> on þam siex hund wæs   smætes goldes,

gescyred sceatta   scillingrime;

þone ic Eadgilse   on æht sealde,

minum hleodryhtne,   þa ic to ham bicwom,

leofum to leane,   þæs þe he me lond forgeaf,

mines fæder eþel,   frea Myrginga. (88-96)

[And I was with Eormanric   for a long time,

and there the king of the Goths   gave me gifts;

this lord of the cities   gave me a ring

which was made of pure gold   worth six hundred shillings;

then I gave this ring   to the possession of Eadgils

my lord and protector,   when I came home,

I gave it to my beloved   lord of the Myrgings,

he who had granted me land,   my father's estate.]

The significance of this generosity, and the way a people interpret a lord's generosity, is

profound in *Widsið*. Furthermore, the poet implies that the lord who is dearest to all of his

subjects, i.e. the most generous and caring, is granted a realm on loan from God while on

earth. The concluding lines of the poem reinforce this theme of transitory "ownership" of

worldly wealth throughout *Widsið*, a theme which is repeated throughout much of the rest

of the *Exeter Book*. By being generous, a lord raises his renown with his people, and that

fame is all that will last when he passes into the afterlife. Fame for wickedness equals

damnation; but the fame espoused here by the poet, that created by generosity, could also

lead to fame in the heavenly kingdom as well, as this might have been read and

understood by a Christian audience.

> Swa ic þæt symle onfond   on þære feringe,
>
> þæt se biþ leofast   londbuendum,
>
> se þe him god syleð   gumena rice
>
> to gehealdenne,   þenden he her leofað."
>
> Swa scriþende   gesceapum hweorfað
>
> gleomen gumena   geond grunda fela,
>
> þearle secgeð,   þoncword sprecaþ,
>
> simle suð oþþe norð   sumne gemetað
>
> gydda² gleawne,   geofum unhneawne,
>
> se þe fore duguþe wile   dom aræran,
>
> eorlscipe æfnan,   oþþæt eal scæceð,
>
> leoht ond lif somod;   lof se gewyrceð,
>
> hafað under heofonum   heahfæstne dom (131-43).
>
> [So I have always found   throughout my travels
>
> that the lord who is beloved   to his people
>
> is the one to whom God   entrusts a kingdom of men
>
> to hold while   he lives on earth."
>
> [Wandering like this,   driven by chance,

---

² According to *Bosworth-Toller,* this word has multiple meanings, which add nuances to the interpretation of this aspect of "good" lords and kings in this poem These meanings include poem, sayings, songs, proverbs, riddles, narratives This may also suggest that a good lord should also be well versed in communicating wisdom

> minstrels travel   through many lands;
>
> they state their needs,   say words of thanks,
>
> always south or north,   they find someone
>
> skillful in songs,   generous in gifts,
>
> who wishes to raise his reputation   with his retainers,
>
> to do noble things,   until everything passes,
>
> light and life together;   he who wins praise
>
> has enduring glory   under the heavens.]

Not all critics agree, however, on the importance of this particular attribute of "good" lords mentioned repeatedly in *Widsið*. In referencing earlier arguments for the lists of kings as exemplary of lordly generosity, Rollman asserts that:

> The problem with this idea is that many of the rulers in the first list are not necessarily characterized by their generosity; indeed, generosity is not mentioned in connection with the list of kings. When a ruler is characterized by anything, it is by success and valor. The second list contains little besides the names of tribes or peoples, and it doesn't make much sense to describe them all as generous. (431)

This is a true assertion in part—while generosity is mentioned in connection with several lords in the poem, particularly when dealing with Eormanric, it is not an attribute of every lord mentioned. Also, Rollman accurately notes that "success and valor" are significant in characterizing rulers. However, the textual evidence of repeated and thorough mention of lordly generosity proves false Rollman's disregard for the primacy

of generosity as a thematic element in the poem. Several lines of the poem reference generosity by lords (and and their consorts): 56, 65-67, 73-74, 90-102, 139. Thus the poem portrays kingly generosity, particularly as it applies toward scops and other entertainers, as an expected attribute of all lords. French mirrors this assertion: "But one of the writer's chief objects may have become apparent—his insistence that a generous lord's duty includes patronizing minstrels, and that there will be an appropriate reward: the celebration of such liberality" (624). It is only a lord who is bountiful in gifts who can hope to have his fame exalted by the scop. While heroic deeds are also important for fame, it is the giving of gifts that is mentioned first in the concluding lines of the poem, and as such seems to be valued before the other lordly virtues in the eyes of this scop, and thus will ensure that the lord's fame remains alive in song long after he has died.

Germanic ideals for lords were not far removed from Christian ideals, and *Widsið* shows this awareness. As Malone succinctly puts it: "as everybody knows, the old poets in their religious compositions leaned heavily on native tradition. In particular, they made God into a Germanic king and God's servants (whether angels or men) into a Germanic dright" (150). As previously discussed in Chapter II, a particular duty for the lord was to dispense treasure to his retainers and people, and when viewing the poems of the *Exeter Book* through a specific thematic manuscript context, such gift-giving could be characterized as almsgiving, since the people were naturally less fortunate (in goods) than the lord. Also, the concept of alms was wide-reaching, and in particular the discussion of Daniel 4:24 in Chapter II is pertinent here. The generous lords in *Widsið,* by giving out treasure and gifts to their people and to Widsið, are practicing a form of charity and

almsgiving, ensuring not only their fame in Widsið's song, but also glory in the eyes of

God.

Two lords mentioned in *Widsið* deserve special discussion—one for his reputed

generosity, and one for his decided lack thereof. Eormanric, a Gothic king with a variety

of background legends, is believed by most historians to have been a real king. Chambers

notes, "that Ermanaric was well known in England is proved by the references in Old

English heroic poetry" (21). Most scholars have interpreted Eormanric to have been a bad

king, a tyrant. Indeed, in *Deor* he is characterized as "grim cyning" (line 23) and we are

told that his people would love to see him overthrown. He is certainly not a particularly

beloved king in this depiction.

Caroline Brady comments that "the high point of the *Widsið* is the scop's

description of his visit to the court of Eormanric" (454). Most scholars have interpreted

the phrase "wraþes wærlogan" (used to describe the king) to mean that Eormanric is an

evil or *fierce* faith-breaker, or some variation thereof. But Kemp Malone makes a credible

argument against this characterization of Eormanric as a tyrant:

> Over a hundred years ago Thorpe translated *wraþes wærlogan* with 'the
>
> fierce faith-breaker,' and his interpretation has become traditional in
>
> Widsithian scholarship. In my edition of *Widsith* [. . .] I challenged this
>
> interpretation, on the ground that, in history and story alike, Ermanric
>
> figures, not as a treaty-breaker but as a judge who *punishes* treaty-breakers
>
> (real and supposed) with the utmost rigor of the law. The grossly perverted

characterization of Ermanric which Thorpe read into the English text fits

Widsith least of all. (148)

Malone interprets those two words, *wrapes wærlogan*, using grammatical and

contextual argument to mean that Eormanric's followers were the real traitors, not

Eormanric himself (148-150).[3]

Perhaps the poet intended not to show Eormanric as the most horrible of lords, but

as one instead that favored justice at any cost. But if the depiction intended of Eormanic

is indeed a negative one, then perhaps the repeated depiction of Eormanric as a giver of

gifts and his characterization as generous was an attempt by the *Widsið* poet to suggest a

means of penance and redemption for the king through almsgiving.

As Yorke and others explain, the Anglo-Saxon idealized lord was not just a

resolute authority who could do what he wanted whenever he wanted, he was also

responsible for the subjects of his realm, and likewise had to be willing to endure their

criticism. In other words, if the people did not approve of the lord, then he could be

refused tribute and thus would be unable to sustain himself or his subjects with adequate

resources by way of gifting. One specific lord in *Widsið* is placed in the poem to enforce

this responsibility.

Caesar is but one lord among the list of major lords who is noted as having

treasure and a large amount of resources available to him; yet Caesar's section of the

---

[3] The heart of Malone's argument is that in the rest of the literature *leodhata*, or tyrant, is never used when referring to subjects, likewise *wærloga*, or traitor, is never used when describing rulers, so why would Widsið mention Eormanric using a word not used for lords? Also, "it is most unlikely that the poet would have made any derogatory reference to Ermanric In general, the author of *Widsith* looks favorably upon princes" (150) This does not mean, however, that the poet/compiler of the poem as it stands would have necessarily followed any standards for use of this phrase, and as the following discussion of Caesar shows, the poet did not always look "favorably upon princes "

poem is decidedly absent of any mention of the giving of these same resources: "mid Creacum ic wæs   ond mid Finnum ond mid Casere, / se þe winburga geweald ahte, / wiolena ond wilna, ond Wala rices" (76-78) [I was with the Greeks and the Finns and with Caesar, / who had festive cities in his power, / riches and treasures, and a foreign kingdom]. The significance here lies with the absence of generosity as a trait of Caesar and the fact that he is the only ruler in the poem characterized as having wealth but not giving any of it away.

Who is this Caesar that is important enough to merit three lines of mention in the poem? The first, Julius Caesar, from which the title "Caesar" is appropriated, could be a possibility: indeed, that first of Caesars found a horrible fate. However, the inclusion of a Caesar is for much more subtle, yet purposeful, reasons. I hypothesize that Caesar is used in the poem as an example of the purely worldly lord who does not give treasure, as opposed to the almsgiving lords, who are more praise-worthy and deserving of lasting recognition.

The "worship" of leaders and heroes was not a foreign concept to the Anglo-Saxons. Does the poet of *Widsið* intend with this passage about Caesar to criticize purely secular hero worship? The absence of gifting by the anonymous Caesar may allude to lords failing to fulfill Christian duty. Caesar was a symbol representing the secular world —indeed, more than once "Caesar" comes up in the Gospels, which our scribe, given the rest of the contents of the *Exeter Book*, undoubtedly was familiar with.

In the Gospels, Caesar is most often mentioned in connection with tribute, the money that the Jews and other subjects of the Roman Empire would be required to pay to

their secular lord, the Caesar of Christ's time (particularly in the case of Christ, Augustus

and Tiberius Caesar). Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention a very similar scenario,

where Jesus is asked if it is lawful to pay the tribute to Caesar:

> Ostendite mihi denarium cuius habet imaginem et inscriptionem
>
> respondentes dixerunt Caesaris et ait illis reddite ergo quae Caesaris sunt
>
> Caesari et quae Dei sunt Deo et non potuerunt verbum eius reprehendere
>
> coram plebe et mirati in responso eius tacuerun
>
> [And they asked him, saying: Master, we know that thou speakest and
>
> teachest rightly: and thou dost not respect any person, but teachest the way
>
> of God in truth. Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or no? But he
>
> considering their guile, said to them: Why tempt you me? Shew me a
>
> penny. Whose image and inscription hath it? They answering, said to him,
>
> Caesar's. And he said to them: Render therefore to Caesar the things that
>
> are Caesar's: and to God the things that are God's. And they could not
>
> reprehend his word before the people: and wondering at his answer, they
>
> held their peace.] (Luke 20.24-26)

This story may be interpreted in several ways. One of the central points of this scene is an

ambiguity—that both God and Caesar (or the secular state he represents) can claim the

money and power associated with the earthly state. Caesar's perspective is in

disagreement with God, because "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm

23.1), including all earthly wealth which God has "loaned" to earthly rulers.The *Widsið*

poet may be alluding to this Gospel story to illustrate the fundamental reason behind

gifting and almsgiving: dispensing of treasure and wealth to others earns the favor of

God, but the hoarding of them earns his disapproval.

Widsið fundamentally portrays how Anglo-Saxon lordship was viewed by Anglo-

Saxon society; thus it gives the contemporary scholar a window into the transmission of

Anglo-Saxon cultural consciousness through artistic and pedagogical expression. Given

the pedagogical and Christian nature of the poem, surely the scribes saw an applicability

to their own century's often troubled monarchies, with the *Widsið* figure being an ideal

teacher to reinforce ideal lordship.

The focus in *Widsið* on the transient nature of all earthly people and goods

continues in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*. While *Widsið* criticism tends frequently not

to consider Christian elements, such is not the case with these two poems, particularly

The Seafarer, which is considered by general critical consensus, including critics such as

Muir, to be primarily about Christian *topoi*. The ideas about the transitory nature of life,

as expressed profoundly in *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer*, find various analogues in the

Bible, and indeed "a very pessimistic statement about life can be seen as an integral

element in a body of Christian writings. It may represent a passing phase of Christian

experience, but not an unusual or unexpected one. The final statement that all security

stands in heaven then becomes a call to the obvious next step of seeking

God" (Bhattacharji 161). *The Wanderer* is plainly modeled on this form of wisdom-

seeking Christian writing.

The most central theme of the loss of worldly people and goods appears

repeatedly throughout *The Wanderer*, with the only surety being of otherworldly origin,

i.e. the Christian God. The Wanderer at turns mourns fallen kinsmen, buildings, and other

transient trappings, yet even in his mourning there is hope of eternal stability and life

with God in heaven (112a-115b). This poem is placed in the *Exeter Book* as a negative

exemplum, meaning that the poem is intended to serve as a didactic commentary against

secular customs of economic exchange, and by negative contrast thus encourages nobles

to "lay up treasure in heaven" rather than hoard or spend foolishly on earth (Matt. 6:20).

While neither alms nor giving to God and the Church is explicitly mentioned in *The*

Wanderer, the absence of almsgiving may be part of the central point of the poem.

Although the Wanderer has experienced giving from his lord (previously argued in the

case of *Widsið* as a possible example of almsgiving, even through secular-based

generosity), this has led to no lasting secular gains for this noble, whose only solace is not

in the frailty of worldly things and relationships, but in the Lord.

This poem, with a central theme of the loss of worldly things, also does not

superficially fit other poems in the *Exeter Book,* which focus instead on the explicit

exhortation to be generous. Possibly this poem is in part intended to convince lords and

other nobility to feel less focused and attached to their personal material wealth, which

could in turn make it easier for them psychologically to give to God by the act of giving

alms to others.

Additionally, what is depicted in *The Wanderer* is the total loss of material culture

that was kept by the lord for his own personal purposes or given to his retainers. Thus, all

of these possessions, along with the people who possessed them, passed away. What is

not shown or discussed are the material possessions that may have been given by the lord

or the speaker of the poem to the Church or the needy, whereas in other *Exeter Book* poems, the exhortation to give alms is clearly stated. This may serve in the poem to illustrate that all object wealth, given by a lord to his retainers, is transitory. In contrast, that wealth could have been given instead as alms, which would have provided the lord more permanent recompense for his generosity.

The Wanderer is the first poem in the *Exeter* manuscript which does not explicitly mention Christianity, and it follows the three *Christ* poems, *Guthlac A* and *B*, *Canticles of the Three Youths*, *The Phoenix*, and the *Passion of St. Juliana*. Immediately after *The Wanderer* is the so-called *God's Gifts to Humankind* (also known as *The Gifts of Men*). If trying to determine the logic (or lack thereof) behind the ordering of the manuscript, one questions why the compiler chose to place a this poem between two decidedly Christian teaching poems, one of which is an exemplum of model Christian behavior and the other a gnomic treatise. This placement by the compiler in the manuscript could indicate that *The Wanderer* is also intended as an exemplum and a "teaching" poem, like the majority of the texts in the manuscript. *The Wanderer* also comes before *The Seafarer* in the manuscript, which is a noteworthy arrangement by the compiler given the progression of how the theme of transitory goods is dealt with in each poem. Only secular wealth and giving results in a transitory world, as depicted in *The Wanderer*. But, as explored in *The Seafarer*, giving up the material and guiding oneself to God merits eternal life.

These superficial interpretations of *The Wanderer* only touch the surface of what is, by all accounts, a highly complex poem. According to Melissa Wolfe, "On one level it is easily understood—no one disagrees that it is both a reaction to loss and a statement on

the transience of life on earth—and on other levels it requires much more effort to see what is going on" (559). Wolfe further explores the questions most readers ask of the poem, including "Is it a secular meditation with Christian bits stuck on the ends, or is it a fundamentally Christian work?" (559) The scholarship on this poem is of enough complication that readers cannot agree even on the appropriate literary genre to assign it to, be it lament or elegy or gnomic, when it is a poem that resists easy genre classification. Other critics have argued that *The Wanderer* is a penitential poem, which Greenfield and Calder assess "will not bear scrutiny" due to "no mention of repentance anywhere" in the poem (285).[4] However, a deeper assessment could indicate that while it is not superficially about penitence, it is ascetic and reminiscent of the struggles of the Desert Fathers of the early Church, and at its core *The Wanderer* is a reflection of the fallacy of reliance on earthly things, and the need for redemption.

Krapp and Dobbie suggest in the introduction to their edition of the *Exeter Book* that both *The Wanderer* and *The Seafarer* contain similar structures and histories, as well as similar themes in content. As far as structure, Krapp and Dobbie explain that "In each of these poems a relatively specific treatment of the subject matter—in the one case the desolation of a man who is lordless, in the other case the joys and hardships of a seafaring life—is followed by an epilogue in more general terms, Christian and homiletic in spirit" (xxxvii). Krapp and Dobbie also observe that by the point of their publication (1936) scholars had been troubled by "an apparent lack of structural

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[4] For a reading of the poem as penitential, which Greenfield and Calder refer to in their refutation, please see Stanley, E G. "Old English Poetic Diction and the Interpretation of *The Wanderer, The Seafarer*, and *The Penitent's Prayer." Anglia* 73 (1955) 413-66

homogeneity" (xxxvii) and that both poems had already been thoroughly studied. As over

seventy years have passed since Krapp and Dobbie's pronouncement, it is unsurprising

that the amount of scholarship on these relatively famous Old English poems is very

extensive. As such, I will focus here on specific scholarship which comments upon

generosity or hoarding of wealth in these poems, particularly if lordship or nobility is also

considered. Surprisingly, the subject of almsgiving is not generally a component of

scholarship on these poems.

By the publication of Thomas C. Rumble's "From Eardstapa to Snottor on Mode:

The Structural Principle of 'The Wanderer,'" in 1958, the poem already had a long and

contentious critical history.[5] Rumble summarizes the various debates on the poem,

including those concerning the inherently Christian or pagan nature of the poem, the

"organic unity" or "lack of unity" in structure, whether it was a "dialogue between a

wanderer and a wise man" or just "the monologue of a wanderer," and whether the poem

serves either as an "extremely primitive elegy" or an exemplary consolation (225).

According to Bernard Huppé in "*The Wanderer*: Theme and Structure," this poem was

often problematic for scholars, particularly those examining the poem's structure,

> notably in the shift from the narrative to the didactic somewhere toward
>
> the middle of the poem; in the intermixture of heathen and Christian
>
> elements; in the problem of the proper end point for the wanderer's
>
> narrative. To many critics these difficulties have seemed sufficient to

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[5] See Andy Orchard's "Re-Reading *The Wanderer*: The Value of Cross-References" for another overview of the large critical history on *The Wanderer*.

> necessitate the assumption that the poem, as it is given to us in the *Exeter Book*, is a pious scribal patch-work. Some, indeed, have gone so far as to see in it only a complicated hodge-podge of heathen poetic fragments, ineptly patched together. Others have considered that the narrative half of the poem represents the (pagan) original and the didactic half a scribal (Christian) addition, or, less sweepingly, have limited the role of the scribe to the addition of only a few lines, markedly Christian in tone, principally at the beginning and end of the poem. (516)

While acknowledging the current, more dismissive, critical opinion of Huppé's general exegetical outlook, his summation of the scholarly debates on this poem rings accurate. Earlier scholars, especially Huppé, argued that because of the changes in perspective from third to first person in the poem, this meant that there were two speakers. This could be the case or, as Wolfe has argued, these shifts in perspective are all from one speaker, who shifts to the removed third person in order to take on the "wise man" persona to dole out wisdom.

Alice Sheppard, in "A Word to the Wise: Thinking, Knowledge, and Wisdom in *The Wanderer*," explains that the poems in the *Exeter Book* which focus on the personal serve another function within the manuscript and the Old English corpus: "the personal is not only individual; it has a communal significance. This generalized dimension allows these poems to function as part of the diverse OE tradition of poetic wisdom literature" (131). It is not a question for the audience of this poem or the critical corpus whether or not *The Wanderer* fits squarely in this wisdom literature tradition, because

"*The Wanderer* defines its relationship to wisdom and wisdom poetry explicitly. The search for wisdom is at the core of its motivating story" (131-2). Andy Orchard further explores the genre of the poem and explains that *The Wanderer* shares key stylistic elements with other poems in the *Exeter Book* manuscript, including the "heroic creed of stoicism and self-restraint" (in lines 11b-14), which are also used in a passage in *Homiletic Fragment II*, a more obviously Christian poem (17-20). Orchard concludes that "*The Wanderer* is perhaps best seen as a 'heroic homily,' a brilliant combination of themes, thoughts, and structuring techniques familiar to its contemporary audience from both the secular poetic and homiletic prose traditions" (26). Orchard's explanation for a syncretic structure is sharp, and fits *The Wanderer* squarely within the larger Old English syncretic tradition.

James M. Palmer has also argued that *The Wanderer* fits into a predominantly Christian manuscript context, explaining that "given the specifically Christian context of poems such as *Juliana* and the three that make up the cyclical *Christ* in the Exeter Book, *The Wanderer*, which in other texts might seem much more secular in nature, can be understood from a religious perspective" (447). However, Palmer further argues that except for two apparent references to God in *The Wanderer* ("fæder in heofonum" in line 115 and "metudes miltse" in line 2), which he assumes are Christian, "there do not appear to be others *explicitly* suggesting a specifically religious framework for the poem" (448). However, as other critics have argued and as I will show in my discussion of the poem, the Christian overtones are clear in several lines.

Also under consideration in the critical literature is the question of how the

narrator is perceived. Muir argues that the narrator presents in the poem a "fictional

exemplum illustrating for others how he achieved this wisdom" and that this text is an

"explicit example of Christian didacticism" related to "the tradition of Biblical exilic

wisdom literature exemplified in particular by Baruch 3: 9-37 and Lamentations

3:19-33" (503). The first comparison, Baruch 3.9-37, includes an *ubi sunt* passage, a

trope which we also see implemented in the poem. This section of Baruch is an "address

by the Prophet Baruch to Israel encouraging her to 'hear and learn wisdom,' and it

reminds Israel that she is an exile in a foreign land because she abandoned

wisdom" (504). The other Biblical passage identified as related to this poem is from

Lamentations 3.19-33, in which the speaker "recalls the bitter memory of his wanderings,

and is waiting patiently for the Lord's compassion. He notes that the Lord is good to

those who actively seek him, and that it is good for one's spirit to suffer trials while

young" (504). These same trials as listed in Lamentations are mirrored in *The Wanderer*,

which leads Muir to the conclusion that "clearly, when reading *The Wanderer*, which is a

patently Christian poem, this tradition of Biblical exilic poetry ought to be borne in

mind" (504-5). The interpretation of this poem, however, cannot honestly be as overtly

Christian as Muir argues, because much of the Christian message is hidden in more

overtly secular imagery and wisdom. As Orchard points out, "it is important to emphasize

that the only Christian coloring in the passage may be provided in the last line by the

phrase "Father in heaven" (*fæder on heofonum*, line 115), which, even so, is far from

unambiguous. Other key words and phrases in the passage (such as *beorn, eorl*, and *mid*

elne) often have a secular sense" (6-7). What does help to lend a firmer Christian

meaning is the nature of the manuscript context in which this poem is placed.

The poem begins with a gnomic description of an unknown character by an

anonymous speaker/narrator, who describes the central character as an "eardstapa,

earfeþa gemyndig" (line 6), an [earthstepper, mindful of hardships]. Many critics see "the

wanderer as a pilgrim, whether he realizes it or not. The problem with this is that unlike

exile in *Seafarer*, the wanderer does not see his isolation as positive or symbolizing a

journey toward God; his hardships certainly inspire his spiritual development, but from

an entirely negative angle" (Wolfe 560). As noted above, there has been no little debate

about this narrator and whether this is one speaker or multiple speakers/narrators, and

whether the narrator is describing himself as the central character. It seems most likely,

logically and textually, that there is a narrator, and then there is a character (the so-called

Wanderer) who serves as speaker throughout the poem to relate his hardships. This

outside narrator provides additional commentary on the events of the Wanderer's life, and

most importantly, conveys some of the more God-centered didactic teaching. The

opening lines seem to be Christian in nature; Orchard explains that more recent

scholarship has upheld this viewpoint, and that "the opening lines can be interpreted in

both a secular and a Christian manner; most modern discussions have favored the latter

over the former" (6). Orchard's assessment supports a narrative voice who holds a

decidedly Christian agenda, one who has specific lessons in mind to impart to the

audience.

This introduction to the central figure of the poem (in lines 6-7) is reminiscent of descriptions of a "wise-man" figure seen throughout Anglo-Saxon literature. The poet makes this allusion because if the audience of this poem is to learn wisdom, they would expect to be taught by an authority in these issues, such as a nobleman who has lived this life and has experienced great loss himself. This central character would have an even greater impact on an audience composed primarily of men like himself, who live their own lives dependent at least partially on the rules of Anglo-Saxon fealty. Therefore, it is vital for a narrator (who we assume to be a member of the clergy, given the catechetical portions of the poem), to distance his own views from the testament of this noble, non-clergy speaker.

This Wanderer is introduced to us as someone who expects to receive mercy from God, presumably because of the life he has had to live, and yet also endures great physical suffering in the process:

> Oft him anhaga   are gebideð,
>
> metudes miltse,   þeah þe he modcearig
>
> geond lagulade   longe sceolde
>
> hreran mid hondum   hrimcealde sæ,
>
> wadan wræclastas—   wyrd bið ful ared! (1-5)
>
> Often the lonely one awaits favor,
>
> the mercy of the Measurer, though he is sorrowful,
>
> and must across the seaways stir the rime-cold
>
> sea with his hands for a long time,

tread the path of the exile. Wyrd always goes as it must!

This mercy is not immediately specified. Indeed, through much of the poem the audience

is only informed of the ways God has destroyed temporal kin and architecture, and the

concept of heavenly favor or any hope at all is not necessarily explored in depth by the

poet. Only at the conclusion of the poem (lines 111-115) does the audience (if not the

figure of the Wanderer) receive any measure of consolation for the inevitable loss that

accompanies life.

After the narrator's introduction, the Wanderer begins to speak directly to the

audience, explaining that he is alone in his troubles, with no one else to speak to (8a-9a);

and, more specifically, that "Nis nu cwicra nan / þe ic him modsefan mine durre /

sweotule asecgan" (9b-11a) [Among the living none remains / to whom I dare clearly

reveal / my inner thoughts]. Additionally, the speaker demonstrates his awareness of the

appropriate Anglo-Saxon social customs related to keeping the emotions guarded:

> Ic to soþe wat
>
> þæt biþ in eorle   indryhten þeaw,
>
> þæt he his ferðlocan   fæste binde,
>
> healed his hordcofan, hycge swa he wille. (11b-14b)
>
> I know for truth
>
> that in a warrior   is a noble strength,
>
> that he should keep his   spirit-chest secure,
>
> guard his treasure-coffer, no matter what he thinks.

These lines are particularly interesting through the lens of this reading of the *Exeter Book* manuscript, as the speaker identifies his inner feelings in his *hordcofan*, or treasure-coffer. If the inner emotions noble men are counted as treasure, which they must hoard to themselves, then the speaker is here by way of this poem freely giving the audience this gift. This is a first, subtle, indictment in this poem of the act of hoarding wealth, albeit via a more abstract type of treasure.

The Wanderer continues his explanation of this noble tendency to guard the innermost thoughts by explaining that those weary in spirit cannot handle *wyrd* or fate, and that those who are troubled in mind cannot help anyone; therefore, it is best for those seeking glory to keep their emotions to themselves.

> Ne mæg werig mod   wyrde wiðstondan,
>
> ne se hreo hyge   helpe gefremman.
>
> Forðon domgeorne   dreorigne oft
>
> in hyra breostcofan   bindað fæste. (15-18)
>
> [Nor may a weary mind   withstand wyrd,
>
> nor does troubled thought   bring help.
>
> Therefore those   eager for glory
>
> often bind fast their agony   in their breast-chamber].

The speaker informs his audience in this gnomic, or wisdom-teaching passage, that in order for any man to do positive things, such as bring help or attain the ambiguous glory, he must hide his emotions and his pain away from others, much like treasure. Yet, here the speaker freely gives this treasure away to the audience, which in turn may be a

sacrifice, in effect, of his "glory" seeking, for the apparently greater goal of dispensing

wisdom to the audience. In a culture so secularly focused on the seeking and obtaining of

glory or fame (if this line is meant to be construed as secular glory or fame-seeking, as

many scholars have suggested), the speaker in this poem finds no need to hold on to these

secular pretenses, presumably because he has seen the inherent impermanence of worldly

glory.

The speaker's contemplation of his sorrowful state continues, as he tells us his

lord is dead and that he has travelled from place to place, trying to find another

benefactor.

> siþþan geara iu   goldwine minne
>
> hrusan heolstre biwrah,   ond ic hean þonan
>
> wod wintercearig   ofer waþema gebind,
>
> sohte seledreorig   sinces bryttan,
>
> hwær ic feor oþþe neah   findan meahte
>
> þone þe in meoduhealle   min myne wisse,
>
> oþþe mec freondleasne   frefran wolde,
>
> wenian mid wynnum. (22a-29a)
>
> [since long ago   I buried my gold-friend
>
> in darkness of earth   and I thence, wretched,
>
> senseless and winter-sad,   sought, hall-dreary,
>
> over waves bound,   a giver of treasure,
>
> where I far or near   might find

> one who in the meadhall   knew my giver of treasure,
>
> or me, friendless,   would console,
>
> and treat kindly].

The speaker's emphasis here is on the loss of not just a lord, but a lord who is also specifically a gold-friend, a dispenser of treasure, quite possibly a king. Significantly, the speaker also explains in these lines that he has sought (presumably in vain) to find another lord who knew his gold-friend and thus will show kindness to the Wanderer because of their shared ties of relationship. In similar language as that used for the dead lord, this sought-after new lord is described not plainly as a *lord*, but as a *giver of treasure*. The audience is not told at this point in the poem any other anticipated Anglo-Saxon lordly qualities about the lamented lord or the type of lord the Wanderer is seeking, but rather the definition of the desired replacement lord is focused on the element of expected lordly generosity.

Wolfe argues that the speaker of the poem should be described as concealing part of his story with purpose:

> There is another indication that he is not, even through his generalized
>
> statements, revealing everything in his thoughts: he never mentions the
>
> name of his beloved *goldwine*. This seems a bit odd in light of all the
>
> name-dropping that happens in [. . .] poems with a strong heroic flavor.
>
> Keeping the name of his lord to himself, though, is a very convenient
>
> thing for this scop to do. It helps him abide by his own statement of

virtuous reticence, he is allowing his message of wisdom to apply to

Everyman though generalization (561).

I read Wolfe's assessment of the poem's "heroic flavor" as meaning Germanic elements

of the poem, which *The Wanderer* surely has, but adapted to a Christian purpose.

Concurring with Wolfe on the "everyman" nature of the Wanderer's wisdom, this poem is

undoubtedly meant to serve as a gnomic poem, and as such is intended to speak to all

who might learn modes of behavior from this literature, particularly nobility. Surely then

this poem's intended audience is at least partially secular and noble, if not primarily so.

The only people in the period of the manuscript's creation with direct access to the

manuscript would have been monks/clergy or members of the nobility who could read or

who would be in an environment to hear such a text read aloud.

The poem's speaker continues his exploration of his friendless fate, shared by any

exile, noting that sorrow is a cruel companion to one without friends, and that

Waraδ hine wræclast,   nales wundengold,

ferδloca freorig,   nalæs foldan blæd. (32-33)

The exile-path holds him,   not wound gold,

a frozen soul-chamber,   not earth's riches.

In these lines the speaker again twice emphasizes the lack of earthly bounties, including

gold, as indicative of his outsider status. Following these lines, the speaker again explains

to his audience the severity of losing his lord, especially because of the resulting lack of

temporal generosity shown to him:

> Gemon he selesecgas   ond sincþege.
>
> hu hine on geoguðe   his goldwine
>
> wenede to wiste—   wyn eal gedreas. (34-36)
>
> He remembered hall-warriors   and receiving treasure,
>
> how in his youth   his gold-friend
>
> accustomed him to the feast—   all joy has died.

Note the emphatic close to this line: as a consequence of losing the worldly comfort associated with his secular lord, all joy has died for the Wanderer. This seems an exaggeration of his emotions, unfitting for an Anglo-Saxon nobleman, but the poet has a clear intention with this display of perhaps excess emotion: overemphasis on the severe results of over-dependence on secular generosity of earthly lords. This complete absence of all joy (at least all joy of the Wanderer's secular, and thus limited, understanding) is essential for the central message of the poem to shine. Only by entering the lowest state of human existence as he knows it can the Wanderer have space to contemplate the hope of heavenly joy not dependent on earthly restrictions.

In the next phase of the poem, beginning in line 34, the speaker is described as dreaming of the past, in which hallucinations, from his subconscious mind or otherwise, invade his mind. In the dream, the focus of the speaker is on his physical closeness to his lord, especially the connection of the lord to his *giefstolas* (44b) or throne (literally translated as gift-seat). The affection of the speaker and his loyalty to his lord are wrapped in his identification of this lord with the primary quality of generosity. Immediately and abruptly after the dream presents the lord's gift-seat, the speaker

awakens to his real desolation (45-48). This sharp turn from the image of the idealized

dream to rude reality serves to highlight the poet's association of lordly generosity as a

centrally important, even if fleeting, aspect of the nature of being an earthly lord.

After further contemplation on the Wanderer's hallucinations and fleeting

memories, the poem seems to change speakers, with a shift to the first person. As

previously discussed in this chapter, critical debate has often focused on this point-of-

view shift in line 58, with most critics concluding that this speaker, be he the same as the

Wanderer figure or the voice of the poet, takes on a newly identified role as a wise-man.

This new, "wise" speaker is clear from the beginning of the passage, and he consequently

directly instructs the audience via traditional forms of Old English gnomic wisdom.

The passage begins with the speaker, now referring to himself using the pronoun

ic, or *I*, contemplating the sad lot of all men in the world, as they are constantly and

inevitably faced with great loss (58a-62a). Perhaps the only reason the speaker's "spirit

does not darken" (59) is because of the still unmentioned hope he has in eternal life not of

this world. This speaker explains, amidst his remarks upon the constant decay of the

world, what qualities a wise man should possess and why:

Swa þes middangeard

ealra dogra gehwam   dreoseð ond fealleþ.

Forþon ne mæg wearþan wis   wer, ær he age

wintra dæl in woruldrice.   Wita sceal geþyldig,

ne sceal no to hatheort   ne to hrædwyrde,

ne to wac wiga   ne to wanhydig,

ne to forht ne to fægen,   ne to feohgifre

ne næfre gielpes to georn   ær he geare cunne. (62b-69b)

[So in this middle-earth

all days will   perish and fall.

Therefore none may become a wise man,   before he has

a share of winters in the world.   A wise man must be patient,

he must not be too angry   nor too hasty of speech,

nor too weak a warrior   nor too reckless,

nor too frightened, nor too cheerful, nor too greedy for treasure

nor ever too eager for boasts   before he knows enough].

Although not as prominently mentioned as in other sections of the poem, the theme of

appropriately placed generosity receives coverage among the requisite qualities of the

"wiseman." A wise man must not be too greedy for goods, presumably whether he is in

the position to give the goods because he is a lord or king, or he is on the receiving end of

the lord's generosity.

This passage, which eventually shifts to what is commonly characterized as

belonging to the *ubi sunt* genre, superficially appears to present traditional Anglo-Saxon

ideal values for noblemen. Central is an attitude of moderation and patience in all actions.

F. N. M. Diekstra reads this section as an attempt by the poet of *The Wanderer* to provide

a condensed account of orthodox Christian teaching, without any

restrictive notions of heathen military ethics, and that this teaching can

be accounted for by reference to generally known and conventional

treatments of moral doctrine in moralistic writers of the Church, with

whose works Old English poets might be assumed to have had some

acquaintance. (74)

Diekstra explains further that the poet may have intended to communicate that "a man

achieves wisdom by allowing the cardinal virtues to rule his affects" (74). Diekstra

specifies that this particular teaching in *The Wanderer* could have come from a wide

variety of sources available to the poet, including Ambrose's *De officiis*, in Jerome's

commentaries, in Augustine's *De civitate dei*, and more prominently, the Old English

translation of Boethius's *De consolatione philosophiae* (75).

Diekstra, to illustrate this point, provides an excerpt from the Old English *De

consolatione philosophiae*, in which the author expands upon Boethius's original Book I,

Metre 7, in order to emphasize certain aspects of the author's/translator's interpretation of

Boethius's teaching on the subject of prosperity:

> Swa nu þa þiostro þinre heortan
>
> willað minre leohtan lare wiðstondan
>
> and ðin modgeþonc miclum gedrefan.
>
> Ac gif ðu nu wilnast, þæt ðu wel mæge,
>
> þæt soðe leoht sweotole oncnawan,
>
> leohte geleafan, ðu forlæten scealt
>
> idle ofersælða, unnytne gefean. (Krapp 158)
>
> [Thus the darkness of your heart will now naturally withstand the light of
>
> my teaching and cause sore affliction in your mind. But if you now wish

to experience clearly the true light, the bright faith—which is within your

power—you must renounce the idle exultations in prosperity, give up vain

joy] (Trans. by Diekstra, 79).

As Diekstra's comparative analysis illustrates, the poet intentionally chose to mirror well-

known teachings of the Church—and the respected Alfred—through alluding to his

widely disseminated adaption of the *De consolatione Philosophiae*. This approach

assumes the *The Wanderer* is post-Alfred, as even if there are earlier versions of the poem

which predate the Alfredian context, the poem as it is extant was compiled post-Alfred.

The poet emphasizes throughout this directly gnomic section of the poem the connection

to a higher didactic authority, the work attributed to Alfred, rather than the more general

secular Anglo-Saxon hoard of wisdom.

　　After these introductory gnomic sayings, which concentrate on patience

(65b-72b), the speaker shifts his attention to focus intensely on the frailty and ultimate

destruction of the world, in a particularly eschatological mode. The wise man tells the

audience that

> Ongietan sceal gleaw hæle　　hu gæstlic bið
>
> þonne ealre þisse worulde wela　　weste stondeð. (73-74)
>
> [A wise man must realize　　how terrible it will be
>
> when all this world's wealth　　stands waste].

The focus in these lines again shifts back to the primary theme of the ultimate loss of the

transitory world. The poet reiterates here a primary lesson: all things of the world,

grouped together importantly as the "worulde wela" [wealth of the world], are worth

nothing at all in the end, be it a natural ending via the passage of time, or as the poem

indicates shortly thereafter, in the Christian apocalypse.

The speaker further details the swiftness of life, mourning fallen warriors once

again, before clarifying for the audience who or what is responsible for the destruction of

this particular city under observation, which also foreshadows the future end of the earth.

> Yþde swa þisne eardgard   ælda scyppend
>
> oþþæt burgawara   breahtma lease
>
> eald enta geweorc   idlu stondon. (85-87)
>
> [And so the Shaper of Men   destroyed this earth-guard
>
> until the ancient work of giants,   without city-inhabitants,
>
> the noise of people,   stood empty].

God, here described as the Shaper of Men, is held responsible for this earthly destruction,

which surely would not have been surprising to a contemporary Anglo-Saxon audience

used to frequent reminders of the imminent Christian end of the world. Roger Fowler

argued nearly fifty years ago that the explicit theme of *The Wanderer* that is often given

by critics (that the world is transitory and only heaven is eternal) is not an accurate

interpretation of the poem, as "one part of the argument which is essential to Christian

poems on mutability is absent: the full argument is 'the world is transitory; *therefore let*

us place no trust in the world, but concentrate on the attainment of God's benefits to

Christians.'" Rather, as Fowler explains, "the didactic argument is not fully worked out,

and the optimistic Christian opening is a red herring" (13). This does not mean that "the

closing lines are [. . .] tacked on clumsily" but instead that the poet intends that the

entire poem "can be read as one on the subject of divine permanence versus earthly

mutability—by double function references within the text" (13). As the speaker continues

to ponder, this emphasis on earthly "mutability" versus the reliability of heaven is clear;

the speaker, because he is "frod in ferðe" or wise in spirit (90a), is able to clearly examine

and explain "þis deorce lif" (89a).

At line 90 the passage begins which is usually classified as most characteristic of

the *ubi sunt* tradition and which forms some of the most well-known lines in the Old

English canon. The speaker wonders where all the transient aspects of the world have

gone, and the effect is emotionally intense. Of interest to my analysis of the theme of

lordly generosity are two lines in this section of the poem, which mention the role of

lords in the order of the world. The first line of the section shifts from the narrator to a

first-person direct speech by "he who thought wisely" (88a), presumably the voice of the

Wanderer. This speech begins in a classical, pre-Old English *ubi sunt* pattern: "Hwær

cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago? Hwær cwom maþþumgyfa?" (92). The speaker first

wonders aloud where the horse and the youth (or young warrior) have gone, which is

logical given that these are symbolic of the Anglo-Saxon warrior in his prime. But the

third person searched for in this section's first line is also highly significant to the

speaker's world view: the giver of treasure, presumably meant here as a reference to the

archetypal secular lord. This figure is not described plainly as a "lord" but rather as

solely characterized by his role as gift-giver. The placement of this gift-giver in the first

line of this section underscores the importance of the lord-as-giver in the Anglo-Saxon

world view, but also reiterates the essentially temporary nature of the secular paradigms

of society, up to and including the king. There is little comfort in this section of the poem, but perhaps it is not meant to console. Morgan reads these lines as communicating that "there is no quality of justice about the passing away of such an exemplary community, only of waste. And, although the 'wise man' must stoically endure such losses, he finds no consolation in his understanding of the transience of worldly glory, nor can he draw comfort from within his own soul" (19). However, there is surely some personal consolation comforting the speaker at the end of the poem, and perhaps the audience is intended to make the jump from consolation in the hope of life everlasting to personal consolation.

As the *ubi sunt* passage closes, the wise-man speaker summarizes his tally of the world's hardships and notes that

> Her bið feoh læne;   her bið freond læne;
>
> her bið mon læne;   her bið mæg læne—
>
> eal þis eorþan gesteal   idel weorþeð." (108-110)
>
> [Here treasure is fleeting;   here friends are fleeting;
>
> here man is fleeting;   here kinsman is fleeting—
>
> all this foundation of earth   turns to waste"].

In these parallel lines, the primary focus is once again turned to the transience of wealth; its importance in the list of hardships places it before the loss of friends and kin, and the last half-line, ending with waste, underscores the ultimate fate of the world. This is the crux of the poem—treasure, along with other lesser components of the foundation of earth, is fleeting, and all segments of the secular world will fail.

The speaker of the poem shifts again as we are led to the conclusion and provides

the final teaching of the poem. The tone here is decidedly didactic, and uses similar

constructions as the previous gnomic section of the poem. The speaker change is

signified by an observation that the preceding wisdom has been given by a

"snottor" [wise man], while he sits at "rune" [counsel] (111). This speaker, either

speaking specifically about the Wanderer as the wise man or more generally, informs his

audience that

> Til biþ se þe his treowe gehealdeþ,   ne sceal næfre his torn to rycene
>
> beorn of his breostum acyþan,   nemþe he ær þa bote cunne,
>
> eorl mid elne gefremman.   Wel bið þam þe him are seceð,
>
> frofre to fæder on heofonum,   þær us eal seo fæstnung
>
> stondeð. (112-15)
>
> [Good is he who keeps his faith,   who does not speak too quickly
>
> what is born in his breast,   unless this nobleman knows beforehand how
>
> to remedy this with courage. It will be well for him who seeks mercy,
>
> consolation from the Father in heaven, where for us perfect
>
> permanence stands].

Therefore, an Anglo-Saxon man, (or humans in general), is "good" or ideal if he

possesses these last qualities as given by the speaker. First among these is faith, which

may be taken as faithfulness to the earthly lord, or to God, as the rest of the poem has

been occupied with explaining how nothing earthly is reliable. Next is implicitly

described the trait of moderation, here as a repetition of the earlier advice to moderate

one's emotions and acts. However, as opposed to earlier in the poem when the audience

is instructed that an Anglo-Saxon noble should not reveal emotions, here the advice is

amended to face emotion by acting with courage, or face the consequences of boasts or

hasty words. The remedy for this all-consuming grief in this case is given in the next line:

consolation from God, and eternal life in heaven. The Wanderer has, in his long exile,

apparently found a solution to his problem of not having a lord—he has found a more

lasting Lord from whom to seek generosity and protection.

Wolfe interprets this concluding section as a "return to hope" and that "the

careworn wanderer and experienced wise man, found his remedy in God, but we, the

audience, can as well. He has combined the general, which has implied that the audience

may identify with him, with the personal, which explicitly identifies the audience with

him" (564-5). Furthermore, as Greenfield suggests, "the conclusion develops the only

logical response from a Christian point of view: in the form of gnomic verse it exhorts

man to become aware of and to act according to the best of his human capabilities; but

since this is insufficient for real security, man must also actively seek the mercy of God to

facilitate the intervention of that mercy on his behalf" ("The Wanderer" 465). Also in

agreement with the Christian interpretation of the conclusion of the poem, J. E. Cross,

who argues the *The Wanderer* is a *consolatio*, notes that even with elements that are not

exactly in line with Christian thinking, "The fact is the undoubted and accepted Christian

consolation at the end of the poem. No pagan could have stated such a clear acceptance

of the next life in the terms of the last two lines" ("On the Genre" 63). Even without

explicit references to Christ or scripture, the majority of audiences have read these lines

as patently Christian, which underscores the significance of the theme of transient secular generosity in the poem. The lasting impact of this poem is not necessarily that *The Wanderer* explicitly teaches lords of the importance of generosity to those less fortunate, or the centrality of giving alms as essential to good lordship. Rather, it is what is left unsaid, by a negative exemplum depicting lords' secular giving as transitory and thus less than ideal, which contextually underscores the message that only giving to the Lord ensures lasting reward. *The Wanderer* may have also served to instruct lords on the eventual fate of themselves and their retainers who were not properly instructed in how to balance the demands of secular exchange systems and the need for giving to the Church, a sentiment mirrored in homilies of late Anglo-Saxon England as well as carried into *The Seafarer*.

The Seafarer focuses on the wisdom of a speaker who is often characterized as a monk on pilgrimage, who has purposely rejected the secular world and secular comforts in order to reach God. *The Seafarer* is also more explicit than *The Wanderer* in arguing the importance of lordly generosity because it tells lords and kings that inappropriate treasure, unlike almsgiving, does not serve as a remedial good work, and thus does not help one reach the goal of eternal life.

As Andrew Galloway summarizes, the journey depicted in this poem has been "interpreted in notoriously conflicting ways" throughout the scholarship (4). At the time of Krapp and Dobbie's edition of the *Exeter Book* (1936), criticism was generally focused on "the question of a dialogue structure in that poem" (xxxvii), in particular debates concerning the number of speakers in the poem and their roles (xxxvii-xxxviii). Morgan

explains the central conflicts in *The Seafarer* criticism, assessing that "the inconsistencies in the speaker's attitude toward exile have opened the door to a variety of interpretations" but that "all agree, however, that the speaker ultimately is able to find a source of joy in his personal relationship with God" and thus volunteers to exile himself to the sea (24-25). This quest for a personal relationship with God is key to interpreting this poem, as it is only through direct experiences that the Seafarer may relate wisdom to others, especially the nobles on land whom he criticizes for their behavior.

Muir, in his commentary on this poem in his edition of the *Exeter Book*, explains that at one time the most common source of critical debate concerning *The Seafarer* was in regard to the integrity of the poem, with earlier critics arguing "that a folio may have been lost at 1.103 and that the ensuing lines belong to some other text" (522). This apparent loss led in part to many earlier scholars' arguments for segments of the poem as later Christian interpolations. However Muir, along with the more recent scholars, sees the poem as being written as one united text, rather than spotted with interpolations (522). In his account of the poem's critical history, Muir states with surety that "*Seafarer* is unmistakably didactic and Christian, and is catholic in its philosophical perspective" (522). Muir's opinion is shared by most current scholars of this poem, and it is a vital distinction to make when reading *The Seafarer*, as another significant part of the critical literature argues that the poem is, at best, syncretic.

According to Galloway by the 1980s *The Seafarer* was "a poem whose exegetical meanings have been [. . .] thoroughly sifted" and was firmly associated with Anglo-Saxon Christianity (1). A review of the major scholarship on the poem confirms this, with

scholars such as Huppé giving "an Augustinian interpretation of the entire poem, seeing it

as a unified allegory for a pilgrimage towards death, Judgment Day, and God" (4), and

Dorothy Whitelock providing a more literal interpretation of the Seafarer as a Christian

pilgrim. According to Muir, Whitelock's article on *The Seafarer* is a touchstone for

scholarship on the poem, as it is the first to situate the poem within the genre of

"Peregrinatio pro amore Dei"—and that much of the criticism since this article appeared

(1950) has "addressed her thesis" (Muir 522) and has resulted in two main camps of

Seafarer scholars: realists, as led by Whitelock, and the allegorists. As opposed to earlier

scholars, Whitelock does not view the Seafarer's journey as a straight-forward allegory of

the voyage as symbolic of "afflictions of life" (199). Rather, Whitelock argues that the

speaker of the poem is meant to be taken literally and that he is a "voluntary exile, a

peregrines," who seeks to find eternal life (201). While Whitelock's literal interpretation

has many rational elements, and I do not discount the speaker is a voluntary exile for the

love of God, my focus in this study is on another central message of this traveler—the

need to renounce worldly prosperity for the sake of heaven, a message which Whitelock

asserts was central to the *peregrinus* (198-211). However, E. G. Stanley provides the

most moderate explanation for the overall genre of the poem, asserting that "[. . .] the

poem is neither realism nor allegory. It is an imagined situation, invented to give force to

the doctrine which forms the end of the poem and its purpose" ("Old English Poetic"

453). My interpretation also takes this middle path, as I view the speaker as most likely

intended as a teaching figure, a cleric or otherwise, whether or not he is meant to be

based on a "real" speaker.

John C. Pope, in "Second Thoughts on the Interpretation of the 'The Seafarer,'" comes to an interesting conclusion about how the speaker in the poem views kings and kingship:

> Yet just here one may detect a lingering fondness for the heroic values of the secular tradition. In his scorn for the prosperous landsman is there not a touch of pride in his ability to endure affliction? He wants the praise of the angels, but also that of his successors on earth. And when he disparages the rulers of his own day, it is not so much because they represent a false ideal as because they are not the equals of the kings and caesars of old. We might imagine that, like Guthlac, he has been attracted to the aristocratic, would-be heroic life of the warrior in his youth, only to find the times, in this degenerate sixth age of the world, out of joint, and the spiritual struggle, under the circumstances, a worthier and more challenging alternative. (83)

Pope argues that the speaker of *The Seafarer* is not just focused on heavenly praise, but in his own way is also eager for earthly fame for being religiously generous. This is a transmutation of the usual Anglo-Saxon ideals regarding secular fame-gaining as based on winning treasure and generosity to retainers, into gaining fame on earth for giving material goods to the needy, and thus gaining fame both on earth and in heaven for Christian deeds. Pope notes the connection between the Seafarer character and Guthlac, which could add to the evidence for a purposeful collation of the *Exeter Book* as an exploration of these ideas of kingship and glory, or their failings thereof. Another

possible ancillary connection to Guthlac comes in the form of the isolated monk-figure

we see in *The Seafarer.* Clair McPherson, in "The Sea a Desert: Early English Spirituality

and *The Seafarer,* " argues for an interpretation of this figure as similar to the early

Christian desert hermits, with the Seafarer's desert being the isolating sea (115-16). It is

also worthy to note that these two poems—*The Seafarer* and *Guthlac A*—from the same

manuscript also repeat a theme of "heroic ascetic" values which indicate a deeper

interpretation: a new way for Christians, including lords, to behave.

Greenfield and Calder also suggest a connection between *The Seafarer* and *Christ

II* (*The Ascension)* by noting that some scholars interpret the Seafarer's "early voyaging

as an allegory for man's life on earth, as in the sea voyage simile at the end of *Christ

II*" (288). Although the interpretation of the Seafarer's journey is widely viewed as

Christian in nature, some critics do not see the Seafarer as setting off on what has been

characterized as a positive or especially Christian pilgrimage. Colin A. Ireland explains

that in the Christian *peregrinus* tradition, one might be exiled "as a penance, or that

imposed as a punishment, [or] a person might seek a voluntary, sometimes ascetic, exile,

often with a missionary motive" (3). He further argues that this specific *peregrinus*

tradition, although often attributed mostly to Ireland, was also considered a fitting path to

aid in salvation by British clerics, including Bede and Aldhelm (3). This is significant

because of the deep influence of the texts of Bede and Aldhelm on the religious and

cultural ideals of Anglo-Saxon society, and who in turn could have influenced *The

Seafarer* poet to view the sea journey as a viable pilgrimage. Orton argues that in *The

Seafarer* "the speaker is drawing a contrast; but it is between the happiness and prosperity

of the landlubber's life and the misery and poverty of his own, not between the

wickedness or folly of the former and the spiritual benefits to be derived from

seafaring" (357). The majority of critics, however, solidly argue for a Christian purpose,

which can be taken both as a literal description of such a journey or more symbolic of the

Christian journey. Also in contrast to Orton's argument, I suggest instead that, like my

reading of *The Wanderer* in this chapter, *The Seafarer* also relies on negative exempla to

prove a point about the search for God by giving up worldly comforts.

The poem begins with the speaker preparing the audience for a transmission of

wisdom, in the form of *soðgied* or "truth-song" (line 1). Unlike the format of the *The*

Wanderer, there can be no discrepancy in interpreting how many speakers are in *The*

Seafarer, as "Maeg ic be me sylfum" (1) [I am able by myself] makes clear. In this song

about himself, the speaker explains how he has toiled on the sea, even though he takes

some time in the length of the poem to inform the audience as to the purpose of his

journey.

<div style="text-align:center">hu ic geswincdagum</div>

earfoðhwile   oft þrowade,

bitre breostceare   gebiden hæbbe,

gecunnad in ceole   cearselda fela, (2b-5b)

<div style="text-align:center">[how I in days of toil</div>

often suffered   a time of hardship,

bitter breast-care   have endured,

and have sought in my ship   many care-halls]

The seafarer describes this not as an enjoyable journey, but from the start as one fraught with bitter sorrow and dangers, as he has sought distant and foreign halls for shelter. It it not yet clear if this "toil" by the speaker is deliberate, and indeed the tone of the opening of the poem could lead the audience to believe that such a harsh journey was not purposely sought.

The speaker continues his description of this time of tribulation at sea, emphasizing the coldness and desolation of the journey (6-12a). However, at 12b, the speaker pauses to offer a gnomic comment, foreshadowing the longer, "homiletic" section of the poem soon to follow.

> Þæt se mon ne wat
>
> þe him on foldan   fægrost limpeð,
>
> hu ic earmcearig   iscealdne sæ
>
> winter wunade   wræccan lastum,
>
> winemægum bidroren,   (12b-16a)
>
> [That man does not know,
>
> he for whom it goes most   agreeably on land,
>
> how I, wretched,   lived in the winter,
>
> in the ice-cold sea,   in the paths of exile,
>
> deprived of powerful friends]

The speaker tells his audience that those whose lot in life is comfortable do not understand what people like this seafarer go through, either by force or by choice comfortless and on the path of exile. It is still unclear whether this is a journey by choice, although scholars in agreement with Whitelock argue that this passage (because of its

apparent indictment of living in landed comfort instead of sailing the rough seas)

indicates that the seafarer's journey should be viewed as a voluntary pilgrimage. This

section is certainly a commentary on those living the "easy life," and promotes the

speaker as a man who is in a position to dispense wisdom on this subject because he has

experienced it, and one who by merit of this struggle on the sea must be strong both

physically and mentally, a certain virtue in the eyes of an Anglo-Saxon audience that

prizes enduring strength and moderation of emotions. This encourages the audience to

have faith in the speaker's testimony, and prepares them to hear messages in this poem

which may reprimand some for their purely secular lifestyle, particularly in the area of

giving.

The speaker continues in his description of the harsh and unforgiving landscape,

before returning again to his lamentation of having no help from anyone in his journey:

> ne ænig hleomæga
>
> feasceaftig ferð   frefran meahte.
>
> Forþon him gelyfeð lyt,   se þe ah lifes wyn
>
> gebiden in burgum,   bealosiþa hwon,
>
> wlonc ond wingal,   hu ic werig oft
>
> in brimlade   bidan sceolde. (25b-30b)
>
> [nor any sheltering kin
>
> might console   my impoverished spirit.
>
> Indeed, proud and wine-merry,   he hardly believes,
>
> who had experienced   life's joy in cities,

and had few calamities,   how I wearily

must often endure   on the sea-path].

Here the speaker reiterates his argument that those who are in their happy, earthly joys cannot understand (or even believe) the misery that the Seafarer endures—and surely would not understand why someone might take the journey purposefully. (This same explanation that a comfortable man would not understand the seafarer's experience is repeated again in lines 55b-57b). This is a central purpose of the speaker: to illuminate his experience in order to help the audience, "proud and wine-merry," gain wisdom without suffering alongside him.

Starting in line 35b, the audience gets a firmer idea of whether the Seafarer is intentionally going on this exile, and to what purpose. "sealtyþa gelac sylf cunnige" [I seek for myself the tossing of the salt-waves]. The verb used to describe the speaker's seafaring in this line is *cunnige*, which translates variously as "ventures," "seeks out," or "explores." This choice of word has a specific tenor, no matter the translation, of a purposeful and freely chosen course of action, rather than a forced exile. This leads to most interpretations of the Seafarer figure as a sort of pilgrim, whether real or allegorical. As the poem continues, the purpose behind his voluntary exile is clarified as particularly Christian, with a magnified focus on issues of material wealth and appropriate and inappropriate giving.

Whitelock interprets the next section (lines 33b-47) containing line 35b as conveying the gnomic wisdom that "while earthly success may cause a man to forget the purpose of his being in the world, may lull him to a trust in material things, the man at

sea will be in no such danger" (202-3). Whitelock's summation is borne out in this

section, in which the speaker tells us that his mind urges him "time and again" (line 36)

for his spirit to "seek out" the land of strangers (37a-38b). Then, the speaker finally gives

a clearer vision of *why* he has set out, and it does seem to be a journey away from the

transience of the earthly world and towards eternal life through communion with God.

> Forþon nis þæs modwlonc   mon ofer eorþan,
>
> ne his gifena þæs god,   ne in geoguþe to þæs hwæt,
>
> ne in his dædum to þæs deor,   ne him his dryhten to þæs hold,
>
> þæt he a his sæfore   sorge næbbe,
>
> to hwon hine dryhten   gedon wille.
>
> Ne biþ him to hearpan hyge   ne to hringþege,
>
> ne to wife wyn   ne to worulde hyht,
>
> ne ymbe owiht elles,   nefne ymb yða gewealc,
>
> ac a hafað longunge   se þe on lagu fundað. (39-47)
>
> [Therefore there is not a man   on earth so proud of heart,
>
> nor in his gifts so good,   nor in youth so bold,
>
> nor in his deeds too brave,   nor whose lord is so gracious to him,
>
> that he never sorrows   about his seafaring,
>
> as to how the Lord   will treat him.
>
> His thought is not on the harp   nor on ring-receiving,
>
> nor is his joy in woman   nor in hope for the world
>
> nor about anything else   except the tossing of the waves,

but he always has longing, he who sets out on the sea].

Here the audience experiences what is a familiar refrain for them: that the transience of the world will fall away, and the only hope is in eternal life with God. The wisdom these lines convey confirms the central thesis of this study regarding the failure of both worldly wealth and the expectations of secular giving. The speaker informs the audience that there is no one who will not have "sorrow about his seafaring" and how "the Lord will treat him." The idealized, secular qualities mentioned here include boldness and bravery, yet they also prominently include being a generous giver. The speaker is saying here that every human, no matter how they have benefited from the secular gift exchange system, either as gift-giver or gift-recipient, will endure sorrow in their seafaring—a fate inescapable by all who live in this world, and an explicit reference to the failure of worldly wealth. After pondering how the Lord will deal with such men, the speaker continues his tally of worldly foci which will eventually fail. The seafarer does not think of music or women, or more prominently, of "ring-receiving" or of "hope of the world," which can be read as trust in worldly things. The poet suggests here that reliance on treasure and other material goods is not an aspect of someone who is on a journey to God. One could argue that the inclusion in the poem of an indictment of worldly wealth, particularly secular gift exchange, would be expected as a 'focus on transience' is a common Old English poetic trope. However, within just these ten lines, the issue of generosity is cause for contemplation four different times, and, as the poem progresses, becomes a central issue of the speaker's warnings against earthly things.

After some further brief description of the seafaring environs, the poem's speaker

turns to a more straightforward gnomic dispensation, and the seafaring gives way "into

the homiletic. What follows is essentially eschatological in nature" (Greenfield and

Calder 287). Rather abruptly the seafarer turns from a description of a bird to explain to

his audience that

> Forþon me hatran sind
>
> dryhtnes dreamas   þonne þis deade lif,
>
> læne on londe.   (64b-66a)
>
>   [Therefore more inspiring to me are
>
> God's joys   than this dead life,
>
> transitory on the land].

The Seafarer contextualizes his forthcoming "homiletic" wisdom with these lines and

conveys to his audience the central message of his teaching: the delights of the Lord and

the surety of eternal life surpass any of the material trappings of this "dead life, / loaned

on land." Earthly goods, we are told again, do not endure; thus, the speaker indicates that

by his seafaring he is choosing a more righteous path, one sure to lead him to salvation.

In lines 68-71, the speaker reminds his audience of a familiar commentary on life

and death, which all men die before their *due* time, either by illness, old age, or by the

sword. The poet includes this comment in order to present the remainder of the homiletic

section, particularly lines 72-83, as this section deals with the fate of man after his death,

no matter the manner of his death. This view of death being equal for everyone in effect

equalizes the audience; all men, no matter how they die, will face eternity. This is a

contrast to the older, more "Germanic" ethos in other Old English texts, where the manner of one's death is significant to how one is perceived after death.

The homiletic section fully begins in line 72, with the speaker detailing the fate of men after death, with the specific explanation of how to achieve appropriate fame, in this case not only earthly fame for their particularly Christian acts, but likewise adequate fame in heaven to grant them eternal life.

> Forþon bið eorla gehwam   æftercweþendra
>
> lof lifgendra   lastworda betst,
>
> þæt he gewyrce,   ær he on weg scyle,
>
> fremum on foldan   wið feonda niþ,
>
> deorum dædum   deofle togeanes,
>
> þæt hine ælda bearn   æfter hergen,
>
> ond his lof siþþan   lifge mid englum
>
> awa to ealdre,   ecan lifes blæd,
>
> dream mid dugeþum. (72-80)
>
> [So it is for each man   the praise of those living,
>
> those who speak after him,   the best epitaph,
>
> that he should perform   before he must go away,
>
> good actions on earth   against the malice of fiends,
>
> brave deeds   against the devil,
>
> so that the children of men   will praise him afterwards,
>
> and his glory later   may live with the angels

always in eternity,   the splendor of eternal life,

joy among hosts].

The path to heaven as described by the speaker is made by two actions, or possibly one action described in two different ways. In line 75a, the audience is told that each man may earn praise by "good actions on earth," which is mirrored in the following line by "brave deeds," both of which are performed against the snares of the devil and his "fiends." Presumably, since these good actions and brave deeds are set against the Christian idea of evil, the devil, the audience is to take these positive actions encouraged here as Christian virtues. The intended audience then learns that good actions are necessary for fame in every context, which could appeal to an Anglo-Saxon noble's desire both for older forms of secular fame after death (as seen in *Beowulf*, among other texts), and for fame among God's retinue.

Muir reads these lines as centrally important, and summarizes their content as "the importance of peoples' reputations after they have died" (522). Morgan also sees this as a significant passage, arguing that these lines should be read as "a good part of the Christian man's reward is the 'after-speaking' of men which must be earned through praiseworthy deeds. That it is necessary not merely to mention this, but to give it four times the emphasis accorded the praise of angels, is an indication that the poet still believes that a man's worth is established by other men" (25-26). In her argument for a more secular reading of these lines, Morgan does not take into account further contextualization with the rest of the poem's message against trying to please secular interests instead of religious ones. Nor does she consider *The Seafarer's* manuscript

context, which would indicate that perhaps these important and praiseworthy deeds are

acts which could be considered under the wider definition of alms.

Neil D. Isaacs asserts that lines 72-80a present a syncretic vision of what

constitutes virtue: "The way to give a semblance of permanence to transient existence is

by performing *fremum on foldan* 'beneficial actions on earth' (75a) and *deorum dædum*

'brave deeds' (76a) against enemies or the devil. Then praise for the good man will live

on, forever with the angels, bringing joy among the *duguth*" (279). The necessity of

doing good deeds on earth as espoused by the poet in line 75a particularly reinforces my

argument that *The Seafarer* continues the *Exeter Book*'s emphasis on appropriate

generosity as increasing fame in heaven and thus ensuring salvation.

As the poem continues to explore these gnomic instructions for how to achieve

lasting and permanent, rather than temporary fame, the speaker provides a more

eschatological view of the nature of doing "good deeds" to gain fame:

> Dagas sind gewitene,
>
> ealle onmedlan   eorþan rices —
>
> nearon nu cyningas   ne caseras
>
> ne goldgiefan   swylce iu wæron (80b-83b)
>
> [Days are departing,
>
> all pomps   of earth's kingdom —
>
> there are not now kings   nor caesars
>
> nor gold-givers   such as there once were]

Presumably the speaker here is talking about a time after the end of days, as the "pomps" of earth, here described specifically as the "kingdom" of earth, are gone. The keepers of these pomps are especially significant when venturing into the idea of alms as pervasive in this poem's message; they are specified as kings, caesars, and more generally, gold-givers. The poet here is deliberately highlighting the perceived failure of the secular power structure known to Anglo-Saxon society at the time of the *Exeter Book*'s creation. While earlier the poet seemed to be discussing all men, here he focuses on the certain end of even the most powerful men on earth, and he does so to criticize their use and disposal of their wealth.

Beginning at the end of this section of the poem (line 85), the audience is given a large number of examples of inappropriate behavior for Christian Anglo-Saxons, particularly members of the noble class. We learn how men grow old and die, wistfully remembering their past (88b-93b). As Isaacs explains, "However much like pagan elegy this passage may sound, the fact is that for forty-five verses the poet is listing examples to show that the old ways (the ways of those who would produce a Germanic or perhaps Celtic elegy and those would appreciate it) don't work" (279-80). In other words, this passage is a firm example of Christian propaganda, a call to Anglo-Saxon readers and listeners to turn from their older, secular practices and focus on those practices which would ensure them eternity.

Isaacs summarizes that "it is emphasized throughout the passage that the glory that is gone is of this world (81b, 87b, 98a, 90b, 102b)" (280). More importantly, as Isaacs notes, is that "this glory is symbolized by gold" as it relates to the lord and

retainer secular exchange system (280). As in other poems in the *Exeter Book*, the poet

here reminds us that gold (both literally and as representative for all worldly, material

things) cannot last; this is another implicit negative example which reinforces other, more

direct teachings in this manuscript on the importance of giving alms instead of hoarding

earthly treasure or giving it for secular purposes only.

    In lines 97-102, a very specific scene is described amidst the more general

discussion of all men dying and losing their gold in the process. Here the speaker

discusses the use of gold as grave goods, noting the insufficiency of such rituals.

Þeah þe græf wille   golde stregan

broþor his geborenum   —byrgan be deadum—

maþmum mislicum   þæt hine mid wille,

ne mæg þære sawle   þe biþ synna ful

gold to geoce   for godes egsan,

þonne he hit ær hydeð   þenden he her leofað. (97-102)

[Though he would strew   the grave with gold

a brother for his kinsman   —bury it with the dead—

a large treasure   that he desires to go with his kinsman,

the gold may not be   an aid to a soul

full of sins   in the face of God's awful power,

when he hides it earlier   while he lives here].

Michael D. Cherniss, in "The Meaning of 'The Seafarer,'" argues that this section

of the poem conveys that treasure was the material equivalent of the glory of man, and

therefore the idea that "wealth is not a warrior's eternal possession" would have been read as more "ambiguous" by an Anglo-Saxon audience, who may have seen not an obviously Christian element, but rather a secular, heroic interpretation of the treasure simply passing on to "heirs" or "that the ideal of heroic 'dom' with which, at least in heroic poetry, wealth is associated, is itself somehow invalid" (147). However, the rest of the poem seems to me to provide a clear view that these lines should be taken as significantly Christian, and that the audience heard them as such. The poet specifies that gold cannot be "an aid to a soul / full of sins / in the face of God's awful power" *when* the person hides the gold while they are still alive. This passage condemns the act of hoarding treasure while alive, and also condemns the act of wasting gold, by burying it according to pagan custom or otherwise, when instead it could be given as alms to aid souls full of sins, specifically the souls of lords or other nobles, who would be in a position to require or give extensive grave goods in the first place.

The poem thus moves into a solidly Christian didactic, or catechetical, conclusion. God is praised, and his power and sovereignty over the earth discussed (103a-105b), followed with exhortations to live rightly in fear of the Lord in order to reach heaven. Line 107b calls for men to live humbly, for they will likewise be blessed, and "cymeð him seo ar of heofonum" [favor comes to him from heaven]. Muir notes that lines 106 and 109a, directly around this humility lesson, also occur nearly identically in *Maxims I (A)* (522), a poem which also survives only in the *Exeter Book*. These identical lines add further circumstantial proof for the intertextual connection among the poems in the Exeter manuscript.

In the next lines, the speaker continues to teach classic Anglo-Saxon Christian virtues of moderation of emotions and focus on God. As the conclusion draws nearer, lines 111-115a provide a penultimate lesson to the audience regarding the nature of relationships with friends and enemies. Lacunæ in the lines missing here, due to damage to the manuscript, complicate the translation and interpretation of this passage.

> scyle monna gehwylc   mid gemete healdan
>
> [lufan] wiþ leofne   ond wið laþne bealo,
>
> þeah þe he hine wille fyres   fulne [* * *]
>
> oþþe on bæle   forbærnedne
>
> his geworhtne wine. (111a-115a)
>
> [each man must with moderation   hold
>
> [love] towards his friend   and malice towards his enemy,
>
> though he may wish him   full of fire [* * *]
>
> or a funeral pyre   consumed
>
> his false friend].

In "*The Seafarer* 111-15: *Dives* and the Ultimate Futility," John F. Vickrey examines these often disputed lines of the poem, and argues that the focus of these lines is on the conflict between earthly wealth and permanent life in heaven. He bases this argument on a comparison of these lines to Psalm 48 and Luke 16. As Vickrey explains, the connection between Psalm 48 and Luke 16 with *The Seafarer* has been described by multiple scholars, including Sisam and Horgan. Just as in lines 111-15 of the poem, these Biblical passages both "emphasize the difference between the way of God and the way of

this world, and each distinguishes between the person who follows, or who is urged to

follow, the way of the Lord and the person who pursues the attractions of this

world" (Vickrey 233). Vickrey further illuminates his purpose behind connecting this

passage of the poem to Luke by surmising that "The commentators always understood

Luke 16.9 to mean that wealthy persons should give wealth as alms, whereupon those

who are succored by these alms become the *amici* of their benefactors by interceding

with prayers in their behalf" (238). If this is the case, then perhaps the composer of this

poem and/or the *Exeter Book* would have relied on these same assumptions being known

by the poem's audience when alluding to Luke in these lines, which in turn would have

solidified the intended almsgiving message. If this poem was taught as part of a program

of instruction for nobles or monks by monks, then such understanding of this passage of

Luke and common commentary on it can be plausibly suggested for the audience, given

the dissemination of the Gospels in Anglo-Saxon England at the time of the *Exeter

Book*'s creation.

Vickrey also argues that "lines 112-15 declare the actuality that too many men

choose the wealth of this world and despise God and therefore perish in the next

world" (234). This reinforces that a strong component of the didactic element in these

poems rests on the negative examples of lords who do not give appropriately, and thus

must face the punishment that accompanies such negligence.

A central component of Vickrey's argument is based on an interpretation of line

115 which indicates that the "rich man's treasure" has been "deified as his *wine* 'friendly

lord'" (237). As Vickrey details, this idea of wealth becoming a lordly figure can be

found in both the Old and New Testaments, with the familiar personification of Mammon (237). In other words, the righteous Anglo-Saxon, if following the example of Luke, should not serve two masters.

Vickrey interprets the problematic images of destruction by fire in this line (115) as particularly significant in understanding the relationship between a normal man with wealth and the *wine*: "The difference between *fyres fulne* 'full of fire' and *forbærnedne* 'burnt up' is significant. In his next life the rich man will be endlessly burned. But to be eternally burned, he must be eternally unconsumed; therefore he is *fyres ful* merely. His *wine*, however, the fire of Judgment Day will consume utterly; he will be *forbærned*" (237). The receiver of secular goods, therefore, will not be as punished for the sin of wealth as his secular lord, who will be completely destroyed; this is a terribly strong admonition to lords and other nobles who could serve as *wine* to give appropriately.

Galloway argues that there is an overlooked reference in *The Seafarer* to a biblical passage, 1 Peter 1.13-19 (1-10), in which someone who is usually regarded as a pilgrim is told that, among other things:

> er si Patrem invocatis eum qui sine acceptione personarum iudicat
>
> secundum uniuscuiusque opus, in timore incolatus vestri tempore
>
> conversamini, scientes quod non corruptibilibus argento vel auro redempti
>
> estis, de vana vestra conversatione paternae traditionis, sed pretioso
>
> sanguine quasi agni incontaminati et immaculati Christi

[And if you invoke as Father him who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every one's work: converse in fear during the time of your sojourning here. Knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things as gold or silver, from your vain conversation of the tradition of your fathers: but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled].

This connection between *The Seafarer* and this passage from 1 Peter reiterates the underlying Christian message by *The Seafarer* poet that material, earthly goods (and perhaps secular, Germanic, Anglo-Saxon tradition) are not paths to redemption.

As the poem concludes, the audience is reminded of the awesome omnipotence and power of God and *wyrd* over men (115b-116b). One last exhortation directly to the audience includes a rhetorical turn, and transfers the speaker momentarily from the wise-man role to part of the collective Anglo-Saxon community. The speaker tells his audience "Uton we hycgan" or [let us consider] the possibility of heaven, and the path we need to get there, and then that we should strive to reach it (lines 117-120). Lastly, God is thanked because he " geweorþade" [honors] humans with the possibility of eternal life (123), surely a conclusion geared to induce further humility in the audience. The peaceful ending of the Seafarer's discussion of his life and the wisdom he learned from his experiences mirrors perhaps the earthly fate of the faithful seafarer himself.

Many critics over the years have identified the *Exeter Book* manuscript as a miscellany because of the multiple genres of the poems, including those superficially secular, of which poems covered in this chapter are a sampling. These poems do not

necessarily reflect the overt religious philosophy permeating most other poems in the text. However, even poems such as *Widsið*, traditionally seen as purely secular descriptions of Anglo-Saxon court life, complement other *Exeter Book* texts offering Christian principles. This is not achieved by an artificial viewing of these poems through an exegetical lens, but through a close reading of the texts themselves with a critical eye to manuscript context. *The Wanderer,* famously read at best as syncretic, and at worst marred by Christian interpolation, under this same scrutiny bears similar conclusions as to theme and purpose, and *The Seafarer* marks a shift to a predominantly Christian mindset. All three poems discussed in this chapter call for lords to give appropriately in order to reach heaven, albeit in varying degrees of explicit exhortation.

IV: THE SAINT AND THE SYMBOL

Within the *Exeter Book,* there are multiple genres, and while the elegies are by far

the most studied and well known, the straightforward religious poetry of the collection is

significant in its variety. The life of Christ, eschatological exhortations, saints' lives,

allegorical animal poems, and some riddles deal with and teach Christian subject matter

in myriad ways. This chapter explores two exemplary religious poems, in order to

uncover some of the ways in which these particularly religious texts function in this

manuscript. *Guthlac A* (also known as *Guthlac (A)*, and renamed *The Life of Saint*

Guthlac (A) by Muir) is one of two versions of this saint's life in the *Exeter Book*, and is

compelling because of the originality of the poet when adopting analogues and creating

new text in order to argue for almsgiving. *The Phoenix*, traditionally seen as an allegory,

uses many preexisting texts to craft a superficially secular, but deeply Christian poem that

reinforces appropriate giving of alms in anticipation of the apocalypse. Both poems

describe exemplars of ideal noble, Christian behavior, and both focus on good works,

explicitly almsgiving and resisting worldly wealth, as necessary not just to get in heaven,

but also to receive God's protection here on earth. Both also advance the attractive

argument that by giving up worldly wealth, not only does one get eternal life, but the far-

superior wealth of heaven (including mansions, gold crowns and other seemingly

"earthly" treasures).

Guthlac A is placed in the manuscript following the lengthy introductory section

comprised of three poems often considered collectively as the *Christ* poems. I argue that

Guthlac A is placed here by the compiler as a segue from direct teachings about Christ (in

the *Christ* poems) into examples of people following Christ effectively, demonstrated in

the *Guthlac* poems. Calder suggests that "although the total scheme may elude us,

perhaps we may assume that the *Christ* poems come first because they are about Christ,

and that the two *Guthlac* poems follow because they are about an English

saint" ("*Guthlac A*" 65-6). Calder's assessment is sound: if one is trying to teach an

audience of English nobility or clergy appropriate modes of behavior, would it not be

prudent to use a distinctly English idealized figure as the exemplar? Indeed, as a noble

warrior who became a religious hermit, and then a saint through appropriate works, such

as the relinquishment of wealth, Guthlac serves as a symbol for multiple intended

audiences. One audience is secular nobles who aspire to be better Christians. Another

audience possibly being addressed is monks (likely to be young nobles themselves), who

need a spiritual guide to help them reduce frivolity and earthly folly in order to gain

spiritual wisdom. Indeed, Roberts argues for a monastic audience because of the poet's

use of specific monastic terms and the "great amount of religious terminology of a sort

not often found in Old English poetry" (*The Guthlac Poems* 52). Guthlac also serves as

an example and encouragement for young nobles and possibly princes to join the

monastic life, a trend which began in Anglo-Saxon lordship prior to the 10th-century

creation of the *Exeter Book*.

The most recent edition of the *Exeter Book Guthlac* poems (before Muir's full

edition of the manuscript) was completed by Roberts in 1979, and the research she has

done on the topic of analogues, structure, and language in these poems is extensive. As

Roberts explains in the introduction to her edition, the earliest "primary source for our

knowledge of Guthlac is the early eighth-century life by Felix, a monk, written for the East-Anglian king Ælfwald" (*The Guthlac Poems* 1). This source provides a historical context for the events of Guthlac's life, for Felix explains that "Æthelred was already on the Mercian throne when Guthlac was born, probably *c.* A.D. 674. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle states that he died in A.D. 714" (*The Guthlac Poems* 1). Ælfwald reigned from 713-749, which places the creation of the Felix *Guthlac* text during this same early eighth century period, importantly predating the *Guthlac* poems of the *Exeter Book* by at least 200 years according to most scholarly estimates.

However, as Muir explains, although Felix provides the first account of Guthlac's life, such critics as Roberts and Colgrave argue that Felix's *Vita* was not a particularly important influence on *Guthlac A* (435), although the relationship between the *Vita* and *Guthlac B* has been thoroughly explored by other critics. Muir further summarizes that a host of critics, from Charitius and Forstmann (late nineteenth to early twentieth centuries) to Sisam, Shook, and Wolpers, have all agreed that the poem we have extant in the *Exeter Book* as *Guthlac A* "is independent of Felix's work" (435). Roberts, in her later article "*Guthlac A*: Sources and Source Hunting," explains that "within the group of Old English Guthlac materials *Guthlac A* is, so far as sources are concerned, anomalous" (1). Could the scribe/compiler have had a hand in the creation of this particular version of Guthlac's life? This is a vital question for this study of the manuscript context and thematic focus of this poem, as it indicates that the author of this poem relies more on his own judgment and purposes (including didactic purposes), rather than a closer following of an earlier hagiography.

However, even if the Felix text is not directly linked to *Guthlac A*, there is important information to be gleaned from Felix's *Vita*, as it is both the first to document the saint's life but also the closest in time period to when Guthlac lived. For example, Roberts explains that "Felix emphasizes Guthlac's noble lineage, tracing his ancestry back to Icel, whose name appears five generations above Penda in Mercian genealogies, and alluding a second time to his kingly descent" (*The Guthlac Poems* 3). Roberts additionally demonstrates that Felix's version also provides essential information including the early life of Guthlac, in which he was a well-known soldier, before "the heroic ideal became insufficient for Guthlac, so at the age of 24 he decided to enter religion" (4). This important background information is mostly missing from *Guthlac A*, wherein the audience is only told that Guthlac "in his first age loved many vicious behaviors" and "lusted for sins," but that through the grace of God gave up love of the world for the love of Christ (lines 108a-113b).

Roberts argues that one possible source for *Guthlac A* is "the opening of Gregory's tenth chapter of the *Vitae Patrum*" ("*Guthlac A*" 5). Her argument is based on structural similarities between Gregory (and Psalms 123.8 which Gregory references) and the opening homiletic section of *Guthlac A* (4-5). This is not an unlikely analogue, as Gregory would surely have been well known to the scribe/compiler (and also a monastic poet)—and such an analogue further cements the argument here that this was a poem composed with particular religious frameworks in mind, and with certainly a didactic, or catechetical purpose. Significantly, as Roberts suggests, the difficulty in locating source material for *Guthlac A* demonstrates the poet's ability to utilize "diverse materials" (9)

and surely illustrates his originality, resulting in a rather unique contribution to the Old

English poetic hagiographic corpus.

Structurally, *Guthlac A* has not always been a clearly delineated work. Liuzza

explains that while the currently accepted structure of two poems, *Guthlac A* and *Guthlac*

B, is "assumed to be correct in critical interpretation of the poems" this conclusion has

not been reached without prodigious debate ("The Old English *Christ*" 1). Early scholars

(notably Benjamin Thorpe) divided the poem now known as *Guthlac A* into separate

poems. In Thorpe's edition, the first twenty-nine lines are grouped into a poem titled "Of

Souls After Death II"; lines 30-92 are delineated into another poem, titled "Poem Moral

and Religious" (Thorpe 102-07). In other editions, the first, more didactic/homiletic

section of *Guthlac A* is either divided off or added to the end of the third *Christ* poem.

Liuzza argues that *Guthlac A* 1-29, like *Christ II*, is a "deliberate hinge poem" which

serves to connect different poems via thematic similarities, in this case a connection

"between the Judgement Day theme and the image of righteousness personified by

Guthlac" ("The Old English *Christ*" 9), thus allowing for earlier explanations of these

introductory lines as separate, while also considering them part of the overall *Guthlac A*

as a segue into the meat of the poem. Calder argues that "*Guthlac A* and *Guthlac B* have

no doubt always existed as distinct compositions, yet their placement in the Exeter

manuscript suggests that someone intended them to approximate a single account of the

saint's life and death" ("Guthlac A" 66). If the *Exeter Book* is viewed as a cohesive

manuscript, then Calder's argument is surely accurate; yet the question still remains to be

answered in future studies as to why the compiler would choose two versions of the

saint's life which are as different as these poems, in scope and structure, for placement in this collection.

Scholars have proffered a variety of interpretations of *Guthlac A*, separate from its connection to analogues. Roberts proposes that the "poet's main concern is the souls of just men and he chooses Guthlac in illustration of one of the many ways in which a man may aspire to the kingdom of heaven. The purpose is didactic" (*The Guthlac Poems* 29). However, Robin Norris asserts that "there is no critical consensus regarding the topic" of *Guthlac A* or *B*, but that the most frequently examined feature of the poem is the "significance of the poem's burial mound, *beorg*, or landscape" (162). Norris emphasizes instead that "*Guthlac A* retells the story of the saint's temptations, but here the saint most often defeats the demons rhetorically, after heated debate" (162-6). Thomas D. Hill questions why *Guthlac A* chooses to focus on the "decline of the world" and the imminent apocalypse, when the action of the poem focuses on Guthlac's battle for his hermitage. Hill suggests that the reason is because "Guthlac's life involves the direct and dramatic intervention of the supraphenomenal upon the life of an English saint" and "consists of warfare against demons" and the influence of angels and Bartholemew ("The Age of Man" 19).

Muir's summation of the import of this poem focuses on "its extended exploration of the 'psychomachia' allegory" and suggests that it is an exemplary hagiography because "Guthlac relives the life of Christ in the trials and temptations that he suffers at the hands of the band of devils" (436). However, as Calder notes, "*Guthlac A* misses the mark of 'pure allegory,'" namely because the battle is over land, not Guthlac himself, and that the

"'didactic or 'homiletic' quality of *A* works against the presence of a literary allegory" because the "moralizations" prevent true allegorical representation (*"Guthlac A"* 77- 8). Whether or not *Guthlac A* is a true allegory, allegorical elements remain, such as the contested land as a representation of a larger theme: the battle of good and evil for control of the entire earth.

What is noticeably absent from criticism on both *Guthlac* poems is any in-depth discussion of the elements of almsgiving or Christian lordship in the poem. Yet, these two elements together comprise a focused theme in the poem as well as the entire manuscript. In *Guthlac A*, the focus is on a noble moving from a wealthy, privileged life to a chosen "higher" path to God. A central lesson of *Guthlac A,* other than the larger theme of being a good Christian, is that because Guthlac (a noble descended from kings) has resisted worldly wealth, he is supported by God in his spiritual combat, and will earn heavenly treasure, the gift of eternal life. This is a new sort of gift exchange, which promises Anglo-Saxon Christians a pure form of eternal wealth in exchange for giving corruptible and earthly wealth.

The beginning section of the poem (lines 1-92) is a long homiletic or didactic exhortation for Christian living. In these lines, a narrator (who is described as an angel from God) discusses the state of men's souls and the necessary actions men must take in order to gain entrance into heaven. In particular, nobles' behavior is referenced as a center-point, with the appropriate treatment of material wealth, specifically the necessity of alms, referenced as particularly important components of salvation.

In the first twenty-four lines, we are introduced to an angel, who speaks to the "sawl" [soul], and on "godes ærende" (56) informs the soul that because of good living, that soul may now enter heaven (6a-10a). Lines 10b through 24b continue to explain the state of heaven and the requirements for entrance into that kingdom, with the implicit didactic message that if one does as God requires, then one shall be rewarded with permanent joys in heaven, rather than the decaying, frail components of earthly life. Of particular note in these introductory lines are two images which draw the audience's attention to power structures in place in both the worldly and eternal realms. The audience is informed by the narrator that those who fulfill the Lord's judgements while on earth will earn eternal reward (14b-16a), where "se hyhsta / ealra cyninga cyning ceastrum wealdeð" (16b-17b) [The highest / king of all kings wields powers over the cities]. This image of the king controlling the cities calls to mind the secular system of Anglo-Saxon lordship, and seems to place the exchange of good works and obedience to God in the same mold as the secular lord-thane relationship, complete with gift exchange and protection in exchange for being a loyal thane to the Lord. As the poem progresses, this allegiance to a greater King than earthly rulers is repeatedly referenced, including the hagiographic commonplace image of the saint as a warrior of God.

A secondary comparison between an earthly power structure and a heavenly relationship is also represented in these lines. After explaining the permanence of God's kingdom (18), another group of souls is confirmed to be recipients of eternal life: those who teach Christ's law:

þider soðfæstra   sawla motun

cuman æfter cwealme,   þa þe her Cristes æ

læra∂ ond læsta∂,   ond his lof ræra∂. (22-24)

[Just souls may   go to Heaven,

come there after death,   they who teach and fulfill

Christ's law, and His praise exult   while they are here on earth.]

Is this a reference to those same monks or clerics who may be using this poem (and other

poems in the *Exeter Book*) to instruct lay people in Christian living? These lines

specifically reference those who teach Christian principles, parallel with Christ's role as

an Interpreter and Fulfillment of God's law. This could signal a variety of messages to the

audience and is an affirmation of the central role and importance of Christian teachers to

those the clerics are educating.

As the introductory homiletic section continues, the audience is informed that

while there are holy men in England (30-34) and those who are clean of crimes may be

counted as holy (28-29), there is also a substantial portion of Anglo-Saxons who give in

to temptations (37b-42b). But, as frequently addressed in the poems of the *Exeter Book*,

love of worldly matters is foolish, as the world will eventually end:

     Forþon se mon ne þearf

to þisse worulde   wyrpe gehycgan,

þæt he us fægran   gefean bringe

ofer þa niþas   þe we nu dreoga∂, (46b-49b)

     [Therefore man need not

think about   this world's recovery,

but instead think that He may   bring us fair rejoicing

over these evils   which we now suffer.]

Roberts argues that lines 35-58 include "many of the conventional ideas of Old English 'elegiac' verse, for example the passing and failing of *eorþan blœd*, the unrest of the world and a falling off in God's worship, and the impossibility of improvement before the end of creation" (*The Guthlac Poems* 31). This eschatological focus situates *Guthlac A* within the wider Old English poetic canon, including other poems in the *Exeter Book* which are focused on preventing the damnation which results from un-Christian living.

The angel continues the catechism, and notes that "middle earth is / in parts divided" (53b-54a) and that upon observation of these divisions ("kingdoms" are a possible meaning for these earth-made divisions), the Lord is displeased.

Dryhten sceawað

hwær þa eardien   þe his æ healden;

gesihð he þa domas   dogra gehwylce

wonian ond wendan   of woruldryhte

ða he gesette   þurh his sylfes word. (54b-58b)

[The Lord perceives

where those who hold   His law live;

He sees their judgements   every day

wane and turn   from worldly law

which He established   through His own word.]

These lines read as a direct indictment of those on earth who pass judgments or make decrees. The first assumption made of who has earned the wrath of God are those holding earthly power: nobles, especially lords. God, the poet continues, will find "fela" or [many] (59a) such earthly leaders or judges, but "fea beoð gecorene" (59b) [few will be chosen]. These earthly leaders have chiefly disobeyed God by not following His law, and instead judge according to a "wrong" view of the system that governs the world. This recognition of faulty human leadership and lawmaking is inserted by the poet in order to prepare the audience for further instruction, which will arguably explain the remedies needed in order to avoid a certain trip to hell.

At line 59, the poem shifts to analyzing the specific ways which people (particularly the aforementioned leaders or nobles) may imitate the very few who follow God's commands. Roberts interprets this movement by the poet as

> his consideration of the ways in which the chosen few serve God. After this long passage on that familiar Anglo-Saxon theme, the transience of all things upon earth, men who place *eorðwela* above *þæt ece lif* [lines 62-71] are unfavourably contrasted with those who yearn for *þa mæran god*, whether in daily life or as anchorites. Such men, the poet declares in the last lines of his first fitt, are God's chosen warriors, and in his closing lines he will remind us again of their behaviour on earth and their heavenly reward. (*The Guthlac Poems* 31-32)

The explication here by Roberts highlights that the focus of those lines is on how better to serve God, and that some specific methods mentioned by the poet are particularly

important for this goal. Those who desire fame do not do the necessary works to get into

heaven (60a-61b). These same men value " eorðwela ofer þæt ece lif" [earthly wealth

above that eternal life] (62). This reiterates the idea that the fixation on earthly wealth is

central to human failure, and something which holy men and women have learned to

resist.

The importance of doing good works is repeated in the next several lines, and the

angel notes that those who earnestly do the will of the Lord will earn a place in heaven as

a reward for their "gewyrhtum" or [works] (70a). The people referred to here as desiring

the use of works in order to increase their closeness to God are ostensibly noble; they are

noted as having great material wealth with which to serve God, mostly by giving it away.

Indeed, those who properly fear God and desire heaven will exchange earthly treasure for

a greater good:

<blockquote>

Swa þas woruldgestreon

on þa mæran god   bimutad weorþað,

þonne þæt gegyrnað   þa þe him godes egsa

hleonaþ ofer heafdum. (70b-73a)

    [So these world treasures

will be exchanged   for the greater good,

when those for whom   the fear of God is over their heads

desire heaven].

</blockquote>

In the next lines, additional guidance for those who "wuldres bycgað" (76b)

[strive after glory] continues the teaching of turning away from material wealth, along

with an important process for doing so: almsgiving.

> sellað ælmessan,   earme frefrað,
>
> beoð rummode   ryhtra gestreona,
>
> lufiað mid lacum   þa þe læs agun,
>
> dæghwam dryhtne þeowiaþ;   he hyra dæde sceawað. (77-80)
>
> [give alms,   comfort the poor,
>
> be liberal   with just gains,
>
> love with gifts   those who possess less,
>
> Serve the Lord daily;   He will behold their deeds.]

Roberts notes that among the "specialized vocabulary not general in Old English verse"

but which is used in *Guthlac A*, is the interesting choice of *ælmessan* in line 77 (*The*

Guthlac Poems 50, 51). The poet has specifically chosen to mention the importance of

alms here, as opposed to a more general discussion of generosity in most other poems in

the *Exeter Book*. In the lines that follow to the conclusion of this fitt, these good people

who "give alms" and "comfort the poor" and who show their love through giving will be

protected by the angels of the Lord from those who would persecute them (84b-90b). The

message to the audience, no doubt full of those whose lives are filled with fear from

outside invaders or outside influence, or of danger from an unsteady nobility, is that

through allegiance to the Lord and noble, merciful acts of generosity, they may have the

protection of the greatest King.

Beginning in line 93a, the poem finally shifts to a direct discussion of Guthlac's life. Guthlac's background and transition to a religious life is the subject of the next fifty lines, and is provided by the poet not only to serve as a backstory for Guthlac's subsequent spiritual battle, but also to illustrate from the start that Guthlac serves as a model for those nobles who would also give up a life of this world in order to fight for a place in eternity. The usual hagiographical praise of a saint is present, yet some specific aspects of Guthlac's journey to a religious life are highlighted by the poet, seeming to enforce an agenda of generosity and almsgiving. From the start of Guthlac's description, the audience is told that Guthlac "in godes willan / mod gerehte, man eall forseah, / eorðlic æþelu" (95b-97a) [in desire of good / directed his mind, rejected all wickedness/ and earthly grandeur] . The structure of these lines, which place "earthly grandeur" immediately after "wickedness" could signify that a primary definition of that wickedness which Guthlac is rejecting is a focus on earthly *grandeur*, or more specifically, the state of being noble.[1] This description of wickedness, or sin, as necessarily connected with the state of earthly honor is a compelling theme in many hagiographies, and underscores the central argument in this poem against inappropriate use of worldly wealth.

As Guthlac's description continues, the audience is informed that he gave up a youth of pleasure and sin in order to serve God (102b-10a). While the nature of Guthlac's "frecnessa fela" (110a) [many vicious behaviors] is not detailed for the audience, the

---

[1] I am defining this state as noble due to the word I have translated as "grandeur": *æþelu*. This word is most specifically defined as having a noble quality, similar to the word for prince, *æþeling*. This could also be taken as an adjective describing honors automatically accorded to one who is identified as noble.

speaker/poet, (no longer the angel it seems, but now an outside narrator) defends his version of the vita, noting that "Hwæt, we hyrdon oft" (108b) [Yes, we have often heard]. As an appeal is made to a collective "we," this indicates that the poet expected the audience(s) to already be familiar with the Guthlac story. This is a small key to understanding this poem's purpose as propaganda to some extent; if the audience is already familiar with Guthlac's basic story, then there must be other reasons for this particular version, a retelling which, as previously mentioned, other scholars have noted is unique and very different from the central source analogues or other versions of Guthlac's life, including *Guthlac B*. If the changes to the source material are sweeping, as Roberts argues throughout her studies of this poem, and given the scarcity of resources and the usual emphasis placed on using source materials accurately, this transformed *Guthlac A* surely is not just the result of wider creativity on the part of the poet/scribe, but rather reflects a deliberate alteration of the saint's life and teachings.

The retelling of Guthlac's youth continues with the narrator explaining that God has a plan for Guthlac, and that an angel would stop Guthlac's "synna lustas" (110b-13b) [desires for sins] . Before the angel is permitted by God to stop the sins, however, Guthlac must undergo his first trial: participating in inappropriate activities and guidance from two "guardians," a *Psychomachia*-style angel and devil, each trying to convince Guthlac to take their paths of redemption or damnation. The angel informs Guthlac that God rewards the righteous for their "dæda" (123b) [deeds] with "giefe" (124b) [gifts] . However, the devil, figuratively on Guthlac's shoulder, "hyne scyte, þæt he sceaðena gemot / nihtes sohte ond þurh neþinge / wunne æfter worulde" (127-29) [persuaded him,

that he a criminals' meeting / by night should seek and through villainous acts / strive

after the world (worldly goods)]. The major sin that Guthlac is being tempted to commit

by this devil is the malicious acquisition of material wealth, in contrast to the repetitive

rejoinders in the poem and *Exeter Book* so far to renounce worldly wealth in favor of

acquiring heavenly gifts.

At last, God decides to stop the temptations of Guthlac's youth, and prompts

Guthlac's angel to chase the devil away and in turn provide Guthlac with a

"beorhge" (140a) [dwelling] in which to make his hermitage (133-40). And thus Guthlac

lives, fighting "ealdfeonda" (141b) [old fiends], and striving for heaven. Throughout the

poet's description of Guthlac's purposes in the hermitage and in the subsequent spiritual

battle which Guthlac will endure at the hands of the assorted devils, the audience is

repeatedly reminded of Guthlac's lack of "gitsunga / lænes lifwelan" (150b-51a)

[covetousness / for the frail goods of life] . Guthlac declines to keep his former state of

greed and love of worldly joy because he wants to emulate the martyrs (161-66b) and due

to his fear of God (167b-69b). The reasons for Guthlac's renunciation of the world are

clear to an audience who has already been informed repeatedly of the failure of worldly

wealth in finding favor with God.

As Guthlac takes the land, he also takes up battle against devils which hold the

land God has given him (160b-69). This portion of the poem, which introduces the

devils' torments and Guthlac's subsequent fight against them, has been singled out by

Charles D. Wright as especially significant in pinpointing allusions in the poem. Wright

explains a reference in these lines by the *Guthlac A* poet to 1 John 2.16 (the three

temptations), which C. Abbetmeyer first recognized in 1903 ("The Three Temptations"

341). This is a significant allusion by the *Guthlac A* poet because of the focus in the poem

on the denial of worldly gains in order to gain eternal life. These three temptations in the

first letter of John are the desires of the flesh and eyes, and a focus on worldly pride. As

other sections of 1 John 2 state, "Love not the world, nor the things which are in the

world [. . .] And the world passes away, and the concupiscence thereof: but he that doth

the will of God, abideth for ever" (*DRBO*). Wright explains that while this allusion, and

its accompanying parallel effect between Guthlac and Christ, is a common hagiographical

strategy, the use of the three temptations and other Biblical motifs are not used in Felix's

Vita ("The Three Temptations" 343), which is another example of the poet using his own

creative power and agenda to shape Guthlac's biography apart from any source material.

As Guthlac prepares to battle spiritually the fiends who occupy his God-given

hermitage, he is described as a warrior. He is an "eadig oretta" (176a) [blessed

champion], is bold in war and words (176b, 181b) and girds himself "zealously" (177a)

"mid gæstlicum / wæpnum [ond wædum]" [with ghostly / weapons (and armor)]

(177b-78a). Similar to other Old English descriptions of powerful saints (and indeed, a

warrior Christ in *Dream of the Rood*), this depiction of Guthlac signals to a strong Anglo-

Saxon warrior audience, or at least those who aspire to warrior values, that it is good to

be a warrior as long as one is a warrior for God. This further cements an ideal of

Christian nobility and manhood both in the poem and throughout the *Exeter Book.*

After dressing appropriately for battle, Guthlac's trials begin, and are centered on

facing numerous temptations at the hands of fiends. They threaten him with death and

eternal torment (205-39), but Guthlac is unafraid. Here Guthlac is only able to resist the

demons because he has properly prepared by praying and acting righteously, and has thus

guarded himself against their snares. As previously explained, his method for preparing

for this spiritual battle was the renunciation of worldly wealth, which was the only way

by which God would protect him and sanctify his actions. Guthlac's fear of God leads to

his denial of earthly pleasures. In recompense, God provides him with the necessary tools

to fight evil.

Guthlac explains to the fiends that he is not "swa fealog" (246a) [so destitute]

and that God will bring him "spowende sped" (254a) [prosperous success]. The fiends

quickly retort that Guthlac is "godes yrming" (272b) or [God's poor one] and that

because of this lack of basic goods Guthlac will be unable to feed or care for himself

(272a-77b). Guthlac, however, is sure of God's salvation, and sees his renunciation of

worldly goods and wealth as necessary:

> Is min hyht mid god
>
> ne ic me eorðwelan   owiht sinne,
>
> ne me mid mode   micles gyrne,
>
> ac me dogra gehwam   dryhten sendeð
>
> þurh monnes hond   mine þearfe. (318b-22)
>
>   [My hope is with God,
>
> I do not care at all   for the earth's wealth,
>
> nor do I desire much   with my heart,
>
> but the Lord sends   my need to me

each day through the hand of man.]

Guthlac relies on God in this fashion because he wants to please Christ with "leofran

lace" (306-07) [dearer gift]. This is a didactic message to the audience via Guthlac's

explanation for his odd behavior. Guthlac does not desire the earth's bounty, but *through*

the "hand of men" is given sustenance from God. Alms are being depicted here: through

almsgiving by righteous men, God provides for Guthlac all that he needs, an explanation

for why it is essential to give alms in order to support not just the poor and "needy" but

specifically alms as support for religious/holy men. This is also a validation of secular

Christian men in that God is relying on all good Christian people, no matter if they are

holy or not, to provide for any of those in need of help. By almsgiving, they literally can

do the work of the Lord.

  After this first series of temptations, from which Guthlac emerges victorious, the

saint meditates with a particular focus on giving up all worldly things (325b-47b).

Guthlac has, of course, "forlet longeþas lænra dreama" (330) [long forsaken transient

joys] . He prays for all souls' "gesynta" (332a) [prosperity] , and he often tries to find

how he can "læsast brucan" (338) [least enjoy] anything of this world . The focus of

Guthlac's rest in these lines is again on the rejection of worldly goods. Admittedly, denial

of comforts is a normative component of medieval hagiography; however, the number of

repetitions of this subject throughout *Guthlac A* points the audience to the central

message that good Christians are able to part with worldly goods, as God will provide for

their needs, which in turn allows those disposed goods to help those less fortunate.

Guthlac speaks in this part of the poem, and he focuses his speech on the relationship between himself as obedient student, and God as his teacher, with his goal to remain "on þæs lareowes / wære" (359b-360a) [in his teacher's covenant]. Furthermore, Guthlac wonders how he will find salvation without obeying God's teachings, and concludes that it would not be possible (361-68). The focus here on obedience and following a leader's teaching, in this case the teachings of God, could also signify the relationship between Anglo-Saxon teachers and students overall, and could serve to reinforce that students should heed their teachers, who in turn were probably clerics required to obey the dicta of their particular order. This possibility reflects upon the hypotheses made earlier in this study regarding possible roles for the *Exeter Book* to play, most importantly that of a didactic tool.

A folio has been lost after line 368b, which means, according to Roberts's estimation, "about seventy verse lines have been lost" (*The Guthlac Poems* 33). This takes place as Guthlac is speaking to his guardian angel, and when the text resumes, Guthlac is discoursing with demons, and is in the middle of a phrase arguing that God will preserve him, even if the demons kill his mortal body (370-75), a possible allusion to the book of Daniel, in the three youths who sing amidst the torture of Nebuchadnezzar, a story recounted in *Azarius* in the *Exeter Book*. Amidst the reasons Guthlac gives for the Lord's salvation of his soul is the message of rejecting earthly wealth in favor of heavenly wealth. Guthlac informs the demons that when he dies, his spirit will go to heaven, where he will "fægran / botles bruceð" (382b-83a) [a fair / dwelling enjoy]. The place of enjoyment, "botles," can also be translated as "mansion," leading us to an

allusion by Guthlac here to John 14.2, where Christ tells his disciples after the last supper

that "in my Father's house there are many mansions. If not, I would have told you:

because I go to prepare a place for you" (*DRBO*). In trust of Christ's words, Guthlac

believes he will receive heavenly wealth, including a mansion or dwelling in God's

house, in exchange for forgoing earthly comfort. Furthermore, as Guthlac explains to the

devils,

> Ne sceal se dryhtnes þeow
>
> in his modsefan   mare gelufian
>
> eorþan æhtwelan   þonne his anes gemet (386b-388b)
>
> [Nor shall the Lord's servant
>
> in his mind   love glory,
>
> earth's riches,   more than his own conduct]

Thus, a true servant of the Lord will not love riches more than his own good behavior,

meaning that behaving God's rules is the most important part of conduct, and the *love of*

riches is notably not representative of being a good Christian. Because of "Cristes

lof" (393b) [Christ's love], "ne won he æfter worulde" (399a) [he (Guthlac) strove not

after the world]. Christ and God protect Guthlac because this higher moral spirit is in

him, and he adamantly strives to reject the "world," meaning the transient trappings and

riches of the world.

     The end of this fitt directly speaks to the contemporary audience of the poem, and

inquires about Guthlac

Hwylc wæs mara þonne se?

An oretta   ussum tidum

cempa gecyðeð   þæt him Crist fore

woruldlicra ma   wundra gecyðde. (400b-403b)

[Which was greater than he?

A hero   in our times,

known as a champion,   so that Christ

manifested more   worldly wonders for him.]

Guthlac is described as a hero, a Christian warrior fit to be called "champion," and appeals directly to an audience vested in Anglo-Saxon ideals of strength and prowess. This description of Guthlac as an ideal warrior, although a warrior for Christ, is mentioned repeatedly in this poem as it calls to mind the trope of the heavenly warrior, previously connected to the warrior-Christ in *Dream of the Rood* and present in other Anglo-Saxon hagiographies of the period. This maneuver ensures that the audience remains receptive of Guthlac as a role model, even when he espouses ideals that may be unpopular with a secular audience, in particular the renunciation of material goods and the gifting of these goods to the "needy."

In the next lines, the demons (with God's injunction that Guthlac not feel pain during the devils' torments) raise Guthlac up into the air to view the world below (412a-14a). What Guthlac is presented with, however, is not necessarily a temptation to him, but rather a tableau of how other "holy" men are tempted:

eall sceawode

under haligra   hyrda gewealdum

in mynsterum   monna gebæru,

þara þe hyra lifes   þurh lust brucan,

idlum æhtum   ond oferwlencum,

gierelum gielplicum,   swa bið geoguðe þeaw,

þær þæs ealdres   egsa ne styreð. (414b-20b)

[(he was) shown entirely

under holy   guardians' power

the behavior of men   in monasteries,

those who enjoyed   the pleasure of life,

in vain possessions   and in excessive pomps,

proud garments;   so is the practice of youth,

where they are not restrained   by fear of the elder.]

This demonstration of the lax behavior of monks is considered a sure win for the demons.

How could Guthlac explain how men of his own holy station revel in worldly goods,

most likely given to them via almsgiving?

Norris sees this section as depicting monks who "live their lives *þurh lust*, by

enjoying useless possessions and ostentatious clothing rather than using such items for

sustenance (as does Guthlac, who has given up the enjoyment of linen and woolen

garments and rich foods in Chapter XXVIII of the vita)" (167). Norris is correct, although

he ties this section to the Felix analogue. Yet, this indictment by the *Guthlac A* poet is

unique among the Guthlac accounts, leading one to question why the poet and compiler

chose to alter the root story of Guthlac. According to Roberts, Rieger in 1869 notes that

the "passage in which Guthlac is shown and taunted with the lax behavior of monks

[. . .] is a tale of which Felix knew nothing" (*The Guthlac Poems* 19).[2] Roberts later

argues that this unique section of this version of the saint's life is "unparalleled in Old

English verse, and the *Guthlac A* poet is unusual for his time in regarding the theme as

one suitable for English poetry. Long before the days of the friars so berated by

Langland, here is an English poet choosing to comment on the misdemeanours of men in

religion" ("*Guthlac A*" 12). Roberts does not accurately assess the *Guthlac A* poet's

achievement here, as there are several other instances of Old English poetry which

criticizes churchmen, including *Seasons for Fasting* from the Cotton MS. Otho BXI, as

well as prose texts including Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi Ad Anglos*, throughout Aldhelm's

works, and Alfred's *Preface* to *The Pastoral Care*. This addition by the *Guthlac A* poet,

separate from any material gleaned from Felix's text, is significant particularly in the

wider thematic context of the *Exeter Book* manuscript. In a collection produced by monks

for an audience composed of fellow monks and, as argued here, nobility, it is a clear

commentary on the nature of both the giving of alms and the appropriate reception of

those same alms. As this is not an unique commentary on "abuse" of alms by monks

within the Old English corpus, it is likely that similar behaviors among monks in real life

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[2] The text referenced here by Roberts is: Rieger, Max. "Uber Cynevulf." *Zeitschrift fur deutsche Philologie.* i (1869), 325, n. 1.

was an ongoing problem in Christendom, years before the creation of the *Exeter Book,*

hence the need for sweeping changes, as in the case of the Benedictine Revival.

For example, according to several chapters in the sixth century *Regula Benedicti*

monks are required to have humility and, particularly, not to revel in material

possessions. Chapter XXXIII dictates that monks should not have personal ownership of

any property, and Chapter LV states that items of clothing specifically should be sparse

(Benedict), most definitely not of the pompous and ornamental variety displayed by the

monks shown to Guthlac. These monks are resplendent in the vanities of earthly life, and

the devils are sure that this obvious hypocrisy will change Guthlac's heart.

The last two lines of the quoted section above are compelling, as they attribute the

young monks' behavior to their youth, and to the qualities of youth which are not

"restrained" by fear of elders. Does this mean to imply that the monastery where these lax

monks reside does not have adequate *rule*? This could lead to some future speculation on

the dating of this poem, and whether it may predate the Benedictine Revolution, or rather

whether it is intended to serve as an indictment after the switch to Benedictine Rule is

well underway.

Guthlac resists the devils' temptation, and is placed gently back into his flowering

hermitage (421-45). The demons remain nearby and continue to "afflict" Guthlac with

their "angry insults" (447b-48a), yet Guthlac remains strong and courageous thanks to the

Lord's guidance, in similar fashion to earlier segments of the poem. Guthlac's response to

the demons also repeats the same refrain found throughout the poem, as he explains that

God guides him because Guthlac himself is good, and the devils cannot hope for

deliverance from God (478-80). Pertinent to my argument, Guthlac provides a compelling

response to the devils' example of the "bad monks:"

Setton me in edwit   þæt ic eaðe forbær

rume regulas   ond reþe mod

geongra monna   in godes templum.

Woldan þy gehyrwan   haligra lof,

sohtun þa sæmran,   ond þa sellan no

demdan æfter dædum.   Ne beoð þa dyrne swa þeah.

Ic eow soð wiþ þon   secgan wille.

God scop geoguðe   ond gumena dream;

 ne magun þa æfteryld   in þam ærestan

blæde geberan,   ac hy blissiað

worulde wynnum,   oððæt wintra rim

gegæð in þa geoguðe,   þæt se gæst lufað

onsyn ond ætwist   yldran hades,

ðe gemete monige   geond middangeard

þeowiað in þeawum.   þeodum ywaþ

wisdom weras,   wlencu forleosað,

siððan geoguðe geað   gæst aflihð. (488-504)

[You said to me in reproach   that I readily endured

the unrestrained rules   and the savage mind

of young men   in God's temples.

You would hear   the praise of the holy,

but you sought the inferior,   and did not judge the better

according to their deeds.   But shall they not be hidden.

I will then say to you   the truth.

God created youth   and the joy of men;

the young generations   may not at first

bear fruit,   but instead they rejoice

in the world's pleasures,   until that number of winters

passes for the youth,   into the time when the spirit loves

the aspect and substance   of elder state,

which many people   over middle-earth

serve properly in conduct.   The wisdom of men is shown

to people,   they lay pride aside,

when from youth   the spirit goes fleeing.]

Here Guthlac explains to his tormentors that while youth may rejoice in the trappings of

the world, after a "share of winters" those young monks will crave real wisdom indicative

of an "elder state." By most accounts, Guthlac seems to rationalize the young monks'

behavior, even though throughout much of the rest of this poem such focus on worldly

goods is depicted as negative. Even though Guthlac provides a "gentler interpretation of

misconduct," Roberts suggests that the *Guthlac A* poet is still firm in his indictment, and

that "the criticism stands, revealing to us a poet prepared to comment on social

issues" ("*Guthlac A*" 13). Under this focus, even with a more tolerant attitude towards the

young monks, Guthlac is reprimanding them because he knows that of which he speaks,

for he himself was once this type of misguided youth, and it was only by the wisdom of

age and the guidance of God that the saint was able to turn away from worldly wealth and

turn to righteousness. Guthlac fights the temptation because he has wisdom from

experience, a quality which an Anglo-Saxon audience would respect, perhaps more so

than wisdom gained from simple book learning or a homily.

Guthlac continues to suffer his "portion" of pain at the hands of his tormentors,

although the Lord only allows him to feel what he can handle (515b-17a). The narrator of

the poem reminds the audience in this final third of the poem that Guthlac is a

commendable model to be followed, because God has given him the tools of wisdom to

defeat his enemies (526-56). Guthlac is then brought by the demons to another

temptation, this time the "heldore" "door of hell" (559b), presumably to terrify him into

insanity or a mistrust in God (564-575). Importantly, here the demons accuse Guthlac

once more of transgressions, focusing on the Christian attribute of "words and works":[3]

> Ne eart ðu gedefe,   ne dryhtnes þeow
>
> clæne gecostad,   ne cempa god,
>
> wordum ond weorcum   wel gecyþed,
>
> halig in heortan.   Nu þu in helle scealt
>
> deope gedufan,   nales dryhtnes leoht
>
> habban in heofonum,   heahgetimbru,

---

[3] The focus on performing "words" and "works" in order to achieve salvation is ever present in early through medieval Christianity (and beyond, primarily in the Catholic Church). It is frequently addressed through both Testaments, and is a specific focus of James and 2 Thessalonians 2.16-17.

seld on swegle,   forþon þu synna to fela,

facna gefremedes   in flæschoman. (579-86)

["You are not gentle, nor the thoroughly proven

Lord's servant,   nor a good champion,

in words and works   well-manifested,

holy in your heart.   Now into hell you shall

deeply dive,   nor the Lord's light

(will you) have in heaven,   those high structures,

or a seat in the firmament,   because you perpetrated

too many sins and treacheries   in the body].

They directly accuse Guthlac of not being the Lord's servant, or worthy of being called "good," for that matter, because he has not shown his goodness adequately via words and works. In addition, these demons explain that Guthlac should be punished in hell because of sins he has committed. This seems to refer back to the worldly sins of Guthlac's youth, due to the emphasis on these sins and treacheries being "perpetrated in the body" (585b-86b). This section of the poem serves to warn the audience that they must submit themselves to a more Christian life focused on good words and works, or else they may themselves be thrown into the fire of hell.

Guthlac is unfazed by these remonstrations, and expresses his surety not only in his good actions, but in the actions the Lord does in recompense for his good works. Guthlac explains that he obeys the Lord "þeawum ond geþyncðum, ond him þoncian / ealra þara giefena þe god gescop" (605-606) [in practices and thoughts, and Him thank /

for all the gifts which (he) God created]. Guthlac has and will continue to "weorþian wordum ond dædum" (619) [worship by words and deeds] and thus the Lord will preserve him (637a-57a), but the devils unfortunately will suffer eternally for their sins and cannot hope to receive mercy from the Lord (623a-36b). The poet takes nearly eighty lines here to explain why the demons have no hope of an eternal home with God, a passage which reinforces the necessity for appropriate behavior on behalf of all Christians. Within this long condemnation, Guthlac reiterates that heaven is a "rice" [kingdom] and that the Lord is fundamentally a "ryht cyning" (682) [righteous King] who has sent Bartholomew, His "dyre [. . .] þegn" (693a) [dear [. . .] thane] to Guthlac as "mundbora" (695a) [protector]. The poet is extrapolating the relationship between humans and God in terms of the Anglo-Saxon lord-thane relationship. This syncretic move, much as is used in other poems like *The Dream of the Rood*, explains to the audience how their relationship with God should ideally work in terms of their understanding of the secular relationships they follow as members of the nobility. This grounds the argument for almsgiving as necessary to the rule of performing "good works" within a process familiar and followed in secular society.

Bartholomew recognizes Guthlac as his brother and because of Guthlac's righteousness in the face of the demons' torments, says, "sceal ic his word ond his weorc in gewitnesse / dryhtne lædon—he his dæde conn" (720-21) [I shall his words and his works in witness / bring to the Lord—He shall know his deeds]. Bartholomew not only stops the attacks of the demons (on God's behalf) but also names Guthlac his *brother*, which taken in context of the Christ-thane relationship explained previously in the poem,

means that he counts Guthlac among God's thanes. Bartholomew offers to witness for

Guthlac, because Guthlac has proven himself in spiritual combat, and the Lord, and

presumably the entire house of the Lord, will know of Guthlac's deeds and bravery. This

is clearly a touchstone for comparing Christian societal structure and traditional, Anglo-

Saxon (or Germanic) societal structure. Guthlac gains fame on earth for his good

Christian deeds, but more importantly, he earns fame in heaven for these same actions.

He is a new type of ideal noble warrior, one who speaks directly to the fame-gaining

ambition of Anglo-Saxon society.

As the poem moves to its conclusion, Guthlac is transported back to a transformed

hermitage, resplendent with greenery and wildlife. The narrator reminds the audience that

this great story of Guthlac "geeodon in ussera / tida timan" (753b-55a) [happened in our /

period of time]. This reminder that a fellow Anglo-Saxon nobleman was successful in

achieving sanctity makes the entire poem more authentic for the audience. This prepares

the audience for the final messages of the poem, which shift heavily once more to the

homiletic, and encourage them to emulate Guthlac as an ideal Christian Anglo-Saxon,

rather than just a distant saint who has achieved impossible feats.

There is a change here to the overall teaching of the poem that men are required to

do good works, especially give to the needy; instead, God is depicted as doing the giving.

> Wile se waldend   þæt we wisdom a
>
> snyttrum swelgen,   þæt his soð fore us
>
> on his giefena gyld   genge weorðe,
>
> ða he us to are   ond to ondgiete

syleð ond sendeð,   sawlum rymeð

liþe lifwegas   leohte geræhte. (763-68)

[The Lord wishes   that we always and prudently

consume his wisdom,   so that His truth before us,

His golden gifts,   are current,

which he gives and sends to us in mercy

and for understanding, and which clears for souls

the brightly defined,   smooth path of life.]

Because of Guthlac's "dagas ond dæde" [days and deeds] the Lord has given to him a better life (772-80). After some time in his hermitage, Guthlac dies and his soul is brought to heaven, where "Him wæs lean geseald, / setl on swegle" (784b-85a) [To him reward was given, / a seat in heaven]. None of these events are surprising to the audience, who have been told throughout the poem that Guthlac has earned reward for his good works. Yet here it is God's works that are emphasized, and in turn, Christ's actions which direct Guthlac's course. Christ is mentioned separately from his Father at the close of the poem in regard to his relationship with the sainted Guthlac:

Is him bearn godes

milde mundbora,   meahtig dryhten,

halig hyrde,   heofonrices weard. (787b-89)

[To him is the Son of God

a kind protector,   the mighty Lord,

a holy shepherd,   the Guardian of heaven's realm.]

Note here the juxtaposition of two types of qualities of Christ as King: gentle and strong. Christ is "kind" and a "shepherd," yet he is also "mighty" and a "Guardian." Christ as the model king is gentle and kind to those who are good, but he is also strong and mighty, defending His Father's kingdom. This use of Christ as a model for ideal lordship is present throughout the *Exeter Book*, most prominently in the three "Christ" poems which begin the manuscript, and which are discussed in the following chapter. *Guthlac A*, through this message of good works as essential to good Christian practice and good Christian lordship, serves the overarching didactic theme of the *Exeter Book*. This need for lords to give alms is also carried into *The Phoenix*, a poem with strong allegorical elements and a central figure considered by most scholars to be representative of Christ as the ideal model for lordship, specifically kingship.

The Phoenix

The poem traditionally known as *The Phoenix* is one of several animal-focused poems in the *Exeter Book,* and follows a number of poems which are quite obviously religious: the three *Christ* poems, *Guthlac A* and *B*, and *Azarias* (retitled by Muir in his edition as *The Canticles of the Three Youths*). *The Phoenix* follows as a religious poem in keeping with the manuscript's purpose, but changes the genre characteristics of the manuscript up until that point into something more in the style of allegory, rather than the more straightforward character depiction in the preceding poems. Although this poem is generally classed as an allegory, there is some critical disagreement over this assigned

genre, as well as what the central figure of the phoenix is meant to symbolize. Cross

explains that "the Phoenix represents, first, the good Christian who by his deeds gains

admittance to his heavenly home after the Fire in the last days and the general

resurrection, and second, Christ in his resurrection" ("The Conception" 135). Yet other

critics, such as Judith Garde, argue that such simple symbolism does not fully explain the

function of the mythical bird in the poem, and that the Phoenix "never actually represents

either the risen Christ or the good Christian [. . .]. It is intended first to recall and then

explicitly to exemplify each in a reiterated didactic context" (196), meaning that instead

of the bird being the actual Christ or a Christian, it is a teaching model. Regardless of

whether the bird is meant to be taken as a literal symbol or a vehicle for teaching, the

Phoenix has long been symbolic of Christ and those who follow in His image, and is

meant in this poem to support allegorically the catechesis of good works, specifically

alms, as necessary for salvation.

Blake in his 1964 edition of the poem explains the usual critical division of *The*

Phoenix, noting that it is "divided into two parts (1-380, 381-677), the first of which

relates the story of the phoenix and the second supplies the allegorical

interpretation" (17). Blake, however, notes that it is "dangerous" to divide the poem in

this way, presumably because it detracts from the artistic unity of the poem (17). Nearly a

decade later, Calder also argues against the artificial division of the poem into two parts,

"the fable and its allegorization," because both the Phoenix and its paradise are

"unitive" ("The Vision" 168). Calder's conclusion is that this poem is not "formal

Christian allegory" but rather is intended as a "vision" of the "relationship between

beauty and salvation" (168). Furthermore, Calder argues, "the classification of *The Phoenix* as a Christian allegory has obscured the perception that the poem may contain a single symbolic vision," that of a paradise that humanity should strive for, instead of the focus on "strict allegorical readings" of the poem, because such a focus has led to "an exegetical system so rigid that it falsifies the poem itself" (167). While a false division of the poem does detract from the poem's central unity (and is a division the poet did not intend), more recent critics have retained artificial divisions in the poem in order to illuminate all functions of the text.

Muir, relying on the work of Blake and Garde, summarizes the current critical consensus on the content of *The Phoenix*, explaining that "the first section of *Phoenix* (ll. 1-380) is a free and creative adaption and development of Lactantius' *Carmen de ave phoenice*, by a poet well versed in Christian theology" (468). However, as Blake cautions, "the English poet was by no means a slavish imitator and he adapted the original to suit his own ends" (25), and these ends included removing classical references and situations in favor of Anglo-Saxon Christian topoi and God (Blake 27-31). In Blake's summation of the history of the Phoenix myth, he notes that "early in the Christian era the phoenix story achieved its greatest popularity [...] Although not all works in which the phoenix appears are specifically Christian, the major development of the story takes place within a Christian context" (10). According to Blake, the first account of the Phoenix story within a Christian framework occurs in the *Physiologus*, "a collection of animal fables with Christian morals, which was written in the near east possibly as early as the second century after Christ" (11). The attribution to Lactantius as

a source predates Blake's edition, and comes with many pitfalls, including the concern

whether Lactantius "wrote the poem before or after his conversion to Christianity (17).

Blake goes on to argue that it is not likely that Lactantius wrote *Carmen* after his

conversion (18), and Blake is probably correct because of the frequently discussed

"pagan" elements in the *Carmen*. However, Blake writes that "even if Lactantius was not

a Christian when he wrote the poem, the *Carmen* was almost certainly introduced into the

Christian tradition about the phoenix shortly after its composition, and Christian writers

interpreted the poem in a Christian way long before *The Phoenix* was written" (18). This

is significant to this study, as it should be clear to most critics of this poem that *The*

Phoenix as it stands in the *Exeter Book* is explicitly a Christian poem, whereas other

poems in the manuscript, such as *Wulf and Eadwacer* or the riddles, have been read as

primarily secular.

Others, such as E. K. C. Gorst, have argued this first segment is inspired not only

by Lactantius but also by earlier Christian Latin works or directly from scripture. Phillip

Pulisano, for example, identified Psalm 101.7-8 as a source for lines 199b-207 of the

poem (3). Gorst has recently detailed new proof that the poet of the *Phoenix* also

integrated "elements from three other Latin poems: Blossius Aemilus Dracontius' *De*

laudibus dei; Alcimus Ecdicius Avitus' *De origine mundi*, and Flauius Cresconius

Corippus' *In laudem Iustini Augusti minoris*" (136-37). Gorst explains that this discovery

is significant because it illustrates that "the *Phoenix*-poet does not simply expand the

Carmen [. . .] he carefully selects, translates, and integrates lines from a number of

Christian Latin poems" (137). However, Cross argues that *The Phoenix*, as it is intended

to teach, by necessity needed substantial revision from any classical analogues: "The Old English poet cannot do other than omit [. . .] in transferring the ideas to a different poetic idiom, especially in a such a clearly didactic poem, which assumes an audience less knowledgeable than the author" ("The Conception" 130). This firmly argues for a poet who not only was literate in Latin, but had access to multiple Latin Christian texts to borrow from when creating *The Phoenix*. This is a monastic poet of not just erudition, but significant artistic skill. It follows that such a poet would craft so carefully, using multiple sources to build his poem, to communicate a significant catechetical message.

Muir explains that "the second section of the poem (ll. 381-677) is not based on any specific source. However, it is clear that the poet was familiar with Ambrose's *Hexameron*, and probably also with a number of classical descriptions of the Phoenix (or excerpts from them transmitted by the Fathers)" (468). According to Blake, the symbol of the phoenix "was commonly interpreted by the fathers as symbolising the resurrection of man, and there are thus many sources which the poet of the *The Phoenix* could have drawn upon" (20), but he also agrees with the argument for specific use of Ambrose's *Hexameron*, because of the large number of similarities between that text and *The Phoenix* (20). However, there are some differences between the two texts which are striking, particularly because of what the poet changed when creating *The Phoenix*:

> The allegory is then developed in *The Phoenix* by the poet's statement that a Christian builds himself a nest in that tree by reason of his good works; a similar injunction is found in Ambrose. Each then states what these good deeds are. But in the Latin they are merely enumerated as *castitas,*

misericordia and *justitia,* whereas the Old English poet expatiates on each

virtue and does not follow the same order found in the Latin. (20)

Other than these virtues of chastity, pity/mercy and justice, the *Phoenix* poet makes

specific and repeated mention of charity, especially in the form of giving alms, which

changes the central catechetical message significantly.

In interpreting *The Phoenix*, most critics agree that the Phoenix represents Christ,

as well as the Good Christian, and his journey is representative of the path that all

Christians must follow to achieve eternal life in the mode of Christ. McFadden suggests

that the figure of the Phoenix "might also have struck a millennial chord among those

searching for signs of the approaching end" ("Sweet Odors" 200), making the Phoenix an

ideal symbol for redemption in a poem placed in a manuscript dated to the late tenth

century. In line with these ideas that the poem is meant to lead sinners to a better path

before it is too late, Muir argues that *The Phoenix* is "about Purgatory rather than an

earthly paradise [. . .]. The land is paradisical because those in Purgatory have already

been judged worthy of salvation and will enter into the heavenly kingdom once their sins

and blemishes have been burned away by the purgatorial fires" (468). This need for

redemption from sins runs throughout the *Exeter Book* manuscript, and houses the central

theme of almsgiving as essential to good Christianity, as well as good Christian lordship.

Garde argues that in poems like *Christ III*, which depict the Day of Judgment, the focus is

on those "sinners for whom repentance might come too late" (201). However, the poet of

The Phoenix takes a different course, and "encourages those warriors of God who

actively *choose* Life, stressing the Christian concept of new life after the judgmental

flame, not simply the resurrection of flesh. *All* men will rise before Judgment but the former condition has most diligently to be earned" (201-2). Multiple critics bolster these arguments that the poem offers advice to make a successful Christian journey. Cross theorizes that *The Phoenix* is a "poetic homily," following a homiletic structure ("The Conception" 137). Complementary to Cross, Garde argues that the poem is primarily didactic, and that its central message is that for those who live a good Christian life, "new life after death [. . .] is ultimately achievable" (196). As a close reading of *The Phoenix* will demonstrate, the clearest path to achieving this "new life" is by way of giving alms.

In contrast to the relative dearth of criticism dealing with the subject of alms or almsgiving for other poems in the *Exeter Book,* there is some limited critical analysis of this topic for *The Phoenix.* According to Blake, the poem argues that "to shelter in Christ man must build a nest by means of his good works, which correspond to the spices used by the phoenix to construct his nest. By these good deeds a man earns admission to the heavenly home" (lines 489-90), but must wait first for the apocalypse, after which he is judged by God, and "the blessed are happy, for they have won salvation by their good works and they rise to glory having been purged by fire (518 ff.)" (Blake 32). The Phoenix is modeled on the resurrected Son and thereby acts as a model for those men who wish to earn positive judgment from God. Garde characterizes this ideal Christian, who appropriately follows this path, as a "monastic warrior" and explains that this type of man "in *Phoenix* gives alms to the poor, bends in pious prayer, shuns evil and fears the Lord" (190). Importantly, the good works that such a warrior does are not optional, but absolutely necessary. Garde compares both *Christ II* and *The Phoenix* to *Blickling Homily*

IV, explaining that "in *Phoenix* (453-55a), almsgiving and the proclamation of the Lord's

mercy to the less fortunate are included among acts considered to be essential" and that

this is a form of "obligatory didacticism" which guides the *Phoenix* and other Old

English religious poetry (204). Thus, a focus of this poem is that good works, especially

and specifically giving alms, are necessary components to imitating Christ and thus

earning salvation. This situates *The Phoenix*, a poem about a mythical bird, firmly within

the explicitly and implicitly Christian *Exeter Book*.

As *The Phoenix* begins, a first-person narrator informs the audience that he is

retelling a story he has "gefrugnen" (1a) [heard] , situating the poem within a tradition or

oral history of the Phoenix. This technique is used in medieval poetry and prose to give

authoritative credence to the information being presented. Lines 1-83 are a detailed

description of a paradise. God has created and controls this land (9-10, 46b), and, as

Blake explains, "In *The Phoenix* we learn that it is God who has ordained that this land

should be far removed from sinners. God dominates the poem which is firmly and

unashamedly Christian" (26-27). This land is "æþele" (20b) [noble], has not been touched

by the waters of the Flood (41b-46b) because of the will of God, and is clearly evocative

of Eden. Interestingly, as Garde points out, "No holy souls languish in the bird's pleasant

land, and the garden is empty of all but its single resident guardian" (199). The lack of

humanity in this paradise is an important detail, because, as Garde says, the poem later

explains that "Exemplary Christians, [. . .] must strive with laudable words and works to

earn the right to rise with Christ into that indescribable homeland that is suggested by the

perfect land" (199). In addition, it is imperative that good Christians earn their place in

heaven *before* the apocalypse, which is referenced early and often in *The Phoenix*, with

the explanation that the good land the Phoenix dwells in will remain until "oð bæles

cyme, / dryhtnes domes, þonne deaðræced, / hæleþa heolstorcofan, onhliden

weorþað" (47b-49b) [until the fire comes, / God's judgement, then the death-houses, / the

graves of men, shall be opened]. This is a dire, perhaps frightening vision of the end of

days, with the opening of graves for the final judgement by the Lord. This fearful image

is immediately followed by a short didactic segment, in which the audience is told what

sorts of evil they must overcome in order to reach eternity; indeed, the description given

of what is not present in this sacred place is a roll call of the greatest ills of humanity:

Nis þær on þam londe   laðgeniðla,

ne wop ne wracu,   weatacen nan,

yldu ne yrmðu   ne se enga deað,

ne lifes lyre,   ne laþes cyme,

ne synn ne sacu   ne sarwracu,

ne wædle gewin,   ne welan onsyn, (50-55)

[In that land there is not   hateful antagonism,

nor wail nor vengeance,   nor token of evil,

age nor misery   nor the narrow death,

nor loss of life,   nor coming of the enemy,

nor sin nor strife   nor painful exile,

nor poor one's toil,   nor desire for wealth,]

Note the last line quoted above: here is a juxtaposition of two types of danger to mankind. One is the mortal strife that a poor person must endure because of his or her poverty; yet, equal in status is the desire for wealth. These sufferings are deliberately contrasted as mirror opposites, and could underscore the message that through the wealth so desired, the toil of the impoverished could be remedied.

At line 85a, the audience is introduced to the Phoenix, an immortal bird whose charge is to greet the sunrise each day (85-96). It is symbolic of Christ, not just because that is what earlier Christian sources have written (which the poet clearly notes), but because of the association of the Phoenix as belonging to the Lord. For example, the bird is an "æþela fugel" (104a) [noble fowl] who rises with the day and, in its perfection, "twelf siþum hine / bibaþað in þam burnan ær þæs beacnes cyme" (106b-107b) [twelve times itself / bathes in the brook before the beacon's coming]. This example of the repetitive use of the number twelve in the poem is a clue to the reader of the Phoenix's identity as a perfect, exemplar being, both controlled by and identified with God.[4]

As the description continues, the Phoenix enjoys life, sings, and is "sælum geblissad" (140b) [happily blessed]. It lives this way for many years, until it is time for its death and rebirth. To begin this last part of the resurrection cycle, the Phoenix travels to a

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[4] The number twelve is significant in various world cultures, and features prominently as a number in both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible Twelve (like seven) is a number which represents wholeness or completion, and is one of the most widely used numbers in scripture One well-known example is found with the twelve apostles of Christ, who famously after the death of Judas Iscariot quickly found a replacement to restore their number to twelve (Acts 1 16-26) Another reference possibly being made here by the poet is to the prodigious use of twelve in Revelation, including the understanding that the 144,000 people to be saved at the end of the world are composed of 12,000 people from each of the twelve tribes of Israel (Rev 7 4) These are important to this study because they reinforce the mystical nature of the Phoenix, a symbol for other followers of Christ who themselves wish to be numbered among those judged as saved

far dominion and holds court over all of the birds (155-61). Thus surrounded by his court,

the Phoenix, ready for death, flies to Syria to prepare his sacrificial nest (161b-66b). As

this bird, the "þeodne mærum" (165b) [great lord] of the race of birds travels, he is

surrounded by those birds who are each his "þegn ond þeow" (165a) [thane and servant].

Clearly, this is an allusion to the lord/thane relationship of Anglo-Saxon society. Yet,

since the Phoenix is a known symbol for Christ as well as a devotional figure for

Christians who desire to imitate the good ways of Christ, these lines are also an allusion

to Christ's followers, who in turn may be earthly lords themselves, but who nevertheless

remain thanes to their Lord. This retinue of birds may also allude to the followers of

Christ who were present for his execution, yet in the next lines of the poem, the Phoenix

drives away his followers before he builds his last nest in preparation for death

(167b-70b).

The Phoenix constructs a splendid nest in the branches of a tree which is eternally

protected by God (171-207), and after completing its nest, sits "fus" (209a) [waiting],

also often translated as "waiting for death." The sun rises, and the nest and holy Phoenix

burn, and the Phoenix dies (214b-22a). But, in the next line, "æfter fyrstmearce" (223a)

[after some time], "feorh edniwe" (223b) [life (is) renewed] within the dead ashes and

bones. The resurrected Phoenix grows within the nest until it is in its previous glorious

form, "eal edniwe eft acenned, / synnum asundrad" (241-42) [all renewed, born again, /

sundered from sins]. Through his death, the Phoenix was able to shed his sins—but what

sins these are is unclear, for the poem does not depict the bird as anything but noble

perfection. Perhaps here the Phoenix is meant to symbolize the sacrifice Christ made for

humanity's sins. Or, more likely, the fact that the Phoenix is "renewed" and "born again" (meaning perhaps freed from sin, much like a baptism by fire) could be teaching the Anglo-Saxon audience that by committing to Christ and participating in such sacraments as baptism and confession, they may cleansed of their sins and reconciled to God. As the poet leads the audience into the often-labelled allegorical (and didactic/ homiletic) second half of the poem, the solution of removing sins via good works is announced.

The second half of the poem treats the audience to a long description of the Phoenix in all of its beauty. It is variously colored and decorated by God, but especially compelling is that much of the description uses the language of worldly treasure, not unexpected when trying to describe unknown heavenly treasure:

> ond þæt nebb lixeð

swa glæs oþþe gim,   geaflas scyne

innan ond utan. Is seo eaggebyrd

stearc ond hiwe stane gelicast,

gladum gimme, þonne in goldfate

smiþa orþoncum biseted weorþeð. (299b-304b)

> [and the beak glitters

like glass or gem, the jaws beautiful

within and without. The eye is

strong and in aspect most like a stone,

a sparkling gem, when it is set

in a golden vessel   by a smith's artifice].

Furthermore, the feathers around its neck form the "beaga beorhtast" (306b) [brightest of

rings]. These images are familiar to audiences who have read other poems within the

Exeter Book or *Beowulf*: these are the treasures by which lords retain thanes' loyalty and

amass status. Yet, by describing the Phoenix as a treasure above other earthly treasures,

the frailty of worldly, man-made wealth is highlighted as inferior to the wealth which

God might choose to bestow on those worthy of it by their good deeds.

At line 381, *The Phoenix* shifts to a direct didactic and particularly catechetical

tone and form. As previously discussed, some critics have viewed this second

"allegorical" half of the poem as homiletic, and the language exhorting sinners to redeem

themselves or face eternal damnation upholds this assessment. The progress from the

mythology of the Phoenix to direct Christian teaching begins with the ultimate goal of

Christian life: an afterlife in communion with God.

> Swa þæt ece lif   eadigra gehwylc
>
> æfter sarwræce   sylf geceoseð
>
> þurh deorcne deað,   þæt he dryhtnes mot
>
> æfter geardagum   geofona neotan
>
> on sindreamum,   ond siþþan a
>
> wunian in woruldre[5]   weorca to leane. (381-86)
>
> [So each of the blessed   chooses for himself

---

[5] I am following the emendation of Klaeber, Cook, *ASPR,* and Trahern of this word to "wuldre" which makes more sense contextually than the manuscript reading. Please see Muir 479 for more information on which critics have emended or not emended their translation of this word.

> that eternal life   after painful exile,
>
> through dark death,   so that he may after lapse
>
> of days partake   of the Lord's gifts
>
> in everlasting joys,   and ever after
>
> dwell in glory   in reward of works].

Thus, the heart of the didactic message is that good works will earn men God's gifts, and they will be granted eternal life. The key here is *in reward of good works*—this underscores the fundamental requirement of works in order to achieve salvation. In the next lines, the poet specifies how the Phoenix connects to this message: humans who wish to enter heaven must be willing to emulate the bird in his sacrifice, even through the pain of fire, in order to be reborn (387-92). Thus, humans should be willing to give all of themselves to others for the sake of God, in the fashion of Christ, who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," (Phillippians 2.7), giving all of Himself as alms to save the world.

The narrator continues comparing the Phoenix, in all of its righteousness and subsequent reward, and the continually sinful nature of humanity, saved only by Christ's sacrifice (393-423). Precisely, the ancestors of the audience are compared with the Phoenix, as these humans were forced to venture out into harm's way because of their eviction from Eden, and were thus oppressed by evil in the world, but those who pleased God with "halgum ðeawum, / dædum domlicum" (444b-45a) [holy rites, / many deeds] were shown kindness by God (445b-46b). Garde explains that this section is intended as a model for the audience to follow, and that "Christ's (clearly monastic) warrior also longs

to achieve the greatest number of good deeds with which to ascend like the phoenix into everlasting life" (196). Garde's summary is accurate, as the good Christian. labelled by the poet a *champion*, reinforcing his warrior-like quality, prepares to meet his own fate by the same method as the phoenix:

> þær him nest wyrceð   wið niþa gehwam
>
> dædum domlicum   dryhtnes cempa,
>
> þonne he ælmessan   earmum dæleð,
>
> dugeþa leasum,   ond him dryhten gecygð,
>
> fæder on fultum,   forð onetteð (451-55)
>
> [There the Lord's champion   builds himself
>
> a nest against each hostility   with praiseworthy deeds
>
> when he gives alms   to the poor
>
> and to the least of the troop,   and thus the Lord calls to him,
>
> the Father helps him,   hastens forth]

The main defense for any of the Lord's followers is a secure nest, as demonstrated by the Phoenix and in the lines above; yet for this champion the nest is not built of fragrant herbs, but rather of good deeds, specifically giving alms. Note here that the alms given here are for the poor and also for the "least of the troop," or in other words, the member of the group who has the least amount of resources. In Chapter II of this study, I included a passage from Augustine's *Enchiridion*, wherein the saint explains that the nature of alms is not limited to just the "poor" but is rather the good we do for anyone who has need of it. In the lines immediately following this exhortation to give alms in various

ways, the audience sees that because of the champion's almsgiving, as well as his prayer

and avoidance of sin, the Lord is his "scyld" [shield], and the "sigora waldend" [Giver of

victories] (456-65). Garde recognizes the poet's purposeful discussion of almsgiving,

noting that "the desired works, including almsgiving, personal piety and the proclamation

of the faith, as well as a proper Christian attitude, are carefully catalogued" (206). Garde,

however, sees the purpose of this mention of almsgiving as merely a comparison between

the ways a Phoenix adorns its nest, and how a Christian might adorn his or her "nest"

with good words and deeds (206). Rather, almsgiving as the foremost component of the

Christian's nest, and the repetition of the necessity of almsgiving and good works

throughout *The Phoenix,* are the central modes by which to attain everlasting life, rather

than just an additional help in one's salvation.

As the catechesis continues, the "plants" which mankind uses to build their nests

are exchanged for "wic gestaþelad / in wuldres byrig weorca to leane" (474b-75b) [a

habitation founded / in glory's city, in reward for their works], which signifies that these

good Christians have "leofne ceosað / ofer woruldwelan" (479b-80a) [chosen the

Beloved / over worldly wealth]. These are the ideal Christians, whom the audience

hearing or reading this poem are meant to emulate, important models to focus on as the

poem moves into a decidedly darker, eschatological direction. In lines 484b-545b, the

final judgement and subsequent saving or damning of souls is explored by the narrator.

The "mihtiga cyning" (496b) [mighty King] is unsparing in his judgements on those who

are wicked, and is pleased to save good Christians from the "byrne" [burning]. After the

Lord has ended death for the blessed, and brought them into heaven, then the destruction

of the world commences, and the focus of this destruction pertains to the argument that a didactic purpose of *The Phoenix* is to encourage almsgiving, especially by nobles, who are by their station the most likely to have these resources thus destroyed in the end-times:

Æðele hweorfað,

þreatum þringað,   þonne þeos woruld,

scyldwyrcende,   in scome byrneð,

ade onæled.   Weorþeð anra gehwylc

forht on ferþþe,   þonne fyr briceð

læne londwelan,   lig eal þigeð

eorðan æhtgestreon,   æpplede gold

gifre forgripeð,   grædig swelgeð

londes frætwe. (500b-508a)

[The noble shall go,

in bands press on,   when this world,

sin-working,   burns in shame,

scorched with fire.   Each one shall become

fearful in spirit,   when fire feeds on

the land's frail wealth,   flame devours all

of earth's possessions,   ravenously grasps

appled gold,   greedily swallows

land's treasures.]

Not just "the world" is destroyed; singled out for decimation are possessions, "appled gold," and all "treasures." These multiple variations on the theme of worldly wealth underscore the importance of the poet's message that since nobles' wealth is transitory, they should give alms, while the earth is still intact and the gold can do the most good by helping those in need. In exchange, the Lord will judge the righteous as fit for heaven, where they will live with Him, who is Himself described as a "wlitig wuldres gim" (516a) [beautiful gem of glory].

As the poem enters the last 150 lines, it focuses on Christians who are saved because of their deeds (lines 527b-28a, 543b, 659a, 669a). Job is quoted for several lines as an example (pertinent because he lost all of his worldly possessions), in which he bemoans his former deeds (556a). The emphasis shifts from deeds to good works and the speaker relates how good souls fly with the Lord, like the retinue of the Phoenix, and that "Weorc anra gehwæs / beorhte bliceð in þam bliþan ham / fore onsyne ecan dryhtnes," (598b-600b) [Works of every one / shall brightly shine in that glad home / before the face of the eternal Lord]. Bearing in mind the scriptural admonition in James 2.18-26 that "faith without works is dead" and will result in eternal death on the Day of Judgment, the *Phoenix* poet and compiler of the *Exeter Book* suggests that deeds and works are the central focus for a Christian who wishes to reach heaven.

Throughout *The Phoenix* and other poems detailed in this study, the promise has been made that God will give treasures in heaven in reward for not "storing" treasures here on earth. The poet explains the nature of this otherworldly treasure, and it reads not much differently from a secular catalogue of wealth:

þær se beorhta beag,   brogden wundrum

eorcnanstanum,   eadigra gehwam

hlifað ofer heafde.   Heafelan lixað,

þrymme biþeahte.   Ðeodnes cynegold

soðfæstra gehwone   sellic glengeð

leohte in life, (602a-607a)

[There the bright ring,   wondrously cast

with precious stones,   rises over the head

of each blessed one.   Brows shall glitter,

bedecked with majesty.   Lord's regal gold

shall brightly, admirably,   adorn each of the just

in their life]

Literally, the saved shall be lords alongside Christ, with no mention of their noble or ignoble status on earth as being pertinent to their status in heaven; rather, the measure of their good deeds, especially almsgiving, results in a greater measure of heavenly wealth.

These blessed souls, in heaven, will not suffer the trials they faced on earth, specifically those hardships which the poor or needy (those who would be in need of alms) endured: "Ne bið him on þam wicum wiht to sorge, / wroht ne weþel ne gewindagas, / hungor se hata ne se hearde þurst," (611-13) [There is not to them in those dwellings any part of sorrow, / crime nor poverty nor days of trouble, / the hot hunger nor the hard thirst,]. The reason they do not face these difficulties is because "Him se æþela cyning / forgifeð goda gehwylc" (614b-15a) [To them the noble King / gives every good].

Christ, as the greatest of kings, is here depicted also as the greatest of almsgivers: a figure

for lords to emulate on earth if they wish also to reign with him in heaven.

As the poem comes to a close, the poet reminds us of Christ's life on earth, His

death, and His resurrection, and exhorts us to pray that we, like the Phoenix, may rise

above the ashes into immortality. The narrator reminds us of the holy saints who, because

of their "worda and weorca" [words and works] have given the Lord a great "giefe" [gift]

(655-60). By imitating those saints, we are told, and by God's graces, we may earn a

place in heaven (667-69). Heaven, like the blessed Edenic land of the Phoenix, is a realm

of comfort, prosperity, and plenty (670-74). The poem ends with a prayer and an

"alleluia" (677b), but the key message of the close of the poem is that by good deeds,

primarily almsgiving, one may "brucan blæddaga" [enjoy prosperous days] with the

Lord. In the late tenth through the eleventh centuries, a time of great upheaval and

uncertainty and millennial fears of the end-times, this appeal to give away material goods

to the "needy" (including the Church) in exchange for certainty and peace with the Lord

would surely have been appealing. The firm didactic message of *The Phoenix* to give

alms situates this poem within the *Exeter Book* manuscript context, which shares the

same central theme.

Guthlac A and *The Phoenix* are often connected in the critical literature by theme

and allusions to the three *Christ* poems. These three separate poems, although they begin

the manuscript, are the focal point of the *Exeter Book* compiler's overall message: Christ,

as the King of kings, is also the Almsgiver among almsgivers, and for earthly lords,

especially kings, to follow his model and thereby ensure their salvation, they must give

alms.

V: CHRIST AS MODEL KING AND ALMSGIVER

This final chapter focuses on the poems which begin the *Exeter Book*, the so-called "Christ" poems. These three poems, *The Advent Lyrics, The Ascension,* and *Christ in Judgement* all form a unified cycle of poems on the life of Christ and his ultimate resurrection and future role as Judge of the quick and the dead. These poems depict Christ as the King of kings, and within his role as greatest of Kings, he is also explicitly shown to be the greatest of Almsgivers, primarily through his gift of salvation. Christ in these poems is also a form of Alms Himself, as he is described as various sorts of treasure, including gold, which God has given to humanity because of his love and pity for his creation. In turn, because Christ is not merely a passive treasure, but rather is depicted as strong and actively involved in his own death, (reminding readers of a similar Anglo-Saxon version of a Warrior-Christ in *Dream of the Rood*), Christ is also giving himself as Alms. As this image of Christ the King and Almsgiver is represented through these three poems which compiler chose to group near the beginning of the manuscript, this reads as a foundation for the continuing argument that lords, especially kings, must give alms, a theme present throughout the *Exeter Book.*

These three poems (at the beginning of their critical history) were generally viewed as one poem, but by the late nineteenth century scholars had shifted to varying sets of divisions for the works known collectively as the *Christ.* Numerous combinations of division have happened since, but critics at the present time agree on a division into

three distinct poems,[1] with the first, *The Advent Lyrics,* as a unified set of twelve separate

lyrics on the subject of the Advent, followed by *The Ascension* (or *Christ II or B*), and

Christ in Judgement (*Christ III* or *C*).[2] However, even with the division, these poems are

often still considered an intentional grouping by the *Exeter Book* compiler, and as such

are frequently compared and read together as a unit.

Calder sifts through the extensive and contentious debate over the unity of the

Christ poems, concluding that "the debate concerning the interrelations among these

three [. . .] has been long and inconclusive. Obviously the three poems or parts of a

single poem were meant somehow to go together. The scribe or his patron has juxtaposed

them in *The Exeter Book* in such a manner that the problem cannot be

disregarded" (*Cynewulf* 42). Calder is in line with Krapp and Dobbie, who also argue that

these poems must be connected for them to be placed in the manuscript together, and that

the connection between these three poems was natural, but "not that of a connected

narrative or exposition, but rather a general similarity of theme and treatment" (xxvii).

In contast to these assessments, Thomas D. Hill argues that these three poems "are very

different kinds of poetry and that their presence together in sequence is simply the result

of the decision of whoever was responsible for the arrangement of the codex. There is no

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[1] The first critic to make these divisions is Franz Dietrich, who explains these divisions into three poems in *Zeitschrift fur deutsches Alterlhum* ix (1853) 193-214 Krapp and Dobbie in their edition divide the poem based on manuscript evidence, meaning punctuation and lines breaks They arrange the three poems into line numbers which are still used today, and divide the *Advent Lyrics* appropriately (xxv-xxvi)

[2] I will refer to these three poems by their titles in Muir's *Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry,* because these titles provide the most accurate reflection of the poems' contents (which also explains the British spelling of "Judgement ") However, much of the criticism refers to these poems by alternate names, particularly in the case of *Christ II* or *B* and *Christ III* or *C* Of course, since none of these poems are titled within the *Exeter Book,* all titling is subjective emendation of later editors

intrinsic reason for these poems to be joined together" ("Literary History" 19). Yet, it is

significant that the compiler of the *Exeter Book* thought these three poems should go

together at the beginning of this manuscript (even with the lost folio); moreover, as this is

our only extant version and accompanying arrangement of these poems, we are left with

the greater question of how the compiler might have seen them fitting in the manuscript

as a whole, and why these poems would aid the compiler in his didactic purposes, for

which the *Exeter Book* was surely created.

As discussed in Chapter I, the opening folio of the *Exeter Book* is now lost, but

scholars believe it included at least one other Advent lyric, even though "it is impossible

to tell with certainty how much matter is missing of this first major division" (Krapp and

Dobbie xxvi). Krapp and Dobbie accept Albert S. Cook's argument in *The Christ of

Cynewulf* that this missing component "'can scarcely have exceeded a dozen lines at

most'" (Krapp and Dobbie xxvi). This leaves the critic at a disadvantage, particularly

when assessing the all-important beginning of a manuscript. Yet, given the evidence

already presented in this study as well as forthcoming in this chapter, it is possible that

the lost folio from the beginning of the manuscript could have contained lines that further

emphasized the central argument of Christ as a model King for kings to follow.

Although these are poems about Christ, it may be unclear to modern readers why

Anglo-Saxon kings would necessarily look to Christ for a model, who sensically seems

inimitable. Yet, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, particularly in the case of King Edgar

(r 959-75), Anglo-Saxon kingship was changing into a form more closely aligned with

the Church. Anderson explains the evolution of kingship to the tenth century, in which

Anglo-Saxon kings "move away from the God-centered/Old Testament models of

kingships favored by the early Carolingians to a more Christ-centered model" (70),

meaning that instead of a king who is a father in the image of God the Father, these later

Anglo-Saxon kings modeled themselves on Christ. In particular, it is the well-known

ideal figure of "Christ the King" which Anglo-Saxons kings would have looked to in

regulating their behavior, and which those in charge of teaching appropriate behavior to

kings and other nobles would have used as a teaching model. According to M.J.

Silverman, "at least two influences were at work nurturing a christocentric theory of

rulership in tenth-century England," including the Benedictine Revival and the move by

the Anglo-Saxon kings, particularly Edgar, to use propaganda to "promote itself [i.e. the

monarchy] as an imperial authority" (334). The foci of these tenth- and eleventh-century

kings were "a deliberate paralleling of Christ and the English monarch in the role of

imperial King of Kings" (334). Christ the King, as exemplified in these three *Christ*

poems, is the exemplar of how a king should act, including in the giving of alms. Christ

gives the ultimate in alms, salvation through sacrifice of Himself, and thus is ultimate

Almsgiver. Yet, by this same reckoning, He serves in these poems as the ultimate of

Alms, both given by His Father to the world and by Himself, as He *actively* chooses to be

crucified, as seen in *Dream of the Rood* and *The Phoenix*.

Before Christ gives Himself as alms on the cross, He must first be conceived and

born of the Virgin Mary, which makes the *The Advent Lyrics* a natural place to start a

manuscript which centers on Christ and the Christian mysteries as models for salvation.

In Chapter II, Augustine's *Enchiridion* was referenced as an example of the patristic

definitions and explanation of almsgiving, which expanded upon scripture, and which

served as a model for homilists, and as I argue here, poets. The admonishments by

Augustine that almsgivers give shelter, feed the hungry, care for the sick and dying, and

perform other selfless acts indicates that those who give alms mimic the actions of Christ

Himself, and thus become more like Christ. In turn, *The Advent Lyrics* focus attention on

the discussion of Christ as God's "gift" to the world (and in turn a gift from Christ

Himself) and it is only through this direct gifting—almsgiving—of redemption that

humanity is saved. The poet implies that Christ, as the ultimate gift, is in essence Himself

alms; at the same time, as Christ gives Himself to the world as a sacrifice, He is also the

greatest of Almsgivers, and worthy to be emulated by humankind. In their critical history

the *Advent Lyrics* have been thoroughly catalogued and discussed in reference to probable

source material and place in the Old English canon. As previously mentioned, these lyrics

were originally considered part of the larger poem presupposed to be by Cynewulf and

known simply as *The Christ*, which was later divided by critics into a separate poem

within the series of three poems and was then known as "Christ I" in the "Christ" poems

of Cynewulf; much of the earliest critical literature still views these lyrics as one poem.

Yet, as Jackson J. Campbell explains in the preface to his edition of the lyrics, *The Advent

Lyrics of the Exeter Book,* by 1959 the critical opinion was that:

> During the last half of the nineteenth century, the lyrics were considered
>
> the first section (*Christ I*) of a tripartite poem by Cynewulf called the *Christ*.
>
> Some time ago the great majority of Old English scholars gave up this notion,
>
> which Dietrich in 1853 created almost out of whole cloth, and I shall not here

enter into a controversy which men like Brandl, Trautmann and Sisam have made a dead issue. (vii)

Over time this shifted further, and now *Christ I* is divided into twelve shorter poems, known collectively as the *The Advent Lyrics*, which begin the manuscript of the *Exeter Book*. Moreover, the poems are still treated consecutively as a single unit in their line numbering. The general critical consensus is that Cynewulf was the author only (possibly) of *Christ II* (*The Ascension*).

What is known of the source material for *The Advent Lyrics* is also debated, but scholars agree that the lyrics can, according to Claes Scaar in *Critical Studies in the Cynewulf Group*, "be said to have been modelled on known liturgical texts" (36). Muir identifies that "Cook (1900) and Bourauel (1901) were the first to recognize that *The Advent Lyrics* are based upon or inspired by particular antiphons for the liturgical season of Advent, which were either chanted or recited at Vespers, usually before and after the *Magnificat*" (384). Campbell, in his introduction to his edition of the lyrics, argues as well that "There can be no doubt that *The Advent Lyrics* are based very directly on a series of antiphons called the Advent O's. It can be further said with certainty that they owe a great deal in direct and indirect ways to the liturgical office for the Advent season in general" (3). Yet other critics have argued that this is not necessarily the case, and no matter the direct influence, undoubtedly the poet who created *The Advent Lyrics* considerably changed the Advent antiphons to reflect his or his patron's rhetorical purposes.

Garde argues for a wider range of possible source material for *The Advent Lyrics*,

including "Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Zachariah, Matthew, Luke, John and Paul" as well as

myriad early Christian materials related to the Advent season (60). Given this generous

number of sources, this poet must have been widely read, and familiar with biblical texts

in particular, in order to have successfully used these sources when crafting these poems.

In addition, as Hill argues, the lyrics were "written for an audience which shared the

Biblical and patristic learning of the poet; without this background they would simply

seem opaque and confusing" ("Literary History" 12). Surely an Anglo-Saxon audience

for these poems, which was undoubtedly composed not only of monks but also nobles,

would have had the background Hill posits, and thus would have understood the

messages being taught. The poet of *The Advent Lyrics* is successful in conveying his

message because he uses imagery familiar to the style of other Anglo-Saxon poetry,

particularly in his equation of Christ with the good King and heaven with the mead-hall,

among other associations.

Edward B. Irving, Jr. argues that the central interpretation of the poem should be

that "the poem stresses endlessly that Creation was not one past event but is, now, all the

time" (127). The Advent itself is meant by the poet to stand for several different Advents,

which all converge to form one cycle of redemption or damnation. Irving explains these

events, noting that "Many readers have noticed these various Advents: Jesus comes to

Jersusalem; God comes to Mary; Jesus is born in Bethlehem; Hope, or grace, comes to

man; Christ comes to harrow Hell; Christ comes to be born in each person—in

me" (128). In agreement with Irving, Garde argues for an audience-based approach to the

understanding of Advent within these lyrics, wherein the audience is meant to "ponder the logical significance of the Incarnation in their own sinful lives, proceeding [. . .] to a declared acceptance of Christ as personal Savior and Lord" (62). The Advent is not just an event from the past, but is also relevent given the presumed advent of the Judgement Day, a popular topic in the late tenth century, when the *Exeter Book* was compiled. That century's eschatological focus suggests a perceived need for repentence on the part of the Anglo-Saxon audience. The men of the church ensured that repentance by educating laypeople on appropriate ways by which to fulfill the biblical requirement of "words and works," an education provided by the didactic function of these poems.

There is a variety of evidence that almsgiving was a part of the Advent season, both on the Continent and in Anglo-Saxon England. Cook illuminates the early Christian view of the Advent season, and explains that "Caesarius of Arles (d. 542) delivered two sermons on the subject of the Advent in which he urges Christians to abstain from avarice, hatred, pride, anger, drunkenness, and lasciviousness, and to be sober, merciful, pure, humble, and rich in alms-deeds" (xxvi).[3] Thus, there is a precedent for the issue of alms and almsgiving to be discussed in works related to the Advent. Also in support of this notion of penance as part of the Advent season, Cook quotes the homilies of Ælfric on the season of Advent, and referencing Ælfric's second homily (*Hom.* 2.22) explains that among other exhortations, Ælfric writes "We should [. . .] love those things which God has enjoined, that is, lowliness and mercy, righteousness and truth, alms-deeds and temperance" (xxx-xxxi). Thus, if almsgiving was an expected and promoted component

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[3] Source for these sermons by Caesarius of Arles: Migne, *PL*, 39, 1973-7.

of the Advent season, why does the mention of almsgiving in the *Advent Lyrics* stand as unique within the Old English corpus, and how does it support the notion of giving alms as a central theme and argument within the *Exeter Book*? *The Advent Lyrics* are situated near the beginning of the original manuscript to prepare the audience, familiar with the exhortations of the Advent season (and quite possibly being read these poems during this season), to hear and accept the message as presented subsequently throughout the manuscript that alms are necessary for salvation.

Each of the twelve individual lyrics that comprise *The Advent Lyrics* references gifts. Usually, this is in the form of Christ given as gift (which is sensible since the superficial purpose of these lyrics is to supplement the celebration of the Advent season). Occasionally, references are also made to Mary as a gift, because she willingly carries Christ, or as receiving the gift of Christ from God, and in one lyric, the discussion of her virginity as a gift to heaven. Although the word for gift, *lac*, is not used in reference to Christ, but rather only to Mary's virginity, even with the absence of that particular word as a description for Christ, the idea that Christ is a gift from God, who also gives Himself in sacrifice, is thoroughly implicit throughout the lyrics, as will be demonstrated below.

"Lyric One" of *The Advent Lyrics* directly appeals to the King (Christ as God) to come and save His people on earth. As Garde reads it, "the didactic intention is overt from the opening stanza" (62), and the appeal to the "cyninge" [king] in the fragmentary first line directly praises Christ as the "wall stone" and as the King, in a particularly Anglo-Saxon fashion:

Wel þe geriseð

þæt þu heafod sie   healle mærre,

ond gesomnige   side weallas

fæste gefoge,   flint unbræcne, (lines 3b-6b)[4]

[It is very fitting

that you are the head   of the great hall,

and draw together   the wide walls

unbroken flint,   with a firm joint]

The speaker compares Christ to not only the cornerstone which holds the building

together (2a-3a), a reference to Ephesians 2.19-22, but could also be the traditional

Germanic king, who as king would be expected to head up a great hall that he would then

maintain as a gathering place and safe house for his people. Christ, as foundation and

head of the hall (or the world, or the Church of His followers) is thus appealed to as

responsible for taking care of the world and the world's inhabitants. The poet then

petitions Christ for assistance, exhorting that

Nu is þam weorce þearf

þæt se cræftga cume   ond se cyning sylfa,

ond þonne gebete,   nu gebrosnad is,

hus under hrofe. (11b-14a)

[Now is the work so difficult

---

[4] I will be citing line numbers based on the traditional line numeration, which views all three separate *Christ* poems as one unified work, and thus numbers each of the poems consecutively.

that the Maker comes,   and the King himself,

and they repair   the house under its roof,

which is now decayed].

Here the poet asks for Christ to come and save humanity, through the gift and subsequent sacrifice of Himself. Christ takes on two apparent roles here: King on his *gifstol*, responsible for the care of His people (a reference to giving, and perhaps almsgiving), and Christ the Gift, or alms, to the world. This metaphor for Christ as King ruling the Great Hall may also be read as a didactic notice to Anglo-Saxon kings to emulate Christ, and care for their people through works, particularly by sacrifices to repair the good of the community. Christ, as responsible King, will come and save His people, "swa he oft dyde" (17b) [as He has often done]. His salvation is His almsgiving to his people; in turn, earthly kings who wish to secure their own salvation would do well to act in part as Christ's agents in "saving" their own subjects, a "wergan heap" (16a) [weary multitude] Christ is ultimately responsible for.

The discussion of Christ as King continues in "Lyric Two." In the first line of the poem, the poet talks directly to not just Christ the King, but Christ as "riht cyning," (18b) or [true king]. This emphasizes the sovereignty of Christ over all earthly kings, reiterating that all earthly kingships are transitory, unlike Christ's true kingship, which is eternal. Immediately following, the poet refers to Christ as the arbiter of the fates of all humans, and that " lif ontyneð, / eadgu[m] upwegas, oþrum forwyrneð / wlitigan wilsiþes, gif his weorc ne deag" (19b-21b) [you reveal life / the exalted path, yet you deny the glorious journey / to another, if his acts are not worthy]. Notice here the emphasis placed on

worthy acts; a human is denied the glorious journey (taken here to mean entrance to heaven) if he has not done worthy acts. This directly refers to works as the means of redemption, and here Christ judges what works will merit redemption.

As the second lyric continues, the speaker refers to Christ's noble act of self-sacrifice in order to ensure salvation for all the people he has created. Irving explains that this second lyric, the *O clavis David* antiphon, centers on Christ's responsibility as the prisoners' "*mundbora* (line 28), their legal protector and, unworthy as they are, only he has the power to lift them up, to strengthen their faint hearts and wrap their feeble wit in glory" (126). This presumes more of a priestly role for Christ the King, which is at odds with older, more secular forms of Anglo-Saxon kingship. He is a King who is not merely a leader among equals, or reliant on a comitatus; rather, he is the one divine Savior, and his responsibility for salvation (and, likewise, his role as Judge) puts him in a unique position of power which was not familiar to early Anglo-Saxon kings. However, this unique form of religiously royal power would appeal to later Anglo-Saxon kings invested with the idea of the divine right of the monarch to rule, such as Kings Alfred or Edgar.

"Lyric Three" is mainly an homage to the holy city of Jerusalem, describing it as Christ's homeland. Christ's nobility is accentuated here, when Jerusalem is described as the "cynestola cyst" (51a) [best of royal thrones]; the supremacy of Christ's birthplace asserts His dominance as King over all earthly kings, none of whom may claim Jesus's throne.

The last section of the third lyric is particularly relevant to this discussion, as it reiterates again that Christ is a gift to save humankind, and that we humans, before His

arrival and giving of Himself, were poor (an allusion perhaps to the poor or "wretched"

who must depend on alms to survive):

<div style="text-align:center">Nu is þæt bearn cymen,</div>

awæcned to wyrpe   weorcum Ebrea,

bringeð blisse þe,   benda onlyseð

niþum genedde   Nearoþearfe conn,

hu se earma sceal   are gebidan. (66b-70)

<div style="text-align:center">[Now has that Man come,</div>

born to reclaim   the works of the Hebrews,

brings joy to you,   loosens the chains

imposed by sin. He knows the dire need,

how the poor must   await grace].

Christ as King knows that poor (humanity) has dire needs to be met, in this case as alms

in the form of "grace" from Himself. Earthly kings may have read this same passage as

exemplar for their own understanding of their subjects' needs, particularly the poor,

which they as leaders would be responsible for fulfilling.

"Lyric Four" is a retelling of the Annunciation, and does not necessarily pertain to

my argument here. Yet, the Virgin receiving Christ in her womb may be be considered a

gift from God, as *The Ascension* will explore in more specific detail. Likewise, her

acceptance at the annunciation is a type of alms which she bears for the sake of humanity.

In the fifth lyric, the speakers appeal to Christ to come Himself, as a "sunnan" [sun]

to illuminate the darkness (lines 112-15), as they are in dire need of His "geweorc" (112)

[works]. The last two lines thank the Lord "symle bi gewyrhtum" [for his deeds], in this case referring to the act of sending Christ to humanity: "secgan sigedryhtne symle bi gewyrhtum, / þæs þe he hine sylfne us sendan wolde" (128-29) [say thanks always to the Victory-Lord for his works, / that He Himself decided to send to us]. Irving examines the relationship in this lyric between the submissive, needy prisoners among humanity, and the Christ who they rely on to save them, concluding that "though still prisoners in torment, those below can now speak articulately, and do speak, eloquently and at length: it is they who are now able at last to define Christ's role as the necessary Rescuing King" (130). Irving's assessment of this power exchange between dependent prisoners and King supports the argument for Christ as ideal Kingly Almsgiver, in a mode that Irving further argues "creates and defines his role as savior; their grateful loyalty after they are rescued enlarges even more his royal glory. It is a reciprocal exchange of the king Anglo-Saxons seem wholly familiar with" (130). This is yet another example of how this poet manipulates secular imagery (kings and their their role as givers) in order to share a catechetical missive.

The power of the great King to help the poor or needy in spirit is continued into "Lyric Six." Christ is recognized as the "cyninga cyning" [King of all kings] who was foretold as the messiah (135b-37b). Yet again, the speaker gives thanks to Christ for saving humanity by giving Himself (141-48a) once again referring to humanity as the poor or needy, "oferþearfum" (153b). Christ does not serve as just any almsgiver in His granting of salvation to wretched mankind; rather, He is begged to "gecyð cynelice" [royally make known] His "miltse" [mercy] upon them (156b-57a).

The speaker informs the audience that Christ, for this grant of eternal life, shall be praised as a "weoroda wuldorcyning" (161a) [Glory-King of the people], a kenning-style appellation for the King of kings, a label which sets Him apart from lesser, earthly kings. He is a King to not only pledge fealty to, but to be worshipped, particularly by earthly kings are, in the eyes of the Lord, equal with other mortals.

In "Lyric Seven" as in "Lyric Four" the topic is Mary, here shown in dialogue with Joseph. The one reference here to the subject of giving and Christ as alms occurs in line 200b, in which Mary notes that "ac me eaden wearð" [to me it was granted], in this case the *gift* of being Christ's mother is granted to her, and through her thence the chance for humanity to be saved.

In the ninth lyric, the speaker extols the virtues of the Virgin and directly prays to her for her alms on humanity's behalf, through her role as the mother of Christ. Direct mention of "giving" in this lyric abounds: Mary takes her virginity and "sealdes butan synnum" [gave it without sin] to God (290a). In addition, the speaker references Mary's virginity as the "lac" [gift] that she has sent home to heaven (292b-94a). By Mary's sacred gift to God of her virginity, she is granted the greatest of Gifts: the Christ child, who through her becomes a Gift for all of humanity. This complex chain of gifting and gift exchange seems to follow Germanic rules of reciprocity; by using this model of gifting with these examples of spiritual, rather than temporal gifts, the poet instructs the audience that their own giving of religious gifts is in form alike to traditional modes of Anglo-Saxon gift-giving.

The tenth lyric in the sequence praises Christ as "heofona dryhten" (348b) [Lord of Heaven] and repeats many of the same messages seen throughout *The Advent Lyrics* thus far. Christ as King is appealed to for salvation, and He is begged for mercy from the "Hreowcearigum" (367a) [care-burdened]. Christ's offer of salvation to those who identify as care-burdened, miserable, and sickly, is His almsgiving.

In "Lyric Eleven," the court of Christ is described, and the angels who crowd Christ's "þeodenstol" (397a) [throne] are His thanes (378-99). This straightforward depiction of Christ as King of the angels seems intended to glorify the Redeemer in his role as King. Depicting Christ with a retinue, this lyric emphasizes Christ's kingly nature in terms that Anglo-Saxons would certainly understand.

The last lyric in the extant sequence, which focuses on Christ as the Giver, ties the cycle together. The Antiphon this lyric is based on, which starts "O admirable commercium" [O wonderful exchange] suggests the central lesson to be taken from this round of lyrics: the system of exchange present in the salvation journey. Christ, through the gift of Himself is also the Giver of Salvation, and in exchange for salvation humanity must give back to Him their own gifts, in the form of appropriate deeds, up to and including almsgiving. The Lord "his forgifnesse gumum to helpe / dæleð dogra gehwam" (427-28) [every day grants His forgiveness / as an aid to people], as well as His love (434-35). Because of these rewards for good service, men and women are able to escape Hell, and experience heaven.

The Advent Lyrics poet's purpose in weaving in the elements of Christ as gift/alms and giver/almsgiver appears two-fold. Firstly, Christ is depicted as the King of Kings

who gives the ultimate alms to his people: himself. This reminds earthly kings of their

humility before Christ as King of all Kings, and their responsibility to follow Christ's

example and care for their kingdoms, in exchange for a place in His kingdom after their

deaths. Secondly, *The Advent Lyrics* introduces a didactic or catechetical theme of the

Exeter Book from the very beginning of the collection: almsgiving is a requisite of

Christian kingship, and an important path to redemption.

The Ascension, also known as *Christ II* or *Christ B* is the subject of considerable

critical commentary. Despite vigorous debate, it is one of the four poems often attributed

to the poet Cynewulf, a rare thing in a corpus of literature with very little authorial

attribution for verse. Charles Kennedy, in his 1949 edition of the "Cynewulfian" poems,

explains the early attributions by scholars of many Old English poems, including

Beowulf, to the hand of Cynewulf" (2-3).[5] However, by the time Kennedy is writing,

critical opinion is secure enough on the Cynewulf question that he is able to assert that "It

is evident therefore that as undoubted work of Cynewulf we can claim only the four

poems signed with his name—the *Elene, Juliana, Fates of the Apostles*, and that portion

of the *Christ* which contains the Runic signature" (4). While Kennedy also posits that a

few other poems may be attributed to Cynewulf (405), the most logical conclusion is that

there is no certainty without the runic signature.[6]

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[5] Among the scholars responsible for Cynewulf attributions, according to Kennedy, are Ten Brink, who included "*Riddles, Phoenix, Vision of the Cross, Descent to Hell, Guthlac, Andreas,*" the entire "Christ" poem, and others in "*Geschicte der englischen Literatur,* i, 64-75" G Sarrazin attributed "*Beowulf, Judith, Wanderer, Seafarer,*" and others to Cynewulf in "*Beowulfstudien,* Berlin, 1888" (Kennedy 2)

[6] For the sake of this study, the shaky question of authorship of all three *Christ* poems is not an essential line of inquiry For my argument, the question of original authorship or subsequent alteration of these poems in transmission is not central to the exploration of to what purpose these poems were collected within this manuscript.

This attribution of only *The Ascension*, but not the other two *Christ* poems, to Cynewulf does not preclude the notion that the *Exeter Book* compiler may have altered the poem to associate it clearly with both *The Advent Lyrics* and *Christ in Judgement*. Liuzza explains a sign of the scribe's hand in changing the message of the second Christ poem: "One small indication that Christ II has in fact been altered and adapted as a sequel to Advent is the poem's opening lines [. . .]. Cynewulf begins at section IX of his source, a homily of Gregory, and makes direct reference to the subject of the previous poem; one should also note the first word *nu*, an unusual poetic opening in Old English" ("The Old English Christ" 7-8). Thus, if this poem was written completely without reference to *The Advent Lyrics*, the compiler of the manuscript was adept at fitting poems together to form a thematic link within the context of the didactic message.

As with other religious poems in Old English, source attribution abounds for *The Ascension*. As Kennedy explains, "the source of the second portion of the *Christ* (lines 440-866) [. . .] is to be found in Gregory the Great's homily upon the Ascension" (32) and most other critics have agreed that this is a probable source.[7] Calder, in his thorough explanation of the attributed source material for the poem, also recognizes this homily by Gregory, but goes further and notes "several portions of Scripture [. . .] mainly Psalm 23, Matthew 28:16-20, Luke 24:36-53, and Acts 1:1-14" (*Cynewulf* 42); and Hill

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[7] Cook offers a description of each segment of *The Ascension* which can be sourced to Gregory's Homily XXIX from his *Forty Gospel Homilies* (Cook 115) For this homily, please see Migne, *PL*, lxxvi, 1218-9 (*Sancti Gregorii Magni Homiliarum Evangelica*, Lib ii, Homil xxix) Hill is confident enough in this attribution to note that "The main source of *Christ II*, Gregory's Ascension Homily, has been known for over a century now" ("Literary History" 6)

identifies "Bede's Ascension Hymn"[8] for other segments ("Literary History" 14),

demonstrating that our poet (Cynewulf or otherwise) is probably a member of the

educated elite, well-versed in scripture as well as patristic sources. However, Hill argues

that it is "possible that Cynewulf's source was not Gregory's homily as such but a

vernacular version of it, either in prose or poetry, which already exhibited the Germanic

features we have attributed to Cynewulf" ("Literary History" 6). These Germanic

"features" of the poem are attended to frequently throughout the critical literature, and

unlike with other poems including contrastive features (*Beowulf*) these syncretic pieces

are not generally viewed as interpolations. Hill clarifies the general critical consensus of

what is Germanic in *The Ascension*, noting the "embellishing [. . .] with figures and

rhetoric which echo the conventions of traditional Germanic poetry" ("Literary History"

6). Among these "Germanic" features, Hill suggests that the poet uses "imagery [which]

would appeal most naturally to a secular Anglo-Saxon audience for whom [. . .] the

relationship of Christ and his disciples could most readily be imagined in terms of the

relationship of thane and lord" (15). In regard to these Germanic aspects of *The

Ascension*, I will focus on the depiction of kingship and the relation of the King to his

thanes in this poem, to illustrate how Cynewulf is using the model of Christ as King to

teach earthly kings about appropriate charity.

 As the title implies, the central theme of *The Ascension* is Christ's ascension to

heaven after His resurrection, and most critics agree with this theme (R.W. Adams).

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[8] Bede's Ascension hymn, or *De Ascension Domini*, may be found in *PL* 94.624B-6C. The first recognition of this hymn as a source for *The Ascension* was made by Cook in his edition of the Cynewulf poems (1900). xliii-xlv, 115-18.

Among the many possible sources for this poem, Calder focuses his interpretation on the

direct influence of scripture upon the poet, as "Christ's charge to the apostles at His

Ascension (476a-90b) to go into the world and preach the Gospel derives from several

biblical accounts, though most directly from Mark" (*Cynewulf* 49). It is clear upon

reading the poem that Calder's summary is correct, and furthermore that this poem itself

may be meant to serve much like Christ's apostles are directed to serve. Muir also argues

that *The Ascension* contains "liturgical echoes" and that

> this and other poems would inevitably have led readers or listeners to
>
> associate the poetry with the most important text of all, the Bible, and the
>
> liturgy developed from it; indeed, it is not unlikely that some of the
>
> surviving poems [in the *Exeter Book*] may have been read in whole or in
>
> part as part of the liturgy of the Anglo-Saxon church. (402)

If Muir's assessment is correct, then almsgiving as essential to salvation is a logical

central theme on which to base a collection of poems possibly used liturgically.

Colin Chase suggests that the interpretation of *The Ascension* should center on

how Cynewulf "focuses on the gift of redemption, and on the freedom, peace and

protection given to man through the redemption, as the meaning of Christ's

ascension" (89). Adams, however, argues that *The Ascension* is not just about this point

of salvation, but, rather, "the entire *Heilsgeschichte*" and that although the poem "may

initially celebrate the Ascension, it includes in that celebration necessary references to the

Creation and Fall, to the primary events of the Incarnation [. . .] and finally to the

Judgment" (73-74). This is an accurate outline of the poem, which centers *The Ascension*

cogently within its manuscript context, preceeded by *The Advent Lyrics* focused on the Incarnation of Christ, and *Christ in Judgement* leading the audience to Christ's final acts on Earth at the Apocalypse.

Adams argues that *The Ascension* is not didactic or catechetical, suggesting that "The poet [. . .] does not have foremost in mind a homiletic or instructive purpose" because he focused rather on "personal devotion" (74). May not a poem classed as "personal devotion" also be catechetical? Given the repeated mentions of the "teacher" within this poem, as well as the multiple exhortations to the audience for appropriate behavior, surely the poet intended *The Ascension* to teach valuable Christian lessons.

The Ascension begins as though in the middle of a thought, with the apparent segue of "nu ðu" (440a) [now you]. This is doubly interesting as the subject matter of the first lines refers to the events of the Advent of Christ, making this second poem of the *Christ* series appear to intentionally build upon the subject of *The Advent Lyrics*. After a short review of the Advent events, scripture (or "bocum" [books], line 453) is presented to provide for the appearance of angels to announce the Lord, a natural segue from theAdvent to the Ascension. This attention to the importance of books, particularly scripture, is worth mentioning here because of the primacy of the written word in teaching. Even if Anglo-Saxon pupils could not read, monks reciting this poem would have used this segment to convey the importance of written knowledge. The idea of teaching as important also continues in the next lines, where Christ, the "þeoden" (457a) [Lord] is then addressed as the "lareowes" (458b) [Teacher] whose [word] (459b) is welcomed by the disciples, who are ready to listen to their "sincgiefan" (460a) [Treasure-

giver]. These multiple roles for Christ within a few lines has a specific purpose: to

reinforce Christ as model for both earthly teachers, and the lords/nobility they teach.

Christ here is connected with the giving of treasure through His teachings; Calder asserts

that "Cynewulf equates the Word with treasure; both are and are given by

Christ" (*Cynewulf* 55). Christ is depicted as the giver of treasure (the Word according to

Calder's interpretation), and He is also himself the Word, which also makes Him the

treasure. As these line depict Christ as both a giving teacher and giving king, this

illustrates the ongoing theme of Christ as King and Almsgiver, as well as Alms Himself.

Preparing for His ascension, Christ speaks to his disciples one last time, advises

them on their path after He is in heaven (476-90), and allows them to see what paradise

awaits them if they follow His path. Heaven is filled with angels who surround the

"cyninga wuldor" (506-08a) [Glory of Kings], who tell the disciples that they are

witnessing the

> soðne dryhten
>
> on swegl faran;   sigores agend
>
> wile up heonan   eard gestigan,
>
> æþelinga ord,   mid þas engla gedryht, (512a-515b)
>
> [the true Lord
>
> going into heaven;   the Lord of triumph,
>
> the Chief of Princes,   goes from here
>
> and enters his habitation,   with his train of angels]

Christ's status as the model king is emphasized here in multiple ways. He is the Chief of

Princes, the "true" Lord, suggesting that all earthly Lords are not really lords, but rather

have their power by His grant alone. These titles for Christ not only prepare the disciples

within the poem to follow Christ and teach others about His primacy, but also act

similarly for Anglo-Saxon audiences reading or hearing the poem, encouraging Anglo-

Saxon nobles and kings to humble themselves before Christ, the Lord of Lords and the

King of Kings.

The angels conclude this first speech by proclaiming to the disciples a warning

that is all too familiar to readers of the *Exeter Book*:

> Wile eft swa þeah   eorðan mægðe
>
> sylfa gesecan   side herge,
>
> ond þonne gedeman   dæda gehwylce
>
> þara ðe gefremedon   folc under roderum. (523-26)
>
> [He will yet again   Himself seek
>
> with a large host,   the tribe of earth
>
> and then judge   each deed
>
> of those performed   by people under heaven].

Christ ascends immediately after this speech, and the message of the angels is clear:

Christ will return to judge, but He will not judge people, but *deeds*. Chief among these

deeds, as shown in previous chapters of this study, and as we will see in *The Ascension*

and carried into *Christ in Judgement,* is the deed of almsgiving.

As Christ, the "haligra helm" (529a) [protector of the holy] ascends, the narrator

informs us that "Hyht wæs geniwad" (529b) [Hope was renewed]. This phrase is a

formulaic construction in Old English verse: in *The Wanderer*, the audience is told that

when the wanderer awakens from his haunted sleep, and realizes he is alone, "sorg bið

geniwad" (50b) [sorrow is renewed]; In *The Wanderer* and *The Ascension*, when this

phrase occurs, there is a description of the sky above, and to the astute reader of the

Exeter Book it is hard to discount the contrasted connection between these two poems

which share a similar phrase. In *The Wanderer*, the man is alone and full of sorrow,

because of the death of his lord and tribe and the utter failure of the Germanic gift-giving

system to provide him comfort; but in *The Ascension*, hope is renewed because Christ not

only overcomes death but also ascends into heaven, and he promises humanity that if

they perform good deeds, they too may enjoy eternal life. The Wanderer has been

abandoned by his earthly lords and material temporal wealth; yet in *The Ascension*, those

united to Christ who lay treasure up in heaven through their good deeds know that the

Lord will never abandon them, and thus their "hope was renewed."[9]

As the poem approaches a lacuna due to a missing leaf, the Lord is again noted

again for His role as gift-giver: He is the "eadgiefan" (546a) [prosperity- or bliss-giver]

who is also the "folca feorhgiefan" (556a) [Giver of life to people]. Our poet seems to

---

[9] The word "geniwad" or [renewed] is used several times in the Old English corpus, all occurring in poetry. The particular phrase here in *The Ascension* for "hope was renewed" is also found in *Guthlac A* (953) and *Andreas* (1010) within the *Exeter Book*, and found outside of the *Exeter Book* in *Dream of the Rood*. What I find particularly compelling with this construction is that except for the case of *Beowulf* (2287), *Dream of the Rood* (148), and *Exodus* (33), all occurrences of "geniwad" are only found within the *Exeter Book*, which could show a scribal hand at work in the possible revision of the poems included. (Although, to allow for all possibilities, some of these occurrences may be due to the sheer number of poems within the *Exeter Book*). The inclusions, other than those already mentioned, are as follows: *The Phoenix* (279, 529), *Juliana* (607), and *Riddle 13* (9).

draw from an endless well of gift and prosperity laden adjectives to describe Christ as a

kingly giver, thus serving to magnify this aspect of Christ.

After the break in the text, a longer speech by an angel begins, which tells of the

harrowing of hell. Calder asserts that "Cynewulf's basic inspiration for the long speech of

the angelic herald (556b-86b) is verses 19-25 of Bede's Ascension hymn" (*Cynewulf* 54).

Calder argues that while Bede's hymn may be the basis for this section of the poem,

according to Pope, it is not merely a repetition of Bede, but rather "certain differences in

imagery and emphasis once again demonstrate Cynewulf's special perceptions. Bede's

hymn, narrative combined with dialogue, is essentially devoid of images" (*Cynewulf* 54).

Calder argues that the ways that Cynewulf diverges from Bede are numerous and

extraordinary, and notes that "Cynewulf chooses the fundamental image of Christ the

King, acting by his own and singular might, [. . .] robbing hell of the treasure it

wrongfully possessed" (*Cynewulf* 54). This treasure is not the worldly gold, but rather the

treasure of souls:

> heofonrices helm,   hilde gefremede
>
> wiþ his ealdfeondum   anes meahtum,
>
> þær he of hæfte ahlod   huþa mæste
>
> of feonda byrig,   folces unrim (566-69)
>
> [The protector of the heavenly kingdom   waged war
>
> against his ancient foes   by his own might,
>
> and there from captivity he drew   numberless people,
>
> the greatest of plunder   from the foe's fortress,]

So, as the mighty victor in this battle against Satan (a particularly attractive passage to

earthly "helms") Christ gains control of the spoils or plunder of war: salvation for those

who were trapped in Hell before His coming. After Christ harrows hell, he assumes his

"giefstol" [gift-seat or throne] (571a-72a). It is instructive here that Christ's Kingly

throne is described as a "gift-seat" because Christ is the only provider of real wealth or

treasure, in the form of grace and salvation, to all of His people. Colin Chase compares

the Ascension, particularly this aspect of Christ as gold-giving King upon his heavenly

"giefstol," to traditionally Germanic segments of Old English poetry, noting that "This

pattern of battle, peace, and gift-giving is reminiscent" of the Finnsburgh segment of

Beowulf," and "Christ, bestowing gifts on loyal angels and newly reconciled man, can be

compared with Finn, treating Danes and Frisians alike" (88-89). These lines indicate that

the poet is invoking in the audience an appreciation for Christ as a strong warrior-King,

indeed the only champion capable of defeating the greatest of enemies—death—and

offering humanity salvation, all while accumulating the treasure of human souls from his

battle. Calder argues that "the image of wealth and its various associations appears

consistently in all Cynewulf's poems; its use in this context may not be as abruptly

intrusive as it first seems" (*Cynewulf* 54). If Cynewulf is known for his commentary upon

wealth, then it is fitting that this poem be included with the *Exeter Book* and its

complimentary focus on the appropriate giving of wealth.

The narrator then gives a litany of reasons to be thankful to the Lord and reminds

us of our duties as good Christians to the King who has saved us. The Lord " . . . us æt

giefeð ond æhta sped, / welan ofer widlond," (604a-605a) [. . . gave to us and in

possessions thrived, / wealth over the wide earth], and provides the sun, moon, rain, and food for humanity to survive (609a-11a). By feeding, sheltering, and generally caring for the well-being of His people, Christ is providing for their needs and, thus, giving alms. Yet, above all of these transient alms which Christ bestows, is the gift of salvation, and acting as Almsgiver on behalf of His Father, Christ is both the ultimate Almsgiver (611b-18a) and the ultimate Alms. He is above all, a "heanum to helpe" (632a) [help to the humble], or poor, through the sacrifice of Himself, and like the Phoenix, some people, because of their evil ways or their ignorance, would not believe that He was able to offer such a gift as eternity in heaven (636b-44b).

From lines 654a-85, a well-known "Gifts of Men" portion is presented, wherein the narrator informs or reminds the audience of the myriad gifts which Christ has given humanity. Talents ranging from wisdom, harp playing, singing, law, writing, and success in battle are listed as being gifts from God (660a-81a). Christ "giefe bryttað" [dispenses gifts] to men (682b) but will not give one man all of these gifts because that could result in "pride" (683-85). Importantly, Calder explains that in these lines "Cynewulf does not restrict the importance of the gift theme and its relation to allotment and choice solely to the famous passage on 'the gifts of men'" (*Cynewulf* 55), but, rather, deals with this topic throughout *The Ascension*. This section, focusing on delineating the gifts Christ may give to men, reflects the poet's preoccupation with Christ's role as Giftgiver, and Almsgiver. Christ's action here is not merely the lordly giving of gifts, but a Christian king's giving of alms, dispensing what poor humanity needs for salvation, which in this case includes

various forms of wisdom by which to succeed and to help those less fortunate than themselves.

This portrayal of Christ as bestowing countless "gifts" along with images of earthly wealth upon his poor people continues throughout the remainder of this more joyous and peaceful section of *The Ascension*. Christ's "geofum" [gifts] are "unhneawum" [unsparing] (686). His Father is the Creator of the heaven and earth, where he has placed stars which are really "halge gimmas" (692b) [holy gems]—and like these stars shine brightly in the sky, "swa seo godes circe / þurh gesomninga soðes ond ryhtes / beorhte bliceð" (699b-701a) [so the church of God / through congregations of truth and righteousness / brightly gleams]. The church which Christ has established on earth to spread the news of His resurrection and ascension is itself worthy of the title treasure, and the poem shows that the disciples go forth to dispense this "treasure" or gift from God (703a-46a).

After this celebration of Christ's many gifts to the world and the joy of His mysterious ascension, the poem turns to darker matters: preventing damnation through imitating Christ in "halgum weorcum" (750a) [holy works]. To prevent the arrows of the Devil from giving us "synwunde" or [sin-wound] we must exhibit good behavior or risk our salvation with Christ (759a-72). To teach the audience behavior that may save one from damnation, the speaker in line 773a begins an exhortation reminiscent of a homily, interspersed with direct prayers to Christ to save us.

The homiletic section reiterates that it is by good works that people shall be saved (782b-85a). The speaker notes the "humble" descent of Christ as a "mægna goldhord, / in

fæmnan fæðm" (787b-788a) [mighty gold-hoard, / into a Virgin's womb]. Translators will often translate Christ's description in this line as "treasure," which a *goldhord* certainly is. However, the fantastic image remains in the original Old English, envisioning Christ as a literal hoard of gold which is given to the Virgin Mary to bear. The implications of this description are that the poet is emphasizing the role of Christ as Alms given to the world via an image of treasure which was familiar and enticing to an Anglo-Saxon audience. This "humble" (as humble as a gift of a gold-hoard from heaven might be) state of Christ is shown to prepare for the contrast of the doom written of in the next lines.

The speaker takes an interesting turn when describing the pain of damnation, noting that he does not believe he is doing what is required for salvation, and likewise he thinks many others are also disobeying the Lord and will suffer for it (789b-96b). In the following description of horror, filled with "reþe word" [angry speech] from Christ and "wraþra wita" [wrathful punishments], a runic signature is embedded, with the runes standing in not only for Cynewulf's name, but also for words and for images of destruction (797a-807a). At the end of these lines with his runes, Cynewulf mentions the prominent cause for suffering on earth, the want of wealth, and what will happen to this evil which plagues mankind.

<div style="text-align:center">

Biþ se .**W.** scæcen

</div>

eorþan frætwa.　　.U. wæs longe

.L. flodum bilocen,　　lifwynna dæl,

.F. on foldan.　　þonne frætwe sculon

byrnan on bæle;　　blac rasetteð

recen reada leg,   reþe scriþeð

geond woruld wide.   Wongas hreosað,

burgstede berstað.   Brond bið on tyhte,

æleð ealdgestreon   unmurnlice,

gæsta gifrast,   þæt geo guman heoldan,

þenden him on eorþan   onmedla wæs. (804b-14b)

       [Gone will be the want

of earth's treasures.   In the past for a long time

was the the region of life's joys,   wealth on earth

enclosed with flood waters.   So then shall treasures

burn on the pile: dusk shall crackle with

smoke-red flame, which shall freely wander

over the wide world.   The plains shall sink down,

city-holds shall burst. The brand shall be kindled,

the fire shall consume old treasure without pity,

greediest of guests. That which old men held

while to them on earth   was pride].

At the end, the pride of men in their earthly possessions will all be destroyed by the fires of Judgement Day. What, then, should the solution be for this love of damning treasure? In the following lines, the audience is reminded that dire retribution (831b) awaits those who do "eargum dædum / lifdon leahtrum fa" [in wicked deeds / live stained with crimes] (828b-29a). According to the speaker, "þa þe hyra weorcum wace truwiað" (837) [those

who in their works faintly trust] (837) are those who will be damned (838-49). The way

to shore up these works is, in the style of *The Seafarer*, to journey over the waves of this

world, the "windge holmas" [windy seas] of the Christian journey (850a-56a). At the end,

if our sailing has been true, then Christ, our guide, will lead us into "port" (858b-66b).

The terror of the preceding lines gives way to hope—by joining the journey and facing

isolation on stormy seas, one may attain salvation. This hopeful and reassuring

conclusion to *The Ascension* reminds readers that even when they have sinned,

particularly by either bad works or not enough good works, such as almsgiving, if they

reverse it while they still live they can also receive the treasure of companionship with

Christ in heaven. Yet, as is the case with much rhetoric, this hopeful message with only a

brief mention of the consequences of sin may not have served to convince some of its

Anglo-Saxon audience of the necessity of good works, particularly giving alms. To

remedy this, the compiler of the *Exeter Book* chose *Christ in Judgement* to follow *The

Ascension*, which surely provided an adequate catechesis on the horrors of hell that await

those who fail to do good works.

  The last poem of the *Christ* sequence is *Christ in Judgement* (*Christ III* or *Christ

B*), which Muir explains as "the most detailed poetic exposition of the 'Last Judgement'

among the surviving poetry" (418), a particular accomplishment, because the theme of

the apocalypse was popular in Old English literature if the extant corpus is any

indication. As Roy E. Aycock notes, "Apocalyptic visions of Doomsday and the Last

Judgement provide conspicuous themes in Old English poetry [and] various doctrines of

eschatology are repeated, reshaped, reworked" (67). This patching of various versions of

the Christian end of the world is represented especially in *Christ in Judgement*, which not only covers the components of salvation or damnation, but illustrates them visually with stunning, terrifying, and often heart-wrenching emotional imagery, and which is so different and more complex than other Old English works on this same theme that it leads Aycock to assess that most readers are "unprepared" for this rendition of the apocalypse (67).

For source hunters, *Christ in Judgement* has proved somewhat problematic, with multiple sources suggested. Muir, in surveying this issue, explains that "Although a number of sources and analogues have been proposed for *Christ in Judgement,* it is the opinion of the present editors that the Bible is its principal source and inspiration" (418). However, the genre of early Christian sermons is also singled out within the critical literature as a possible major inspiration. According to Garde, *Christ in Judgement* is undoubtedly "the most explicit eschatological statement in Old English," mostly because of the source material used in part by the poet, Caesarius of Arles' Sermon 57, on the topic of the Judgement Day (192).[10] Others, such as Christopher Chase, explain that Caesarius of Arles' Sermon 58[11] is also influential, among myriad other Biblical and patristic sources ("*Christ III*" 11). These identified sources are not surprising, given that the sources used for the other poems in both the *Christ* sequence and the *Exeter Book* in its entirety are also of the Patristic variety and are wide in their scope and deep in their

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[10] Additionally, Christopher Chase notes that "As is well known, lines 1379-1514 of the Old English poem are a translation of this powerful sermon" (22) For the sermon directly, please see Morin, Dom Germain *Caesarii Arelatensis Opera* Corpus Christianorum 103 251-254

[11] Chase documents that Edward B Irving, Jr discusses the influence of this sermon on *Christ in Judgement* in "Latin Prose Sources for Old English Verse" *JEGP* 56 (1957) 588-595 For the sermon directly, please see Morin, Dom Germain *Caesarii Arelatensis Opera* Corpus Christianorum 103.254-258

erudition. This further emphasizes the religious and secular vernacular education of the poet of *Christ in Judgement* as well as the compiler or scribe of the manuscript.

For overall interpretation of the poem, Christopher Chase explains the meaning of *Christ in Judgement* as "a narrative description of the events of the Parousia" ("Christ III" 11), which is accurate as a surface-level assessment. Further, Garde explains that *Christ in Judgement* is representative of "obligatory didacticism" that teaches each step of the process towards salvation or damnation, based on one's own actions. The poet "emphasizes the error of sinners who fail to acknowledge Christ's redemptive act and the unmerited gift of *Life*" and, consequently, "the punishment of the unrighteous will begin with guilt and shame for evil deeds now visibly exposed" (192). Muir also supports this explication, and argues, furthermore, that

> Here as elsewhere throughout the literature it is stressed that individuals
> are free to determine their own fates and choose eternal punishment for
> themselves by preferring this transitory world to the eternal stability of the
> heavenly kingdom; they earn eternal reward by both their words and
> works or deeds. (419)

Muir's summation of the poem's meaning is clear, and it confirms my argument concerning this poem (as well as throughout this study): either perform good deeds (particularly, almsgiving) and receive eternal life with God, or perform bad deeds and receive eternal damnation. The Anglo-Saxons, free to choose their own course, are offered multiple paths from which to choose, with the suggestion that if one might not

follow Church law because of morality, one might follow the law out of fear for the consequences.

The structure of *Christ in Judgement* is circular, moving from describing ways that people might be among the blessed who are saved, and warnings to those who might be damning themselves because of their failure to follow the rules of God, particularly in good works, including almsgiving. The poem starts with the reader witnessing the Last Judgment, and reminds the reader of the Resurrection of Christ as the dead are caused to rise from their graves in anticipation of their final reward. After the dead rise and pass through the fires of judgement, they are sorted into the blessed and the damned by the deeds they carry with them; Christ welcomes the blessed and extols their virtues, and condemns the damned and explains the error of their inadequate deeds. This alternating praise/damnation structure can prove tedious—but is rhetorically brilliant, because this cyclic repetition serves to reinforce the terror that the audience should feel at the prospect of eternity in hell.

The apocalypse "semninga forfehð" (873a) [suddenly surprises] humanity one night, and the end of the world, with Christ as leader of the troops, commences. Yet, as this feared day begins, immediately "Swa on Syne beorg somod up cymeð / mægenfolc micel, meotude getrywe, / beorht ond bliþe—him weorþeð blæd gifen" (875a-877b) [So on Sion's hill shall together come up / a vast and mighty people, faithful to the Lord, / bright and blithe—to them shall reward be given]. Those who have been faithful to God are set to receive an award of eternal life from Christ upon their Judgment. As such, they do not approach this day with fear, but with joy. This is contrasted immediately by the

poet with those who are "cearum cwiþende cwicra gewyrhtu" (891) [sorrowfully

lamenting their works when alive]. These souls know from the beginning of this last day

that they are damned because of either their lack of good works, or because of their

number of bad works. Just as in the New Testament Book of Revelation, all of mankind is

prepared for judgement, and is divided only according to good and bad. Importantly, the

poet does not mention as a factor the station in life of each person—kings are no more

likely, noble or not, to be saved than any other person. Nor are men and women of the

church separated, despite devoting their lives to God. This level field is important in the

context of the *Exeter Book*, as often the poems feature nobles or monks as main

characters dealing with human issues specific to their rank in society. Here, near the

beginning of the manuscript, the poet makes clear that the only eternal measure of a man

(or woman) is by words and works.

Christ's appearance on this day is different for different audiences. To the good,

he looks beautiful and heavenly (910); to the bad he appears "egeslic ond

grimlic" [dreadful and grim], as a reflection of the state of their souls (918). Among the

dreadful destruction of the world, wherein the sun turns to "blodes hiw" [blood's hue]

(935a) and the stars and moon fall from heaven (937-40), the poet familiarly describes

Christ as a King, but more astutely, He is labeled "mægencyninga meotod," (942a) the

[Creator of mighty kings]. By labeling Christ as the Creator of all mighty kings, the poet

is humbling all kings before their King, who reigns over even the best earthly king or

warrior. This functions in making all kings equal, and prepares a noble audience for the

forthcoming warnings, embedded within this poem, against earthly wealth.

In the ensuing fire which engulfs the earth, those who have sinned shall be in fear, and watch the object of their sins be destroyed:

Beornas gretað,

wepað wanende   wergum stefnum,

heane, hygegeomre,   hreowum gedreahte.

Seoþeð swearta leg   synne on fordonum,

ond goldfrætwe   gleda forswelgað,

eall ærgestreon   eþelcyninga.

Ðær bið cirm ond cearu,   ond cwicra gewin,

gehreow ond hlud wop   bi heofonwoman,

earmlic ælda gedreag.   þonan ænig ne mæg,

firendædum fah,   frið gewinnan (991b-1000b)

[People wail,

weep, moaning   with abject voices,

humble, mournful,   grievously afflicted.

The dark flame shall see   the physical destruction of sin,

and glowing coals shall devour   the gold ornaments,

all ancient treasure   of the kings of earth.

There shall be cry and care,   rue and loud lament

through heaven's corners,   and strife for the living,

a sad band of men.   Thence may not any,

stained with sinful deeds,   gain peace],

In these lines it is not just the "gold ornaments" of sin which are devoured by this fire, but *all* the "ancient treasure" of earth's kings. Thus, all kings who have hoarded their treasure will regret these worldly deeds, which have "stained" them, preventing them from attaining the peace of heaven.

As those living are sure of either their eternity with God or their damnation, the dead rise from their graves also to be judged. The imagery of this event is frightening in any description, but in *Christ in Judgement* it is tinged with sadness, as these resting souls now are encircled with their deeds both good and bad, and have no hope of trying to redeem themselves for past deeds. Each soul's "sinra weorca wlite" (1037a) [image of his works] is laid bare, and under the vision of Christ no soul is able to hide what they have done or not done in their lives (1045b-1048b). Those who have done well to follow God's commandments are clearly recognizable because as they "berað breosta hord fore bearn godes" [bear their breasts' hoards before the Son of God] they show that they carry a hoard of "feores frætwe" [their life's treasures] (1072a-1073a), which in turn earns them salvation, a "wuldorlean weorca" (1079a) [glorious-reward for their works]. This pleases God, and He is happy to have them join his heavenly retinue.

As the poem progresses, it thoroughly reminds the audience of the cycle of Christ's crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and the harrowing of hell (1081a-1189a). This retelling of the salvation story in its entirety calls to mind Adams's argument for *The Ascension* as a form of *Heilsgeschichte*, or "history of salvation," which is also the best way to describe these lines. The poet intersperses this salvation cycle with added description of destruction and the horrors sinners are witnessing, the section ending with

a resolution that reminds the audience that Christ is Himself treasure, "se earcnanstan" [a precious stone] given by God as alms to humanity, and which all the world may look to for comfort (1195a).

The time of Judgement arrives, and alternating between the saved and the damned, the poet informs us first as to why they have earned their particular fates, and then Christ speaks directly to each group, good and evil, to extrapolate and pronounce his final judgement. As expected, given the poem thus far and the poems preceding, a special focus in the judgement relies upon "words and works" and highlights almsgiving as centrally important.

The blessed are recognized first by the Lord, as they are "eðgesyne" [easily seen] because they "scinað" [shine], having done the will of the Lord by their "wordum ond weorcum" [words and works] (1234-41). They are joyous, for this time of judgement is one of redemption for them, and, surprisingly, they are depicted as growing in "wynsum gefea" (1252b) [winsome delight] when they see how the evil people are suffering. This morbid joy from witnessing how the damned shall be punished is not found in the Bible, and it is surprising to read; why would good, holy souls delight in the misfortune of others, and thank God for their own safety? This seems against Christian ethics, but must serve a function within the text. Perhaps depicting the blessed as having victory over the damned is meant to convince the audience that Christian righteousness is also a type of victory in battle over the unrighteous.

The sinners, however, are clearly damned and face "atolearfoða ær gedenra" (1265) [dire afflictions for their former deeds]. Again and again the audience is

reminded that the damned are in this state because of their "synbyrþenne" [sin-burden] (1299b) they must carry as a yoke about their necks. And, mirroring the aforementioned voyeuristic joy of the blessed in witnessing how the damned suffer, these souls on the other side must witness the joy that the saved have received:

þearfendum sorg,

cwiþende cearo,   þæt hy on þa clænan seoð,

hu hi fore goddædum   glade blissiað,

þa hy, unsælge,   ær forhogdun

to donne   þonne him dagas læstun;

ond be hyra weorcum   wepende sar

þæt hi ær freolice   fremedon unryht. (1284b-1290b)

[It is sorrow to the miserable,

wailing care,   that they on those purest shall see

how they for their good deeds   gladly rejoice,

deeds which they,   unhappy souls, neglected

to do before,   when their days lasted;

and they are sorely weeping   for their works,

because they had earlier   did wrong].

These sinners are far from ignorant, and clearly know that their failure to complete enough good deeds has directly resulted in their fate. Yet, when faced with these facts, the sinners are mournful, and weep for the lost chance to make things right. Unfortunately, as the audience soon learns, their sorrow will not help them at this late stage.

After the speaker suggests that all of humanity should strive to fix our sins while we have time, Christ is depicted again, this time speaking to the blessed as they arrive at heaven. In this speech, Christ explains to them in detail what of their deeds have merited their place in heaven:

> Ge þæs earnedon   þa ge earme men,
>
> woruldþearfende,   willum onfengun
>
> on mildum sefan.   Ðonne hy him þurh minne noman
>
> eaðmode to eow   arna bædun,
>
> þonne ge hyra hulpon   ond him hleoð gefon,
>
> hingrendum hlaf   ond hrægl nacedum
>
> ond þa þe on sare   seoce lagun,
>
> æfdon unsofte,   adle gebundne,
>
> to þam ge holdlice   hyge staþeladon
>
> mid modes myne.   Eall ge þæt me dydon,
>
> ðonne ge hy mid sibbum sohtun,   ond hyra sefan
>
> trymedon (1349a-1359b)
>
> [You earned this   when you willingly received
>
> poor men,   the world's needy,
>
> with a tender soul.   When they in My name
>
> humbly prayed to you   for compassion,
>
> then you helped them   and gave them shelter,
>
> gave bread to the hungry   and a garment to the naked

and those who were in pain   or who lay sick,

and painfully suffered,   bound by disease,

you kindly   sustained their spirit

with love of mind.   You did all that to Me,

when in peace you sought them,   and strengthened their souls]

This is a central portion of this poem, as within Christ's praise for the blessed are the main methods by which one may give alms. The blessed have given to the needy food, shelter, and clothing, as well as comfort and love, all defined in the Bible and by patristic authors as alms. Now, the catechetical teaching of this poem becomes clear: the deeds which count as "good" and worthy of salvation are those that count as almsgiving. Here Christ's speech to the blessed end as they are brought into their heavenly reward, and no other reasons than "good deeds" are presented in *Christ in Judgement* for why these souls have attained salvation. This passage is the cornerstone for the religious teaching of the *Exeter Book* poems: more than any other act, giving alms is the way to God's blessing. Those with the most resources, such as lords and kings, would likewise be expected to give more in alms, as all of their subjects would be more "needy" than their sovereign lord.

Christ then turns his attention to the sinners, and speaks to them also in preparation, this time for their eternal torment. Christ chastises them, and shows them again the suffering that He endured in his persecution and crucifixion for their salvation (which they so easily disregarded). Christ tells the sinners that he created them and (in parallel fashion to how he praised the blessed) how they abused their wealth: "Geaf ic þe

eac meahta sped, / welan ofer widlonda gehwylc, nysses þu wean ænigne

dæl" (1383b-384b) [I also gave you abundant powers, / riches over each of the wide

lands, you knew no portion of affliction]. Christ specifically has given them power and

riches, an implicit description of those who in Anglo-Saxon understanding would be seen

as noble in some way. These rich and powerful sinners did not have to deal with

afflictions, unlike the wretched in need of alms. By so easily hoarding wealth and

disregarding the sacrifices and suffering Christ endured to give them salvation, these

lords are locked in eternal torment, instead of enjoying life in heaven:

> Hu þær wæs unefen racu   unc gemæne.
>
> Ic onfeng þin sar   þæt þu gesælig moste
>
> mines eþelrices   eadig neotan,
>
> ond þe mine deaðe   deore gebohte
>
> þæt longe lif   þæt þu on leohte siþþan,
>
> wlitig, womma leas,   wunian mostes. (1459-64)
>
> [How uneven an account there was   to us in common.
>
> I received your pain   so that you most blessed
>
> could happily enjoy   my native realm,
>
> and by my death   dearly bought
>
> that long life   that you might afterwards
>
> abide in, in light, beautiful,   free of sins.]

Christopher Chase argues that until this speech, "the reader has but an indirect sense of

Christ's sufferings [. . .] But all this changes when Christ himself addresses the throng of

wrongdoers [which appears] to be addressed not so much to the sinner at the end of time as to Everyman (that is, the reader) in the present" ("Christ III" 13). This direct address to a contemporary Anglo-Saxon audience enforces the catechetical purpose this poem is meant to serve: give alms, or give up any hope of heaven.

Because these sinners ignored the life Christ died to give them, they will have to enter into another exchange with Him: "ac forgield me þin lif, þæs þe ic iu þa min / þurh woruldwite weorð gesealde" (1476-77) [but let your life repay me, of which for you I gave mine as a price / through worldly penalty]. They have fatally disrespected their King, who "wæs on worulde wædla þæt ðu wurde welig in heofonum" (1495) [was in the world so that you might become rich in heaven]. The sinners' greed for earthly wealth has in turn cost them eternal grace, and in a direct reversal of the speech given to the blessed in which He praises their almsgiving, Christ condemns the damned specifically for *not* giving alms:

> Bibead ic eow   þæt ge broþor mine
>
> in woruldrice   wel aretten
>
> of þam æhtum   þe ic eow on eorðan geaf,
>
> earmra hulpen.   Earge ge þæt læstun—
>
> þearfum forwyrndon   þæt hi under eowrum þæce mosten
>
> in gebugan,   ond him æghwæs oftugon,
>
> þurh heardne hyge,   hrægles nacedum,
>
> moses meteleasum.   þeah hy him þurh minne noman
>
> werge, wonhale,   wætan bædan,

drynces gedreahte,   duguþa lease,

þurste geþegede,   ge him þriste oftugon.

Sarge ge ne sohton,   ne him swæslic word

frofre gespræcon,   þæt hy þy freoran hyge

mode gefengen.   Eall ge þæt me dydan,

to hynþum heofoncyninge.   þæs ge sceolon hearde adreogan

wite to widan ealdre,   wræc mid deoflum geþolian. (1499-1514)

[I bade you   that you should cherish well

my brethren   in the world's realm

from the possessions that I gave to you on earth,

to help the poor.   You performed that badly,

you forbade the needy   that they might enter

under your roof,   and denied them everything,

through cruel mind,   clothing to the naked,

food to the meatless. Though they in my name

weary, sick,   asked for water,

tormented for drink,   lacking good things,

oppressed with thirst, you harshly denied them.

The sorrowful you sought not,   nor a kind word of comfort

spoke to them,   that they thereby a gladder spirit

might in their minds receive.   You did all of that in scorn of me,

heaven's King.   Therefore you shall severely suffer

torment forever,   endure exile with devils].

Christ has told these sinners that they should have used the "possessions" which He

granted to them to help the poor in whatever they might need, in the expected format for

alms. Waiting for the mercy of these damned souls, the poor have starved and suffered of

thirst, and withstood sorrow and friendlessness. Just as the blessed have received God's

mercy because they showed appropriate mercy, the damned will suffer just as they forced

others to suffer while on earth. There can be no more direct, stronger claim for the power

of almsgiving than in these passages.

As *Christ in Judgement* approaches its conclusion, the audience is privy to more

explicit description of the torments which await the sinners in hell. Among these tableaux

of fear-inducing imagery, the audience is warned to cultivate "worda ond dæda" [words

and deeds] before their time on earth is done, or they too shall end up in hell (1578-90).

Yet, in another cyclical reversal, the speaker resumes speaking to those who choose the

path of righteousness, and because of their good deeds will "bring Christ" "beorhte

frætwe" [bright treasures] in heaven (1634a-35a). Those who are blessed because they

gave alms to their fellow man will enjoy an eternity where "Nis þær hungor ne þurst, /

slæp ne swar leger, ne sunnan bryne, / ne cyle ne cearo" (1660b-62a) [There is neither

hunger nor thirst, sleep nor grievous pain, nor burning of the sun, / nor chill, nor care].

The positive ending after such miserable imagery is where the poet's central message is

driven home to the audience, who now, in fear for their souls, should go forth into the rest

of the *Exeter Book* supremely focused on the necessity of almsgiving, and the sovereignty

of Christ the King over all of humanity, including all earthly kings. The poem ends on

this joyful message, one of hope for salvation, but only for those who follow the example of Christ, King and Almsgiver, and give according to their station and appropriately for the needs of their subjects or parishioners.

CONCLUSION

The model provided through the *Exeter Book* of good almsgiving was an essential teaching tool for tenth-century and eleventh-century monks and canons to use in their pastoral and catechetical missions. This focus on almsgiving as a vehicle by which religious houses and the needy of the kingdom might be provided for, is tied to increased efforts from Edgar's reign through to Edward the Confessor, to hold the Christian Anglo-Saxon king up to a divine right and thus divine standard. Almsgiving by lords provided for men of the cloth, who in turn provided for the nobles and monarchy by legitimizing and promoting their rule over the people, and praying for the salvation of lords' souls. In addition, by giving alms in the appropriate spirit of mercy, the lord was able to assure himself a place in the heavenly kingdom with Christ, the model King and Almsgiver. The relationship provided by almsgiving was mutually beneficial for the Church and kings, and ensured that the poor and needy of England were provided for.

Garde argues that "the poetry assembled in late tenth century codices represents a contemporary demonstration [. . .] of a practical, living faith. Urgent exhortations to faith, penitence, and good works routinely appear, together with the necessary gratitude and praise that is owed to the Saviour for his unmerited gift of grace" (212). The *Exeter*

Book is an example of this "living faith," a cohesive document which serves a catechetical purpose. Future studies could build upon this argument, with a particular need including the reevaluation of the Christian rhetorical strategies used when constructing Anglo-Saxon manuscripts as cohesive collections, instead of viewing these works as fragmented.

The compiler of the *Exeter Book* created a poetry collection which has multiple Christian agendas and methods by which to teach appropriate Christian behavior. The movement from more secular giving and exchange rituals to religious giving maintained expected social cohesion and hierarchies in Anglo-Saxon culture, all while serving the benefit of those in need. The *Exeter Book* exemplifies the development of heroic or secular Anglo-Saxon poetics into a tool of the Church. Thus, nobles who were instructed using the poems of the *Exeter Book* would be prepared to give appropriately and thus to ensure their place in heaven.

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