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Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England

Theology and Society in an Age of Faith

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Chapter 1

I Believe in One God

... every man should learn so that he knows and understands the pater noster and creed, if he wants to lie in hallowed ground or be worthy of the Eucharist, because he is not a good Christian who will not learn it ...¹

In the early decades of the eleventh century, Archbishop Wulfstan of York (d.1023) declared that those who were ignorant of the creed and the pater noster were not good Christians, and therefore should be deprived of certain Christian rights such as burial in consecrated ground. Wulfstan was a scholar: he was widely read, his ideas were informed by theology and canon law, and he was one of the leading English clergy. Perhaps unsurprisingly, he presents a top-down approach of what it meant to be Christian: he stands high up in the institutional ecclesiastical hierarchy, with the responsibility for many souls, and he was a vigorous advocate for reform and high standards.² Scholars like Wulfstan viewed beliefs and practices surrounding death and burial in the light of Christian theology, learning and tradition, but these were of course never isolated from the world in which they existed. Wulfstan's decree highlights the tensions which might occur as theology negotiated and influenced the social context in which it was worked out, just as it also throws up many questions which illustrate the complexities of early medieval religious belief. How far, for example, does this decree reflect a response to a genuine problem of people who lacked basic Christian knowledge but still sought inclusion in Christian practices? Are knowledge and understanding of the creed and pater noster enough to consider someone a Christian, if there is not also belief, faith or conviction? Why would someone who did not know such basic Christian prayers have any desire for burial in hallowed ground in any case? What did this mean to Wulfstan, and to those who sought it? And, ultimately and perhaps most importantly, what did it mean to be a Christian (or to be a good Christian) in the changing social contexts of Anglo-Saxon England?

The details of the answers to these questions depended in the early Middle Ages, as they depend today, on who was asked, when, and in what context. The priest and monk Bede (d.735) also insisted that Christians should know the pater

¹ Wulfstan, *Canons of Edgar*, 22, ed. R. Fowler, *Wulfstan's 'Canons of Edgar'*, EETS, OS 266 (London, 1972), 6: '... ælc man leornige þæt he cunne pater noster and credon, be þam þe he wille on gehalgodan licgan oððe husles wyrðe beon; forðam he ne bið wel cristen þe þæt geleornian nele ...'.

² See the essays in M. Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference* (Turnhout, 2004).

noster and creed.³ But while Bede seems to have accepted the value of burial in a monastic cemetery, he probably would not have understood the concept of hallowed ground in precisely the way that Wulfstan did, since it does not seem to have existed in the eighth century.⁴ This highlights the fact that neither belief nor practice is static and it is not always clear which came first, as in the case of hallowed ground. From an early stage in the history of Christianity, burial near saints' relics or in a church was considered to be important or spiritually valuable, and perhaps this ultimately gave rise to the practice of burying bodies in ground which had been consecrated and therefore marked out as holy. But since burial near saints' relics or in churches or church cemeteries was in early centuries a privilege afforded to the wealthy and to those in religious life, it might also be that this practice led to a desire to be buried in places which were understood to identify prestige and inclusion in a Christian community, and to a belief that this practice was somehow spiritually valuable.⁵ In reality, these beliefs and practices probably developed in parallel and were mutually reinforcing, illustrating the reciprocal nature of the relationship between theological discussion and the societies in which this was carried out, as well as the fact that in some cases it can be difficult to disentangle theological and social factors.

This book explores the relationship between Christian theology and societies in Anglo-Saxon England, and is concerned in particular with how theology was mediated from the scholarly contexts in which it was discussed and developed to situations in which it affected or more directly influenced the lives of Christian Anglo-Saxons (or Anglo-Saxons who thought they were Christians, good or otherwise). And, since the relationship works both ways, this book also considers how social practices and interests in Anglo-Saxon England affected the development of theology. This means that much of the theology explored here is pastoral or pastorally oriented, in that it focuses on topics which were communicated to congregations or individuals with the aim of helping souls to achieve their own salvation, topics such as eschatology – the study of death, the afterlife and the Last Judgement – or the beginnings of sacramental theology in the rituals of baptism. The practicalities of pastoral care itself have been explored in some detail in recent scholarship: the work of John Blair, Katy Cubitt, Sarah

³ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgberhtum*, 5, ed. C. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam gentis Anglorum: Historiam abbatum, Epistolam ad Ecgberctum, una cum Historia abbatum auctore anonymo, ad fidem codicum manuscriptorum denuo recognovit, Epistola ad Ecgberctum* (2 vols, Oxford, 1896), 408–9. For information about Bede, see the essays in S. DeGregorio, *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge, 2011); and G.H. Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, 2009).

⁴ See below, 273–8.

⁵ For the development of the rites and rituals for consecrated cemeteries, see H. Gittos, 'Creating the Sacred: Anglo-Saxon Rites for Consecrating Cemeteries', in S. Lucy and A.J. Reynolds (eds), *Burial in Early Medieval England and Wales* (London, 2002), 195–208.

Foot and Francesca Tinti has been particularly important here in pinning down the details of ecclesiastical organisation and structures across the Anglo-Saxon period, as well as developments in practice.⁶ This focus on institutions and organisational structures has allowed for investigation of ‘the Church’, but has meant that the impact of theology specifically has received much less attention. Discussion of pastoral theology was based on, and worked out in relation to, the evidence of Holy Scripture and the body of tradition inherited from earlier theologians, especially the ‘Greats’ such as Pope Gregory I (d.604), who had sent Christian missionaries to England from Rome, or Augustine of Hippo (d.430), who has been called the Father of western theology. But what was explored or considered in a speculative or abstract theological discussion might not be immediately suitable for communication to lay Christians, especially those who had little formal learning, and who could not read for themselves. It is at the meeting-point between the more speculative and the practical that it is possible to glimpse this pastoral dialogue, which on one side comprises the ways that preachers and teachers dealt with the challenges of conveying what was necessary for salvation to their congregations, and on the other how those people responded to what they were taught.

The surviving sources which reveal this dialogue seem to present a fragmented picture, and it is notoriously difficult to understand both sides: the vast majority of people in the early Middle Ages have not left any personal expression of belief, most often because they were unable to read or write. While Bede explains what he believes, and what he thinks good Christians ought to believe, the beliefs of the Northumbrian peasants of Bede’s day do not survive in their own words, and Bede’s correspondents and dedicatees as well as many of the people he describes are ecclesiastical or noble rather than ‘ordinary’. However, the interpretation of sources for Anglo-Saxon theological thought and discussion presents its own difficulties, especially in terms of understanding whose ideas they represent, how widely these ideas circulated, and in what contexts. It is not always easy to understand whether earlier ideas were repeated by Anglo-Saxon authors because that is what those Anglo-Saxon authors specifically believed, or whether the authority of tradition dictated what was communicated without that necessarily being representative of the thoughts of either the preacher or the congregation. Nevertheless, there is a considerable amount of textual, material and pictorial evidence which throws light on this dialogue, and which reveals the tensions and concerns which were played out in belief and in practice, and in a wide variety of cultural and social contexts.

⁶ See for example J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005); C. Cubitt, ‘The clergy in early Anglo-Saxon England’, *Historical Research* 78:201 (2005): 273–87; C. Cubitt, ‘Bishops, priests and penance in late Saxon England’, *Early Medieval Europe* 14:1 (2006): 41–63; S. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600–900* (Cambridge, 2006); F. Tinti, *Sustaining Belief: The Church of Worcester from c. 870 to c. 1100* (Farnham, 2010).

Some areas are more difficult to access than others, and so because of the nature of the evidence as well as for reasons of space, this study focuses on Christian communities in Anglo-Saxon England rather than on conversion or on religious beliefs held prior to conversion. The primary concern here is how theology was developed and used in Christian contexts, rather than the process of Christianisation itself.⁷ This means that although the key issues explored in this book are considered as far as possible in relation to Anglo-Saxon England in general, the discussion centres on the period from the eighth century, by which time much of England was Christianised, to the eleventh, when Anglo-Saxon England gradually became an Anglo-Norman realm and ecclesiastical structures and interests also saw significant change. Within this chronological period, geographical coverage is uneven because of the patchiness of the surviving evidence. The traditional problems of Anglo-Saxon sources are reflected here: the eighth century is dominated by Northumbrian sources while in the ninth century evidence is comparatively scarce until the reign of King Alfred (871–99). Scandinavian migration into northern England in the ninth and tenth centuries seems ultimately to have resulted in re-Christianisation and conversion of some areas, but there is comparatively little written evidence available for understanding how theology was developed or used in these communities in this period, and these communities are not considered in detail.⁸ In the tenth and eleventh centuries the majority of the surviving sources originated in southern England, with the exception of the booming voice of Archbishop Wulfstan of York, who at times threatens to drown out other contributors to the picture.

Theological and religious texts form a large proportion of the extant written evidence from Anglo-Saxon England, and almost all surviving textual evidence was written down, if not authored, by men and women in religious life or those who had been trained by them. Even texts which might seem to be more documentary than ‘religious’, such as records of the transfer of property, usually survive because they were copied in the archives of religious houses, and might represent an event which was motivated as much by religious concern as by economic, social or cultural interests. This has two major implications for this study. The first is simply to underline yet again the difficulties of written evidence for accessing the beliefs of people who were illiterate and who were not wealthy or influential enough to have people to write for them. The second is more subtle, and forms one of the methodological strands taken here. Some texts such as sermons were

⁷ For studies of Christianisation, see H. Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (London, 1972); B. Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain, c.600–800* (Harlow, 2006); J.-H. Clay, *In the Shadow of Death: Saint Boniface and the Conversion of Hessia, 721–54*, *Cultural encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* 11 (Turnhout, 2010); see also the essays in R. Gameson (ed.), *St Augustine and the Conversion of England* (Stroud, 1999).

⁸ On this topic see further L. Kopar, *Gods and Settlers: The Iconography of Norse Mythology in Anglo-Scandinavian Sculpture* (Turnhout, 2012).

intended to teach or communicate theological ideas, but even texts with a different primary purpose often contain information which is either pertinent to theological discussion, or which indicates how the complexities of theology were negotiated in other contexts. By setting this kind of information alongside the more formal discussions found in more straightforwardly theological texts, it is possible to gain another perspective on the meeting-point between theology and the ‘real life’ contexts in which it functioned. This perspective can in turn be supplemented by other sorts of evidence, such as archaeological material, images, or in some cases topographical or place-name evidence. This approach to theology is unusual but it is only in this comparison of a wide range of different types of evidence that it is possible to begin to explore the workings of early medieval theology in its social context. Ultimately, despite their limitations and fragmentary nature, the combination of different types of evidence also opens up possibilities in the range of perspectives gained, and the resulting picture is not so much fragmented as refracted.

It is also worth noting that Anglo-Saxon theology is, in some respects, different both from the theology of the patristic tradition which preceded it, and from the scholastic tradition which followed it. Most Anglo-Saxon theological texts are not treatises examining specific issues and subjecting these ideas to sustained questioning, although a few Anglo-Saxon writers did produce works of this sort: one example is the discussion of the nature of the soul by Alcuin (d.804), an Anglo-Saxon scholar who was trained at York but who spent much of his working life away from England, at the court of Charlemagne.⁹ Instead, a considerable proportion of the texts which reveal the theological discussions of Anglo-Saxon scholars are either catechetical, and so focus on the basics of the faith; or they are exegetical, and so provide commentary on passages of Scripture; or they are both of these. In the tenth and eleventh centuries in particular, many of the texts which reveal theological and religious thought were written as homilies or sermons, for private reading as well as (or sometimes instead of) public delivery, and usually in the vernacular. The homilies of Ælfric of Eynsham (d.1009/1010), an abbot who was an older contemporary of Archbishop Wulfstan’s, are tied closely to their liturgical contexts and often expound the Scriptural passages set for the day; but Ælfric also tied catechesis into exegetical commentary, as for example in his homily for Epiphany, which narrates and explains Christ’s baptism before discussing the necessity of baptism and other rituals such as the Eucharist for salvation.¹⁰ Here the pastoral purposes of catechism and exegesis together are clear, and stand in some contrast, for example, to the large number of Latin exegetical works written by Bede which were probably intended for monastic audiences.

Many of the tenth- and eleventh-century homilies are quite heavily dependent on their patristic sources, but their production for late Anglo-Saxon audiences

⁹ Alcuin, ‘De animae ratione liber ad Eulaliam virginem’, *PL* 101.639–47.

¹⁰ For information about Ælfric, see the essays in H. Magennis and M. Swan (eds), *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden, 2009).

does show one way in which theology was undertaken at this time, with varying degrees of adaptation for their new contexts.¹¹ To some extent, religious poetry also reflects the adaptation of ideas to a particular medium and context, but is frequently descriptive rather than speculative.¹² In contrast, more direct engagement with specific questions is found in other contexts such as letters which raise or deal with particular questions, even if sometimes only one half of an exchange survives: a wealth of information about the pressing theological issues of the day is to be found, for example, in the letters of Bede or Alcuin, or in the collection of letters associated with the eighth-century missionary Boniface (d.754), who wrote to many different people to ask for guidance or advice.¹³ Some of these letters clearly continued to be valued for the theological (and other) advice they contained, as shown by their preservation in later manuscripts. Other exchanges show not only the depth of thinking which went into the discussion of some topics, but also that these could rouse the tempers of some of the participants in such debates: a surviving personal letter from Ælfric to Wulfstan, and the letters which Ælfric wrote for Wulfstan to be read publically to priests, indicate that Ælfric was infuriated by some of the opinions and questions which Wulfstan had sent him.¹⁴ Even though Wulfstan's part of this debate no longer survives, his own opinions are clear both from Ælfric's responses and from his many other writings, including law codes and quasi-political tracts, as well as from the materials collected by him for use in his own writings.

Gradual changes in theology are also visible in penitential handbooks, liturgical texts, law codes, and in the canons of church councils, all of which are related in their attempts to regulate certain types of behaviour or events. Penitential handbooks set out the range of penances required to atone for particular sins, and seem to have been used in England in some form as early as the late seventh century, since penitential texts survive which may represent some of the teachings of Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury (d.690).¹⁵ This material continued to be

¹¹ M.M. Gatch, 'The unknowable audience of the Blickling Homilies', *Anglo-Saxon England* 18 (1989): 99–115.

¹² See for example *Dream of the Rood*, ed. G.P. Krapp, *The Vercelli Book*, Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records 2 (New York, 1932), 61–5.

¹³ E.L. Dümmler, *Epistolae Karolini aevi*, MGH, *Epistolae Karolini aevi* II (Berlin, 1895); M. Tangl, *Die Briefe des Heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, MGH, *Epistolae Selectae* 1 (Berlin, 1916); see also C.E. Fell, 'Some Implications of the Boniface Correspondence', in H. Damico and A.H. Olsen (eds), *New Readings on Women in Old English Literature* (Bloomington, IN, 1990), 29–43; A. Orchard, 'Old sources, new resources: Finding the right formula for Boniface', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001): 15–38.

¹⁴ B. Fehr (ed.), *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics in altenglischer und lateinischer Fassung*, *Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa* 9 (Darmstadt, 1966, reprinted with supplementary introduction by P. Clemoes [orig. pub. 1914]); see also below, 177–84.

¹⁵ This material is extremely complicated: for discussion see T.M. Charles-Edwards, 'The Penitential of Theodore and the "Iudicia Theodori"', in M. Lapidus (ed.), *Archbishop*

used and was eventually translated (with some adaptation) into Old English: by the tenth and eleventh centuries, a range of vernacular penitential handbooks seems to have been in circulation alongside Latin texts, and some of the changes in their stipulations reflect developments in theology.¹⁶ Many penitential injunctions were drawn directly from canon law, the decisions made at ecclesiastical councils in response to current issues; and in some cases canon law was also influential in secular law codes.¹⁷ The developments which are visible in the decrees of ecclesiastical councils and secular law are often matched by changes in liturgical rituals, or in some cases by the production of liturgies for specific rituals, as in the case of ordeals, or consecrated ground.

These texts are quite helpful in understanding theology as the discussion of belief, but because they are all normative (and so state what ought to happen, rather than what actually happened), they reveal much less about actual practice. More useful information about belief and practice on the ground, and thus also for the existence of theological ideas in non-normative contexts, can sometimes be found in chronicles, or more often in narrative sources such as histories and hagiographies. The distinction between these last two genres is sometimes loose, and all three are most often concerned with nobility or with those in religious life. But for hagiographical texts in particular, the heavy reliance on earlier models and the lack of information available to some authors can make it difficult to know how to interpret beliefs, practices and events described in these texts.¹⁸ Perhaps the most notable example of this is found in the Northumbrian *Life of Gregory the Great*, written probably in the late seventh or early eighth century at Whitby, in which the author explains that on account of the limited information available, some of the miracles described may not in fact have been performed by Gregory: the author concludes that these are ‘universal truth’ and it should not be considered problematic if the miracles were in fact performed by some other saint, because

Theodore: Commemorative Studies on his Life and Influence (Cambridge, 1995), 141–74; R. Flechner, ‘The making of the Canons of Theodore’, *Peritia* 17/18 (2004): 121–43; and for the texts P.W. Finsterwalder (ed.), *Die Canones Theodori Cantuariensis und ihre Überlieferungsformen* (Weimar, 1929); see also A.J. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983); A.J. Frantzen, ‘The tradition of penitentials in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983): 23–56.

¹⁶ See A.J. Frantzen (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: A Cultural Database* (2008), <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance>, accessed November 2012.

¹⁷ See C. Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils, c.650–c.850*, Studies in the early history of Britain (London, 1995).

¹⁸ F. Lifshitz, ‘Beyond positivism and genre: “Hagiographical” texts as historical narrative’, *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1994): 95–113; R.C. Love, ‘Hagiography’, in M. Lapidge et al. (eds), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 1999), 226–8; E.M. Treharne, ‘Ælfric’s Account of St Swithun: Literature of Reform and Reward’, in R. Balzaretto and E.M. Tyler (eds), *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout, 2006), 167–88.

like the limbs of the body, ‘we are all members one of another’.¹⁹ Hagiography is an imitative genre, and as the *Whitby Life* shows, in some cases the episodes described may in fact owe more to their predecessors than to early medieval reality.

Other narrative material can sometimes be found in charters, documents which arrange and formalise transactions and donations of property and which may include accounts of disputes, or explain how the land became available to be granted.²⁰ In addition to this narrative material, charters in particular sometimes include theological information in the proem – the introductory section – but it is worth remembering too that charters are quite formulaic and that in many cases the existence of the document seems to have been more important than what it said.²¹ However, charters as well as wills and writs are important because they represent the end-product of a much longer process of engagement and interaction between lay people and religious houses, and this itself probably afforded opportunities for the communication of ideas. And although formulae were used in creating the texts, this does not mean that those formulae were ‘empty’ or insincere: in some cases it is possible to hear the echoes of the voices of those who wished to donate property or portable objects for the good of their souls. Charters and wills primarily represent the transactions of extremely wealthy individuals, and although they reveal far more than the simple fact of a transaction of land, it is difficult to know how far the concerns that they illustrate were a reality further down the social scale. But other types of documentary evidence such as guild statutes also reveal these kinds of concerns, and while these are still not representative of all levels of society, they go at least some way towards attempting to redress the balance.

Some of the difficulties of written evidence are also reflected in material and visual culture. The pictorial and visual evidence of stone sculpture and illustrations in manuscripts or on church walls (either surviving or described) are, like written evidence, primarily associated with religious houses and elites. It is possible, if unlikely given the preservation history of most manuscripts, that

¹⁹ *Vita S. Gregorii*, 30, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, *The Earliest Life of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge, 1985 [orig. pub. 1968]), 128–35.

²⁰ S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred ‘the Unready’ 978–1016: A Study in their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3rd series, 13 (Cambridge, 1980), 97, 130 and n. 168, 200–1; S. Keynes, ‘Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in R. McKitterick (ed.), *Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), 226–57, at 245–52; P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century* (Oxford, 1999), 143–53; S. Foot, ‘Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record, or Story?’, in E.M. Tyler and R. Balzaretto (eds), *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout, 2006), 39–65, at 53; see also P. Wormald, ‘A handlist of Anglo-Saxon lawsuits’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 17 (1988): 247–81.

²¹ See for example D.F. Johnson, ‘The fall of Lucifer in Genesis A and two Anglo-Latin royal charters’, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 97:4 (1998): 500–21; see also S.E. Kelly, ‘Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word’, in McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Mediaeval Europe*, 36–62, at 44.

some of the surviving illustrated books were associated with lay people: David F. Johnson suggests that the early eleventh-century illustrated copy of the Old English Hexateuch, now London, British Library, Cotton Claudius B.iv, might be a contender here, although on balance it seems more likely that this book belonged to a religious house.²² But whether lay or religious, manuscript art is essentially private because it is contained in books and viewed by small groups of people, unlike the ‘public’ images painted on walls or carved into stone sculptures. It is difficult to know how to interpret public visual representations too, because it is not always clear how visible such images were, or how far people might have understood the theological complexities that lay behind them.²³ And although archaeological evidence is valuable in understanding practices which were not necessarily limited to quite such a small number of noble or ecclesiastical individuals, this too has difficulties of interpretation. While texts describe practice and state belief, even if the reliability of these is variable, archaeological remains only reveal practices, so that belief must always be conjectured.²⁴ Moreover, the most useful archaeological evidence for the issues discussed in this book comes from burials and cemeteries, and the archaeology of death brings its own problems of interpretation: it is difficult to know whose practices burials represent, especially when these are tied up with aspects of social or religious control, as in the case of the burial of criminals.²⁵

The importance of theology for understanding all of these sources is the extent to which it lies behind them. The evidence that now survives in Anglo-Saxon texts and images, and in the archaeology of Christian death, was primarily written, designed, commissioned and orchestrated by people who were part of, or influenced by, a tradition of Christian learning. Anglo-Saxon theology

²² D.F. Johnson, ‘A Program of Illumination in the Old English Illustrated Hexateuch: “Visual Typology”?’ in R. Barnhouse and B.C. Withers (eds), *The Old English Hexateuch: Aspects and Approaches* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000), 165–99, at 194–5; in contrast, for the suggestion that a female audience may have been intended for the manuscript, see C.E. Karkov, ‘The Anglo-Saxon Genesis: Text, Illustration, and Audience’, in R. Barnhouse and B.C. Withers (eds), *The Old English Hexateuch: Aspects and Approaches* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2000), 201–37, at 206–7. There are also exceptional cases of Latin manuscripts in lay ownership, as for example the book of patristic Latin texts owned by Æthelweard the Younger (see S. Keynes, ‘Cnut’s Earls’, in A.R. Rumble (ed.), *The Reign of Cnut: King of England, Denmark and Norway* (London, 1994), 43–88, at 67–70; C. Cubitt, ‘Ælfric’s Lay Patrons’, in Magennis and Swan (eds), *A Companion to Ælfric*, 165–92, at 182.

²³ See below, 101–3.

²⁴ See below, 265–7.

²⁵ See below, 278–313; also M. Parker Pearson, ‘The powerful dead: Archaeological relationships between the living and the dead’, *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 3:2 (1993): 203–29, at 203–7; M. Parker Pearson, *The Archaeology of Death and Burial* (Stroud, 1999), 11–17; A.J. Reynolds, *Anglo-Saxon Deviant Burial Customs* (Oxford, 2009), 34–60.

has sometimes been viewed as static or derivative,²⁶ but the imagination and innovation of Anglo-Saxon authors has been stressed in recent years, and this is significant: Aron Gurevich observed that ‘theological thought, which is apparently constrained by tradition, does not nevertheless remain stationary, but is constantly developing as it responds to changes in social world understanding’.²⁷ While this is undoubtedly true, the flipside of this is that society and social world understanding are also influenced by changes in theological thought. It is clear too that Christian beliefs, or perhaps better, the beliefs of Christians, are not limited to the formal tenets of the Christian faith because they encompass, incorporate and exist within the broader realm of culture and lived experience. Moreover, much of what might be termed ‘culture’, or cultural ideas or beliefs, is not transmitted through explicit tuition, but rather is absorbed, acquired or inferred from social situations, practices or interactions.²⁸ The close examination of a wide variety of sources undertaken in this study therefore sheds light both on Anglo-Saxon theology and on Anglo-Saxon society, so that homilies can help to make sense of charters, archaeological evidence can help to interpret anecdotal accounts in saints’ lives, or place-names can cast a different light on the rituals of baptism and the funerary liturgy as well as on the homilies that describe these rituals. Although not always easy to read, real or attempted communications of ideas and beliefs are visible in the surviving sources, as are decisions over how practices were determined, undertaken or enforced. Theology is woven in and out of these, where it is found informing particular approaches, or pressed into action to interpret a given situation.

Of course, some areas of theology were undoubtedly remote from the daily lives of Anglo-Saxon Christian communities: Bede’s careful and complex discussion of what precisely was meant in a particular passage of Isaiah probably would not have seemed immediately relevant (or comprehensible) to most Anglo-Saxon men and women.²⁹ But this study shows that theology did form part of the experience of Anglo-Saxon Christian communities, often in the way it shaped or responded to events or practices, and this is explored here through case studies which focus on particular theological ideas, or on specific contexts which allow a way into understanding how theology was developed in, and responded to, different contexts in Anglo-Saxon England. Considering creation and the role of angels and devils in liturgy and landscape helps to bridge the gap between monasticism and the wider world in which monasteries were located (Chapter 2); a discussion of theology and the law reveals how theological ideas about mercy and judgement

²⁶ See for example C.L. Wrenn, ‘Some Aspects of Anglo-Saxon Theology’, in E. Bagby Atwood and A.A. Hill (eds), *Studies in Language, Literature and Culture of the Middle Ages and Later* (Austin, 1969), 182–9, at 182.

²⁷ A. Gurevich, ‘Popular and scholarly medieval cultural traditions: Notes in the margins of Jacques Le Goff’s book’, *Journal of Medieval History* 9:2 (1983): 71–90, at 88.

²⁸ P. Boyer, *The Naturalness of Religious Ideas: A Cognitive Theory of Religion* (Berkeley, 1994), 24.

²⁹ Bede, *De eo quod ait Isaias ‘Et claudentur’* (Epistola XV), PL 94.702–10.

shaped the ways that methods of proof such as oaths and ordeals and penalties such as capital punishment were understood and used (Chapter 3). Changing ideas about the immediate fate of the soul after death and especially the concept of purgatory are revealed through the gift-giving practices of Anglo-Saxon men and women and provide evidence for the communication of beliefs about the afterlife (Chapter 4); and the practical and theological responses to concerns over the body and its relationship to the soul attest to lively debates about eschatological ideas, and show how different beliefs might affect practices (Chapter 5). The rest of this chapter considers in more detail how the surviving evidence relates to ‘popular’ belief and culture, before setting out the institutional contexts in which Christian beliefs were communicated to Anglo-Saxon audiences between about 700 and 1100, and exploring the broader contexts of life and lived experience which also contributed to the range of beliefs of Christian Anglo-Saxons.

Understanding Belief in the Early Middle Ages

Interpretations of early medieval religious beliefs have, unsurprisingly, changed significantly in the centuries that they have been scrutinised by scholars, as have the particular issues which most concerned those who have explored this topic. In the sixteenth century, both Protestant and Catholic scholars in England looked to early medieval religious belief and practice in Britain to provide evidence that their interpretation of Christianity was ‘correct’ and had the weight of antiquity on its side, and especially in the islands where religious beliefs and practices were being deliberated and challenged.³⁰ By the nineteenth century, scholars no longer looked for evidence that early medieval English or British people were like them in their faith, as the sixteenth-century antiquarians had done. Instead, many sought to demonstrate precisely the opposite, that early medieval belief was marked by credulity and gullibility and was therefore markedly different from the contemporary modern world. Henry Lea’s study of ordeals and other legal practices in the early Middle Ages, entitled *Superstition and Force*, exemplifies

³⁰ B. Gordon (ed.), *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe: Vol. 1, The Medieval Inheritance* (Aldershot, 1996); D. Nussbaum, ‘Reviling the Saints or Reforming the Calendar? John Foxe and his ‘Kalendar’ of Martyrs’, in C.J. Litzenger and S. Wabuda (eds), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England: A Tribute to Patrick Collinson from his Students* (Aldershot and Brookfield (VT), 1998), 113–36; B.S. Robinson, ‘John Foxe and the Anglo-Saxons’, in C. Highley and J.N. King (eds), *John Foxe and his World* (Aldershot, 2002), 54–72; F. Heal, ‘What can King Lucius do for you? The Reformation and the early British Church’, *English Historical Review* 120:487 (2005): 593–614; F. Heal, ‘Appropriating History: Catholic and Protestant polemics and the national past’, *Huntington Library Quarterly* 68:1/2 (2005): 109–32; A.J. Kleist, ‘Anglo-Saxon Homiliaries in Tudor and Stuart England’, in A.J. Kleist (ed.), *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation* (Turnhout, 2007), 445–92; C. Highley, *Catholics Writing the Nation in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2008).

this approach: Lea argued that ‘it is only in an age of high and refined mental culture that man can entertain an adequate conception of the Supreme Being’, contrasting his own day with the ‘limited reason’ of the early medieval period, an age of ‘comparative simplicity’, in which ‘miracles come to be expected as matters of every-day occurrence, and the laws of nature are to be suspended whenever man chooses to tempt his God with the promise of right and the threat of injustice to be committed in His name’.³¹

This kind of impression of early medieval religious belief was based on a rather uncritical reading of the surviving sources and informed primarily by the top-down picture presented by them, so that the early medieval period was perceived as an age of faith marked by credulity and mindless adherence to Christian teachings.³² There were also attempts to consider belief more from the bottom up, but from some quarters this resulted in the rather extreme view that except in learned and elite contexts, paganism survived or was appropriated, so that ‘Christianity’ for many people was syncretistic, imperfectly learned or somehow detached from ‘true Christianity’.³³ This too is problematic: although syncretism does seem to have occurred at various points in the early Middle Ages in England and elsewhere, as in Bede’s description of the seventh-century East Anglian King Rædwald (who may or may not have been buried in Mound 1 at Sutton Hoo),³⁴ documented cases of prolonged syncretism (of the kind suggested by the proposed sharp division between learned and popular beliefs) are rare. Even more importantly, in the early Middle Ages as later there is no evidence that ‘paganism’ was deliberately maintained so that it existed in secret as a religion which was self-consciously opposed to Christianity.³⁵ In turn, therefore, this view too was rejected by many

³¹ H.C. Lea, *Superstition and Force: Essays on the Wager of Law – The Wager of Battle – The Ordeal – Torture* (Philadelphia, 1870), 86, 201.

³² This view has been completely discredited in scholarly literature but unfortunately still seems to exist in ‘popular’ works: see for example C. Freeman, *The Closing of the Western Mind: The Rise of Faith and the Fall of Reason* (New York, 2003), and as a useful corrective introduction, the essays in S.J. Harris and B.L. Grigsby, *Misconceptions about the Middle Ages* (London, 2008).

³³ See for example J. Delumeau, *Le catholicisme entre Luther et Voltaire, Nouvelle Clio* (Paris, 1971).

³⁴ Bede, *HE* II.15, ed. M. Lapidge, P. Monat and P. Robin, *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais = Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, Sources chrétiennes 489–91 (3 vols, Paris, 2005), I.372–6; S. Keynes, ‘Raedwald the Bretwalda’, in C.B. Kendall and P.S. Wells (eds), *Voyage to the Other World: The Legacy of Sutton Hoo* (Minneapolis, MN, 1992), 103–23; M. Parker Pearson, R. Van de Noort and A. Woolf, ‘Three men and a boat: Sutton Hoo and the east Saxon kingdom’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 22 (1993): 27–50.

³⁵ J. Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2005), 115–16; on what clerical writers meant by ‘pagans’, see R.A. Markus, ‘Gregory the Great’s Pagans’, in R. Gameson and H. Leyser (eds), *Belief and Culture in the Middle Ages: Studies Presented to Henry Mayr-Harting* (Oxford, 2001), 23–34; J.T. Palmer, ‘Defining paganism in the Carolingian world’, *Early Medieval Europe* 15:4 (2007): 402–25; see also below, 57–9.

scholars in favour of a blurrier distinction between elite and clerical circles of belief and culture on the one hand, and unlearned or lay ('popular') circles on the other, as spheres of interest which were to some degree separate, but constantly in contact and certainly not isolated from each other.³⁶

But as a number of scholars have pointed out, the key problem with this model of connected but rather compartmentalised circles of belief is that it assumes that 'types', 'classes' or 'social categories' of people held different beliefs, which implies in turn that these social groups were internally coherent and at the same time relatively distinct from one another.³⁷ Local priests are particularly good examples of why this is problematic, because as clergy they might be (and of course in the sources, often are) presented as a separate group from the laity; but many local priests were drawn from the communities which they served and their education may often have been basic or patchy, so that they might have shared more in common with their congregations than with bishops or highly educated monks.³⁸ And just as it is clear that some clergy were well educated and others were not, some laity (primarily elites) seem to have attained a considerable level of learning while others did not.³⁹ At the same time, the relationships between priests and those they served may also have been quite variable. The tenth-century will of Æthelgifu, an Anglo-Saxon noblewoman, illustrates precisely how the sharing of religious culture is not dependent on social or clerical status alone. Æthelgifu was a high-ranking lady who seems to have led some kind of quasi-religious life outside the cloister, and perhaps she could read, at least a little. In her will, she freed 'Eadwine, my priest', and asked that he offer three masses for

³⁶ J.-C. Schmitt, 'Au Moyen Age: culture folklorique, culture clandestine', *Revue du Vivarais* (1979): 143–8; J.-C. Schmitt, 'Les traditions folkloriques dans la culture médiévale. Quelques réflexions de méthode', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions* 52:1 (1981): 5–20; J. Le Goff, 'The Learned and Popular Dimensions of Journeys in the Otherworld in the Middle Ages', in S.L. Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*, New Babylon Studies in the Social Sciences 40 (Berlin, 1984), 19–37, and the essays in J. Le Goff, *The Medieval Imagination*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1992).

³⁷ M. Rubin, *Corpus Christi: The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge, 1991); K.L. Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996); C. Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity: Revisiting the cult of murdered and martyred Anglo-Saxon royal saints', *Early Medieval Europe* 9 (2000): 53–83, at 54–8; C.S. Watkins, "'Folklore" and "popular religion" in Britain during the middle ages', *Folk-Lore* 115:2 (2004): 140–50.

³⁸ Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity', 58; Watkins, "'Folklore" and "popular religion"', 141–2.

³⁹ See Kelly, 'Anglo-Saxon Lay Society and the Written Word'; E.M.C. van Houts, 'Women and the writing of history in the early middle ages: The case of Abbess Matilda of Essen and Æthelweard', *Early Medieval Europe* 1 (1992): 53–68; S. Ashley, 'The Lay Intellectual in Anglo-Saxon England: Ealdorman Æthelweard and the Politics of History', in J.L. Nelson and P. Wormald (eds), *Lay Intellectuals in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2007), 218–45.

her each week.⁴⁰ Eadwine might have been Æthelgifu's confessor, and/or able to discuss with her such religious topics as she wanted, but it is not clear how well educated he would have been himself, and he was not even a free man.⁴¹

Recognition of these difficulties has led to acceptance by many scholars that medieval and early modern European 'popular' and 'elite' or 'clerical' belief and culture were much more closely integrated than once thought, and especially that elites (both lay and ecclesiastical) shared and participated in the beliefs and practices of non-elites to a significant degree, although there are differences of opinion over precisely how this may have worked. Karen Jolly presents Anglo-Saxon 'popular' and 'formal' religion as two overlapping spheres in which almost all 'formal' religion exists within the sphere of the 'popular': she argues that 'popular religion' is essentially the common Christian worldview which incorporates almost all aspects of Christianity broadly construed, including the formal practices of the Church and excluding only a few complex theological ideas such as *homoousios* (the idea that Christ is the same essence or substance as God), which she suggests was known to 'only a few scholars in the early Middle Ages'.⁴² A similar (but perhaps more clearly defined) model is proposed by Carl Watkins, who argues that broadly speaking the spectrum included 'official beliefs', the core systematic teachings of the Church, and 'unofficial beliefs', which often varied locally and were much more fluid.⁴³ To a greater or lesser extent, he suggests, everyone held both official and unofficial beliefs, and that these 'existed within the interstices of official faith and ritual and churchmen did not *necessarily* see them as pagan, unChristian, heretical or erroneous',⁴⁴ although this does not mean there were no tensions between different beliefs or cultural values. He cautions, however, that although the distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' beliefs might be clear to modern scholars, those living in local communities as well as local and diocesan clergy may not always have perceived such clear-cut distinctions.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ S 1497, ed. D. Whitelock, *The Will of Aethelgifu: A Tenth Century Anglo-Saxon Manuscript* (Oxford, 1968), and see 33–4: 'mon eadwine preost'; see also D.A.E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Mediaeval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon History (Woodbridge, 1995), 115; S. Foot, *Veiled Women: 1, The Disappearance of Nuns from Anglo-Saxon England; 2, Female Religious Communities in England, 871–1066* (Aldershot, 2000), I.139–41, II.183–6.

⁴¹ As a slave, Eadwine should in theory not have been allowed to be a priest: see Pelteret, *Slavery*, 115–18, 248.

⁴² Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 18–19. '... Deum verum de Deo vero, natum [genitum], non factum, consubstantialem Patri; per quem omni facta sunt' ('true God of true God, born, not created, of the same substance/essence as the Father').

⁴³ Watkins, "'Folklore" and "popular religion"', 145–7.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 146. The idea that the distinction between 'official' and 'unofficial' beliefs could be rather fuzzy on the ground is borne out by anthropological research, which supports the idea that such distinctions are not always clear-cut to members of Christian

These are only two examples of a considerable body of scholarship, and these models and others like them are helpful in acting as a reminder that the experience of religious belief for many people was not simplistic, and consisted of more than either a tradition based on learning, or beliefs based on superstition.⁴⁶ But they are only helpful up to a point, and in considering religious belief and practice in Anglo-Saxon England it is important to bear in mind the significant social, religious and intellectual developments of the eleventh century, which would fundamentally change the way that the regulation of Christian belief and practice were conceptualised, and it is essential to remember how the situation was different before this. In this context the changing nature and perception of papal authority in the eleventh century (and subsequently) was particularly important. The pope had been held to be the spiritual head of all Christians since well before the Christianisation of the Anglo-Saxons, but effective institutional control from the papacy in matters of jurisdiction and belief was only really achieved fairly late in the eleventh century.⁴⁷ Before this time, the papacy was essentially responsive and reactive rather than active in its approach to questions of belief and practice: the pope might act as final arbiter in certain kinds of disputes, or show papal authority in the grants of privileges or immunities, or confirm (but perhaps not appoint) certain candidates for archbishoprics or bishoprics, but the extent to which successive popes were concerned with more general belief and practice for Christians outside Rome was fairly limited.⁴⁸ This is not to say that the pope was

communities who hold and practise those beliefs. See for example the study of a rural community in modern Greece, where it was observed that people did not distinguish clearly between the central tenets of their denomination of Christianity and other beliefs (such as the evil eye) which are not officially part of Orthodox teaching: H.A. Forbes, *Meaning and Identity in a Greek Landscape: An Archaeological Ethnography* (New York, 2007), 350–2.

⁴⁶ See also (for example) B. Scribner, 'Is a history of popular culture possible?', *History of European Ideas* 10:2 (1989): 175–91; Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity'; P. Burke, 'History and folklore: A historiographical survey', *Folk-Lore* 115:2 (2004): 133–9; C. Cubitt, 'Folklore and Historiography: Oral Stories and the Writing of Anglo-Saxon History', in R. Balzaretto and E.M. Tyler (eds), *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout, 2006), 189–223; E. Duffy, 'Elite and popular religion: the Book of Hours and lay piety in the later Middle Ages', in K. Cooper and J. Gregory (eds), *Elite and Popular Religion: papers read at the 2004 Summer Meeting and the 2005 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, *Studies in Church History* 42 (Woodbridge, 2006): 140–61; N.P. Tanner, *The Ages of Faith: Popular Religion in Late Medieval England and Western Europe* (London, 2009).

⁴⁷ See for example H.E.J. Cowdrey, *Pope Gregory VII, 1073–1085* (Oxford, 1998), 423–80, 520–9; K.G. Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century: Spirituality and Social Change*, *Manchester Medieval Studies* (Manchester, 2005), 55–81.

⁴⁸ See for example J.M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Frankish Church*, *Oxford History of the Christian Church* (Oxford, 1983), 110–22, 276–8, 295–7; B.H. Rosenwein, *Negotiating Space: Power, Restraint, and Privileges of Immunity in Early Medieval Europe* (Manchester, 1999), 106–12, 133–4, 156–83; J. Moorhead, 'Bede on the papacy', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 60:2 (2009): 217–32; F. Tinti, 'England and the Papacy in the Tenth Century', in

insignificant or had no influence at all, but it is reasonable to say that in the early Middle Ages the active identification and enforcement of correct Christian belief and practice for the whole Church was not usually one of the major tasks of either the pope, or the papal organisation.⁴⁹

In the early Middle Ages, questions of belief and practice were often considered more in the context of theological discussion rather than as official statements from the papacy or from papal councils.⁵⁰ It is worth bearing in mind that the effects of the significant developments in theology from the later eleventh century means that here too there are quite striking differences between the earlier and later Middle Ages. In some cases there are clear distinctions in approach which help to explain why these theological changes are significant in understanding how belief was set down and perceived. An early example of this is *Sic et Non*, a text put together by Peter Abelard (d.1142): this presented contradictory statements from patristic texts, inviting (but not offering) resolution, and was intended as an exercise for students.⁵¹ But this was foreign to the working methods of many early medieval writers: Ælfric, for example, was inclined to treat conflicting statements in separate works rather than to deal directly with apparently divergent opinions, at least partly because he was often quite closely dependent on the Scriptural and patristic authorities that he used.⁵² Even here though there are visible differences among Anglo-Saxon authors. Bede at least occasionally explained and resolved apparent contradictions, or analysed and corrected the opinions of previous authors.⁵³ Ultimately, the pastoral focus of much early medieval theology means that when Anglo-Saxon authors treated theological topics, they were often trying to set them down as they applied to their congregations, and what was discussed or determined was frequently reactive or recapitulative, and responded to the point raised without trying to examine an issue from all angles.⁵⁴ In contrast, scholars

C. Leyser, D.W. Rollason and H. Williams (eds), *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honour of Wilhelm Levison (1876–1947)* (Turnhout, 2011), 163–84.

⁴⁹ Blair, *The Church*, 506–7; Cushing, *Reform and the Papacy in the Eleventh Century*, 60–86.

⁵⁰ See M.L. Colish, ‘The Early Scholastics and the Reform of Doctrine and Practice’, in M.B. Christopher and I.H. Louis (eds), *Reforming Church before Modernity* (Aldershot, 2005), 61–8.

⁵¹ See *Sic et Non*, prol., ed. B.B. Boyer and R. McKeon, *Sic et Non: A Critical Edition* (Chicago, 1977), 89–104, for Abelard’s explanation of the purpose and function of the work.

⁵² See for example M.M. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Aelfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977), 4–17; and the discussion of Ælfric’s theology in L. Grundy, *Books and Grace: Aelfric’s Theology*, King’s College London Medieval Studies 6 (London, 1991).

⁵³ See for example the essays in S. DeGregorio, *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, 2006).

⁵⁴ This was the case often but not always: see for example the discussion in M.L. Colish, ‘Carolingian debates over nihil and tenebrae: A study in theological method’,

like Abelard and those who followed him often invited questions from both sides, at least partly in an attempt to explore and to systematise belief, and so also to determine what should be considered as correct belief.

The effects of these ecclesiastical and intellectual developments were significant, because it means that from the latter part of the eleventh century there were two key changes in how belief was discussed and considered. On the one hand scholars were attempting to explore and elucidate belief in new ways, while on the other the papacy was more actively seeking to establish and mandate belief from the top. This is quite different from the situation in earlier centuries, and there are three key points here. Firstly, there are a number of areas where it is impossible for the modern scholar – let alone local communities in the early Middle Ages – to identify one official line which represents the beliefs of ‘the Church’ on such issues. Secondly, even for topics where there is more clearly an official or more universally accepted line, this does not always mean that ‘the Church’ attempted to mandate that belief, given the limits of the papacy before the later eleventh century. And thirdly, it is questionable how useful the concept of ‘the Church’ even is in this period, given that for most people the experience of religion and belief was profoundly local or regional, and based in small communities.⁵⁵ In particular, it is worth noting that some clergy simply took a harder line than others in terms of what they would or would not accept, so that horizontal variance in belief within one ‘group’ or ‘type’ of people is at least as significant as vertical variance in belief across different levels of society.⁵⁶ The cumulative effect of all this is that what was believed and practised in any given local area may have been quite variable, both in terms of what was taught by the priest or other ecclesiastics, and in terms of what other beliefs might have circulated locally. Medieval theologians, clerics and religious writers may have liked to think that they had a monopoly on belief, but it is clear that this was never the case.

The difficulty of identifying an official line of belief is exemplified in the range of beliefs about the afterlife, especially the concept of purgatory and the fate of the soul immediately after death and before the Last Judgement. There are few systematic explanations or discussions of purgatory in surviving Anglo-Saxon (or other early medieval) texts, whether intended for lay education or as academic theological discourse. Bede and Ælfric discussed purgatory, but the works of other Anglo-Saxon scholars do not consider purgatory in any detail.⁵⁷ Archbishop

Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies 59:4 (1984): 757–95.

⁵⁵ See P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, AD 200–1000* (Oxford, 2003), 355–79.

⁵⁶ See for example see R.A. Markus, ‘From Caesarius to Boniface: Christianity and Paganism in Gaul’, in J. Fontaine and J.N. Hillgarth (eds), *Le Septième siècle: Changements et continuités. Actes du Colloque bilatéral franco-britannique tenu au Warburg Institute les 8–9 juillet 1988*, Studies of the Warburg Institute 42 (London, 1992), 154–72.

⁵⁷ See below, 203–12.

Wulfstan seems not to have referred to purgatory in his entire corpus of writings, and one sixteenth-century reader of his sermons noted approvingly that Wulfstan appears to express the idea that souls go only to heaven or hell after death, with no possibility of an alternative interim condition.⁵⁸ It has been argued that purgatory emerged from ‘popular belief’ and that theologians and ecclesiastics were simply forced to accept it, sanction it, and make it official, and that purgatory did not exist at all in this period and would be ‘born’ only in the late twelfth century.⁵⁹ Chapter 4 examines belief in purgatory as one of the case studies for the transmission and effect of theological ideas, and concludes not only that it did exist in this period, but also that it was quite widely believed. But widespread or not, it is difficult to determine from the surviving evidence whether purgatory counted as official teaching in this period since it is so infrequently mentioned, even if it is only discussed by those who were the academic and orthodox giants of their day. In this the contrast between the early and high or late Middle Ages is marked.

The surviving sources show that what was determined, promoted or objected to depended on local context and particular individuals, sometimes simply those who shouted the loudest, and here it is significant that some concepts which were rejected by Anglo-Saxon authors would in due course be established as canonical or be considered mainstream doctrine. The passage of time determined that Ælfric was over-cautious in a number of areas, such as his apparent rejection of the concept that would become transubstantiation.⁶⁰ This issue had already caused

⁵⁸ See the marginal note in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201, p. 20, printed and discussed in D. Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957), 225, 339, see also 25: ‘Hic Archiepiscopus Wulfstanus diserte negat tertium locum post hanc vitam’.

⁵⁹ Gurevich, ‘Popular and scholarly’; J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984), 1–14 and *passim*; see also C.S. Watkins, ‘Sin, penance and purgatory in the Anglo-Norman realm: The evidence of visions and ghost stories’, *Past and Present* 175:1 (2002): 3–33; C.S. Watkins, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2007), 180–5, 230–1.

⁶⁰ Ælfric, *CH* II.1, ll. 86–148 (and esp. 124–8), ed. M. Godden, *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies: The Second Series Text* EETS, SS 5 (Oxford, 1979), 152–4: ‘Micel is betwux þære ungesewenlican mihte þæs halgan husles. and þam gesewenlican hiwe agenes gecyndes; Hit is on gecynde brosnienndlic hláf. and brosnienndlic win. and is æfter mihte godcundes wordes. soðlice cristes lichama and his blód. na swa ðeah lichamlice. ac gastlice’ (‘There is a great difference between the invisible power of the holy Eucharist and the visible appearance of its own nature: in nature it is corruptible bread and corruptible wine, and after the power of the divine word, it truly becomes Christ’s body and his blood, not bodily, however, but spiritually’); *Pastoral Letter* I. 138–40, ed. Fehr, *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, 30: ‘þæt husel is Cristes lichama, na lichamlice ac gastlice. Na se lichama, þe he on þrowode, ac se lichama, þe he embe spræc. Þa-þa he bletsode hlaf and win to husle anre nihte ær his þrowunge ...’ (‘the Eucharist is Christ’s body, though not bodily but spiritually. Not the body in which he suffered, but the body which he spoke about when he blessed bread and wine for the Eucharist, the night before his passion ...’). See also H. Magennis, ‘Ælfric Scholarship’, in Magennis and Swan (eds), *A Companion to Ælfric*, 5–34, at 9–11.

serious disagreement in the Carolingian world in the ninth century, and, like purgatory, continued to be the subject of much discussion: even in the later Middle Ages when the general premise was accepted, there was still significant debate over the details. Transubstantiation was widely accepted later, but many people (both highly educated and less well educated) evidently found transubstantiation a difficult belief to accept, and perhaps also to understand.⁶¹ The nature of the surviving Anglo-Saxon evidence makes it almost impossible to determine how widely accepted was the belief that when bread and wine was consecrated in the mass it turned literally and physically into the body and blood of Christ, but the evidence of Ælfric's over-cautiousness (as it would turn out) acts as a warning that some of his objections ought perhaps to be taken with a pinch of salt since his claims for orthodoxy may in fact have gone against the grain, even if he genuinely had found little evidence for some of the beliefs to which he objected in the works he read. This highlights too how access to resources, or library books, might in some cases affect which beliefs were accepted or rejected by learned local authorities.

It is worth noting too that the complaints of vociferous clergy were not always held up on appeal, highlighting both the multiplicity of beliefs and the rather random nature of what was, or was not, determined to be acceptable in any given local context. A clear example of this is found in an incident discussed in a letter of 746 written to Boniface by Pope Zacharias, who complained about Boniface's decision to rebaptize certain individuals who had already been baptized by a priest whose Latin was poor. The priest had mangled the Latin words so that instead of baptizing 'in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti' ('in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'), he baptized instead 'in nomine patria et filia et spiritus sancti' ('in the name of the Holy Spirit with the fatherland and the daughter'). Boniface's objections were not received well by Pope Zacharias, who wrote as his immediate superior to inform him that since poor Latin was not (quite) akin to heresy, it was unnecessary to insist on rebaptism, itself unorthodox if not performed for appropriate reasons.⁶² This disagreement may have arisen in part because in the early Middle Ages sacramental theology had not really been explored in detail as it would be later, and in this period the number of sacraments, their nature, and even what made something a sacrament was not a matter of universal agreement, so that the theology of the sacraments was itself subject to debate.⁶³ Perhaps more

⁶¹ See for example C. Chazelle, 'Exegesis in the Ninth-Century Eucharist Controversy', in C. Chazelle and B.v.N. Edwards (eds), *The Study of the Bible in the Carolingian Era* (Turnhout, 2003), 167–87; and Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 30–7, 53–5, 121–4, 327–8.

⁶² *Epistola* 68, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 140–2.

⁶³ Pope Zacharias seems to take the approach which would later become standard, that the intention and matter (water) were crucial for the sacrament and so confusion in the wording would not immediately invalidate it (e.g. Augustine, *Tractatus in Iohannis euangelium*, 80.3, ll. 5–6, ed. R. Willems, *Sancti Aurelii Augustini in Iohannis Euangelium*

importantly, it is worth considering too how this must have been received on the ground and the confusion that this may have caused for new Christians attempting to learn about their faith and the purpose of baptism.

This instance of disagreement is also important as a cautionary reminder about the nature of the extant evidence. As in so many cases, only one side of the story survives: neither Boniface's original instructions in his own words, nor his response to this letter, are now extant. If the letter from Pope Zacharias had not survived, and instead a manuscript preserved a letter from Boniface instructing that rebaptism was necessary in such cases of priestly incompetence in Latin, modern scholars might assume that Boniface's letter represented the belief of 'the Church', since Boniface was the local figure of authority and by 746, he was also archbishop and papal legate. The surviving letter, like Ælfric's comments on the Eucharist, underlines the variability of theological belief in different places and how much this was dependent on local ecclesiastical officials, even extremely learned ones. This is significant in remembering that theological beliefs cannot be cast as rigid, unchanging and monolithic in comparison to fluid and flexible local 'popular' beliefs. One of the dangers in the various models put forward for understanding beliefs is therefore that in looking for the popular, the role and nature of more academic beliefs and the variability of theology is forgotten. People living in an area with a Boniface or an Ælfric might have been told more categorically and perhaps more frequently what was, and was not, deemed acceptable, but this may have been more limited, or simply different from, what higher authorities expected.

These tensions also point to another difficulty with many of the models for understanding belief. Ultimately, even while recognising that the dividing lines are not clear-cut, they tend to perpetuate a top-down perspective because they continue to distinguish between 'what is certainly acceptable to the Church', usually linked to literate and scholarly traditions, and 'what may be, but may not be, acceptable to the Church', some of which may be linked to local or place-bound traditions. Certain types of beliefs evade easy categorisation and sit uncomfortably in models like those proposed by Jolly or Watkins, because it is not easy to know where to place them or how to fit them into the categories which these models include. For example, heretical beliefs cut across the division between learned and unlearned, 'popular' and 'formal', or the beliefs of the masses and the beliefs of the few; they are identified in opposition to another tradition, and from the outside – in that the heretic assumes that he or she holds correct belief – but where beliefs were identified as heretical they were not discussed by contemporaries in ways which allow easy categorisation. It has been argued that the reason that so few

Tractatus CXXIV, CCSL 36 (Turnhout, 1954), 529: 'accedit verbum ad elementum et fit sacramentum'). In contrast, Boniface's rigid insistence on the correct wording of the liturgy suggests that he believed the performative aspect of the sacrament to be critical, so that pronouncing the correct formula effected sacramental change, almost like 'magic words'. See also H. Vorgrimler, *Sacramental Theology* (Collegeville, MN, 1992), 43–55.

cases of heresy are recorded in the early Middle Ages is precisely because official beliefs were not universally identified and uniformity was not demanded from the top, whether out of disinclination or inability.⁶⁴ Many beliefs which did provoke complaints of heresy from groups or individuals had originated in learned contexts, and/or were held (at least initially) by small groups of people: it is therefore not particularly useful to consider these as ‘popular’ or ‘unofficial’ beliefs in the usual sense, and they are not place-bound in the sense of being tied to the landscape.

A good example of these different kinds of beliefs side by side is found in the condemnation of two heretics in the mid eighth century, first at a provincial synod in Francia and later at a Roman synod, and recorded in the collected correspondence associated with Boniface.⁶⁵ Here it is also possible to see the objections of local figures of authority, like Boniface, to the beliefs which they identified as problematic in their areas of jurisdiction, and it is clear that such issues were identified at local or regional level and passed upwards when further problems were encountered, rather than being determined in the first instance by universalising or top-downward decrees. The individuals condemned for heresy were Aldebert, a Gaul, and Clemens, an Irishman, and the letter from Boniface to Pope Zacharias recorded that although they differed in the form of the error, they were alike in the weight of their sins.⁶⁶ Aldebert was accused of all manner of wickedness and seems to have sparked some popular following as a miracle-worker: among other offences, he apparently dedicated oratories to himself, gave out his fingernails and hair as relics, and declared that there was no need for confession, because he knew all hidden sins.⁶⁷ In contrast, Clemens is reported to have denied the writings of the holy fathers (Jerome, Augustine and Gregory are specifically mentioned), to have revived Jewish law and thus to have insisted that it is right for a Christian to marry his brother’s widow, and to have declared that when Christ descended to hell he released all who were there, worshippers of God and idols alike.⁶⁸

The beliefs of Clemens are described as the ‘incorrect’ interpretation of written texts, and at least some of what was attributed to him seems to have originated from a reading of Scripture and patristic writings. This suggests that despite the

⁶⁴ R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe, 950–1250* (Oxford, 2007), 66–8.

⁶⁵ *Epistolae* 57, 59, 62, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 102–5, 108–20, 127–8.

⁶⁶ *Epistola* 59, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 110, ll. 2–5: ‘Unus, qui dicitur Eldebert, natione generis Gallus est, alter, qui dicitur Clemens, genere Scottus est; specie erroris diversi, sed pondere peccatorum compares’.

⁶⁷ *Epistola* 59, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 111, l. 11 – 112, l. 12.

⁶⁸ *Epistola* 59, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 112, ll. 13–29. He apparently meant the liberation of souls at the harrowing of hell rather than universal salvation: see M.M. Gatch, ‘The harrowing of Hell: A liberation motif in medieval theology and devotional literature’, *Union Seminary Quarterly Review* 36 Suppl. (1981): 75–88; K. Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2007).

inevitable polemic and stereotyping which accompany such accusations of heresy, the disagreement here arose in the context of learning and interpretation of Scripture rather than out of ‘unofficial’ or ‘popular’ beliefs, and Clemens is not recorded as having had any kind of popular following. This is rather different from Aldebert, who has sometimes been associated with nature worship and paganism,⁶⁹ although this is probably wishful thinking. It is clear that what Aldebert was accused of was perceived as Christian heresy and incorporated Christian structures and hierarchies (Aldebert himself was ordained bishop, for example) even if he presented an alternative to the religious beliefs and practices espoused by Boniface and others. On the other hand, the reported actions of Aldebert do give some insight into the more place-bound beliefs which might be associated with local saints’ cults, for example. It is also clear that while Aldebert’s reported beliefs have elements which might be deemed or identified as ‘popular’, he was not utterly detached from the world of learning. A number of written texts were brought as evidence against Aldebert, including what was purportedly a *Life* written about him; a letter supposedly used by Aldebert which he said was from Jesus and fell down from heaven; and a prayer including the names of many angels.⁷⁰ These clearly show contact with Christian liturgy, learning and apocryphal traditions, although it is of course possible that they were simply found (or invented) by his opponents and attached to his name without good reason.

Boniface and the various councils did not reject the beliefs of either Aldebert or Clemens because these were ‘popular’ or outside the world of formal religion, or because they were at the wrong end of a spectrum of official and unofficial belief, or because they were ‘pagan’. The beliefs of Aldebert and Clemens were rejected by Boniface and other figures of authority because they did not agree with what was perceived by that select group to be the correct interpretation of Christianity, but this apparent unity of belief should not overshadow the fact that Boniface also did not always agree with his superiors, as the correspondence over rebaptism indicates. Moreover, while the Frankish and Roman councils which condemned Aldebert and Clemens were unified in their agreement that the beliefs of these men were not unacceptable, there is no recorded attempt to identify and set down the appropriate beliefs about these matters. This is significant because the identification of unacceptable belief does not necessarily determine what is considered to be correct or acceptable belief, and in extreme cases like those of Aldebert or Clemens it might have been perfectly clear that these beliefs were not acceptable to any of the bishops involved even if in fact individual episcopal interpretations of some aspects of a particular belief, such as the harrowing, might not have agreed in all the details. This contrasts significantly with later approaches: the first canon of IV Lateran, for example, is an expanded version of the creed which identifies

⁶⁹ V.I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1991), 168–72.

⁷⁰ *Epistola* 59, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 114, l. 14 – 115, l. 29, 116, l. 35 – 117, l. 19.

the accepted interpretation of some of the credal statements,⁷¹ but this highlights how difficult it is to take even the credal statements as clear evidence for ‘Church teaching’ or ‘official’ belief, because the bare bones of the creeds are not absolute and are subject to interpretation.

It is also significant that in some cases there was little difference between beliefs and practices which occurred locally and to which local figures of authority objected, and the beliefs that those same local figures of authority held themselves. One example is in the context of the cults of saints and the local veneration of saints. In summary, theological belief about sanctity and the cults of saints held that miracles might occur at the places where the bodily remains of certain holy individuals rested, or at places which were somehow associated with them or with their deeds in life. This belief underpins the veneration of established saints such as St Peter or St Oswald (in later Anglo-Saxon England) as much as it underpinned the veneration of newer saints such as St Eadburh, or those about whom little was known. Sometimes local veneration of individuals or places seem to have caused clerical condemnation; importantly, however, this was not always based on different beliefs, but could rather stem from a different understanding of how particular beliefs should be applied, and in some cases perhaps also political exigency. One example of this is the growing cult of Waltheof, an English earl who had been executed in 1076 and whose body had been translated after it was found incorrupt in 1085.⁷² In 1102, the Council of Westminster condemned new veneration of the bodies of the dead, or springs or other things, without episcopal authority, and it is possible that this canon applied at least partly to Waltheof’s cult.⁷³ Archbishop Anselm of Canterbury (d.1109) also wrote to the nuns at Romsey (and to Stephen, the archdeacon of Winchester) in 1102 to forbid their veneration of an unnamed man as a saint.⁷⁴

⁷¹ IV Lateran (1215), 1, ed. N.P. Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils* (2 vols, London, 1990), I. 230. This is too long to quote in full but for example, this expanded creed specifically affirms belief in transubstantiation, the indivisibility of the Holy Trinity, and that the bodies which will be resurrected are the same as those fleshly bodies that we have now – none of which is outlined specifically in the creed.

⁷² See E. Cownie, *Religious Patronage in Anglo-Norman England, 1066–1135* (Woodbridge, 1998), 119–21, at 126; P.A. Hayward, ‘Translation-narratives in post-conquest hagiography and English resistance to the Norman Conquest’, *Anglo-Norman Studies* 21 (1998): 67–93, at 92.

⁷³ Council of Westminster (1102), 27, *Councils and Synods*, I.ii, no. 113: ‘Ne quis temeraria novitate corporibus mortuorum aut fontibus aut aliis rebus, quod contigisse cognovimus, sine episcopali auctoritate reverentiam sanctitatis exhibeat’. See also the Council at London (25 December 1074 x 28 August 1075), 8, *Councils and Synods*, I.ii, no. 92.

⁷⁴ *Epistolae* 236, 237, ed. F.S. Schmitt, *S. Anselmi Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, opera omnia* (Edinburgh, 1946–61), IV.144–5; Hayward, ‘Translation-narratives in post-conquest hagiography’, 92.

What this example shows is of course not an objection to the cults of saints, nor to the theological beliefs which underpinned the practices surrounding the veneration of saints. Anselm and his colleagues all believed in saints, in their miracles, and in the veneration which was due to them. What they objected to was people or places being venerated as holy when they had not been approved by episcopal sanction and brought under ecclesiastical control.⁷⁵ Similar examples are visible throughout the Middle Ages, from the dubious individual venerated by locals but discredited by St Martin in the fourth century, to the three local cults which the fourteenth-century bishop of Exeter, John Grandisson, sought to eradicate.⁷⁶ And although in some cases they simply repeat or translate earlier proscriptions, some of the earlier Anglo-Saxon objections to local practices should probably be viewed in this light. Ælfric's complaints about holy wells, trees or stones echo and repeat those of writers from late Antiquity, and such objections continued throughout the Middle Ages, but it is possible that some of what Ælfric, like Anselm or John Grandisson, disliked was the fact that these had grown up outside local ecclesiastical control. Crucially, what this means is that in many cases local or 'popular' belief must in fact have been incredibly close to the beliefs of local clergy and figures of authority, whether those individuals were the most learned or the most ignorant ecclesiastical officials. Differentiating between these beliefs is a question of shades of grey, not the black and white distinctions of 'correct' or 'incorrect' that the surviving sources often present.

In understanding how a local figure of authority like a Boniface or an Ælfric might have perceived the range of beliefs he encountered, it is useful to compare the status accorded to different types of visions by the modern Roman Catholic Church. Private revelations to individuals do not have the status of Scripture, which is the public Revelation of God to humanity, but the Church may accept (or simply not discredit) the validity of certain revelations without considering them as fundamental to Catholic belief.⁷⁷ Thus Scripture is 'proved' or 'approved';

⁷⁵ A. Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2011), 38–9, 66–9; see also Hayward, 'Translation-narratives in post-conquest hagiography', 81–3 for discussion of the possible lack of episcopal validation for the translation of saints by Abbess Ælfgifu at Barking; and P. Fouracre, 'The Origins of the Carolingian Attempt to Regulate the Cult of Saints', in J. Howard-Johnston and P.A. Hayward (eds), *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown* (Oxford, 1999), 143–65, at 143–50.

⁷⁶ N. Orme, 'Bishop Grandisson and popular religion', *Devonshire Association Report and Transactions* 124 (1992): 107–18.

⁷⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church: Popular and Definitive Edition* (London, 2000), 22–3 (c.67): 'Throughout the ages, there have been so-called "private" revelations, some of which have been recognized by the authority of the Church. They do not belong, however, to the deposit of faith. It is not their role to improve or complete Christ's definitive Revelation, but to help live more fully by it in a certain period of history. Guided by the Magisterium of the Church, the *sensus fidelium* knows how to discern and welcome in these

private revelations may be ‘unproved’ or ‘unverified’ even if they are widely accepted (such as the apparition of the Virgin Mary at Fatima in 1917),⁷⁸ and still further visions are disapproved of, and rejected outright (such as those reported by Joseph Smith in 1823–1827, which ultimately led him to found the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints).⁷⁹ This tripartite distinction can also be found in the early Middle Ages even if it is not expressed in exactly this way, and even if these distinctions were identified personally and individually rather than institutionally. Thus for Boniface as for the modern Church, beliefs found in Scripture were ‘proved’ or ‘approved’. A vision of the otherworld shown to a brother of the monastery of Wenlock was ‘unproved’ and ‘unverified’ in the sense that it was a private vision to an individual and not recorded in Scripture, but clearly Boniface accepted it as useful and considered it worth publicising, since he recorded it and took care to stress the closeness of his account to the visionary. In contrast, the visions of Aldebert were ‘disapproved of’ and emphatically rejected as contrary to ‘correct’ belief.

These are just three points in a personal perspective which would of course encompass and make judgements about many different beliefs encountered in the course of life, and there were presumably also some areas of belief which provoked less strong opinions, or where there was little consideration of which side of a line a particular issue might fall. Personal perspectives such as these are important because the exact range and variety of beliefs held by any one individual, and in turn the relative significance attached to different aspects of religious belief, are unlikely to be exactly replicated even by another follower of the same religion.⁸⁰ Aldebert, for example, clearly did not share precisely the same perspective as Boniface. Even those who were not in positions of authority to approve or disprove beliefs might have a clear idea of which beliefs they personally accepted or rejected. In this connection, the few cases of unbelief described in early medieval sources indicate that the rejection of beliefs of any kind was not limited to those who had been highly educated, and this is important too because although the transmission of Christian ideas (that is, Christian education in the

revelations whatever constitutes an authentic call of Christ or his saints to the Church’; K. Rahner, ‘Über Visionen und verwandte Erscheinungen’, *Geist und Leben* 21 (1948): 179–213; P. de Letter, ‘Revelations, Private’, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 12 (Washington, DC, 2003), 202.

⁷⁸ M. O’Carroll, ‘Apparitions’, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Wilmington, DE, 1982), 47–8.

⁷⁹ See J. Smith, *The Book of Mormon: An Account Written by the Hand of Mormon upon Plates taken from the Plates of Nephi* (Liverpool, 1854); G. Hardy, *Understanding the Book of Mormon: A Reader’s Guide* (Oxford, 2010).

⁸⁰ Examples from the modern world suggest that members of the same denomination of Christianity can apparently hold completely contradictory beliefs and yet to a certain extent negotiate the tensions arising from them, as illustrated by the issue of women’s ordination in the Church of England.

broadest possible sense) is an important prerequisite for Christian belief, the fact that people were exposed to Christian education does not *prima facie* mean that they necessarily believed everything that they were taught.⁸¹

The surviving sources might give the impression that if preachers could only hammer in the right kind of information, heresy and unorthodoxy would be stamped out; but this is in large part because they often originated from clergy who were keen to push a reformist agenda, and in practice attempts to understand or refine theology and beliefs might in fact themselves be interpreted as heresy or heterodoxy (although a later example, Martin Luther is a case in point here). Ascertaining instances of unbelief or irreverence from the surviving evidence is difficult, but they are occasionally found in miracle stories as proof of the power of God or the saints. Context makes it difficult to trust these at one level since the purpose of the story is frequently to demonstrate divine or saintly power, but as Susan Reynolds cogently argues, such anecdotal accounts of unbelief would not be there if they did not bear some relation to reality.⁸² One such account is found in Ælfric's *Life of St Swithun*, and Ælfric seems to have added this himself because it does not appear in his sources. Ælfric tells of a funeral wake at which someone joked and mocked Swithun by pretending to be him, until he fell down, senseless, and did not recover until he had been taken to St Swithun and begged forgiveness for his silliness.⁸³

Another anecdote is found in the *Life of Ecgwine*, written in the early eleventh century by Byrhtferth, the school-master of Ramsey: this records the attempt by a 'rustic' to claim ownership of land which the monks claimed belonged to the saint.⁸⁴ The 'rustic' was required to swear an oath asserting his right to the land, and attempted to pervert the course of justice by placing in his shoe some earth from lands which were genuinely his own: this way, when he swore that he was standing on his own lands, he felt he was (near enough) telling the truth. The point of the story is to demonstrate St Ecgwine's sanctity and power, and so the 'rustic' was not allowed to escape unscathed but accidentally cut off his own head with his scythe, which indicated clearly that he had sworn the oath falsely. The story itself is a combination of literary construct and hagiographical intent, but is possible that behind these some elements of truth are buried. Byrhtferth had little information about St Ecgwine, who had lived in the late seventh/early eighth century, but this event is of course not supposed to have happened during Ecgwine's lifetime, and instead is recorded as having taken place while one Wigred was prior of Evesham.

⁸¹ S. Reynolds, 'Social mentalities and the case of medieval scepticism', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series 1 (1991): 21–41, at 25–31.

⁸² Reynolds, 'Social mentalities and the case of medieval scepticism', *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸³ Ælfric, *Life of Swithun*, 19, ed. and trans. M. Lapidge, *The Cult of St Swithun*, Winchester Studies 4.ii (Oxford, 2003), 600–1.

⁸⁴ *Vita S. Ecgwini*, iv.10, ed. M. Lapidge, *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgwine* (Oxford, 2009), 290–6 and see lxxxii–lxxxiii for the date; the anecdote is discussed in Wormald, *Making of English Law*, 158–9; Cubitt, 'Folklore and Historiography', 199–200.

Wigred himself is another figure about whom little is known but later writers placed this episode in a chronology which suggests that it took place in the late tenth or early eleventh century, and so perhaps roughly contemporaneously with Byrhtferth's composition of the *Life*, if the later chronology can be trusted.⁸⁵

It is worth stressing again that the accounts that Byrhtferth and other writers presented did need to be credible to their audiences, even if these were audiences predominantly made up of well-educated men and women in religious life. Early medieval hagiographies often present those who scoffed at the power of the saints as stupid or delusional rather than atheistic, and true atheism in the modern sense seems unlikely in the early Middle Ages, at least on the basis of the present evidence.⁸⁶ On the other hand, while Byrhtferth's context for writing did not admit the possibility that someone could get away with such a trick, clearly the peasant thought otherwise, or he would not have tried it.⁸⁷ Seeing through accounts of the miraculous like this one in order to find evidence of 'what actually happened' is challenging, and understanding how these miracles appeared to contemporaries is also difficult. It is clear that there were no pervading early medieval *mentalités* which made all people think in a particular way (specifically, one which is supposedly different from modern people or modern scholars).⁸⁸ In the same way, it is inappropriate and inaccurate to assume that events which look peculiar in different societies might seem quite normal to people within those societies because of their worldview.⁸⁹ Whether people believed in (for example) invisible spirits or not, it did not mean that they considered these spirits 'normal' or un frightening, that they ever expected to see them, or even that they did not find the idea of angels and devils as unsettling as many people might do today: they

⁸⁵ Lapidge (ed.), *The Lives of St Oswald and St Ecgbwine*, 291, n. 81.

⁸⁶ There are few discussions of medieval atheism, but those studies which have been undertaken usually focus on the later Middle Ages. See for example F. Niewöhner and O. Pluta, *Atheismus im Mittelalter und in der Renaissance* (Wiesbaden, 1999); O. Pluta, 'Atheismus im Mittelalter', in K. Kahnert and B. Mojsisch (eds), *Umbrüche: Historische Wendepunkte der Philosophie von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart. Festschrift für Kurt Flasch zu seinem 70. Geburtstag* (Amsterdam, 2001), 117–30, and most usefully Reynolds, 'Social mentalities and the case of medieval scepticism'.

⁸⁷ It is interesting too that Byrhtferth's account stands in such contrast to some of the later literary constructions of those who swore oaths or undertook ordeals falsely by reframing the question, or answering (like the peasant here) in such a way that they did not directly tell a lie. In a twelfth- or thirteenth-century romance, someone pulling such a stunt might have escaped with land and life, especially if he were noble or royal rather than 'rustic', but in tenth-century hagiography, apparently not. See J.W. Baldwin, 'The crisis of the ordeal: Literature, law, and religion around 1200', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 24:3 (1994): 327–53.

⁸⁸ Reynolds, 'Social mentalities and the case of medieval scepticism', esp. 21–9. In the same way, it is clearly nonsense that people in the early Middle Ages had no sense of individuality (for example): see Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe*, 186.

⁸⁹ Boyer, *The naturalness of Religious Ideas*, 34–6.

demand and receive attention in the surviving sources precisely because they are unusual and disruptive in the pattern of daily life.⁹⁰

A useful comparison here is William Dalrymple's account of the experience of twentieth-century monks in the monastery of Mar Saba, in the West Bank. One Fr. Theophanes described a frightening experience that he had on a windy night:

As I prayed I heard footsteps coming up the corridor. It was the noise of a monk walking: I could hear the rustling of his habit. The footsteps came closer and then stopped outside my room. I waited for the monk to speak, but nothing happened. Suddenly I heard very clearly the noise of many feet tripping down the stairs from the opposite direction. They were like madmen, jumping down the steps very quickly – loud, irregular footsteps: there were maybe nine or ten of them, all running.⁹¹

On leaving his cell, Fr. Theophanes saw nothing, and thinking that thieves had come to the monastery, he and his companion Fr. Evdokimos spent an hour searching for them. But afterwards when they had found no one, they discussed the matter with their superior, the Archimandrite, and eventually understood what had happened. 'The first set of footsteps were those of St Sabas. The rabble were demons coming to turn Fr. Theophanes into a Freemason.'⁹² St Sabas knew what they were planning, so he stood in front of Fr. Theophanes' door to guard it. Then he chased the demons away.⁹³

What is significant here is that while Fr. Theophanes might have believed that demons were a continual threat and that St Sabas was always present in the monastery, he did not initially interpret what he had experienced as a demonic attack thwarted by St Sabas until after he had re-evaluated the episode with input from their superior, and only then when other logical explanations had been excluded. Accounts from the early Middle Ages also suggest that the surviving interpretations as recorded in sources were sometimes reached in a similar way. One such episode comes from the *Life* of Leoba, an English missionary abbess of Tauberbischofsheim (Baden-Württemberg) who had died in 782, although the *Life* itself was written at Fulda (Hessen) in the ninth century.⁹⁴ This text gives an account of the disappearance of keys that belonged to a nun at Wimbourne

⁹⁰ Ibid., 34–5.

⁹¹ W. Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain: A Journey in the Shadow of Byzantium* (London, 1997), 292.

⁹² Freemasons appear sometimes to be equated with Catholics (see Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain*, 280). In other Orthodox monasteries, Dalrymple was apparently asked whether he was 'Orthodox or heretic'.

⁹³ Dalrymple, *From the Holy Mountain*, 293.

⁹⁴ See S.J. Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church: Sharing a Common Fate* (Woodbridge, 1992), 271–6.

(Dorset), the community where Leoba had been trained.⁹⁵ The nun assumed that she had lost the keys and begged forgiveness from the abbess, but the abbess informed her that she had not lost them, insisting instead that they must have been taken by the devil. The nuns prayed and the keys eventually turned up in the mouth of a dead fox, which confirmed the suspicions of the abbess.⁹⁶ In reality, the identification of demonic power or influence may not have been made as early as the account suggests, as in the case of Fr. Theophanes and the devils. Many of the incidents now attributed in early medieval written accounts to demonic, angelic or saintly spirits must also have been re-evaluated after the event, and once interpreted in this way, it was precisely their unusual nature which made them worthy of recording.

The interpretations of Fr. Theophanes and Wimbourne's abbess were made in monastic contexts that were consciously or unconsciously informed by written texts which record similar events and interpretations: it is not at all clear how many believers in the same region (whether the West Bank in the twentieth century, Wimbourne in the eighth, or Fulda in the ninth) but who lived in non-monastic contexts would have accepted the same analysis of the episode. Perhaps some would have agreed with the interpretation, while others, like Byrhtferth's 'rustic', would have been more sceptical of the powers of the saint than were his devoted monastic followers. And yet, on the other hand, there are many people in modern 'rational' societies who are quite happy to accept beliefs which other members of those societies might consider superstitious, such as the evil eye; or lone magpies as a portent (or cause?) of sorrow; or even, depending on the viewpoint, organised religion. In the early Middle Ages as in the twentieth or twenty-first century, these complexities of belief are elided unless the roles played by individuality, agency, context and circumstances are understood. Early medieval sources do show differences between the beliefs and practices of peasants and clergy, and the objections of clergy to beliefs held by non-clerical communities, but they also show differences between abbesses and their nuns, and between scholars such as Ælfric and Wulfstan. In the case of theological disagreement, as in the case of local saints, the overwhelming impression is that many of the beliefs involved were not so different as they are sometimes made out to be, but were simply justified or understood in slightly different ways which were nonetheless held to be crucially distinct.

Understanding the beliefs of every individual in the early Middle Ages is clearly impossible. Even the beliefs of almost all educated Anglo-Saxons are no longer discernible by modern scholars, because there are so few authors whose names are known and whose works survive to the present day, while those at the bottom of the social scale may even be as invisible archaeologically as they are

⁹⁵ Rudolf, *Vita Leobae*, 5, ed. G. Waitz, 'Vita Leobae abbatissae Biscofesheimensis auct. Rudolfo Fuldensi', *Supplementa tomorum I–XII, pars III*, MGH, *Scriptores in Folio* 15.1 (Hannover, 1887), 118–31, at 124.

⁹⁶ See also below, 72–3.

in the textual record.⁹⁷ One approach to this is, as Sarah Tarlow argues, ‘to accept that personal interiority, especially in the past, may ultimately be inaccessible’.⁹⁸ And yet it remains true that the acceptance or rejection of a particular belief is ultimately down to the individual, and models which seek to analyse belief in a structural way where ‘the Church’ or ‘official belief’ is at one end of a spectrum, or forms one circle, still in a sense take an ecclesiastical perspective. What people believed was determined to some degree by personal choice and decision as much as it was governed by local circumstances including place-bound beliefs and practices, or affected by the views of the local religious and secular authorities on the matter, or the specific context, as well as the way in which an interpretation or belief was formed – and recorded. As the example of the monks of Mar Saba or the nuns of Wimbourne suggests, some of the beliefs which are presented as *faits accomplis* in the surviving texts are clearly far more complex, and probably required much more interpretation after the fact, than is generally obvious in the surviving sources.

This is not to suggest, however, that the evidence which survives is so person- or place-specific that it can never be informative about ideas or beliefs more generally in the period, and here Tarlow proposes the concept of ‘belief discourses’. This involves recognising that people accept a variety of beliefs, some of which may be inconsistent or contradictory, and almost all of which are context-specific: belief discourses may represent belief indirectly through practice rather than providing direct evidence of it, and incorporate material practices as well as through textual statement, discussion or narrative.⁹⁹ In examining the richness and variety of early medieval beliefs about issues like angels and devils, or the dead body, and the practices which went hand-in-hand with these beliefs, it is possible to see the range of ideas in circulation and in dialogue, even if it is ultimately fruitless to try to identify one belief as ‘popular’ or ‘unofficial’, or another as ‘formal’ or ‘official’. The importance of specific context is highlighted by Watkins too: he shows that the twelfth-century author Gerald of Wales seems to have adjusted his approach depending on whether he was writing manuals of instruction or attending local festivals.¹⁰⁰ In some cases, such specific context is not easy to identify for the surviving texts; and it is difficult to imagine that someone like Ælfric would have budged much to ‘negotiate’ Christian values, since he was something of a hardliner and a stickler for orthodoxy: Ælfric quite unnecessarily uses the example of the man who mocked Swithun as an opportunity to complain about wakes, and

⁹⁷ See H. Hamerow, ‘Overview: Rural Settlement’, in S. Crawford, H. Hamerow and D.A. Hinton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (Oxford, 2011), 119–27, at 125–6.

⁹⁸ S. Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead Body in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2010), 15; see also S. Tarlow, *Bereavement and Commemoration: An Archaeology of Mortality*, Social Archaeology (Oxford, 1999), 47.

⁹⁹ Tarlow, *Ritual, Belief, and the Dead Body*, 15–18.

¹⁰⁰ Watkins, “Folklore” and “popular religion”, 142–4.

about the practices of eating and drinking around a corpse instead of offering prayers.¹⁰¹ Perhaps in Ælfric's writings it is possible to access personal interiority, although he and others like him are certainly the exception rather than the rule.

Conceptualising belief in terms of multiple individual perspectives requires acknowledging that all beliefs may be received differently, and accepted or rejected by individuals, wherever such beliefs originated, and in this sense it is reasonable to argue that personal interiority is inaccessible in the early Middle Ages. But the significance of conceptualising belief in this way is that both Ælfric and the man who mocked Swithun, who clearly accepted and rejected different beliefs, are thus placed on the same level. Ecclesiastical officials like Ælfric himself would argue that he and the man who mocked Swithun should not be placed on the same level, because Ælfric was highly educated in the ways of theology, and the man who mocked Swithun was not. Taking a step back, it seems that this too is to misunderstand what Christian belief is, and what it means to be a Christian. Those at the top of the hierarchy thought that what they determined, based on learned tradition, was Christian belief, although as the discussion of examples like Boniface and the issue of rebaptism has shown, this was not always secure or fixed. But Christian belief is more complex than this. Vincent of Lérins observed that Catholic belief is 'what has always been believed everywhere, by all' ('quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est').¹⁰² It seems likely that even in the fifth century, this was not as straightforward as Vincent suggests, and it was certainly not straightforward in Anglo-Saxon England (and is still less so in the twenty-first century).

The ability of all Christians to assert their own beliefs – as in the case of burgeoning saints' cults, or Aldebert and Clemens, or theological discussions – means that these must all be examined as instances of Christian belief, even while recognising that some contemporaries identified them as incorrect, invalid or objectionable, and that the ecclesiastical hierarchy retained the last word – although not the only word – on belief. This range of Christian beliefs and the different ways in which they were perceived by contemporaries surrounds the dialogue between priests and their congregations, in which pastoral theology was communicated to wider audiences and was required to engage with the societies which made up those audiences. Understanding the fact of this variety is therefore the first step in understanding this process of communication. The next section of this chapter turns to the second step, and explores the range of circumstances in which Christians learned and expressed

¹⁰¹ Ælfric, *Life of Swithun*, 20, ed. Lapidge, *Cult of St Swithun*, 602.

¹⁰² *Commonitorium*, II.5, ll. 25–6, ed. R. Demeulenaere, 'Vincentius Lerinensis, *Commonitorium*', in R. Demeulenaere and J. Mulders (eds), *Foebadius, Victricius, Leporius, Vincentius Lerinensis, Evagrius, Ruricius: Liber contra Arrianos; De laude sanctorum; Libellus emendationis; Epistulae; Commonitorium. Excerpta ex operibus s. Augustini; Altercatio legis inter Simonem Iudaeum et Theophilum christianum*, CCSL 64 (Turnhout, 1985), 127–95, at 149.

their faith in Anglo-Saxon England, both within and outside churches, as well as the changing institutional contexts and opportunities in which teaching might take place. It is also important to consider the materials used for teaching – not only the texts which were used to teach and the authors who wrote them, but the written form in which these circulated; and to consider the teachers themselves, how (and how much) they were trained and what were the aspirations (if not always the actualities) of the pastoral mission. To say that within this dialogue the responses of the laity were clear would be to overstate the case, but it is possible sometimes to hear the echoes of lay experience or to postulate how such teaching was received.

Learning the Faith in Anglo-Saxon England

In the broadest and most basic sense, and in the early Middle Ages as today, Christians are those who are initiated into the faith through baptism,¹⁰³ and again in the early Middle Ages as today, a good Christian might be said to be someone who keeps to the promises made in baptism, both in the beliefs which are held and in the performance of practices which express and form part of Christian belief. From the perspective of ecclesiastical officials, the formal responsibility of informing and educating people about Christian belief and practice fell to priests and bishops, in the contexts of preaching or the services of routine pastoral care such as baptism and confession. However, the context in which this pastoral work was undertaken was not static: the ecclesiastical landscape which supported pastoral care changed and developed significantly between the late sixth century and the eleventh century. Missionaries from Rome and Iona came to England from the late sixth century, and Irish and European contacts continued to be influential in subsequent centuries, so that reforms instigated abroad were taken up and put into practice in English contexts too.¹⁰⁴ Understanding the variety of local ecclesiastical arrangements which sustained both clergy and laity is extremely

¹⁰³ See S.A. Keefe, *Water and the Word: Baptism and the Education of the Clergy in the Carolingian Empire*, Publications in Mediaeval Studies (Notre Dame, IN, 2002), 1.2–6.

¹⁰⁴ H.M. Taylor, 'Tenth Century Church Building in England and on the Continent', in D. Parsons (ed.), *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London, 1975), 141–68, 237; V. Ortenberg, *The English Church and the Continent in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries: Cultural, Spiritual, and Artistic Exchange* (Oxford, 1992); Blair, *The Church*, 8–49; Foot, *Monastic Life*, 265–8; J.T. Palmer, *Anglo-Saxons in a Frankish World, 690 – 900*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 19 (Turnhout, 2009); S. Hamilton, 'The Early Pontificals: The Anglo-Saxon Evidence Reconsidered from a Continental Perspective', in C. Leyser, D.W. Rollason and H. Williams (eds), *England and the Continent in the Tenth Century: Studies in Honour of Wilhelm Levison (1876–1947)* (Turnhout, 2011), 411–28.

important for understanding how Christian belief and practice may have worked on the ground, and how these were shaped and influenced by local circumstances.

Here it is important also to understand the development of the settled landscape in which these ecclesiastical structures and arrangements existed, and in which pastoral work was carried out. Anglo-Saxon society was predominantly rural: early Anglo-Saxon settlements were mainly quite small and dispersed rather than nucleated (although there is regional variation), and in the late seventh and early eighth centuries there is evidence that some settlements shifted gradually across the landscape rather than remaining stable.¹⁰⁵ By the late seventh or early eighth century there were also other larger centres where churches or ecclesiastics might be found, including proto-urban trading places known as ‘wics’ and probably under royal or ecclesiastical control, such as Ipswich or Hamwic (modern Southampton); royal palaces, such as Bamburgh; and major religious centres such as Jarrow (Northumberland), or Whitby or Ripon (Yorkshire), many of which also seem to have been sites of trade and production, to judge from the material assemblages found there.¹⁰⁶

From the ninth century, rural settlements seem to have stabilised to some degree, and some continued to be occupied as before, while there was also an increase in urbanisation and urban settlements.¹⁰⁷ From this time there is more evidence for smaller, local churches, both in towns and in the surrounding localities, apparently at least partly due to a growing desire among Anglo-Saxon nobility to

¹⁰⁵ H. Hamerow, ‘Settlement mobility and the middle Saxon shift: Rural settlements and patterns in Anglo-Saxon England’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1991): 1–17; H. Hamerow, ‘The development of Anglo-Saxon settlement structure’, *Landscape History* 31:1 (2010), 5–22.

¹⁰⁶ R.A. Hall and M. Whyman, ‘Settlement and monasticism at Ripon, North Yorkshire, from the 7th to 11th centuries A.D’, *Medieval Archaeology: Journal of the Society for Medieval Archaeology* 40 (1996): 62–150; J.D. Richards, ‘What’s so special about “productive sites”? Middle Saxon settlements in Northumbria’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology & History* 10 (1999): 71–80; Blair, *The Church*, 255–6; T. Pestell, ‘Markets, Emporia, Wics, and “Productive” Sites: Pre-Viking Trade Centres in Anglo-Saxon England’, in S. Crawford, H. Hamerow and D.A. Hinton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology* (Oxford, 2011), 556–79, and see the essays in D. Hill and R. Cowie (eds), *Wics: The Early Medieval Trading Centres of Northern Europe* (Sheffield, 2001) and T. Pestell and K. Ulmschneider (eds), *Markets in Early Medieval Europe: Trading and Productive Sites, 650–850* (Macclesfield, 2003).

¹⁰⁷ D. Hill, ‘Athelstan’s urban reforms’, *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology & History* 11 (2000): 173–86; M.O.H. Carver, *The Birth of a Borough: An Archaeological Study of Anglo-Saxon Stafford* (Woodbridge, 2010); Hamerow, ‘The development of Anglo-Saxon settlement structure’; R.A. Hall, ‘Burhs and Boroughs: Defended Places, Trade, and Towns. Plans, Defences, Civic Features’, in Crawford, Hamerow and Hinton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, 600–24.

have churches on their own estates.¹⁰⁸ Early episcopal seats were often located in old Roman towns (such as York), although in the early centuries of Anglo-Saxon Christianity these were not urban in the way that they would come to be later; other sites founded as monasteries were more isolated (such as Lindisfarne).¹⁰⁹ While church-building accompanied urbanisation and the construction of towns in some cases, for example the early tenth-century defensive towns built by Æthelflæd, Lady of the Mercians (d.918), in other cases churches or bishoprics were founded away from towns.¹¹⁰ From the later tenth century, following the monastic reform movement, a number of cathedrals were served by monastic communities, so that the urban centre of Winchester (for example) held the episcopal seat, male and female monastic communities, and a number of smaller town churches.

It has been suggested that before about the late ninth or early tenth century, the key ecclesiastical centres in this landscape were ‘minsters’, a term which covers religious foundations or communities whether monastic or non-monastic: these minsters may have provided much of the routine pastoral care which Christians needed, such as baptism, the mass, or confession.¹¹¹ Some of the larger minsters seem also to have had smaller satellites dependent on them, and in some places groups of monasteries seem to have formed ‘clusters’; in some cases there is evidence for communities of various types which grew up around them.¹¹² It is clear that there were significant variations in size and purpose, from large double foundations like Wearmouth-Jarrow through to the women’s house at Nazeing (Essex), which seems from the archaeological evidence to have been extremely small indeed. In later centuries it is possible to see the proliferation

¹⁰⁸ Blair, *The Church*, 368–425; see also S. Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2006), 645–51.

¹⁰⁹ Blair, *The Church*, 66–73, 249; see also M. Henig, ‘The Fate of Late Roman Towns’, in Crawford, Hamerow and Hinton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, 515–33.

¹¹⁰ J. Barrow, ‘Churches, Education and Literacy in Towns 600–1300’, in D.M. Palliser (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain: Vol. 1, 600–1540* (Cambridge, 2000), 127–52, at 130–1; G.G. Astill, ‘Overview: Trade, Exchange, and Urbanization’, in Crawford, Hamerow and Hinton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, 503–14, at 508–10.

¹¹¹ There is a considerable body of literature on the institutional arrangements for pastoral care in early medieval England. See for example Blair, *The Church*; S. Bassett, ‘Boundaries of knowledge: Mapping the land units of late Anglo-Saxon and Norman England’, in W. Davies, G. Halsall and A.J. Reynolds (eds), *People and Space in the Middle Ages, 300–1300* (Turnhout, 2006), 115–42, at 115–19; Foot, *Monastic Life*; C. Cubitt, ‘The Institutional Church’, and ‘Pastoral Care and Religious Belief’, in P. Stafford (ed.), *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages: Britain and Ireland c.500–1100* (Oxford, 2009), 376–94, and 395–413; T. Pickles, ‘Church Organization and Pastoral Care’, in Stafford (ed.), *A Companion to the Early Middle Ages*, 160–76.

¹¹² I.N. Wood, ‘Monasteries and the geography of power in the age of Bede’, *Northern History* 45:1 (2008): 11–25.

of smaller churches, either founded by and dependent on the ‘old minsters’ as part of their efforts to ensure effective pastoral care across the large areas for which they were parochially responsible, or founded by local aristocracy on their own lands and perhaps also taking some public pastoral role, as well as serving as the private chapels of land-owners.¹¹³ According to the ‘minster model’ or ‘mother-church model’, the earlier minsters retained their significance as ‘mother churches’, often receiving dues from the smaller local churches or controlling them in some other way.¹¹⁴ This argument is based on a range of detailed and complex evidence, including archaeological and topographical information as well as written material, and this cannot be discussed here at length; the idea of the enduring influence of the earlier ‘mother churches’ finds support (for example) in the tenth-century legal decrees which enjoin that ‘old minsters’ should receive certain types of tithes and a proportion of the dues paid to smaller churches founded with their jurisdictional areas.¹¹⁵

This ‘minster model’ has received widespread support from a number of scholars, but aspects of it have been queried.¹¹⁶ The extent to which the larger minsters in any part of the period were driven by a perceived need to provide pastoral care has been questioned, and it has been argued that small churches may have been far more numerous even in the seventh and eighth centuries than has often been assumed, so that even in the early centuries of the Anglo-Saxon Church, some clergy may have lived with their families in lay settlements rather than in religious communities.¹¹⁷ The surviving evidence shows that the relationships between, and even the number of, smaller churches and larger ecclesiastical centres seem to have varied a great deal between different regions, and it is clear

¹¹³ Jolly, *Popular Religion*, 35–70; Blair, *The Church*, 291–504; Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, 225–314.

¹¹⁴ S. Foot, ‘Parochial ministry in early Anglo-Saxon England: The role of monastic communities’, in W.J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds), *The Ministry: Clerical and Lay: papers read at the 1988 Summer Meeting and the 1989 Winter Meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society*, Studies in Church History 26 (Oxford, 1989): 43–54, at 43; Blair, *The Church*, *passim*, esp. 4–5, 156, 162–3, 491.

¹¹⁵ II Edgar 1.1–3.1, ed. F. Liebermann, *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen* (3 vols, Halle, 1903–1916), I.196–9; and Blair, *The Church*, 442–3.

¹¹⁶ See for example E. Cambridge and D.W. Rollason, ‘Debate: The pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church: A review of the “Minster hypothesis”’, *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995): 87–104; D.W. Rollason, ‘Monasteries and Society in Early Medieval Northumbria’, in B. Thompson (ed.), *Monasteries and Society in Medieval Britain: Proceedings of the 1994 Harlaxton Symposium*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies, n.s. 6 (Stamford, 1999), 59–74.

¹¹⁷ C. Cubitt, ‘Images of St Peter: The Clergy and the Religious Life in Anglo-Saxon England’, in P. Cavill (ed.), *The Christian Tradition in Anglo-Saxon England: Approaches to Current Scholarship and Teaching* (Woodbridge, 2004), 41–54; Cubitt, ‘The clergy in early Anglo-Saxon England’. See also E. Cambridge, ‘The early church in County Durham: A reassessment’, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 137 (1984): 65–85.

that no one arrangement can have been in place for the whole of England at a stage when local circumstances varied so greatly between different regions. Even towards the end of the period when England was politically unified (at least in theory), it seems that there was no common Anglo-Saxon experience: evidence from the Domesday Book suggests that the number of churches in different dioceses varied greatly, although in some cases this may owe more to the way in which information was recorded rather than to reality; and in the main, smaller churches appear to have played a greater role in eastern England than in western England, where minsters may have retained rather more influence.¹¹⁸ But even in one diocese relationships between smaller churches and ‘old minsters’ were not uniformly construed: Francesca Tinti’s detailed study of the Worcester diocese reveals that older minsters retained their importance where successive bishops were influential, but areas where lay or monastic patrons were stronger tended to see the proliferation of smaller churches.¹¹⁹

This variety of circumstances in which lay people related to the institutional Church, and how these circumstances may have changed over the centuries, is significant in understanding that there was an attendant variation in what might have been expected, communicated and performed in terms of practice and perhaps also belief, and how this too may have varied or changed according to local situations. It seems that by about 800, the number of churches in the landscape was such that most people would have lived within three to five miles of one: if someone had a desire to visit a church to request pastoral services he could probably find one within reasonable walking distance, although what was available locally might have varied as much (or more) as between a community like Jarrow or a community like Nazeing.¹²⁰ It is not always easy to establish the relationship of surviving early churches to the communities for which they may have been responsible. It is possible that the prominent hill-top locations of some churches in the landscape, such as Breedon on the Hill (Leicestershire) or Brixworth (Northamptonshire), may have made them somewhat isolated from other settlements;¹²¹ in other cases churches were founded in central positions near core settlement areas, and were perhaps central to the communities they served.¹²²

The personal and communal experience of religion which required laity to seek out churches at some distance must have been quite different from religious experience in settlements which either contained small churches, such as the

¹¹⁸ V. Thompson, *Dying and Death in Later Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2004), 29; J. Barrow, ‘The Clergy in English Dioceses c. 900–c. 1066’, in F. Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 6 (Woodbridge, 2005), 17–26, esp. 24–5.

¹¹⁹ Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, 225–314.

¹²⁰ Blair, *The Church*, 152.

¹²¹ Foot, *Monastic Life*, 99–101.

¹²² See in particular S. Turner, *Making a Christian Landscape: The Countryside in Early Medieval Cornwall, Devon and Wessex* (Exeter, 2006).

late Saxon church at Raunds Furnells (Northamptonshire), or which had grown up near or around larger ecclesiastical centres; or in the urban areas of the tenth and eleventh centuries which might contain several small churches as well as a religious community (or communities) of varying sorts, and perhaps an episcopal seat, as for example Worcester or Winchester.¹²³ The different types of religious establishment point also to the range of experiences of the clergy and those in religious life, and this is important too because at the heart of routine pastoral care were sacramental offices such as baptism, the mass, or the imposition of penance, which could be performed only by priests. Even in the early period when religious communities at minsters may have provided many of these services, it is clear that priests were allocated this duty: in his letter to Archbishop Ecgberht of York, Bede assigns the role of basic Christian teaching to priests when he complains that he had to provide translations of the creed and pater noster for them.¹²⁴

Some priests were also monks, as Bede himself was, but distinguishing between monk-priests, priests who were not monks, and monks who were not priests, is not always easy in the surviving sources, because in many cases men are described either as monk or as priest even when they were both.¹²⁵ This means that it can be difficult to ascertain the precise status of the priests who undertook pastoral care, and how and where they might have been educated and trained, but it is clear that there were many different possibilities. Some priests do seem to have lived in communities which had both (contemplative) monastic and pastoral functions, as the ‘minster model’ suggests: according to Bede, members of the monastic community at Lindisfarne travelled throughout the countryside to perform baptisms, masses and other duties of pastoral care.¹²⁶ The author of the *Life* of Boniface suggests that Wessex in the late seventh century likewise saw travelling priests.¹²⁷ In the later period, especially after the monastic reforms of the tenth century, an increasing number of cathedral communities were staffed by monastic personnel. In the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, records show that a large proportion of the monks at Winchester’s cathedral (the Old

¹²³ For discussion see A. Boddington, G. Cadman and J. Evans, *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard* (London, 1996); Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*; H. Foxhall Forbes, ‘Squabbling siblings: Gender and monastic life in late Anglo-Saxon Winchester’, *Gender & History* 23:3 (2011): 653–84.

¹²⁴ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, 5, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam*, 409.

¹²⁵ Cubitt, ‘The clergy in early Anglo-Saxon England’.

¹²⁶ Bede, *Vita S. Cuthberti prosa*, 9, ed. and trans. B. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert: A Life by an Anonymous Monk of Lindisfarne and Bede’s Prose Life* (Cambridge, 1985 [orig. pub. 1940]); *HE* III.26.4, ed. Lapidge, Monat and Robin, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, II.164–6; Foot, *Monastic Life*, 292–6.

¹²⁷ Willibald, *Vita S. Bonifatii*, 1, ed. R. Rau, *Briefe des Bonifatius: Willibalds Leben des Bonifatius, nebst einigen zeitgenössischen Dokumenten* (Darmstadt, 1968), 460, II. 19–21.

Minster) were ordained as priests and deacons: they were presumably responsible for providing services of pastoral care for those who came to the cathedral, but there is little evidence that they travelled widely to offer the sacramental offices to those who did not come to them.¹²⁸ Other cathedrals such as Exeter (or Sherborne before Bishop Wulfsig's reforms in 998) were staffed by communities of secular clergy;¹²⁹ and there were probably secular communities without bishops whose priested personnel undertook pastoral services for the surrounding areas, who may have had greater resources in the form of books and liturgical equipment than lone priests at local churches.¹³⁰

Access to resources and learning is a crucial factor in considering how belief or practice might have been shaped and affected by local contexts and circumstances. The *Regularis Concordia*, produced in Winchester probably in the early 970s, as well as the tenth- and eleventh-century records of the members of the Winchester communities suggest that child oblation was a reality in the tenth century as it had been in the late seventh century when the seven-year-old Bede was given to the community at Jarrow:¹³¹ boys who grew up in monasteries which were wealthy and with good resources – centres of academic excellence – might more easily become priests who were highly educated scholars. Evidence for cathedral schools is more difficult to recover, but it seems that there was little substantial difference between monastic and cathedral schools in this period, and it is possible that priests trained in the school at one community might be sent elsewhere after ordination, although whether to other communities or to serve at the churches of nobles or kings is unclear.¹³² Some local churches and their patrons seem to have been able to support communities of clergy rather than a lone priest, and although it is usually impossible to recover how well resourced these small communities might have been, it is possible that lay patrons may have provided less in the way of books and liturgical equipment than was

¹²⁸ See Stowe 944, fols. 18r–20r (Old Minster), 20v–22r (New Minster); S. Keynes (ed.), *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster and Hyde Abbey, Winchester: British Library Stowe 944: Together with leaves from British Library Cotton Vespasian A. VIII and British Library Cotton Titus D. XXVII*, EEMF 26 (Copenhagen, 1996), 64–5.

¹²⁹ Barrow, 'The clergy in English dioceses'.

¹³⁰ J. Wilcox, 'Ælfric in Dorset and the landscape of pastoral care', in Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, 52–62, at 57–8.

¹³¹ Bede, *HE*, V.24.2, ll. 6–14, ed. Lapidige, Monat and Robin, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, III.188; *Regularis Concordia*, 11, 20, 22, 31, 36–7, 62, ed. T. Symons, *Regularis Concordia: The Monastic Agreement of the Monks and Nuns of the English Nation* (London, 1953), 7–8, 17, 18, 28, 35–6, 61; Stowe 944, fols. 19r–20r, 21r–22r (although it is not clear in all cases what exactly 'puer' (literally 'boy') means in these lists). See also M. de Jong, 'Growing up in a Carolingian monastery: Magister Hildemar and his oblates', *Journal of Medieval History* 9:2 (1983): 99–128.

¹³² F. Barlow, *The English Church 1000–1066: A History of the Later Anglo-Saxon Church* (London, 1978), 277–8; C.S. Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels: Cathedral Schools and Social Ideals in Medieval Europe, 950–1200*, Middle Ages Series (Philadelphia, 1994), 26.

found in churches supported by monastic or episcopal patrons.¹³³ Records of local churches which were inherited by the children of priests suggest that some trainee priests may have learned by helping their fathers, although in other cases they might perhaps have assisted their uncles, and presumably other boys in the area could also learn in the same way.¹³⁴

Clergy in all these different contexts were theoretically responsible to their bishop, whose duty it was to assess their suitability as candidates for ordination and who could theoretically refuse to ordain them if they lacked the requisite knowledge; and yet it is also difficult to establish the education and beliefs of bishops in this period. Post-conquest sources paint a bleak picture of the Anglo-Saxon Church and its bishops in some areas: William of Malmesbury reports that one Denewulf was appointed as bishop of Winchester in the ninth century despite being unable to read or write.¹³⁵ It is difficult to assess the veracity of William's account, but the importance of bishops as political players suggests that it is not impossible that such appointments were made if they were deemed to be strategic for some reason.¹³⁶ However, many bishops were trained in and ruled over major churches which were centres of learning and which produced many manuscripts, and some sense of the possible levels of episcopal learning can be gleaned from the professions made by southern English bishops to successive archbishops of Canterbury.¹³⁷ The professions rework and expand upon the creed,¹³⁸ and their contents suggest that some English bishops may have mastered advanced levels of theology, if they wrote in their own words as is sometimes claimed.¹³⁹ However,

¹³³ Barrow, 'The clergy in English dioceses', 22–3; Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West*, 519–20, 530. See for example the details of the equipment apparently belonging to a church in Sherburn-in-Elmet listed in the York Gospels: J.J.G. Alexander and N. Barker (eds.), *The York Gospels: A Facsimile with Introductory Essays by Jonathan Alexander [et al.]* (London, 1986), 96–7.

¹³⁴ H. Gittos, 'Is there any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches in Late Anglo-Saxon England? The Red Book of Darley and the Status of Old English', in Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, 63–82, at 63–4.

¹³⁵ II.75.22, ed. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury, Gesta pontificum Anglorum* (Oxford, 2007), I.256.

¹³⁶ See below, 172–85.

¹³⁷ These are edited and discussed in M. Richter and T.J. Brown, *Canterbury Professions* (Torquay, 1973), and see also N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066*, *Studies in the early history of Britain* (Leicester, 1984), 164–7.

¹³⁸ See for example the professions of Tidfrith, bishop of Dunwich, and Denebeorht, bishop elect of Worcester (nos. 2–3, ed. Richter and Brown, *Canterbury Professions*, 2–4).

¹³⁹ For example, a profession to Ceolnoth, probably by Cynefrith, bishop of Lichfield, includes the following statement: 'Moreover, I will explain in a few words the orthodox, catholic and apostolic faith, just as I have learned it from [my teachers and predecessors]' (see no. 17, ed. Richter and Brown, *Canterbury Professions*, 14–16: 'Insuper et orthodoxam catholicam apostolicamque fidem, sicut ab illis didici, paucis uerbis exponam'). The

some of the bishops used standard formulae or recycled a profession written by one of their predecessors, and it is not clear whether in some cases bishops simply affirmed a profession that was given to them and therefore did not have to write it themselves; others seem to have had poor Latin grammar, suggesting that language may have posed difficulties even if their learning might have been stronger in other respects.¹⁴⁰

The resources or circumstances within some dioceses were probably not ideal, although this might have been noted more by bishops with greater learning: the questions for ordinands in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 121 (a Worcester manuscript dating from the third quarter of the eleventh century whose contents are primarily associated with Archbishop Wulfstan), allow the ordination of a ‘half-learned’ priest if the need is great, suggesting that ordination was not only conferred on those who had achieved high levels of education.¹⁴¹ Clearly, those who learned in environments with greater access to resources were more likely to have more secure and more extensive knowledge of the complexities of Christian teachings, although the effort which some tenth- and eleventh-century churchmen in particular put into providing materials for use by priests of all backgrounds, from well educated but under-confident through to ‘half-learned’ shows a clear desire to improve standards across the board.¹⁴² Sometimes this may have been from personal experience: Ælfric complained that his teacher, a rural priest, had been unable to interpret Scripture correctly.¹⁴³ On the other hand, Ælfric and others were apparently able to learn at least the basics from local clergy, such as Orderic Vitalis (d.c. 1142), who was taught from the age of five to ten by Siward, a Saxon priest

profession of Deorwulf, bishop elect of London, also made to Ceolnoth, notes that he composed and wrote his statement of faith (no. 23, ed. Richter and Brown, *Canterbury Professions*, 19–20).

¹⁴⁰ Nos. 11, 14, and 15, ed. Richter and Brown, *Canterbury Professions*, 11, 13 are virtually identical; the profession of Helmstan of Winchester (no. 18, ed. Richter and Brown, *Canterbury Professions*, 16) contains numerous grammatical errors (see M. Lapidge, ‘Latin learning in ninth-century England’, *Anglo-Latin Literature, 600–899* (London, 1996), 409–54, at 434).

¹⁴¹ *On the Examination of Candidates for Ordination*, 16, *Councils and Synods*, I.i, no. 57.

¹⁴² See for example J. Hill, ‘Monastic Reform and the Secular Church: Ælfric’s Pastoral Letters in Context’, in C. Hicks (ed.), *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies 2 (Stamford, 1992), 103–17; J. Hill, ‘Archbishop Wulfstan: Reformer?’, in Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York*, 309–24.

¹⁴³ Ælfric, Preface, ll. 13–42, ed. R. Marsden, *The Old English Heptateuch and Aelfric’s Libellus de Veteri Testamento et Novo: Vol. 1, Introduction and Text*, EETS, OS 330 (Oxford, 2008), 3–4; for information about Ælfric’s education, see J. Wilcox (ed.), *Aelfric’s Prefaces*, Durham Medieval Texts 9 (Durham, 1994), 7–8; Cubitt, ‘Ælfric’s Lay Patrons’, 177; J. Hill, ‘Ælfric: His Life and Works’, in Magennis and Swan (eds), *A Companion to Aelfric*, 35–66, at 44–9.

at his father's church in Shrewsbury in the latter part of the eleventh century.¹⁴⁴ Siward may have been high-born, and little more is known of Ælfric's teacher, but this does suggest that some learning was available even outside monastic contexts. In practice it is clear that the ways in which religious practices and beliefs were understood, performed and explained by priests, and in turn observed, received and understood by their congregations, must have varied quite significantly according to each priest, where he was working, how he had been trained, and according to the different people within the congregation, and their own experiences.

The basic benchmark for Christian education that priests were supposed to teach their congregations was knowledge of the creed and the pater noster. Wulfstan was only one of many clergy to insist on this, although he was unusual in incorporating the requirement into legal texts.¹⁴⁵ Instructions that all Christians should learn the creed and the pater noster are found in a number of tenth- and eleventh-century homilies, both those by Wulfstan's colleague Ælfric and those whose authors are now anonymous, and this message had been promulgated in England at least from the early eighth century.¹⁴⁶ When Bede wrote to Ecgberht, Archbishop of York, he urged that 'above all, one message should be proclaimed: that the Catholic faith, which is contained in the Apostles' Creed, and the pater noster, which the Scripture of the Holy Gospel teaches us, should be thoroughly committed to the memory of all of those who are under your rule'.¹⁴⁷ Bede made it clear that all Christians – both laity and those in religious life – should learn these prayers, and urged Ecgberht several times in the space of a few lines to ensure that everyone under his charge had done so.¹⁴⁸ The importance of knowledge of these prayers for all Christians was emphasised in the canons of numerous councils, such as the Council of *Clofesho* in 747, which was significant for its attempts to regulate church life and pastoral care at a fairly early stage of the English Church, and addressed many of the concerns identified by Bede.¹⁴⁹ Similar exhortations are found in Christian contexts throughout the Middle Ages.

¹⁴⁴ Orderic Vitalis, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, V.1, XIII.41, ed. M. Chibnall, *The Ecclesiastical History of Orderic Vitalis* (6 vols, Oxford, 1969–1980), III.6–9, IV.552–3.

¹⁴⁵ I Cnut 22–2.4, ed. Liebermann, *Gesetze*, I.302–3.

¹⁴⁶ Reynolds, 'Social mentalities and the case of medieval scepticism', 31–2; J.H. Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship: Ritual Sponsorship in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ithaca, NY, 1998), 187–8.

¹⁴⁷ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, 5, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam*, 408: 'In qua uidelicet praedicatione populis exhibenda, hoc prae ceteris omni instantia procurandum arbitror, ut fidem catholicam, quae apostolorum symbolo continetur, et dominicam orationem, quam sancti euangelii nos scriptura edocet, omnium, qui ad tuum regimen pertinent, memoriae radicitus infigere cures'.

¹⁴⁸ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecbertum*, 5–6, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam*, 408–10.

¹⁴⁹ Council of *Clofesho* (747), 10, ed. A.W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland* (3 vols, Oxford, 1869),

From a pastoral perspective, for Christians to learn enough of their faith to achieve salvation it was the sense and content of the prayers rather than the Latin words themselves which were important, and so in England from a fairly early stage both laity and priests were advised to learn the prayers in the vernacular if they could not learn them in Latin. Bede instructed Archbishop Egberht to make those who did not know Latin learn the creed and pater noster in their own language, and noted that to this end he had frequently provided translations of the creed and pater noster to priests, presumably so that they in turn could teach them to lay learners.¹⁵⁰ Both Ælfric and Wulfstan likewise provided vernacular translations of basic Christian prayers, including them in sermons which instructed that these were the prayers that all Christians should know.¹⁵¹ Vernacular poetic paraphrases of the Apostles' Creed and pater noster (and the Gloria patri) are incorporated into a liturgical compilation in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 121, a late eleventh-century Worcester manuscript;¹⁵² but it seems that these poems were originally composed for a different purpose and thus theoretically might have been intended as a meditative response to the creed and pater noster or perhaps as a way of making the sense and content more memorable.¹⁵³ Another poetic paraphrase of the pater noster is found in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201 (a manuscript containing material associated with Wulfstan), where it was copied alongside penitential poems; and a more straightforward translation is found in the Exeter Book.¹⁵⁴

The creed was also significant because as the foundation of Christian belief, it has an important role in the rituals of pastoral care which prepared Christian

III.366; see also Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils, c.650–c.850*, 97–124.

¹⁵⁰ Bede, *Epistola ad Egbertum*, 5, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam*, 409: 'Propter quod et ipse multis saepe sacerdotibus idiotis haec utraque, et symbolum uidelicet, et dominicam orationem in linguam Anglorum translata optuli'. Bede described the priests who needed such translations as 'stupid' or 'unlearned', but it is not clear whether they were genuinely ignorant of the prayers, or if they could explain the sense and content of the prayers in English but perhaps were only able to memorise or read out the Latin, rather than being able to relate the content of Latin words or phrases to the knowledge required for salvation.

¹⁵¹ See for example Ælfric: *CH* I.19, I.20 ll. 1–2, ed. P. Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, EETS, SS 17 (Oxford, 1997), 325–34, 355, and the Ælfrician translations in Cambridge, University Library, Gg.3.28 (Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, 160–1); Wulfstan, *Hom.* VIIa, ed. Bethurum, *Homilies*, 166–8; *Canons of Edgar*, 17, 22, ed. Fowler, *Canons of Edgar*, 6–7.

¹⁵² These are in C.A. Jones (ed. and trans.), *Old English Shorter Poems: Vol. 1, Religious and Didactic* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 78–81 (Lord's Prayer III), 82–7 (Apostles' Creed), 88–93 (Gloria Patri).

¹⁵³ See Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems*; L. Whitbread, "The Old English Poems of the Benedictine office and some related questions", *Anglia* 80 (1962): 37–49.

¹⁵⁴ See Jones, *Old English Shorter Poems*, 66–7 (Lord's Prayer I, from the Exeter Book), 68–77 (Lord's Prayer II, from CCC 201).

men and women for salvation. In theory, instruction in the Christian faith was a prerequisite for baptism, the ritual which initiated believers into the Church, and the baptismal ritual included affirmation of the creed, although not necessarily its recitation by the baptismal candidate. The priest put credal statements to the candidate and he had to affirm that he accepted them (by answering ‘credo’, I believe).¹⁵⁵ Since acceptance of these beliefs was the minimum required for initiation it might seem peculiar that Christians, who by definition had accepted the creed, were encouraged to learn it; but by the late seventh century (or possibly the early eighth), infant baptism seems to have been considered ideal: it may by this time have been usual in some, but probably not all, areas of England.¹⁵⁶ In later centuries the situation must have varied considerably across England: from the ninth century northern England saw significant Scandinavian immigration and an influx of non-Christians, whereas by this time Christianity was well entrenched in the south.¹⁵⁷ The parents and godparents of those who were baptized when they were too young to affirm their own faith were required to affirm these beliefs on his/her behalf, with the attendant promise to instil Christian belief and faith and its significance in the baptismal candidate as he/she grew up.¹⁵⁸ To this end, parents were instructed to teach their children the fundamentals of the faith, and where beliefs or knowledge about beliefs were directly or indirectly passed on, this may have reinforced (or, in some cases, undermined) the messages delivered in more formal contexts.¹⁵⁹

Surviving penitential and legal texts record a variety of (often quite heavy) penalties for priests who were responsible for children dying without baptism, and especially in the later period and where pastoral care seems to have been undertaken by priests who lived in settlements with the laity they served, it was presumably in the priest’s own interest to ensure that he did baptize children quite soon after birth, rather than potentially risk the wrath of angry parents if a child died unbaptized.¹⁶⁰ The laws of King Ine of Wessex (r.688–726) instruct that children should be baptized within 30 days, although since these decrees only survive as an appendix to the laws of King Alfred (d.899) it is difficult to be certain

¹⁵⁵ P. Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200–c. 1150* (Cambridge, 1993), 140–1.

¹⁵⁶ S. Foot, ‘“By Water in the Spirit”: The Administration of Baptism in Early Anglo-Saxon England’, in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), 171–92, at 187–8; Foot, *Monastic Life*, 300–1.

¹⁵⁷ See for example the essays in D.M. Hadley and J.D. Richards, *Cultures in Contact: Scandinavian Settlement in England in the Ninth and Tenth Centuries*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 2 (Turnhout, 2000); and Kopar, *Gods and Settlers*.

¹⁵⁸ Foot, ‘Baptism’, 187–8; Lynch, *Christianizing Kinship*, 183–8.

¹⁵⁹ Council of *Clofesho* (747), 14, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, III.367; Foot, *Monastic Life*, 301.

¹⁶⁰ Foot, ‘Baptism’, 192.

about quite how closely they represent a genuine seventh-century tradition.¹⁶¹ Eighth-century canons recommended that baptism be performed only at Easter and Pentecost, or in cases of emergency, but it seems likely that in reality baptisms were performed throughout the year as required, when children were born or when they came close to death.¹⁶² In later centuries it is difficult to determine precisely what was considered to be ideal because there are so many different regulations. For example, an eleventh-century homily recommends that priests should baptize children within 30 days, apparently without regard for the liturgical season and more because of concerns over infant mortality, and in his *Pastoral Letter* for Bishop Wulfsgie, Ælfric insisted that if a priest was presented with unbaptized children he should baptize them immediately so that they did not die without baptism; but canonical prescriptions about the performance of baptisms only at Easter and Pentecost or in cases of emergency were repeated at ecclesiastical councils of the later eleventh century.¹⁶³

Baptism was supposed to be followed up by confirmation performed by the bishop, and if this took place when the candidate was old enough, this would be another opportunity for teaching and perhaps also examination of the faith.¹⁶⁴ In settlements which lay at some distance from cathedrals, the occasion or opportunity for confirmation must have depended primarily on the travels of the bishop or the willingness of the parents to travel.¹⁶⁵ The sources suggest that (unsurprisingly) some bishops were more diligent than others in travelling through their dioceses and performing confirmations, but it remains difficult to establish either how frequently confirmations took place or, more importantly, how assiduous bishops were in examining the faith of candidates when they performed confirmations.¹⁶⁶ The vast areas covered by some dioceses in the early years of English Christianity

¹⁶¹ Ine, 2–2.1, ed. Liebermann, *Gesetze*, 90–1.

¹⁶² Report on the legatine synod of 786, 2, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, III.448–9; Foot, ‘Baptism’, 188–9; for Carolingian baptismal instruction, see Keefe, *Water and the Word*.

¹⁶³ *Hom.* 24, ed. A.S. Napier, *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit*, Sammlung englischer Denkmäler in kritischen Ausgaben 4 (Berlin, 1883), 120, ll. 8–15; Ælfric, *Pastoral Letter* I.71, ed. Fehr, *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, 16; e.g. Council at Winchester (1070), 7, *Councils and Synods*, I.ii, no. 86.

¹⁶⁴ Foot, ‘Baptism’, 178–9, 183–4; see for example *Hom.* 24, ed. Napier, *Wulfstan*, 120, l. 15 – 121, l. 5.

¹⁶⁵ Foot, *Monastic Life*, 300.

¹⁶⁶ In the early period in particular it seems that baptized individuals were not always confirmed: see U, IV.9, ed. Finsterwalder, *Canones Theodori*, 317; Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgberhtum*, 7, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam*, 410; also H. Vollrath, ‘Taufliturgie und Diözesaneinteilung in der frühen angelsächsischen Kirche’, in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds), *Irland und die Christenheit: Bibelstudien und Mission / Ireland and Christendom: The Bible and the Missions* (Stuttgart, 1987), 377–86, at 385–6; Foot, ‘Baptism’, 179; Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages*, 179.

suggests that for some bishops it may simply have been impossible to travel through the entire diocese in a year, although this may have become more manageable in later centuries.¹⁶⁷ An eighth-century vision of the afterlife includes a description of a multitude of children who died unbaptized during the episcopacy of Bishop Daniel of Winchester (c.705–44), although whether the blame was to be directly laid at his door or elsewhere is not clear.¹⁶⁸ In any case, the diocese at this stage was huge and the idea that so many children died without baptism is perhaps not unrealistic, although the point here may also be rather political.¹⁶⁹

The rituals for confession and penance underline the importance of the creed as the basis for Christian knowledge, as do the rites for the sick and the dying since they incorporate the rite of confession.¹⁷⁰ Before confession, the priest was required to ensure that the penitent understood (and believed) the fundamentals of the faith so that he could make a proper confession: as in the case of those who sought Christian burial without knowledge of the creed, it seems that the importance of the ritual of confession (and specifically, absolution) may have been understood even by those whose knowledge of Christianity was rather shaky. Some of the rituals for confession include the incipit for the Nicene Creed, although it is not clear whether penitents were regularly able to recite this. Other confessional rituals examined the penitent's knowledge of the creed through a dialogue in a way similar to the baptismal ritual.¹⁷¹ These dialogues render the creed more loosely, and especially where the creed is shortened they often emphasise two key ideas which seem to have been considered the most essential knowledge for laity. These are firstly the idea of God the Father, Son and Holy Ghost (one God in three parts), and secondly the idea of life after death and resurrection at judgement day (the immortality of the soul, and reward or recompense according to one's deeds in life).¹⁷² The focus on these ideas is understandable even though essential aspects of Christian belief such as the Crucifixion and Resurrection are omitted, since these underline the monotheistic nature of Christianity and highlight the importance of

¹⁶⁷ Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils, c.650–c.850*, 114–15.

¹⁶⁸ *Epistola* 115, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 247–50, at 249, ll. 3–12.

¹⁶⁹ Cubitt, *Anglo-Saxon Church Councils, c.650–c.850*, 114–15.

¹⁷⁰ F.S. Paxton, *Christianizing Death: The Creation of a Ritual Process in Early Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1990), 92–114.

¹⁷¹ Frantzen, 'Tradition', 24–5.

¹⁷² See for example the ritual for confession in the *Old English Handbook*, 52.01.02, ed. Frantzen, *The Anglo-Saxon Penitentials*, quoted here from CCCC 201 (D): 'ic gelife on drihten heahfæder ealra þinga wealdend. & on þone sunu & on þone halgan gast & ic gelife to life æfter deaðe & ic gelife to arisenne on domes dæge & eal þis ic gelife þurh godes mægen & his miltse to weorðone' ('I believe in the Lord, the High Father, ruler of all things, and in the Son, and in the Holy Ghost, and I believe in life after death, and I believe that I will arise on the day of judgement. And all this I believe will happen through God's power and mercy').

life after death and careful preparation for it, towards which many of the rituals of pastoral care were aimed.

Establishing how frequently early medieval Christians (in England or elsewhere) had recourse to confession is more difficult. Tenth- and eleventh-century Anglo-Saxon homilies contain frequent exhortations to confession, giving the impression that it took place only infrequently, but this may be misleading; conversely the lack of references in narrative sources perhaps indicates in fact that the practice was common enough that it was not considered to merit comment, just as references to the abuse of confession suggest that the practice may have been fairly widespread.¹⁷³ Confession may have been more frequent in some sections of society than others, especially in the early period, since even in the eighth century some elite individuals seem to have had their own confessors.¹⁷⁴ It is worth bearing in mind too that at least from the ninth century, if not earlier, the reception of communion was linked with confession, and this had affected the expected frequency of both practices.¹⁷⁵ Early medieval sources from England and from the Continent encourage confession and reception of communion at least annually, and more often if possible, especially in the later period.¹⁷⁶ Neither Bede in the eighth century nor Ælfric in the late tenth would necessarily have expected lay people to receive communion every week, but both recommended reception of communion whenever the soul was in a fit state (that is, following confession), and Ælfric instructed that lay people should receive communion at mass about sixteen times a year.¹⁷⁷ In the eleventh century Wulfstan enshrined in law an exhortation to frequent confession and communion.¹⁷⁸ Long before the Fourth Lateran Council

¹⁷³ Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, 155–6; R. Meens, ‘The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance’, in P. Biller and A.J. Minnis (eds), *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, York Studies in Medieval Theology 2 (Woodbridge, 1998), 35–61, at 53.

¹⁷⁴ B. Poschmann, *Penance and the Anointing of the Sick*, trans. F. Courtney (Freiburg, 1964), 139.

¹⁷⁵ S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900–1050* (Woodbridge, 2001), 60.

¹⁷⁶ See, for example Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, 15, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam*, 419; Council of Clofesho (747), 23, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, III.370; *Capitula Bavarica*, VI, ed. R. Pokorny, *Capitula Episcoporum*, MGH (4 vols, Hannover, 1995), III.196; Theodulf, *Capitula*, 36, ed. H. Sauer, *Theodulfi Capitula in England: die altenglischen Übersetzungen, zusammen mit dem lateinischen Text*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur englischen Philologie 8 (Munich, 1978), 376–83; see also Meens, ‘Frequency and Nature’, 37; Hamilton, *Practice of Penance*, 5.

¹⁷⁷ Ælfric stated that the laity should receive communion on Sundays in Lent, the three days preceding Easter Sunday, and on Easter Day, the Thursday of Rogation week, Ascension Day, Pentecost and the four days after the four Ember-feasts: see *Hom. XIX*, II. 119–35, ed. J.C. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, EETS, OS 259–60 (2 vols, London, 1967–8), II.628–9; Foot, *Monastic Life*, 205, 302.

¹⁷⁸ e.g. V Æthelred 22, 22.1, ed. Liebermann, *Gesetze*, I.242–3; and see Wulfstan, *De conuersione et penitentia et communione*, ed. T.N. Hall, ‘Wulfstan’s Latin Sermons’, in Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York*, 93–139, at 129–30. See also Frantzen,

in 1215, which formally enjoined annual confession and reception of communion upon all adult Christians, some clergy evidently considered that this was an essential part of Christian practice.¹⁷⁹

Expectations for church attendance were also quite high: from early on, officials of the English Church seem to have assumed that laity would be present at churches on Sundays and feast-days, where they were supposed to attend mass and hear the preaching which priests and abbots were required to undertake, whether or not they received communion at the mass.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, the sermons of the tenth and eleventh centuries assume that preaching is the responsibility of bishops and priests, and that this would take place on Sundays and feast-days. Many of Ælfric's homilies contain a gospel pericope and commentary, indicating that they were expected to be preached at mass, and he provided homilies for most of the Sundays in the Church year.¹⁸¹ By the tenth century, if not earlier, most preaching to lay congregations seems to have been in the vernacular, although even Bede's Latin homilies seem to refer to the presence of a lay congregation: Bede's Latin would presumably have presented difficulties for most lay people and some clergy, too, although perhaps the homilies might have been used as notes for *ex tempore* vernacular preaching, especially if the texts were glossed.¹⁸² Nonetheless, it is far more difficult to ascertain in reality how frequently laity might have attended churches, or even if they did, how studiously they paid attention: one Old English homily notes that the devil encourages fidgeting in church, suggesting that

Literature of Penance, 146–7; S. Keynes, 'An abbot, an archbishop, and the viking raids of 1006–7 and 1009–12', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2006): 151–224, at 177–9.

¹⁷⁹ A. Murray, 'Confession before 1215', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series 3 (1993): 51–81, at 58, 63, 64–5. Anglo-Saxon secular laws also refer to the performance of penance and decree that those who refused penance could be excommunicated: see Ch. 3, and Foot, *Monastic Life*, 305–6.

¹⁸⁰ Council of *Clofesho* (747), 14, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, III.367; see also Alcuin, *Epistola* 18, ed. Dümmler, *Epistolae*, 52, ll. 31–2: 'laicorum est obedire praedicationi, iustos esse et misericordes' ('[the duty] of the laity is that they should obey preaching, and be just and merciful').

¹⁸¹ P. Clemoes, 'The Chronology of Ælfric's Works', in P. Clemoes (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of Their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins* (London, 1959), 213–47, at 214–18; M. Clayton, 'Homiliaries and preaching in Anglo-Saxon England', *Peritia* 4 (1985): 207–42, at 221; Wilcox, 'Ælfric in Dorset', 53.

¹⁸² M.M. Gatch, 'The Achievement of Aelfric and his Colleagues in European Perspective', in P.E. Szarmach and B.F. Huppe (eds), *Old English Homily and its Backgrounds* (Albany, 1978), 43–73, at 60–1; D.G. Scragg, 'The corpus of vernacular homilies & prose saints' lives before Ælfric', *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979): 223–77, at 223; A. Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care in Early Anglo-Saxon England', in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds), *Pastoral Care before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992), 137–70, at 140–1.

(unsurprisingly) some members of medieval congregations may have been much like their modern counterparts.¹⁸³

This accumulation of evidence presents a complicated and somewhat fragmented picture, in which it is difficult to pin down precisely how, or how often, laity at different times and in different places had access to Christian teaching. The frequent exhortations for people to learn the most basic prayers and tenets of the Christian faith, or to participate in routine Christian practices, might seem to indicate firstly that many people in Anglo-Saxon England neither acquired much knowledge of the Christian faith nor believed much of it, and secondly that only a minimum of knowledge was expected of lay congregations in any case. Comments such as those made by Ælfric about the poor level of learning (or possibly poor attention span) of some of those in his congregations seem to reinforce the picture of limited lay knowledge of the Christian faith.¹⁸⁴ But it is important to remember that (then as now) congregations cannot have been completely static and that at any given time a congregation might have included people with limited knowledge as well as people with much more detailed knowledge. Comments on the creed in particular were especially appropriate in homilies at certain regular times of the year when the creed was a defining part of the liturgy, for example at Easter, or in the context of particular services or offices, such as baptism. It is also clear that Anglo-Saxon clergy did not consider that Christian learning among the laity was (or should be) limited to knowledge of the creed and pater noster, only that this was the minimum basis on which to build more detailed learning: exhortations to learn basic prayers are matched by much more complex and sophisticated discussions of theological topics even in texts which seem to have been directed at lay audiences.

This picture presented by the sources is therefore not only complicated, but rather contradictory, simultaneously insisting on the basics and assuming that more complex and detailed theological discussions will not be lost on the same audience. This is exemplified by one of Wulfstan's sermons which begins by stating that Christian men should know the pater noster and creed, but turns to a careful discussion of Christology and the idea that Christ is both truly divine

¹⁸³ *Hom. XLVI*, ed. Napier, *Wulfstan*, 233, ll. 17–20.

¹⁸⁴ See for example *CH I.11*, ll. 2–7, ed. Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies*, 266: 'Ic wolde eow trahtnian þis godespel þe man nu beforan eow rædde: ac ic ondræde þæt ge ne magon þa miclan deopnesse þæs godspelles swa understandan swa hit gedauenlic sy. Nu bidde ic eow þæt ge beon gepyldige on eowrum gebance oð þæt we þone traht mid godes fylste oferrædan magon' ('I want to explain this gospel to you, which has now been read before you, but I worry that you are unable to understand the great depth of the gospel as is appropriate. Now I ask that you be patient in your thoughts until we can read through the text, with God's help'); or *CH I.36*, ll. 282–4, ed. Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies*, 495: 'We mihton þas halgan rædinge menigfealdlicor trahtnian æfter augustines smeagunge; ac us twynað hwæðer ge magon maran deopnysse þæron þearfllice tocnawan' ('we could explain this holy reading in more ways according to Augustine's thinking, but we doubt that you can profitably understand the great depth in it').

and truly human, receiving his divinity from God and his humanity from Mary.¹⁸⁵ Significantly, this kind of inconsistency is not limited to texts intended for use in lay education, but is also found in much of the material produced for priests who were responsible for performing routine pastoral care, or aimed at improving or assessing their knowledge. Thus the questions for ordinands in Junius 121 require the would-be priest to be able to explain the significance of baptism and the mass, even though they conclude with the possibility that a half-learned priest might be ordained.¹⁸⁶ In his *Pastoral Letters* for Wulfstan and Bishop Wulfsize of Sherborne, written in the voice of the bishop and directed at priests who were probably in the bishops' respective dioceses, Ælfric discusses quite complex topics such as what happens when the Eucharist is consecrated, but also takes care to explain that the consecrated Host should not be left in a place where it can go mouldy, or where mice can eat it.¹⁸⁷ Likewise, in his computistical handbook *Byrhtferth* of Ramsey makes frequent (and often quite sarcastic) jibes at the ignorance of those who struggled with Latin, and then proceeds to explain complex methods of calculation for them in English, so that his subject-matter remained sophisticated even while he berated the 'stupid' priests he addressed.¹⁸⁸

To some extent this results from the conflict between an ideal situation where all Christians are highly educated about their faith, and the rhetoric of reform which focused on those who displayed any measure of ignorance.¹⁸⁹ In the Anglo-Saxon Church this rhetoric dates at least back to Bede's time, and his complaint

¹⁸⁵ *Hom.* VII, ed. Bethurum, *Homilies*, 157–65. One of the manuscripts which contains this sermon, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 201, also preserves a shorter version (VIIa, ed. D. Bethurum, *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957), 166–8) where the translation of the creed is much simpler. It is difficult to ascertain the intended purpose of the manuscript, but it seems to have been intended at least partly as a reference book for teaching. The two sermons are also found in two Worcester books which were intended to be companion volumes: the more complex sermon (VII) is included in Hatton 113+114, and the simpler (VIIa) in Junius 121. The collections in CCC 201 and Junius 121/Hatton 113+114 are closely related, but it may be that in both cases the compilers considered it useful to have two sermons explaining the basics of the faith – one simple and one more complex – which could be used according to the potential audience. See further H. Foxhall Forbes, 'Making Books for Pastoral Care in Late Eleventh-Century Worcester: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Junius 121 and Hatton 113+114', in P.D. Clarke and S. James (eds), *Pastoral Care in the Middle Ages* (Farnham, forthcoming); and cf. Gatch, *Preaching*, 20, for the suggestion that Wulfstan preferred to avoid theological subtlety.

¹⁸⁶ *Examination of Candidates*, 11–16, *Councils and Synods*, I.i, no. 57; see also the canons of the Council of *Clofesho* (747), 10–11, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, III.366.

¹⁸⁷ Ælfric, *Pastoral Letter for Wulfsize*, I.133–42, ed. Fehr, *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, 29–31; Hill, 'Monastic Reform', 109–11.

¹⁸⁸ e.g. Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, I.1, ll. 137–40, 214–16; I.3, ll. 1–2; II.1, ll. 191–3, ed. P.S. Baker and M. Lapidge, *Byrhtferth's Enchiridion*, EETS, SS 15 (Oxford, 1995), 14–16, 20, 46, 66.

¹⁸⁹ Hill, 'Monastic Reform', 111.

about ‘unlearned’ priests, but it is unclear whether these priests were only ignorant of Latin or also of content: it may be that these priests were able to explain at least some of the sense and content of the prayers in English even if they could not read Latin.¹⁹⁰ It is also notable that while Bede makes this complaint to Archbishop Egberht he does not complain about the decision by Egberht or other bishops to ordain priests who did not know these prayers in Latin. Boniface clearly also faced a scarcity of priests in the mission field, and was instructed by Pope Zacharias that men could be ordained priest before the canonical age of 30, if the situation required it.¹⁹¹ Boniface’s concern is clear in his own letter to Archbishop Egberht, where he asks advice about whether to remove a priest who had been restored to the priesthood after performing penance: his letter reveals his anguish over the decision, as he tells Egberht ‘if I remove him ... children will die without the holy water of rebirth [i.e., baptism] because of the scarcity of priests’.¹⁹² In the eighth century as in the eleventh, it seems that half-learned or otherwise inadequate priests were deemed to be better than none at all, but this enjoined a constant process of learning and teaching on priests as on laity, picked up in Byrhtferth’s admonition to the priests who used his manual: ‘in the sight of the just judge both will be guilty – those who do not wish to learn, and those who do not wish to teach’.¹⁹³

Especially after the middle of the tenth century, such complaints also spring from a specifically monastic rhetoric which presented secular clergy as ignorant, lazy and lax in fulfilling their duties in contrast to those in monastic life, and because so many of the surviving texts and manuscripts seem to have originated from, and survive in manuscripts copied at, the major episcopal or monastic centres (or episcopal centres which were monastic) the picture is coloured in favour of monasticism. But this can overshadow the fact that even while monastic authors complained about the secular clergy, they clearly accepted that these men played an important role in the Christian mission, and in some cases recognition of this role may have led to silence about it rather than complaints.¹⁹⁴ On the other hand, the nature of the evidence means that it is difficult to pinpoint precisely the materials which secular communities and lone priests might have used for teaching, and how these materials might have related to the surviving texts and

¹⁹⁰ Bede, *Epistola ad Ecgbertum*, 5, ed. Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Historiam ecclesiasticam*, 408–9.

¹⁹¹ *Epistola* 87, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 369–72.

¹⁹² *Epistola* 91, ed. Tangl, *Die Briefe*, 376–7.

¹⁹³ Byrhtferth, *Enchiridion*, 4, ed. and trans. Baker and Lapidge, *Byrhtferth’s Enchiridion*, 53–4: ‘Simul erunt rei in conspectu iusti arbitris: qui nolunt scire et qui nolunt docere’. See also Ælfric’s comment in his English preface to his *Grammar*, ed. Wilcox, *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, 115 (no. 3b): ‘And he se naðor nele ne leornian ne tæcan, gif he mæg, þonne acolað his andgyt fram ðære halgan lare and he gewit swa lytlum and lytlum fram Gode’ (‘And he who will neither learn nor teach if he is able to, then his understanding of holy learning will become cold, and he will go little by little from God’).

¹⁹⁴ See for example the discussion in Foxhall Forbes, ‘Squabbling siblings’, 673–4.

manuscripts. Priests were instructed that they should own and be able to use a fairly wide selection of books, including those for the mass and pastoral offices (such as confession and baptism) as well as those for daily services and for calculating Church feasts.¹⁹⁵ It seems probable that not all priests would or could have owned or used all of these different books, but even in the localities some priests may have worked from centres which owned resources in common.¹⁹⁶ It also seems likely that in many cases the material copies of texts used in smaller churches may have been in the form of booklets rather than bound books, whether these were liturgical rituals or homilies for preaching, and some of the surviving manuscripts look as if they might have been intended as reference collections containing the sorts of texts copied in this way.¹⁹⁷

Apart from the many other reasons why manuscripts do not survive to the present day, the prevalence of bound manuscripts rather than booklets in the surviving record is probably because booklets were used until they fell to bits, or were discarded, reused or recycled (for example as strips for binding other books) as liturgical texts and homilies became outdated or superseded by new material.¹⁹⁸ However, the surviving books do indicate the variety of contexts for pastoral care and education in the range of purposes suggested by the texts and books used and copied within the same centre. For example, similar collections of penitential texts are found in two eleventh-century manuscripts from Worcester, now Oxford, Bodleian Library, Laud misc. 482 and Junius 121, but the two books are noticeably different in character and were clearly for different practical purposes.¹⁹⁹ Laud misc. 482 is a slim and portable volume containing liturgical material and instructions for performing the offices of confession and the rites for the sick and dying, and the absence of the last pages of the volume may point to wear as a result of practical use and being carried about.²⁰⁰ In contrast, Junius 121 is a fat volume containing catechetical homilies and other instructional material, including information pertinent to the training of priests such as questions which bishops should put to candidates for ordination, and it forms a partner to the homiliary now surviving in two parts as Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 113 and 114.²⁰¹ While Laud misc. 482 looks like it was specifically designed to be used in the practical performance of pastoral care, the material found in Junius 121 and Hatton 113+114 is a collection which may have had many purposes, one of which

¹⁹⁵ e.g. Ælfric, *Pastoral Letters*, I.52, II.157, ed. Fehr, *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, 13, 126–7; see also Penitential of Ps.-Ecgberht, Prol., ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, III.417.

¹⁹⁶ Wilcox, 'Ælfric in Dorset', 56–60.

¹⁹⁷ P.R. Robinson, 'Self-contained units in composite manuscripts of the Anglo-Saxon period', *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978): 231–8; Wilcox, 'Ælfric in Dorset', 60–1.

¹⁹⁸ Gittos, 'Is there any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches?', 63–4.

¹⁹⁹ N.R. Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford, 1957), nos. 338 and 343.

²⁰⁰ Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 67–73.

²⁰¹ Ker, *Catalogue*, 399, 412.

seems to have been the education and training of priests, but it might also have been used as a reference book for copying texts into booklets.²⁰²

Books and booklets as well as the information from book-learning supported priests' duties in performing religious practices for their congregations, and teaching them about Christian beliefs, but once again what might have been offered depended on time and place. Priests at smaller churches seem to have been expected to provide the offices of baptism and mass, as well as offering their congregations the opportunity to confess and to perform penance, or to receive anointing when they were unwell.²⁰³ In later periods they might also have been expected or requested to provide Christian burial rituals, as the place and type of burial seems to have become increasingly important.²⁰⁴ But what was offered by a lone priest did not cover all the practices which were deemed (or which came to be deemed) necessary. In some cases the bishop's presence was required in the localities, as for consecrating churches (and cemeteries, in the tenth and eleventh centuries), just as confirmations seem to have been performed when bishops toured their dioceses. For other rituals which were performed at cathedrals, priests as well as individuals and congregations were required to travel to the bishop: the rite of public penance, for example, reserved for serious sins and used mainly in the tenth and eleventh centuries, was performed by a bishop and involved the ritual (and literal) expulsion of the offender from the Church on Ash Wednesday before reconciliation on Maundy Thursday.²⁰⁵ The liturgies for some major feasts (such as Easter) required the participation of more than one person in holy orders, and although it is possible that some priests without deacons needed to know how to perform these rituals, it is also possible that some priests may have gone with their congregations to a larger church such as a minster or cathedral for these feasts.²⁰⁶

Such travel as a Christian community is significant in the common sense of religious purpose which may have attended such occasions, but there were also several occasions during the year – indeed, often at these major feasts – which were marked by processions which brought formal religious practices out of churches and into the local landscape, especially in later centuries. On Palm Sunday, the festivities for Holy Week began with a procession recalling the triumphal entry

²⁰² M. Budny, *Insular, Anglo-Saxon and Early Anglo-Norman Manuscript Art at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge: An Illustrated Catalogue* (2 vols, Kalamazoo, MI, 1997), I.476–7; Tinti, *Sustaining Belief*, 298–301.

²⁰³ Gittos, 'Is there any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches?', 64–5.

²⁰⁴ D.A. Bullough, 'Burial, Community and Belief in the Early Medieval West', in P. Wormald et al. (eds), *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J.M. Wallace-Hadrill* (Oxford, 1983), 177–201; Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 57–63, 112–17; Gittos, 'Is there any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches', 64–5.

²⁰⁵ S. Hamilton, 'Rites for Public Penance in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in H. Gittos and M.B. Bedingfield (eds), *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (Woodbridge, 2005), 65–103, at 87–8.

²⁰⁶ Gittos, 'Is there any Evidence for the Liturgy of Parish Churches?', 65–6.

of Jesus into Jerusalem before his arrest, Crucifixion and Resurrection, events which were commemorated later in the week on Maundy Thursday, Good Friday and Easter Sunday respectively.²⁰⁷ The evidence for the practicalities of how these processions worked in specific localities is generally rather patchy but eleventh-century Winchester provides a clearer picture than most. Here the monks at the Old Minster (the cathedral) and the New Minster formed a procession and went to a church together to collect the palms, perhaps the church of St James outside the city walls to the west.²⁰⁸ A similar type of procession took place at Candlemas (2nd February) to mark the presentation of Christ in the temple and in Winchester this too seems to have involved the monks from both the Old and New Minsters and may have involved a station at another church.²⁰⁹ Processions also took place on Rogation Days and at the celebrations for saints' days, usually whichever saint or saints were culted in the locality.²¹⁰

These kinds of processions were occasions at which cultural ideas shared by communities of believers were expressed and communicated, whether directly or indirectly. Homilies for Palm Sunday explain the event commemorated, but the procession itself was a moment of liturgical drama and recreated a past event and its symbolism: observers of any age (whether or not they were involved in the procession) who did not understand the significance of the event it commemorated may simply have asked those who did.²¹¹ The Rogation processions are a particularly important example here because it seems that at Rogationtide it was assumed that a particularly large number of people would be present, perhaps including those who were less than well catechised: many of the Rogationtide homilies are quite simple and focus on quite basic information.²¹² But these processions are also important in that they are one example of religion and religious ritual happening beyond the confines of churches, blurring the boundaries between lay and ecclesiastical space. Another example of this in action is possibly visible from the liturgical blessings which were used for crops and fields, or other areas of the outside world beyond the

²⁰⁷ For full discussion of these, see M.B. Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England* (Woodbridge, 2002), esp. 90–170.

²⁰⁸ *RC*, 33, 36, ed. and trans. Symons, *Regularis Concordia*, 30–1, 34–6; M. Biddle and D. Keene, 'Winchester in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', in M. Biddle (ed.), *Winchester in the Early Middle Ages: An Edition and Discussion of the Winton Domesday* (Oxford, 1976), 241–448, at 268–9.

²⁰⁹ Biddle and Keene, 'Winchester in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries', 268–9.

²¹⁰ Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England*, 191–6; Blair, *The Church*, 455–6, 486–9.

²¹¹ See for example *Hom. VI*, ed. R. Morris, *The Blickling Homilies of the 10th Century: From the Marquis of Lothian's Unique MS. A.D.971*, EETS, OS 58 (London, 1874), 71; Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England*, 90–113.

²¹² J. Bazire and J.E. Cross (eds.), *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, Toronto Old English Series 7 (Toronto, 1982), 41; Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England*, 196–7.

monastery.²¹³ These were once understood to be evidence of the accommodation of Christianity to paganism, but recent work has demonstrated that in fact these were closely associated with the institutional Church, and represent ideas and ideals of religious thought more than those of the laity.²¹⁴ To try to interpret these as evidence of 'lay piety' would therefore clearly be incorrect, but blessings for crops or wells, for example, may provide another instance of the possibility of liturgical ritual outside church walls, even if once again it is difficult to determine how frequently laity or lay communities attended such blessings.²¹⁵

Celebrations in honour of saints were another opportunity for bringing laity into contact with formal ritual, although again how this occurred, and how frequently, depended according to local context. Major centres often had a large number of relics, some of which might be the remains of saints who were culted universally in Christian cultures, such as the apostles or other people who featured in the gospels: the list of relics at Exeter includes (for example) the beard and hair of St Peter, and the neckbone of St Paul.²¹⁶ The documents which record Exeter's relics also provide some information about how the relics came to the minster, apparently by the donation of King Æthelstan in the early tenth century, and this is given in the form of a text which is more likely a sermon than simply a list, perhaps intended for a mass or procession in celebration of the relics.²¹⁷ This long list of relics is comparatively unusual and a feature of a major centre rather than a smaller church: comparable relic lists survive for other large religious houses like the New Minster in Winchester, which similarly records the gifts of relics, such as the 'scrin' given by Emma of Normandy (d.1052), who was married first to King Æthelred (d.1016) and then to Cnut (d.1035).²¹⁸ Interest in relics gave rise to a couple of texts which record the relics of the saints scattered across England, but again these are primarily for major churches.²¹⁹ However, it seems likely that almost all churches, even quite small ones, would have contained relics of a saint

²¹³ K.L. Jolly, 'Prayers from the field: Practical protection and demonic defense in Anglo-Saxon England', *Traditio: Studies in Ancient and Medieval History, Thought, and Religion* 61 (2006): 95–147; D.A. Rivard, *Blessing the World: Ritual and Lay Piety in Medieval Religion* (Washington, DC, 2009), 41–3, 51–77.

²¹⁴ T. Rowe, 'Blessings for Nature in the English Liturgy, c. 900–1200', PhD thesis, University of Exeter, 2010, 188–94, 214–16, 234–45. I am grateful to Tamsin Rowe for allowing me to see a copy of her doctoral thesis.

²¹⁵ Rowe, 'Blessings for Nature', 42–52, 172–9.

²¹⁶ P.W. Conner, *Anglo-Saxon Exeter: A Tenth-Century Cultural History* (Woodbridge, 1993), 171–209, esp. 176–87.

²¹⁷ F. Rose-Troup, 'The ancient monastery of St Mary and St Peter at Exeter', *Report and Transactions – The Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science, Literature and Art* 2 (1931): 179–220, at 212–15.

²¹⁸ London, British Library, Stowe 944, fols. 58r–v.

²¹⁹ See D.W. Rollason, 'Lists of saints' resting-places in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 7 (1978): 61–94.

or saints, although in most cases these saints were probably culted much more locally and were perhaps unique to one place.²²⁰

Written information about many of these local saints is lacking and for many, possibly never existed, so that only their names (and often, not even that) survive to the present day. One example is the St Ailwine (now Egelwin) culted at Scalford (Leicestershire), about whom nothing further is known (local legend holds that he is buried in the churchyard, but no one seems to know where exactly). The local character of these cults and the landscapes in which they existed are particularly important, because when saints were celebrated in the places where they had lived and died, stations in processions might be made at places where the saint had left a lasting impression in the landscape. Sometimes these were literal impressions in the physical landscape, like the footprints of St Mildred in a slab of rock near Thanet (Kent), but sometimes the natural environment formed part of a saint's legend, like the trees and springs associated with St Kenelm.²²¹ Where surviving written hagiographical traditions are rooted in local landscapes and topographies it is possible that they represent quite early cult devotion, even when references are found only in much later texts.²²² Moreover, as Katy Cubitt and others have argued, these kinds of local concerns may represent the kinds of cults which grew up outside the formal ecclesiastical legends which sought to represent all saints and their miracles in the models of earlier hagiographical texts.²²³

The number of visitors to the places which were prominent in the life and death of a saint and the miracles performed at such places likewise feature in hagiographies as a means of indicating the power that a saint commanded: the site where Oswald was killed in 642 apparently attracted visitors who scraped up the dust to use in healing people and animals.²²⁴ Oswald was also responsible for erecting a cross at Heavenfield, near Hexham (Northumberland), where he defeated Caedwalla in 633 or 634; and like the site of his death, the cross was apparently visited by people seeking miracles who took little pieces of the wood which were used to cure people and animals.²²⁵ In other cases saints became part of

²²⁰ J. Blair, 'A Saint for Every Minster? Local Cults in Anglo-Saxon England', in A. Thacker and R. Sharpe (eds), *Local Saints and Local Churches in the Early Medieval West* (Oxford, 2002), 455–94.

²²¹ Goscelin, *Vita virginis Mildrethae*, 19, ed. D.W. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend: A Study in Early Medieval Hagiography in England* (Leicester, 1982), 132–3; *Vita S. Kenelmi*, 6, 13, ed. R.C. Love, *Three Eleventh-Century Anglo-Latin Saints' Lives: Vita S. Birini, Vita et Miracula S. Kenelmi, and Vita S. Rumwoldi* (Oxford, 1996), 58, 68; Blair, *The Church*, 475–9.

²²² J. Blair, *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* (Stroud, 1994), 73–7.

²²³ Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity'; Blair, *The Church*, 146–9, 475–7; see also F. Lifshitz, *The Name of the Saint: The Martyrology of Jerome and Access to the Sacred in Francia, 627–827*, Publications in Medieval Studies (Notre Dame, IN, 2006).

²²⁴ Bede, *HE*, III.9–10, ed. Lapidge, Monat and Robin, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, 58–64.

²²⁵ Bede, *HE*, III.2, ed. Lapidge, Monat and Robin, *Histoire ecclésiastique*, 18–24.

the built environment as their relics continued to lie in churches which also formed part of their legends: once rescued from the thorn bush, St Edmund's head was reunited with his body for burial, and a chapel was constructed over his remains.²²⁶ Although saints were especially commemorated in their localities at particular times of year, their presence in the landscape was of course more constant and the use of saints' names in place-names suggests that at least the names of these saints (and perhaps some of their deeds or possessions) were known to those who lived in, visited or travelled through those places, even if in some cases little written tradition now survives for these individuals.²²⁷

Crosses made of wood or stone, like the one constructed by Oswald, served as a visible and positive marker of Christian sacrality in the landscape, and may have been positioned along routeways or as route markers.²²⁸ In some cases crosses may also have been used as stations in Rogationtide processions.²²⁹ Records of the boundaries of lands contain information about holy features which were used as boundary markers, including what seem to be crosses such as these, as well as trees and wells;²³⁰ but while wooden or stone crosses were holy in and of themselves because of the sign they represented, trees, wells and stones were not. As already noted, some hagiographical accounts explicitly associate springs or wells and trees with saints, and so it may be that some of these features were identified as holy because of now lost traditions that linked them with holy people, although in other cases they might simply have been marked with the sign of the cross.²³¹ Sometimes there appears to have been tension over what was identified as 'holy', as in the striking example of 'the tree which the ignorant call holy' in a Latin charter copied in the twelfth century, itself forged but perhaps containing a translation of a genuine boundary clause.²³² More general objections to holy wells,

²²⁶ Abbo, *Passio S. Eadmundi*, 11–13, ed. M. Winterbottom, *Three Lives of English Saints* (Toronto, 1972), 79–82; see also XI–XIV, ed. T. Arnold, *Memorials of St Edmund's Abbey* (London, 1890), 16–19. Ælfric, *Passio S. Eadmundi*, LS XXXII, ll. 123–88, ed. W.W. Skeat, *Ælfric's Lives of Saints: Being a Set of Sermons on Saints' Days Formerly Observed by the English Church*, EETS 76, 82 (vol. 1), 94, 114 (vol. 2) (4 vols in 2, London, 1881–1900), II.322–8.

²²⁷ Blair, 'Saint for Every Minster?', 455–9, 480–1; Blair, *The Church*, 216–17.

²²⁸ Blair, *The Church*, 478–9.

²²⁹ C. Neuman De Vegvar, 'Converting the Anglo-Saxon Landscape: Crosses and their Audiences', in A.J. Minnis and J. Roberts (eds), *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin* (Turnhout, 2007), 407–29, at 420–3.

²³⁰ e.g. S 766 (W.G. Searle, *Ingulf and the Historia Croylandensis*, Cambridge Antiquarian Society Octavo Publications 27 (Cambridge, 1894), 212): 'haliganstan' ('holy stone'); S 544 (*Abing*, no. 43): 'halgan ac' ('holy oak').

²³¹ Cubitt, 'Sites and sanctity', 62; Blair, *The Church*, 477–8.

²³² S 311 (BCS 476): 'ad quendam fraxinum quem imperiti sacrum vocant'; Blair, *The Church*, 477; D. Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore and Landscape*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 13 (Woodbridge, 2010), 50.

trees or stones are found in the writings of clergy from late Antiquity and right through the Anglo-Saxon period: Ælfric and Wulfstan both complained about the foolishness of those who made offerings at trees, wells or stones.²³³

It has sometimes been argued that such complaints were made in response to beliefs or practices which represent continuity with pre-Christian or 'pagan' ideas, but as already noted, in many cases it was probably the fact that these holy places fell outside ecclesiastical control which upset clerical authorities, rather than because these represented any real (or imagined) 'pagan' behaviour. It is also clear that in some cases certain 'holy' features originated entirely in Christian contexts, and therefore cannot represent continuity of pre- or non-Christian practice. Here many of the 'holy wells' are a good example, because they are located in or near settlements which originated after the Middle Saxon shift and therefore in most places also quite some time after the conversion to Christianity.²³⁴ If these were holy wells, they were perceived as holy in Christian contexts and may never have been considered holy by anyone who did not see himself as a Christian: some of them may have been used for baptism, in any case.²³⁵ The liturgical blessings for wells which were produced and used from the tenth century to the twelfth also show that wells were understood to be Christian by the clergy who wrote and enacted these blessings, since they seem to have been designed as rites of purification for the benefit of Christian communities, and were not intended to 'convert' water features which were perceived to have pagan associations, whatever the actual origins of the wells which received the blessings.²³⁶

This is particularly important because it is extremely difficult to find any concrete evidence for 'paganism' within Anglo-Saxon Christian communities: the idea that pagan belief or practice survived in these contexts to the extent that it is now visible has been discredited by a number of scholars.²³⁷ This is not to say that people did not (for example) believe in magical practices, because undoubtedly

²³³ Ælfric, *De auguriis*, LS XVII, ll. 129–35, ed. Skeat, *Lives of Saints*, I.372–4; Wulfstan, *Canons of Edgar*, 16, ed. Fowler, *Canons of Edgar*, 4–5.

²³⁴ M. Jacobsson, *Wells, Meres, and Pools: Hydronymic Terms in the Anglo-Saxon Landscape*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Anglistica Upsaliensia 98 (Uppsala, 1997), 224–7.

²³⁵ Rowe, 'Blessings for Nature', 141–9, 171–81.

²³⁶ R.K. Morris, 'Baptismal Places: 600–800', in N. Lund and I.N. Wood (eds), *People and Places in Northern Europe, 500–1600: Essays in Honour of Peter Hayes Sawyer* (Woodbridge, 1991), 15–24, at 18–20; J. Blair, 'The Prehistory of English Fonts', in M. Henig and N. Ramsay (eds), *Intersections: The Archaeology and History of Christianity in England, 400–1200: Papers in Honour of Martin Biddle and Birthe Kjølbye-Biddle* (Oxford, 2010), 149–77, at 157–60; Rowe, 'Blessings for Nature', 40–4, 172–9.

²³⁷ See in particular the arguments in C.E. Fell, 'Paganism in Beowulf: A Semantic Fairy-Tale', in T. Hofstra, L.A.J.R. Houwen and A.A. MacDonald (eds), *Pagans and Christians: The Interplay between Christian Latin and Traditional Germanic Cultures in Early Medieval Europe. Proceedings of the Second Germania Latina Conference held at the University of Groningen, May 1992*, Germania Latina, 2; Mediaevalia Groningana, 16

they did. But because the evidence which survives is so overwhelmingly from Christian contexts, it is virtually impossible to uncover any real information about these supposed magical practices, and even where texts survive which look in some way ‘dubious’ now, it is clear that these texts and the books that contain them originated, and were probably used at, religious centres, often quite important ones.²³⁸ It is also clear that in some cases, representations of paganism appealed to Roman or Greek ideas rather than to a precise reality on the ground; moreover, as James Palmer has shown, modern scholars have sometimes ‘translated’ these episodes in ways which reflect preconceptions about ‘Germanic’ paganism without taking full account of the way in which ‘real’ and imagined paganisms were used by medieval authors to reflect a whole range of (probably also real and imagined) ideas that were perceived to run contrary to acceptable Christian belief or practice.²³⁹ While authors sometimes distinguished between bad Christians and pagans, at other times it seems that the groups or individuals who prompted complaints from clergymen simply practised or believed in ways which some clergy – specifically, those who encountered them and wrote about them – felt was inappropriate behaviour for Christians. Such objections were therefore not always connected specifically with (for example) a particular natural feature which was identified as objectionable.

One example may be found in the complaint made in the late eleventh century by St Wulfstan of Worcester to the tree which overshadowed a church that he dedicated. This has been interpreted as evidence that this was some kind of ‘holy tree’ in an unChristian sense, but as Alexandra Walsham points out, it is in fact far more likely that the problem was that the priest tended to sit under this tree while he was gambling and drinking.²⁴⁰ It seems highly unlikely that St Wulfstan, in the overwhelmingly Christian context of late eleventh century southern England, would have recognised a genuine pagan even if one had fallen out of said tree. In the same way, Ælfric’s objections to people who feasted and drank around corpses probably arose from his monastic perspective: in his view, a dead body should be watched over quietly, accompanied by the singing of psalms and the offering of prayers. The complaints about feasting, horse-racing, and other games

(Groningen, 1995), 9–34; R.I. Page, ‘Anglo-Saxon Paganism: The Evidence of Bede’, in Hofstra, Houwen and MacDonald (eds), *Pagans and Christians*, 99–129.

²³⁸ See for example K.L. Jolly, ‘Cross-Referencing Anglo-Saxon Liturgy and Remedies: The Sign of the Cross as Ritual Protection’, in H. Gittos and M.B. Bedingfield (eds), *The Liturgy of the Late Anglo-Saxon Church* (Woodbridge, 2005), 213–43, at 214, 231–2.

²³⁹ Palmer, ‘Defining paganism’.

²⁴⁰ William of Malmesbury, *Vita S. Wulfstani*, ii.17, ed. M. Winterbottom and R.M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury: Saints’ Lives. Lives of SS. Wulfstan, Dunstan, Patrick, Benignus and Indract* (Oxford, 2002), 94–6. See Hooke, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England*, 35, for the suggestion of pagan continuity; and Walsham, *Reformation of the Landscape*, 38 for the counter-argument.

at Rogationtide in the canons of the Council of Clofesho in 747 are again probably borne out of a sense of what was appropriate at a holy time.²⁴¹ As Christine Fell argued, here the sources seem simply to represent ‘secular’ practices (rather than ‘pagan’ ones), and as moments at which the community came together these are also moments at which beliefs and cultural expectations were transmitted. If the feasting and recounting of poems and stories described in other Anglo-Saxon texts, perhaps most famously in *Beowulf*, is at all representative of real practice then these situations too fall into this category.²⁴² The *Beowulf*-poet and Bede (amongst others) suggest that religious ideas and theology were included in what might be communicated at such occasions; if the Old English riddles are also among the sorts of poems that might be performed then, it seems that potential topics could range from God’s creation of the world to filthy humour.²⁴³

Where the surviving evidence for beliefs is primarily represented by practices it is much more difficult to know what to make of them, or how to unpick the specifics. This is the case, for example, with practices like burial, as revealed in the archaeological record. Burials are another context in which beliefs of various sorts might be communicated (although, obviously, not to the person being buried). It is clear that as settlement patterns and ecclesiastical institutional structures varied, so too did burial practices and presumably the attendant beliefs about burials and the dead. Burial practices are discussed in more detail in the final chapter, but it is enough to note here that Christian burial is really a feature of the tenth and eleventh centuries, when local churches began to have graveyards and when churchyard burial became much more usual.²⁴⁴ By the eleventh century, writers like Archbishop Wulfstan assumed that burial in consecrated ground was something that was considered important, but consecrated ground itself seems to be a development of the late ninth (or perhaps the early tenth) century.²⁴⁵ With the exception of the individuals buried in monastic cemeteries, usually elites or those living a religious life in that community, burial before this time seems to have been predominantly a local affair, and the attendant rituals which accompanied such

²⁴¹ Canons of the Council of *Clofesho* (747), 16, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils*, III.368.

²⁴² *Beowulf*, ll. 89b–98, 1063–1162, ed. R.D. Fulk et al., *Klaeber’s Beowulf and The Fight at Finnsburg*, Toronto Old English Series 21 (Toronto, 2008), 6, 37–41.

²⁴³ See J. Wilcox, ‘“Tell Me What I Am”: Old English Riddles’, in D.F. Johnson and E. Treharne (eds), *Readings in Medieval Texts* (Oxford, 2005), 46–59; M. Bayless, ‘Humour and the Comic in Anglo-Saxon England’, in M.H. Sandra and H. Paul (eds), *Medieval English Comedy* (Turnhout, 2007), 13–30.

²⁴⁴ See E. Zadora-Rio, ‘The making of churchyards and parish territories in the early medieval landscape of France and England in the 7th–12th centuries: A reconsideration’, *Medieval Archaeology: Journal of the Society for Medieval Archaeology* 47 (2003): 1–19; D.M. Hadley, ‘Late Saxon Burial Practice’, in Crawford, Hamerow and Hinton (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, 288–314 and below, 273–8.

²⁴⁵ See Gittos, ‘Consecrating Cemeteries’; and below, 273–8.

burials are impossible to recover in the absence of written evidence. Many burials of Christian bodies did not contain material possessions, but some did, and again their significance seems to have been variable. The pectoral cross in the coffin of St Cuthbert might have been meant to honour him; in other cases small items may have been included in graves out of personal sentiments or because they were considered to be amuletic – although identifying precisely the beliefs which these practices represent is probably ultimately impossible.²⁴⁶

Analysis of Anglo-Saxon cemeteries suggests that in both earlier and later periods some importance was attached to being buried according to family or kin groups, who might have been responsible for preparing the body, although in some cases there may have been specialists within a community who undertook such tasks.²⁴⁷ Again, before ecclesiastical institutional structures had developed to the point where the widespread use of Christian ritual in death was possible, ideas about how dead bodies should be treated, and what happened to them, may have been even more variable than they were afterwards.²⁴⁸ Recovering these beliefs accurately is virtually impossible though, just as it is unlikely that the probably numerous and varied religious beliefs associated with domestic life, birth, or ‘coming of age’ in Anglo-Saxon Christian communities will ever be satisfactorily recovered. Here it is also difficult to know where to draw the line between religious and secular, and it is worth remembering that this is in any case something which is worried about by people like theologians, historians and anthropologists, but was probably far less of a concern on the ground: some beliefs or practices probably were self-consciously identified as religious, such as baptism, but it is difficult to know how far, or precisely how, burial in a small lay community in the eighth century might have counted as a religious moment. Beliefs about invisible beings such as angels and devils, or elves and monsters, which might play a role in religious rituals but also exist in the landscape, blur the boundary between religious and secular because they rather form part of life experience and could be accorded religious meaning or not according to context.²⁴⁹

This discussion has attempted to outline what can be learned from the surviving sources about the contexts in which theological beliefs were communicated and

²⁴⁶ See for example Thompson, *Dying and Death*, 33–5, 107–12; D.M. Hadley and J. Buckberry, ‘Caring for the Dead in Late Anglo-Saxon England’, in Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, 121–47, at 138–41; R. Gilchrist, ‘Magic for the dead? The archaeology of magic in later medieval burials’, *Medieval Archaeology: Journal of the Society for Medieval Archaeology* 52 (2008): 119–59.

²⁴⁷ Hadley and Buckberry, ‘Caring’, 142–5; Z. Devlin, *Remembering the Dead in Anglo-Saxon England: Memory Theory in Archaeology and History* (Oxford, 2007), 34, 50; see for example the cemetery at Ailcy Hill, Ripon: Hall and Whyman, ‘Settlement and monasticism at Ripon, North Yorkshire, from the 7th to 11th centuries A.D.’

²⁴⁸ See also É. Rebillard, *The Care of the Dead in Late Antiquity*, Cornell Studies in Classical Philology 59 (Ithaca, NY, 2009).

²⁴⁹ See below, 63–127.

transmitted to Anglo-Saxon audiences, and in which Anglo-Saxon audiences could respond to those beliefs, as well as to touch upon some of the other situations for which limited information now survives. While it is impossible to pry into every aspect of belief and to ‘uncover the secrets of men’s hearts’, it is important to remember what is represented by these different moments in the sources.²⁵⁰ Each one – at baptism, confession, burial, in a Rogationtide procession or at the blessing of a field, or simply walking through the landscape – is an opportunity for questioning or disputing, for learning, for accepting or rejecting one belief or for expressing another, for understanding or misunderstanding. And yet, even though the once impermeable barrier between ‘popular’ and ‘scholarly’ has been broken down, it is still generally considered that theology lay outside the experience of the ‘common man’. In the absence of detailed evidence from the Anglo-Saxon ‘common man’, this book takes an alternative approach, exploring through case studies how far theological debate and discussion might have affected the personal perspectives of Christian Anglo-Saxons, including where possible those who could not read or did not have direct access to the world of letters and learning. In all of these case studies, it is clear that theology was not detached from society or from the experiences of people who were not theologians, but formed an essential constituent part.

²⁵⁰ J.N. Danforth, *Gleanings and Groupings from a Pastor’s Portfolio* (New York, 1852), 319.