

Reading Through Prayer: *Lectio Divina* and “Liturgical Reading”  
in Some Medieval Texts

by

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## Abstract

Reading Through Prayer: *Lectio Divina* and “Liturgical Reading” in Some Medieval Texts

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Prayer texts found in a variety of medieval genres merit more careful scrutiny from literary critical perspectives. Such attention to the verbal artifacts, prayers, that memorialize an activity of central importance in medieval culture, praying, deepens our understanding not only of the prayers and the works in which they are found, but also of the milieu that produced them. This study seeks to model such a critical turn by reading three particular works “through” the prayers that constitute, punctuate and frame them -- privileging the prayers as the starting points for the investigation of their literary and devotional settings. This vantage yields fresh insights into an Anglo-Latin prayerbook -- *The Book of Nunnaminster*, Cynewulf’s Old English poem *Elene*, and the Middle English prose *Seinte Margarete* of the Katherine Group. This approach reveals as well the high degree of association between prayer and reading in medieval culture where prayers are most often highly formal or formulaic texts intended to be read (rather than spontaneous speech) and praying is often figured as an interpretive activity akin to reading. Two medieval reading practices, *lectio divina* and “liturgical reading,” have shaped both the discrete prayers and the whole works examined here. The full appreciation of these texts, and perhaps many others, requires close attention to the prayers within them and an understanding of these habits of prayerful reading.

## Acknowledgments

I have twice, during the many years of work on this project, established study carrels in the coat closets of my homes. These tiny offices have seemed fittingly solitary and enclosed spaces from which to imagine the reading habits of the compiler of *The Book of Nunnaminster*, or the monastic poet Cynewulf as he is portrayed in the epilogue to *Elene*, or the anchoresses who would ponder *Seinte Margarete*. I have tried to demonstrate in this project that the physically isolated practice of *lectio* can participate in the corporate experiences of liturgy when the prayerful reader re-directs his or her attention to the communion of saints, the living and the dead, to whose faithful company the individual is always aspiring, from the contemporary medieval point of view. Likewise, even when alone in my closets, I hope I have always remained keenly aware of and deeply grateful to the supportive community of mentors, scholars, friends and family to which I belong and who have made my work possible.

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*Erat enim sapientia perfectus... caritatis radice plantatus* (For he was perfect in wisdom ... and the plant of charity was rooted deep within him).

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My mother, Joan Edmonds Schilling first taught me both to say my prayers and to memorize poetry; her influence on this work and my life is immeasurable. In her absence here I find new consolation in the vision articulated in a *Nunnaminster* prayer of the realm *ubi sancti sine fine requiescunt et ibi aepulentur omnes amici tui* (where the saints rest without end and there all of your friends feast together), seeing there as well my dearly-missed father-in-law, John Patrick Grogan, and the Reverend James Devereux, S.J., my friend and teacher, whose work on the literary aspects of prayer was one inspiration for my own. My father, Richard Robert Schilling, has waited patiently for many years to see this particular dividend of the educational investments he so generously made and for which, and for all of his faithful loving support, I will

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## List of Abbreviations

AS	Anglo-Saxon.
BHL	Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina, ed. Bollandists.
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CCSA	Corpus Christianorum, Series Apocryphorum
ME	Middle English.
<i>Nunaminster</i>	<i>The Book of Nunaminster</i> , ed. Birch.
PG	Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Graeca. Ed. J.-P. Migne. 162 vols., with Latin translation. Paris, 1857-66.
PL	Patrologia Cursus Completus, Series Latina. Ed. J.-P. Migne. 221 vols. Paris, 1844-1864.
<i>SM</i>	<i>Seinte Margarete</i> . ME text as edited by Mack. Modern English translations in Millet and Wogan-Browne.

## Introduction

O Padre nostro, che ne' cieli stai,  
 non circunscritto, ma per più amore  
 ch' ai primi effetti di là sù tu hai ...<sup>1</sup>

Lines 1-24 of Canto XI of *Il Purgatorio* are a poetic expansion of the Lord's Prayer uttered by the prideful band of souls bent low to the earth at the first cornice of Mount Purgatory. Because the lines are Dante's, they have been scrutinized carefully: What does it mean in relation to the sin of pride for these souls to pray the *Pater Noster*? Does this most basic Christian prayer, the first taught to children, suggest a return to the simplicity of childhood for those who have been puffed up by worldly renown? On the other hand, to the extent that the character of Dante explores his own sin of pride, what can we make of the seeming arrogance that would re-write Christ's own words? Or is it rather an act of meditation and artistic homage, like the painting of an icon, to gild these words in their translation to the vulgar tongue? How does Dante employ prayers throughout *The Purgatorio* to reflect upon the sins of those who mouth them? How have the prayers in the poem been ordered to suggest liturgical resonance in keeping with the elaborate architecture of *The Divine Comedy*? How does Dante use the particular semiotics of prayer to explore broader epistemological questions?<sup>2</sup> When Dante chooses to employ prayer, we take note, confident that the great poet has expertly deployed this unique linguistic, theological and epistemological register to enrich his work.

The anonymous author of the fourteenth-century Parisian play "La Nativité" similarly expands in Old French upon the *Pater Noster*; Adam's son Cep kneels and recites a fifteen-line rhymed version of the prayer as he plants a branch of the Edenic tree on Adam's grave. But as a most recent critical study of this play notes, this poetic prayer has been completely "overlooked" not only by students of Old French drama, but also by those scholars who have created

repertoires of Old French prayer.<sup>3</sup> It seems that the dramatic context of the prayer had placed it beyond the ken of the scholarship on prayer, while the devotional familiarity of the text rendered it uninteresting to literary editors and readers. Yet the presence of the prayer in a vernacular translation at this moment of the play raises many of the same questions we might bring to bear on Dante's "*Padre Nostro*" and would reward more sustained interrogation. The author of "*La Nativité*" is not Dante, of course, but his work might be said to represent a broad range of medieval texts in which the use of prayer evinces a deeply intuited understanding of the complex web of associations -- theological, philosophical, and literary -- that coalesce in this genre of verbal expression. Prayers in medieval texts are often sites of heightened interpretive aspiration for the real-life composer or the imagined speaker which can serve to alert us to the very different universe of reading practices and habits of mind that obtained in medieval culture. I believe that prayer in medieval culture is so essentially tied to literacy, literature, and the identity-forming of both individuals and communities, that the study of prayers in medieval texts, even those already well examined, should be fundamental and can never be exhaustive.

This complex web of associations evoked by prayer speech is woven over centuries but encountered in the simplest moments of everyday life throughout the medieval period. Words of prayer uttered in memorized formulae marked the passage of the day: for a religious in the poetic complexity of the liturgy of the hours; for the unlettered lay person, perhaps in an *Ave* upon rising, a heartfelt *Pater Noster* for protection at some moment of peril, and a few more quick *Aves* before bed. The communal prayers of the Eucharistic liturgy provided the rubrics for ordering the weeks, seasons, and years for lay and religious alike. Just as monastic novices began their educations by memorizing the psalms, lay people learning to read often started by studying their "prymers," or prayer books. Most of the written texts the average person encountered were

certainly religious and probably devotional in nature: the outsized lectionaries and missals propped on the lectern at Mass, instructional charts of prayers and meditations hanging in the local church, the words of prayer scrolling from the mouths of angels and saints in devotional art, private prayer books carried in the hands or pockets of those who could afford them, prayer scraps of vellum brought to the bedside of the woman in labor or the mortally ill.<sup>4</sup>

This brief catalogue of everyday encounters with prayer suggests not only the centrality of prayer in Christian life, but also the high degree of association between prayer and the technologies of literacy. It is not surprising then that prayers are also omnipresent in the more broadly construed literary tradition represented by masters such as Dante and by the anonymous authors and scribes of the mystery plays. So ubiquitous, in fact, are prayer words in medieval literature that this very prevalence can render them almost invisible to the critical eye. Like our unseen atmosphere, they are essential to the religious and literary life of the time, but curiously understudied as an integral element of the inspiration, the breathing, of the medieval literary corpus. Even within the general critical turn in medieval studies over the last thirty years towards a renewed appreciation for religious literature – manifested for instance by the increasing interest in hagiography – the discrete prayers within these spiritual works are too often glossed over.<sup>5</sup> Yet the degree of effort and artistry medieval authors from Cynewulf to Chaucer devote to the creation of prayers, often lavishing on them the most intricate verbal flourishes, suggests that our contemporary expectations differ from the medieval view of how these texts will be read.

For indeed, to a degree that may surprise contemporary students of devotional texts and praxes, the medieval author most often depicts prayers as texts to be read (either from the books into which they have been copied or from the book of the heart where they are stored in memory) and figures the activity of praying as a type of reading. We may say that a prayer once written

down has two aspects: it is both a verbal “artifact,” much like a poem that can be gathered into an anthology, and it is also the semiotic representation of the “activity” of praying. As verbal artifacts medieval prayers are created, copied, altered, combined, collected, shared and compiled into a variety of manuscripts with devotional, liturgical, and literary ambitions. But prayer texts are also scripts, records, models, mirrors or prompts for a real-life activity understood in medieval culture to have metaphysical repercussions. Especially in literary contexts, we may expect to see a clear distinction between the prayer text as artifact – perhaps a piece collected into a devotional miscellany such as *The Book of Nunnaminster* -- and one that represents the personal soul-searching of a particular pray-er --for instance a martyr, such as Saint Margaret, overheard in her narrative legend imploring God for help. Medieval prayer, however, is highly formal or formulaic and its authenticity therefore perhaps suspect from our modern point of view. It may seem uninteresting or merely predictable to us that Cep resorts to a version of the Our Father at Adam’s grave, or that Saint Margaret’s prayers are scriptural pastiches concluding with familiar doxologies. Occasionally in medieval narrative or dramatic contexts prayer speech appears to be a more spontaneous outpouring of emotion – perhaps Judas’s long prayer in *Elene* strikes the reader as the representation of a genuine spiritual activity rather than the rote repetition of a stable devotional artifact. But even in prayers that are not recognizable set pieces like the *Pater Noster* or a doxology, the apparently spontaneous utterance is more likely to be a careful compilation of scriptural, patristic and liturgical reference – as we shall see is true for Judas’s long prayer.

Some prayers in the texts I will examine are indeed more stable and “artifactual” than others, having long histories of use as devotional favorites. Others, particularly in narrative contexts, will seem to more clearly represent prayer as an activity – but that activity is not the

spontaneous outpouring of emotional fervor we might expect to find in prayer speech. Rather the activity figured by these texts, even in cases of spiritual exigency, is usually the more measured, meditative, interpretive act of reading. Indeed, when Saint Dominic recommended nine postures of prayer to his followers, one of them embodies this very understanding of prayer: he instructed them to pray while holding their hands together in imitation of an open book, the better to hear the word of God spoken directly to their hearts.<sup>6</sup> In most medieval literature, as in daily life, people pray quite sincerely by reciting memorized forms, combining scriptural verses, or by reading.

As Paul Saenger has noted:

[I]n the modern world praying is often entirely unrelated to reading. Although oral prayer in the Catholic religion is usually from a printed text, among modern Protestants both oral and especially silent prayer are often impromptu and following from the individual inspiration of the person praying. In the fifteenth century, this dichotomy between programmed and spontaneous prayer was only incipient and the relationship between text and prayer was universally much closer than the one that exists today. It is clear in innumerable instances that -- at least among orthodox Catholics -- the injunction of theologians to say a prayer meant, in fact, to read it aloud or silently.<sup>7</sup>

In such a climate, the formal or even rote nature of prayer cannot be equated with a lack of sincerity or emotion. While modern readers might presume formal prayer to be of little use in probing the human heart or the cosmos, I hope to demonstrate that medieval pray-ers are often represented as “reading” the texts of the self and the world through the expert manipulation of even the most familiar formal devotions. Formal prayer *can* represent both the stillness of an

artifact and the dynamism of an activity precisely because in the medieval period not only is prayer read, but reading itself is often a form of prayer.

In this study I read a selection of texts *through* the prayers which constitute, punctuate, or enclose them, beginning my investigation of Margaret's passion, for instance, by looking first at the saint's prayers as a way into the surrounding text. In a sense I seek to correct the literary critic's neglect of prayer texts by privileging these sites as cruxes for the interpretation of the whole works in which they are found. But I also explore the notion that reading "through prayer" evokes two particular habits of reading with widespread currency in medieval literary culture: the praxis associated with *lectio divina* and the strategies of interpretation fostered by the liturgical life of the Church, which I will call "liturgical reading." When prayers are present in a text, they may be signposts for the reader, pointing to these different modes of readerly experience that either produced the work or are called upon for fully engaging it.

The ancient monastic tradition of the *lectio divina* is an individual encounter with a text which presumes prayer as both the means and the end of that engagement; recent years have seen an explosion of scholarly and devotional interest in this approach to reading. Very recently scholars have begun to explore the connections between this monastic or individual reading practice and more communal types of meaning-making such as drama or liturgical pageantry.<sup>8</sup> The liturgies of the Eucharist and the Divine Office in their diurnal and annual cycles are the products of centuries of reflection on the major texts of the Christian religion and might be called a communal "reading" of scripture and patristic commentary; when enacted by the worshipping community, these liturgies suggest specific interpretations of those texts and particular modes of textual engagement. Again in recent years, liturgical, literary, and cultural studies have urged a broader understanding of "liturgy." However, the particular nexus of liturgy and *lectio* that I

explore here has not been extensively examined. I therefore explore the ways in which prayer texts in their literary and cultural contexts draw upon the conventions of these two important modes of “prayerful reading.”

Literature produced in England from the eighth to the fifteenth centuries is saturated with prayer found in a variety of contexts; I would like to note three of these contexts in particular which the texts chosen for this study represent.

First, discrete prayers and religious lyrics survive in Anglo-Latin, Old English, Anglo-Norman and Middle English, collected into compilations variously described as liturgical, devotional, and literary. We have, for example, poetic expansions of the *Pater Noster* and the Creed in the relatively small corpus of Old English poetry, alongside *Caedmon's Hymn* and *Christ I*, lyric poems which, like many of their contemporaries, might also be called prayers or meditations. From the same period miscellanies survive of scriptural texts and Anglo-Latin prayers that are culled and variously combined from a circulating corpus of such devotions.

Second, we find prayer texts “embedded” in a wide range of medieval genres including hagiographic narrative, epic, romance, and drama. Saint Margaret prays in any version of her story, as Troilus does in Chaucer's version of his. These prayers are sometimes liturgical or devotional set pieces dropped into the text; sometimes a similarly stable, “artifactual” prayer from a narrative would later be abstracted from its literary frame for independent devotional use. But viewed within their framing texts these embedded prayers serve devotional and literary purposes. Prayers in narratives and drama sometimes model exemplary behavior and speech. At the same time they can be literary devices which reveal character, clarify theme, drive plot, parody power or difference, add verisimilitude.

Third, we have the prayers of authors, translators, compilers, scribes, and glossators found at the beginnings and endings of a wide variety of medieval texts. These prayers ask spiritual favors or forgiveness for those who create and use the text at hand; they derive from clearly prescribed forms -- serving, like the *humilitas* trope, as literary topoi. Cynewulf's autobiographical epilogue to *Christ II* and Chaucer's "Retractions" are among the most famous conclusions to request prayer from their readers, but a great number of anonymous medieval poems and narratives begin or end on the same note. These "framing" authorial or scribal prayers, like the prayers in any clearly devotional collection, while representing a common literary convention, most often seem intended as prompts for real life devotional behavior.

The works I read through their prayers in the following chapters are the ninth-century Anglo-Latin prayerbook known as *The Book of Nunnaminster*, the early ninth-century Old English poem *Elene* from the tenth-century Vercelli Book, and the thirteenth-century Middle English prose *St. Margarete* from the Katherine Group. In my original plan for this study, I intended to address prayer in several other works as well: a thirteenth-century collection of Marian miracles found in some manuscripts of the *South English Legendary*, Chaucer's late fourteenth-century rime royal tales, the authorial prayers throughout his corpus, and the N-Town Corpus Christi Cycle, probably transcribed in the fifteenth century. My intention in choosing such a panoramic approach -- spanning six centuries of material representing a broad range of genres in three languages -- was to alert contemporary readers to the pervasive nature of prayer speech in a broad range of medieval texts, to explore some of the variety of literary uses of prayer, and to suggest the extent to which the acts of praying and reading are linked in medieval thought. The fruitfulness of the approach has necessitated the constriction of my aperture, but in the Conclusion I suggest the contours of my thinking about prayer with respect to the works I

could not include in this study. I look forward to engaging these texts more fully in the future. The texts under scrutiny here, however, provide examples of prayer from the three contexts I described above: collected prayers (*The Book of Nunnaminster*), embedded prayers (*Elene* and *Seinte Margarete*), and authorial or framing prayers (*Elene* and *Seinte Margarete*). They also span three of the dominant forms of literary language phases in medieval England (Latin, Old English and Middle English) and some generic variety -- *libellus precum* (prayerbook), *inventio* (narrative of discovery of relics), and *passio* (martyr's passion), the last two also exemplifying, respectively, vernacular epic poetry and alliterative prose -- although these are certainly all works of clearly "religious" origin and import.

Mining the prayer texts in these works has proved a rich experience. That *The Book of Nunnaminster* is not merely a service book, the genre to which it was relegated for so long, but also a thoughtful compilation of poetically exuberant meditations is an insight only attainable to those willing to explore the boundaries between the liturgical and the literary. *Elene* has been well-studied for decades, and yet close readings of the one hundred lines at its heart, Judas's prayer, are few; this one has, I hope, yielded fresh insights into the whole work. That any understanding of *Seinte Margarete* depends upon an analysis of the interplay between Margaret's prayers and the narrative action became clear to me only as I engaged these highly-wrought verbal objects; doing so added dramatically to the depth of my understanding of this passion. I believe that similar attention to the prayers in many medieval works would likewise yield abundantly.

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<sup>1</sup> "Our Father, who art in heaven, encircled by/ nothing except the greater love you have/ for the first works that you made there on high..." (Purg. XI, 1-3). Translation by Merwin.

<sup>2</sup> A review of just the *Cambridge Companion to Dante* (Ed. Jacoff) finds for instance, Jeffrey T. Schnapp reflecting on the "temporal reciprocity" of prayer in the overall schema of the *Purgatorio* (197) and Peter S. Hawkins' overview of his work on the scriptural allusions in this

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prayer and throughout the *Commedia* (127). Both have written extensively on the subjects of prayer, scripture and liturgy in Dante. In *Lectura Dantis, Purgatorio*, (Ed. Mandelbaum et al.) Anthony Oldcorn discusses Dante's alteration of the prayer to emphasize pride (107). Teodolinda Barolini's article on the prideful, "Arachnean art" of the prayer notes that it is "an instance of God's art...elaborated, extended, commented upon -- in short, re-presented -- by a man"(57). Vitz, "Theology and Vernacular Literature," surveys the scholarship on Dante and the Liturgy (584-597). See also Vitz's recommendations (587 n 112) for further reading on liturgical allusions and structure, specifically in the *Purgatorio*.

<sup>3</sup> Gallagher (187) notes this lacuna in the nevertheless very extensive Old French prayer catalogues of Sonet and Sinclair.

<sup>4</sup> In his survey of private devotional life during the later medieval period, Philippe Braunstein notes, "we find prayers not only in the 'books of hours,' consulted every day, and anthologies of manuscripts, in which prayers are found next to recipes and formulas, but also in parchment scrolls, sewn into clothing, and locked into boxes" (Ariès and Duby, Vol.II, 625). Duby discusses the spread outward from monastic centers of text-related practices of personal prayer and piety in the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Ariès and Duby, Vol. II, 528-33), noting among other developments that "the popularity of sacred reading increased steadily in the twelfth century" (530).

<sup>5</sup> Of course I rely in this study on the literary scholars who *have* in fact chosen to focus their attention on the central importance of prayer for understanding medieval literary culture, for instance Thomas Hill and Barbara Raw, whose work on embedded and collected prayer texts serves as a model for my own and should inspire further inquiry in this area. Literary scholarship in French has perhaps been more attentive than that in English to the philosophical and linguistic issues raised by prayer in literary contexts. See Gros or Henriët, for instance, who both contemplate the unique aspects of prayer speech as verbal performance.

<sup>6</sup> See "The Nine Ways of Prayer of Saint Dominic" in Tugwell, especially the fifth way: "[Dominic] would hold his hands out, open before his breast, like an open book, and then would stand with great reverence and devotion, as if he were reading in the presence of God. Then in his prayer he would appear to be pondering the words of God and, as it were, enjoying reciting them to himself" (97).

<sup>7</sup> Saenger 143.

<sup>8</sup> Jessica Brantley's work in this vein will be discussed in Chapter One, below.

## Chapter One

### The Genre of Prayer and Types of Prayerful Reading: *Lectio Divina* and “Liturgical Reading”

Although individual prayer texts may be under-studied, the general interest, among medievalists in religious literature, in the practice of *lectio divina* and in the generic boundaries of liturgy has blossomed over the last thirty years. The texts of religious practice and the devotional methods by which they were encountered, formerly the province only of philologists, codicologists, and liturgists, have increasingly been the subject of studies probing their broader literary and cultural significance. In the midst of such a growing familiarity with, for instance, the term *lectio divina*, the complex contours of this practice can be lost in its easy identification as merely “meditative reading.”<sup>1</sup> For this reason, it will be helpful first to examine in some detail the concepts of prayer, *lectio divina*, and what I term “liturgical reading,” and to review recent scholarship in these and related areas, particularly with regard to the literature of medieval England.

#### *Identifying Prayer Texts and Theorizing the Genre*

How is it possible to isolate particular units of speech for special attention as the moments of prayer “through” which to read broader literary contexts? What, in other words, are the generic boundaries of prayer which will be useful for students of literature? To date, literary critics have failed to reach any form of consensus on what exactly constitutes a prayer. Systems for identifying prayers in literature range from the highly quantitative and analytic “tagmemic” system employed by René Jeanneret to the complete absence of taxonomy in the work of Margaret Bridges.<sup>2</sup> Rossell Hope Robbins used the term “prayer” in 1939 in a collection of

“popular prayers” in Middle English verse, but the works he collected would subsequently come to be termed “religious lyrics.”<sup>3</sup> Rosemary Woolf’s introduction to her 1968 study of “religious lyrics” questions the appropriateness of the term “lyric” for works that aspire to be more than undirected poetic outpourings of human emotion. While she suggests that some of the poems be called prayers or meditations, Woolf nevertheless is reluctant to replace the term lyric, which by then had become the standard classification in critical scholarship.<sup>4</sup> In the preface to his catalogue of fifteenth-century prayers and meditations in English, Peter Revell struggles with the definition of a meditation, but assumes that the rhetorical character of prayer is self-evident. He decides to accept as the “distinguishing quality” of meditation that it approaches “the *locutio ad Deum* characteristic of prayer.”<sup>5</sup> The taxonomy is marked by such circular quasi-definitions.

For my purposes, I identify prayer texts chiefly by their rhetorical orientation. I take Revell’s *locutio ad Deum* as my formal starting point, although for the sake of my future work I will broaden it to include direct address to an intercessor or to any deity, so as to include Marian prayers, prayers to saints, and, in Chaucer and the drama, prayers to pagan deities. I focus my attention for the most part on speech acts of direct address to an intercessor, or deity, that are “sustained.” This delimiting is simply to avoid the necessity of examining every brief parenthetical invocation or ejaculation, although the presence of such pervasive forms of prayer speech in a given text is noteworthy. Prayer texts may also be recognizable because the author or scribe sets them apart from surrounding text with rubrics. And because medieval prayer is so highly formulaic, prayers embedded in longer works may be well-known liturgical or devotional set pieces. Finally, the register of prayer speech -- often biblically or liturgically allusive; often highly ornamented or hieratic in tone -- may be markedly different from that of the surrounding text.

In the present study, with few exceptions, the prayers I examine are not “religious lyrics” or hymns – that is, works specifically ornamented with sound devices because they will be set to music or sung. But such lyrics or hymns certainly belong also to the genre of prayer if my study’s primary concern rests with the direction and intention of a devotional utterance rather than its formal contours.

For indeed it is the audacious temerity of the act of prayer that marks the words as generically different if we allow for the possibility that they were constituted within a human experience of faith. The speech act that looks like a dramatic *monologue* is, to the believing imagination, always truly part of a *dialogue*. The pray-er,<sup>6</sup> even alone in a cell, writes, reads, vocalizes these words before a Listener whose simultaneous presence and absence makes the verbalization both possible and necessary.<sup>7</sup> The words are necessary even before an omniscient Listener, because they serve to manifest the intention of the pray-er for his or her own benefit. As Thomas Hand observed in his study of Augustine’s writings on prayer, “the words we use in prayer are not intended for the instruction of God, but for the construction of our own desires.”<sup>8</sup> Augustine, in a letter to Proba discussing the perfect economy of the Lord’s Prayer, ponders also the gospel admonishment to “ask and you shall receive:”

Since he knows what is needful for us before we ask Him, our mind can be troubled by His acting thus, unless we understand that our Lord and God does not need to have our will made known to Him –He cannot but know it – but He wishes our desire to be exercised in prayer that we may be able to receive what he is preparing to give.<sup>9</sup>

To the extent that a prayer shapes the desires of the speaker’s heart or, as we shall see, articulates a supplicant’s view of his or her place in the world, we may say that the speaker, pray-er or

supplicant is constructing a self through that act of devotional verbalization. It is necessarily a self in relationship with the God who in this worldview hears all prayers and, it is hoped, will answer them. When a character in a narrative, such as Saint Margaret, is portrayed as prayerfully constructing herself before God, the author demonstrates the essentially dialogic quality of this speech by recording the answer from on high, in Margaret's case in the speeches of a heavenly dove and the hymns of angels.

We can never know, of course, which individual prayers in a devotional miscellany such as *The Book of Nunnaminster* may have been composed in the transcendence of communion or in the hope of combating doubt or even in disbelief, but because these words come to us from a culture that presupposes the possibility of faith, prayers in medieval texts of all kinds point towards a philosophical framework that privileges the intention behind the words. Medieval semiotics acknowledges that all words are merely verbal signs, *verba*, cloaking the *res*, but it may be argued that prayer is a special category of verbal utterance in which this highly abstract theory could be understood even by the illiterate person who offered a memorized *Ave*, sure that the heartfelt intentions behind these strange words would supply their meaning when they reached Mary's ears. Perhaps the simple man believed the words themselves had incantatory power? Occasional charms and spells included in prayer collections such as *The Book of Nunnaminster* (not to mention in Chaucer's *Miller's Tale*) do testify to the possibility that there is a permeable border between belief and superstition. Nevertheless, catechesis on prayer was widespread and the depictions of prayer in broadly popular forms such as the mystery play and Marian miracle point toward a widely held basic understanding that prayer speech requires and demonstrates certain interior attitudes.

In analyzing these prayer texts, therefore, it is also useful to employ the vocabulary of prayerful attitudes familiar to medieval thinkers and reflecting their expectations about the genre. With the exception of Bede, Anglo-Saxon writers spent little time on theological definition; their concerns were more immediately pastoral. Bede, in the tradition of Augustine, defines prayer as essentially a disposition of the heart.<sup>10</sup> Beginning in the twelfth century, treatises and sermons on prayer by Hugh of St. Victor, Guigo II, Bernard of Clairvaux and others look back to and expand upon the work of Cassian and Gregory the Great in classifying types of prayer according to the intention in the pray-er's heart (e.g. petition, contrition, adulation, acclamation, thanksgiving, intercession).<sup>11</sup> While these authors do not employ a universally consistent terminology, we may take from them both the vocabulary of a range of prayerful intentions and further evidence that prayer is widely taught to be more than a simple concatenation of syllables. All of these writers aver that the verbal artifact, prayer, is animated only in the heart of its user. It is the activity of praying, which is memorialized in and prompted by the verbal artifact, that constitutes the true essence of a prayer in the medieval imagination. As Augustine wrote, "He who prays with desire sings in his heart, even though his tongue be silent. But if he prays without desire he is dumb before God, even though his voice sounds in the ears of men."<sup>12</sup>

A recent exploration of this same tension between the verbal artifact and the human activity which animates it employs a different set of terms. Rachel Fulton also uses the term verbal artifact to mean the words of devotion which survive on the page or can be taught to another.<sup>13</sup> But she calls these same words "tools" when they are used to create the abstract and unquantifiable experience of prayer. Fulton uses the term "prayer" for only that activity which happens in the heart, and so she recommends that for purposes of literary and historical research into the nature of these ancient tools, such as those prayers found in the Anselmian collection she

studies, we should try to pray with them. Her approach is startling and thought-provoking; it came to my attention late in my own project of theorizing the genre of prayer in literary contexts, and I find much in her study with which I concur.

For my purposes, however, it has seemed prudent to be able to assume, perhaps uncritically, that these artifacts, or in Fulton's terms, these tools, do indeed "work," that is, represent the activity of prayer as well – as intangible or unmeasurable as that activity might be, in for instance, the context of a prayer collection such as *The Book of Nunnaminster*. I have tried imaginatively and from a literary perspective to trace the ranging connections of the prayerfully reading mind that perhaps composed and compiled these individual pieces. But because my project also involves prayers found in narrative contexts, I am able not only to rely on how I imagine these medieval artifacts might have worked, but also to examine how they are represented as working by the medieval authors who depicted their saintly protagonists in the activity of using these devotional "tools."

Hagiography, we may say, captures the dual aspects of prayer as both artifact and activity. Cynewulf shows us the effects of the activity of prayer when Judas prays for enlightenment. At the same time, Judas's "embedded" prayer, once uttered within the story is now an artifact of prayer, memorialized and available for use by others, including perhaps the readers of his story. The same may be said of the prayers uttered by Saint Margaret in her *passio*. And in the case of hagiographic narrative, we must remember that the reading of (or listening to) the whole text, not only the discrete prayers within or framing it, would most likely have been undertaken as an activity of prayer within the contours of the practice known as *lectio divina*. That the entire narrative can then in turn become an artifact of prayer is evinced by the widespread practice of bringing a copy of Saint Margaret's passion to the bedside of women in

labor, so that its reading there, or even its mere presence, might ensure a safe delivery (or, as I will suggest, final deliverance) for the child. Finally, framing prayers which conclude these and many other hagiographic narratives are prompts for the reader to pray to the particular saint or for herself or the author – again a verbal artifact that now requires “real life” activity beyond the borders of the narrative. The inextricability of prayer and reading, the densely woven interplay of artifact and activity, suggest the breadth of the literary, devotional, and philosophical landscape that is available here for exploration, and that will contribute as well to the on-going project of mapping medieval textual practices and the ways in which these differ from our own.

### *Medieval Reading Theories*

Contemporary textual studies have come to concern themselves, in fact, with *reading* as the central activity of medieval literary culture.<sup>14</sup> While authors and their intentions still demand and deserve our critical interest, recent scholarship focuses on the complex interactions of authors, scribes, compilers, patrons, and readers in the production of textual meaning. Each scribe’s copying, compiler’s selecting, patron’s commissioning, or reader’s glossing can be construed as a new reading of the text. And in a climate which neither insists upon nor values originality in literary creation, even the author must be conceived of as a reader in his re-working of the subject matter and literary traditions to produce a “new” text. Does a seemingly limitless cast of readers imply then that there are, correspondingly, infinite possibilities for correct readings of a given text?

Medieval thinkers were well aware of the play and indeterminacy of language which resulted from what they might call its fallen state.<sup>15</sup> But unlike a contemporary, post-structuralist

willingness to allow for that endless free “play” of language that permanently defers meaning, medieval readers entered into dialogue with the texts at every possible stage of “meaning making” to exert interpretive control through what John Dagenais, in work on the *Libro de buen amor*, calls “ethical” reading strategies. Dagenais links the primacy of reading in medieval textual culture and that culture’s awareness of language’s instability in his attempt to answer the question, “How did medieval readers read?” He concludes that the ethics of reading “depends ultimately upon a system of values that directs the flow of the letter’s play and closes it off at the point at which the letter meets the life experience of the individual reader.”<sup>16</sup>

Dagenais suggests that in place of the system of values he explores, ethics, one might as easily study theological, political, or social value systems that likewise served to “control the flow of association” for medieval readers.<sup>17</sup> I would suggest that the widespread presence of prayer in medieval literary texts, both religious and secular, attests that “devotional” may be, in fact, the system of values (and prayer the interpretive activity) most pervasively figured, at least in early medieval literary culture, as the means to “control the flow of association.” The unique nature of prayer speech discussed above makes it a natural locus for the medieval project of meaning making that Dagenais describes: the joining of the letter with the life of the reader. For as Peter Cramer has written in discussing early medieval attitudes towards prayer, “[Prayer is] two things. It is the exuberance of language, its associativeness *ad infinitum*. But it is also the restraint of language, the ability to say ‘enough said,’ and to re-affirm that ‘enough can never be said.’ The exuberant word reaches its object.”<sup>18</sup>

Dagenais is not alone in his interest in the ways in which medieval habits of reading differed from our own and unabashedly linked texts to values and beliefs in the lives of their readers. The prayerful reading practices of *lectio divina* and “liturgical reading” clearly fall

within this intellectual territory. My own study of these practices has benefited tremendously from work done earlier in the twentieth century on the patristic sources of medieval reading habits by Gorce, Smalley, and LeClercq. More recent work by Carruthers, Saenger, Jager, Huot, Hutchinson, Stock, Illich, Dagenis, S. Lewis, Brantley and others has deepened my understanding of how these particular modes of prayerful reading fit within a broader cultural insistence upon ethical, moral, and spiritual approaches to texts.<sup>19</sup>

As these various studies all suggest, moreover, medieval reading as a spiritual praxis is not limited to the interpretation of only *written* texts. If prayers in a variety of literary settings are often constructed and represented as instances of reading, the objects of this interpretive activity include not only texts, but also the hearts, situations, or world in which the pray-er of the book or in the story finds him or herself. Huot calls this more broadly-construed practice, “polytextual” reading, suggesting in particular that devotional manuscripts often both prescribe and foster the practice.<sup>20</sup> We see an example of prayer figured as an epistemological act akin to reading, breaking open the encoded meaning of more broadly construed “texts,” in *Elene* when Judas’s prayer to discover the cross enables him to find it both literally (in the ground on Calvary) and spiritually (through belief in Christ). Judas is figured in the poem as learning how to read both the scriptures -- as these are represented by the cross -- and his own “proper” place in the history of salvation, as an individual and as a representative of the Jewish people. Likewise we may say that the pray-er of the *Oratio Sancti Gregorii*, from *The Book of Nunnaminster*, reads that same salvation history as she invokes a litany of Old Testament figures whose ranks she hopes to join. Saint Margaret’s prayer reads an instrument of salvation, rather than a mode of torture, in the vessel of water into which she is cast.

Brian Stock studies Augustine's seminal role in developing this epistemological construct, which finds its fullest expression in his *Confessions*. Stock describes Augustine's influential paradigm for the "reading" of the self:

Our understanding of our lives is inseparable from the stories by which we represent our thoughts in words. Every understanding, therefore, is a reading of ourselves, every genuine insight, a rereading, until, progressing upwards by revisions, we have inwardly in view the essential source of knowledge, which is God. Reading, though not an end in itself, is a means of gaining higher understanding: the contents of the mind can in turn be conceptualized through the sensory relations of reading – listening and seeing. Augustine is the first to present a consistent analysis of the manner in which we organize the intentional structure of thought through this activity: he suggests that, through reading, a "language game" can become a "form of life."<sup>21</sup>

*The Book of Nunnaminster* is an example of a text clearly created for prayerful reading, but which, we may say, also memorializes the process Stock describes. This codex that is a compilation of prayer artifacts, offers a glimpse of the compiler who created it or a pray-er who uses it engaged in this activity of reading the self. The prayers capture insights, gained through readings of both scriptures and the self, and which in turn reward repeated re-readings, following the trajectory described by Stock as "upwards by revisions" towards "the essential source of knowledge."

That prayer and reading are intimately associated as interpretive activities in medieval thought does not mean that prayerful reading is a monolithic practice with clearly defined methodologies. In the chapters below I explore the two habits of prayerful reading that have

seemed to me to be widely represented in the religious texts I have studied -- *lectio divina* and “liturgical reading” -- and will trace here the contours of their features and practice.

### *Lectio Divina*

The first thing that might be said about *lectio divina*, particularly in its early medieval context, is that its true practice required a great deal of time from its practitioners. We see this commitment figured in Cynewulf’s epilogue to *Elene* where he tells of spending nighttime vigils reading in books about the cross, “painstakingly at night” (“nihtes nearwe,” l. 1239). How much time did monks and other religious spend reading? In Benedict’s *Rule*, *lectio divina* is prescribed as a soul-saving occupation for those hours not devoted to manual labor or the *Opus dei*.

Benedict recommends his brothers spend “certis iterum horis in lectione divina.”<sup>22</sup> By Dom Thomas Symons’ estimation, brothers might read three hours a day in the normal course of a spring, summer or fall day. Through the winter months until Lent, when work outdoors was less time-consuming, brothers might read four and a half to five hours a day. And on Sundays throughout the year even more time was allotted for reading. Finally, Lent was understood as a time especially devoted to *lectio*, for the *Rule* mandates, “During this time of Lent each one is to receive a book from the library, and to read the whole of it straight through.”<sup>23</sup>

Although later generations of Benedictines (both monks and nuns) might have abbreviated the number of hours devoted to reading and study (by adding devotions and offices to the prayer regime), nevertheless, Symons suggests that the essential activities of these many long hours were unchanging: “The intellectual work --*lectio, meditatio*-- of the Anglo-Saxon monks would have been the same as that practiced by St. Benedict’s monks: the pondering of the scriptures, learning psalms by heart, the preparation of the ceremonies and readings connected

with the office and doubtless, the study of the arts and sciences of the day. It would have been in the times allotted to *lectio* that books were written and illuminated.”<sup>24</sup> The amount of time devoted to reading by a 9<sup>th</sup> century Benedictine nun, such as the one who might have compiled *The Book of Nunnaminster*, or by Cynewulf, or even the anchoresses who in the early thirteenth-century would read the *Ancrene Wisse* and *Seinte Margarete*, is an important aspect of *lectio* to consider, because literature produced in this readerly milieu demonstrates a degree of familiarity with scripture that is possible only within a life so given over to the pursuit of that textual intimacy.<sup>25</sup>

In fact, in its earliest usage, the term *lectio divina* seems to have referred both to the scriptural subject matter and the practice of sacred study. The scriptural text itself is *lectio divina*; the habit of reading that text is so known as well in the writings of Ambrose and Augustine. For Jerome, the subject matter of the *lectio divina* consists only of scripture and patristic commentary thereon.<sup>26</sup> It has been argued that Benedict may also have intended *lectio divina* to be limited to the study of scriptural texts. The “bibliotheca” from which the monks were to be given their Lenten reading may simply mean the Bible, whose nine books were often referred to as the *bibliotheca*.<sup>27</sup> In later usage, as Symons suggests, *lectio* continues to mean the practice of reading the Scriptures and the Fathers, but also encompasses the reading and even creation of other devotional materials, such as hagiographic narratives.<sup>28</sup>

*Lectio* begins then with a fairly narrowly defined subject matter, the Scriptures and Fathers, but as Leclercq details, certain literary genres, including hagiography, vocation letters, and devotional *florilegia*, were the particular fruit in monastic culture of the habits of mind developed by the practice. Monastic works in these genres might also then be appropriate for reading within the hours set aside for *lectio*.<sup>29</sup> *The Book of Nunnaminster*, *Elene*, and *Seinte*

*Margarete*'s source text, the *Passio S. Margaretae*, are all works that easily fall within the purview of literature that not only developed within the cloister walls, but might have been originally produced for *lectio divina*. The circular nature of this enterprise reflects the fact that like prayer itself, *lectio*, despite the fact that it is performed in solitude, is essentially dialogic in nature.

*Lectio* is dialogic because the reading of the scriptures is construed within monastic culture both as a listening to the word of God and as an encounter with a person: Christ. This encounter will only take place if the *lectio* is undertaken as itself a prayerful exercise. Indeed Leclercq suggests that for the monastic reader, reading has not really happened unless prayer is the context; *lectio* without *oratio* is a mere decoding of symbols. The mysteries of the text reveal themselves only to those whose hearts have been prepared. Augustine records an early and unsuccessful encounter with the scriptures: "My inflated conceit shunned the Bible's restraint, and my gaze never penetrated its inwardness. Yet the Bible was composed in such a way that as beginners mature, its meaning grows with them. I disdained to be a beginner. Puffed up with pride, I considered myself mature."<sup>30</sup> Augustine's heart had not yet been prepared by prayer. Beryl Smalley notes that for the Fathers, "*lectio* began and ended in *oratio*."<sup>31</sup> Gorce finds in Jerome's letters a profound sense of the interrelatedness of prayer and *lectio* as a conversation with the Divine Spouse, the enacting of which is, indeed the goal that monastic life serves: "la '*lectio*' et l' '*oratio*' sont les deux aspects, où, si l'on veut, les deux moments de ce dialogue mystique, de cette conversation avec l'Époux que la vie monastique a précisément pour but de rendre facile."<sup>32</sup> Jerome's notion of the *lectio divina* as a holy dialogue echoes the insight of Cyprian of Carthage: "Sit tibi vel oratio assidua vel lectio; nunc cum Deo loquere, nunc Deus tecum" (See that you observe either constant prayer or reading. Speak sometimes with God; let

God speak with you sometimes).<sup>33</sup> Likewise Augustine writes, “Oratio tua locutio est ad Deum; quando legis, Deus tibi loquitur; quando oras, Deo loqueris” (Your praying is speaking to God; when you read, God speaks to you; when you pray, you speak to God).<sup>34</sup> *The Book of Nunnaminster*, a codex where Gospel lections literally enunciating God’s Word are followed by a collection of prayers, is a text that structurally figures this dialogue between God and the reader.

This dialogue is conducted on *both* sides -- God’s and the reader’s or pray-er’s -- in scriptural terms. Leclercq observes that the heart and soul (and more literally, the memory) that are filled with the words of scripture will naturally offer responses to God in terms of those scriptures themselves. *Lectio*, therefore, yields prayer and literary work that is highly scripturally allusive. Saint Margaret’s prayers in her passion narrative are replete with biblical references – in one case a seven-line prayer alludes to at least twelve scriptural intertexts.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, Judas draws liberally and verbatim from the Old and New Testaments in his long prayer at the heart of *Elene*, creating within the prayer text itself a sense of the human voice yoked through language to the will and spirit of God. We may say that such prayers embody the fruit of *lectio*, deep knowledge of the scriptures, and also demonstrate, memorialize or make visible the reading method of *lectio* itself.

The reading strategy that *lectio* fosters is itself characterized by a ranging, associative culling of related words, episodes and motifs from within and beyond the scriptural canon, brought to bear on the text currently under the reader’s contemplation. The reading of any one biblical narrative, for instance the story of the baptism of Jesus, might call up an array of related material, including perhaps the Old Testament sources (Ps. 2:7, Isaiah 42) of the “voice ... from heaven” in Luke 3:22, or references in Pauline epistles to baptism in the spirit, or patristic

exegesis of the crossing of the Red Sea as a type for the baptism in Jordan, or liturgical prayers used at baptisms, or even devotional art on the subject in a local baptistry. We see this kind of ranging associativeness captured in the prayers of *The Book of Nunnaminster*, both as individual pieces and also in the compilation of the whole. For instance, a prayer on the last supper (Prayer 18) directly alludes to scriptural passages from Matthew (26:26, Christ offers his body) and Luke (22:20, Christ offers the cup of his blood) and links the prayer-er's own liturgical life to the disciples' experiences. This prayer follows closely upon another concerning the five loaves with which Jesus fed five thousand followers (Prayer 16), a story often interpreted as a type for the Eucharist. Within the whole codex, the Last Supper prayer is linked by its scriptural references to the Passions at the beginning of the volume (which begin with the Last Supper) and by its liturgical allusions to a later sacramental hymn (Prayer 49) that makes explicit that a spiritual hunger and thirst are assuaged by the Eucharistic celebration. Other "eating" and "drinking" prayers in the collection include a non-scriptural meditation on the first nursing of the infant Jesus (Prayer 8) and a celebration of the "inebriation" in the Lord that the pray-er experiences when reflecting on the Wedding Feast at Cana (Prayer 14). Patristic intertexts associate both nursing and inebriation with Eucharistic plenitude. All of this scriptural, liturgical, typological, and patristic material serves as a wide field over which the pray-er's mind ranges in the prayerful reading of this one book and in each return to the individual prayers that participate in this particular thematic nexus.

To the extent that a prayer in medieval literature demonstrates the allusiveness and associativeness born of *lectio*, we may see in that text's particular ranging over and piecing together of scriptures a "reading" or construction of the self who articulates it or the exigency to which it responds. Margaret, hung high and scourged, is depicted as praying with words drawn

from several of the psalms, including Psalm 30 that Jesus likewise quoted as he hung from the cross. Margaret's allusive and associative prayer "reads" the situation within which she finds herself, and also constructs her own life as an *Imitatio Christi*.<sup>36</sup>

Of course the scriptures themselves contain the patterns of interpretation that are further embellished by patristic exegesis to create the deeply textured reading experience of *lectio*. The foundation for the rich architecture of baptismal typology that my reading of the *Passio S. Margaretae* reveals is already laid when John performs his baptisms in the iconic Jordan River and Saint Paul distinguishes the baptism given by John from that promised by Christ. As patristic exegesis insists, deeper, spiritual meanings lie hidden beneath the literal stories of the scriptures, in patterns discernable within, between, and even beyond the two testaments. The process for discovering the spiritual sense is predicated on the spiritual attitudes already discussed, and then teachable, but requiring on the part of the student a diligence equal to the potential esotericism of the subject. Jerome expounds in letters to his students, mostly Roman women, on the mystical significance of scriptural wordplay, numerology, onomastics; he offers expositions on the abecedary nature of Psalm 118, lists of significant biblical numbers, and etymologies for Hebrew names. Origen, Basil, John Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory and others propose typological readings of Old Testament figures and events. To discover these typological patterns is to discern the ongoing work of God in shaping salvation history.

Sacramental typology, which "reads" types from scripture in the words, gestures and symbols of sacramental liturgies further extends the sweep of that history forward into post-biblical times, perhaps even into the life of the medieval composer, compiler or reader. Leclercq summarizes this impulse to read one's own life in terms of the patterns of scriptural history: "According to a comparison which the medieval monks owe to St. Augustine, who himself was

indebted for it to Plato, Holy Scripture is a mirror. In it one sees the picture he should reproduce. As one reads he can compare himself with what he ought to be and try to acquire what the picture needs so that it can resemble the model.”<sup>37</sup>

While *lectio divina* delights in the hermeneutic of hiddenness, however, and revels in the spiritual sense that yields to the prayerful reader, it by no means eschews the literal meanings of the scriptures. Jerome taught that one first brought all available erudition and a disciplined mind to bear upon the scriptural text for the purpose of understanding the literal sense. The literal sense of the Bible revealed itself to those who concerned themselves with the nuances of translation and the geography and history of Palestine; an ascetic life developed the clarity of purpose and the discipline necessary for such rigorous study. A familiar motif in exegetical debate centers on the distinction between the kernel and the husk: which aspect of scripture, the spiritual core or the literal covering, contains the truth? Jerome insists on preparing to engage both levels of meaning; the husk is merely external, but not unimportant.<sup>38</sup>

Augustine likewise insists upon the importance of the literal level of meaning as the necessary letter in which the spirit lives; a textual body, its literal sense, may be analogous to the equally essential human body that contains human personality and soul. Stock describes Augustine’s self-fashioning in the *Confessions* as characterized by a growing appreciation for the literal levels of meaning that were often devalued in the classical literary criticism and neo-platonist philosophies from which both Jerome and Augustine “converted” as readers. Stock notes,

[Augustine] is able to find parallels in neo-platonism for philosophical statements in the Bible (for example, John 1:1-12), but not for the incarnation and the literal story of Christ. These reflections translate his concern with materiality to the

literary sphere, where it reemerges in a more positive light as the literal or historical sense of the biblical text .... From this vantage point his commentary proceeds from the literal to the interior and spiritual dimensions. This is a movement from a real life represented by a text to an inner text that is intended to be lived. Because the model is the historical Christ, the search for the non-literal in himself has to begin with the physical in himself, that is, in his body's narrative in time.<sup>39</sup>

Augustine's concern with the literal meaning of scriptures only deepens over the course of a lifetime of prayerful reading.<sup>40</sup> We will see in examining *Elene* that this insistence on the importance of the literal, or "carnal," level of Scripture is deeply embedded in the narrative's more obvious concern with the interpretation and "right reading" of scriptures. Likewise, *The Book of Nunnaminster* may be said to insist on the importance of the literal body, the "carnal" or incarnational existence, of both Jesus and the pray-er as the locus for spiritual healing.

Approaching *The Book of Nunnaminster*, *Elene*, and *Seinte Margarete* through their prayers yields, then, abundant evidence of a reading practice, *lectio divina*, that values physical and spiritual commitment to scripture, dense allusiveness, associative interpretation, linguistic or numerological exuberance, typological patterns, and both spiritual and literal levels of textual meaning. In addition, these works, as we shall see, incorporate many themes and images that, according to Leclercq and Illich, tend to recur in the works of those who practice *lectio*: a desire for heaven, the scriptures as divine nourishment, the *lectio* as a daily repast, the process of reading as an engagement with Christ the Spouse or Wisdom, the heart as the treasure chest enclosing scripture, scripture as a remedy or medicine for the heart in search of Christ.<sup>41</sup> These common themes seem to highlight the individual and interior nature of *lectio*: Christ as my

spouse, scripture as my food or enclosed within my heart, etc. However, all three works also exhibit to different degrees evidence of a liturgically-informed approach to reading which opens the hermeneutic of the cell and the solitary mind to the communal interpretive strategies embodied in the church's public rituals; I call this mode of reading "liturgical reading."

*"Liturgical Reading"*

"Liturgical reading" is my own term for three interrelated interpretive practices fostered by the liturgical life of medieval Christians that I perceive to be at work in their contemporary literary and devotional practices. Of course, unlike "*lectio divina*," the term had no currency during the medieval period, and yet I believe the concepts and habits of minds I mean to express through it would be familiar to medieval men and women.

Reading has always been an integral part of liturgical celebrations in the Christian religion. As a religion of the Book, the communal reading aloud from and listening to the scriptures has from its earliest, most primitive liturgies been an important part of Christian worship as it developed from its Jewish roots. The privileged place of reading in the Christian Mass and Office underscores once more the high degree of association in the medieval period between the concepts of reading and praying. No matter that many people in a church at any given time might not know how to read or even understand the Latin words they could hear: the efficacious reading was being performed there on their behalf and to their eternal benefit. But that which was accessible to all (in the vernacular sermons or the liturgical art within the Church) and the prayers themselves as these were understood by the more literate in attendance might be said to have instructed the faithful in the proper reading of the scriptures that were so central to

the life of the worshipping community. This is the first type of “liturgical reading” that we will see at play, especially in *Elene*: the liturgies of the Church in their very structure and as augmented by the liturgical accouterments of music, art, and symbol constitute and promulgate the Church’s official readings of the sacred scriptures.

Indeed as Marie Anne Mayeski’s recent work asserts, “the liturgy was the primary context within which medieval Christians heard, read and understood the Bible.”<sup>42</sup> Clearly this sweeping assertion would need “unpacking” at every level of social and educational privilege into which “medieval Christians” could be parsed, but the essential truth -- that the very shape of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours had a profound effect on the “reading” practices of those who attended masses or sang the hours – seems irrefutable and important to consider in this context of examining the connections between reading and praying. Mayeski reminds us that the lectionary system itself, which had been established in late antiquity, insists upon typological interpretations of the Old and New Testament readings which are yoked together. Furthermore those linked readings are commented upon by the graduale psalms, the homily and even by their placement in the liturgical calendar that marks time both present (in which the community is actually worshipping) and eternal.<sup>43</sup> This notion, that the structure, symbols, and words of liturgy are both shaped by and in turn shape reading strategies, is dramatically captured when we consider the parallel trajectories of both the practice of “*lectio divina*” and the Mass: as Mayeski reminds us, in the monastic cell, “*lectio*” gives way to “*ruminatio*,” in the chapel the Liturgy of the Word is followed by the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

But in noting that particular structural imperative of the Mass, Mayeski also astutely observes the degree to which the liturgical settings of these readings extend the interpretive movement forward in time as well. She writes: “In the structure of the eucharistic liturgy, the

liturgy of the readings is fulfilled and completed by the liturgy of the bread and wine. Word flowers into liturgical action, and the homily was meant to affect this transition from one to the other, from reading to action.”<sup>44</sup>

That action is specifically sacramental within the context of the liturgy, but also can refer to action in history as Christians are fortified by their liturgical life to live the *Imitatio Christi* – even in their everyday lives. As Jean Daniélou pointed out a half-century ago: “...the eschatological typology of the Old Testament is accomplished not only in the person of Christ, but also in the Church. Besides Christological typology, therefore, there exists a sacramental typology... this means furthermore that the sacraments carry on in our midst the *mirabilia*, the great works of God in the Old Testament and the New....”<sup>45</sup> In other words, the sacramental typological readings which so delighted the earliest Christian Fathers, whereby, for instance, the eating of the manna in the desert served as a type for the Eucharistic meal, were complemented by the antitypes of scriptural events and figures to be discovered in the symbolism of the sacraments: the water of baptism linked to the deluge that washed away the world’s sins. Patristic intertexts provide material that is layered throughout the liturgies and, along with the essential scriptural texts, is likewise ordered to promote its correct interpretation within both the individual rituals and the annual cycles of the liturgical year.

We will see in *Elene* that the correct interpretation of scriptures is a central concern of the poem. How to control the essential yet potentially disruptive “Jewish” readings of those scriptures is an attendant problem in the narrative for which this first type of “liturgical reading” suggests a solution. As the poem progresses, the prayers of Judas and the Jews become highly liturgical in character. These “liturgical readings” may be said then to safely contain or direct the

interpretations of scripture into authorized channels, just as occurs in the official liturgies from which *Elene*'s prayer structures and language are borrowed.

The second type of "liturgical reading" flows from the first: if through their very structures and constitutive elements liturgies are teaching something, they must themselves be texts that can be read. Liturgy, this book-based amalgam of special words, gestures, music and symbol, conveyed a meaning, both to God and to man, that was open to interpretation, even if perhaps one did not understand every text within it. Amalarius of Metz's reading of the sacramental liturgies in his treatise, *Liber officialis*, which would have far-reaching influence, attests to the currency of the idea that the liturgy itself was a type of book in need of reading. Christopher Jones has recently discussed, for instance, the evidence from Anglo-Saxon monastic and clerical culture that the "book of the liturgy" merited and required careful reading, in the tradition of the *Liber officialis*, in order to properly interpret the "array of signs," both written and unwritten of which it was composed.<sup>46</sup> We see this type of liturgical reading at play in *The Book of Nunnaminster* to the extent that the compiler has appropriated some of the forms of healing liturgies for use within her own text. In order to do so, she must first have read for herself their particular language of gesture and scriptural text. Likewise the original composer of the *Passio Sanctae Margaretae* must have read well the typologically rich baptismal liturgy, probably even by referring to patristic texts that likewise offered interpretive readings of this particular ritual.

The Carolingians in their educational and liturgical reforms produced many liturgical explanations like Amalarius's in the handbooks used by parish priests, the *expositiones missae*, which would have helped to spread the basic understanding that the Eucharist and the sacramental liturgies were both themselves readings of the scriptures and in turn texts which

could be read.<sup>47</sup> Peter Cramer discusses the possibility that the explanations of the meanings undertaken in these handbooks might reduce the understanding of the liturgical actions to mere “habits” which could somehow magically set in motion the “machinery of salvation.” He takes as evidence of this trend the presence in the handbooks of some “magical material” – e.g. charms for cures – that suggests a devolution in popular understanding of how liturgy functions. I will discuss in Chapter Two the nature of such “magical material” in devotional miscellanies, suggesting that such elements, particularly as found in religious settings, may themselves be open to allegorizing interpretations. But whether they might effect magical manipulation of human destiny or not, liturgical words and actions are popularly understood, according to Cramer, as modes of interpreting the cosmos and one’s place within it. Describing the proper functioning of liturgy he writes, “there is the rhythm of prayer as it passes from the sensual to the abstract (and back), in which, even if it does not understand, word for word, what it hears, a congregation recognizes its own standing in the world.”<sup>48</sup>

For this indeed is the third type of “liturgical reading” for which all three of the works I study offer some evidence: not only does the liturgy read scripture, and not only can the text of the liturgy be read, but liturgy as a corporate act of prayer also offers strategies for reading one’s own life and the world. As Mayeski and Daniélou observe, it is the nature of sacramental liturgy to continue the saving action recorded in scriptures, to carry forward the narrative of salvation history into the present and project it into the future. And so, just as the reading habits of *lectio* can be, by analogy, trained upon one’s own heart or the world, we may say that “liturgical reading” has hermeneutical applications beyond the sanctuary of the Church building. The ritual performance of sacramental liturgies such as the celebration of the Eucharist or the baptism of a child may be considered a publicly-enacted “reading” -- not only of the scriptural texts that may

be proclaimed within them or from which the responses are culled, but also of the community's life, which is shown by symbolic action to be part of an ongoing narrative of redemption.

And just as *lectio* also flowers forth into the creation of monastic literary genres – florilegia, hagiography – that can in turn be subject to further *lectio*, “official” liturgies can foster popular devotional practices and even works of literature marked by what Evelyn Vitz calls “liturgicity,” that offer further opportunities for the “liturgical reading” of the self and the world. Vitz describes this impulse to carry the structures and language of liturgies beyond the church doors as “a vast movement to bring the orderliness of fixed prayers, set in liturgical contexts, to men and perhaps women of the laity” especially visible in the development of Books of Hours and other para-liturgical works.<sup>49</sup> Although intended for use in a women's monastic community, *The Book of Nunnaminster* is an example of a work whose *compilatio* bespeaks that desire to bring the liturgical “orderliness of fixed prayers” to bear on the private devotional life of its pray-er. But the impulse to order experience, or read it, liturgically, is not confined to monastic or devotional genres. As Vitz suggests, “Poets and writers also imitated liturgical language, created imaginary liturgies, and constructed liturgical plots that move from alienation and supplication to acceptance and communion.”<sup>50</sup> Given that liturgy shares with drama a performative nature and a reliance on the interplay of word and gesture, it is not surprising that drama is perhaps the literary genre in which the connections Vitz traces between liturgy and literature have been most widely studied.

Although the links between liturgy and the development of drama have long been of interest to students of both, scholarship in the area tended towards sourcing various tropes in their liturgical settings as they incrementally developed into more recognizably dramatic form. Certainly for most of these studies, the contours of medieval “liturgy” were bounded by the rites

to be found in clearly-purposed codices such as sacramentaries and missals and pontificals. Various in form though these may be, the rites as found in these official liturgical aides carried some regional ecclesial authority. More recently C. Clifford Flanigan, Kathleen Ashley and Pamela Sheingorn have urged a broader understanding of “liturgical” life throughout the medieval period, asking us to re-think the boundaries between the officially-sanctioned liturgies, para-liturgical celebrations, and even private devotions.<sup>51</sup>

Jessica Brantley’s study of one Carthusian devotional codex, British Library Additional MS 37049, takes up this challenge and traces the possible connections between the private reading of this book and the realm of public performance that such meditative reading calls into play. Brantley demonstrates that drama and narrative, dialogue and lyric are so interwoven in this and other devotional literature of the period, that the reading of a carefully compiled miscellany such as Additional 37049 may be construed as in fact a “performance activity.” Brantley argues:

...this miscellaneous manuscript itself, and not just a staging of the works it contains, might be said to be broadly performative. This codex is the primary site of the spiritual activity it represents; even in its own shape and format, the book performs certain kinds of devotional meaning. More precisely, the act of reading it performs devotional meaning. For meditative reading – particularly in the late-medieval Carthusian context in which the book was almost certainly used – is a performance in itself. The kinds of meditations demanded by a book like this one involve the imagination of the reader so strenuously that they may be said to be “enacted” by that reader at each repetition....The miscellany shows...that a silent medieval reader encountering the written word in solitude can participate in aspects of performance.<sup>52</sup>

Brantley is concerned with late-medieval habits of thought that might “link reading with performance,” especially during a time when, as she notes, the development of silent reading habits “signals a move away from settings more easily characterized as performative, whether the particular mechanism of performance is oral composition, oral recitation, or simply reading *à haute voix*.”<sup>53</sup> But early or late, oral (and aural) or silent, meditative reading is, I would concur, potentially a performative practice to the extent that its intentions and effects are linked first and foremost with the essentially “dramatic” nature of liturgy. Where Brantley makes connections between these Carthusian meditations (themselves often combinations of words and images) and public pageant, procession, and liturgical devotion, I will confine my own reading of the prayer-centered texts I have chosen for this project to their interface with the sacramental liturgies of Eucharist, baptism, and confirmation and the rites associated with the Anointing of the Sick, penance and exorcism.

All of these are official liturgies in the most traditional sense of the word, although their texts are far from static, or even stable. But it is indeed the dynamic use – by the author, compiler, reader -- of liturgical language, symbol systems, forms, and shape woven into each of the texts studied here which is of principal interest to me and links my approach to Brantley’s. While my earlier medieval texts may well have been read aloud, each one also suggests use by a solitary reader: *The Book of Nunnaminster* as a private (first person) prayer collection, *Elene* as a literary vita apparently intended for visual interaction (as suggested by the presence of the poet’s runic signature), and *Seinte Margarete* as a work known to have been used by anchoresses. Like Brantley, I imagine the solitary reader in a cell, using both the techniques of *lectio* and his or her intimate knowledge of liturgy to read the self into his or her proper place in the earthly and eternal communion with God that true liturgy itself promises. I have chosen not to call this type

of reading “performative,” because I am not intending to link it to the performative arts of drama or to more broadly construed “liturgical” performances such as pageant or procession. I also do not wish to suggest any element of artifice or the association with mere mimesis that the word “performative” may carry. I call this reading habit simply “liturgical reading,” aware that its practice, unlike the practice of *lectio*, may be unconscious. It is not a strategy necessarily chosen, but a fact of medieval reading culture that I believe simply *is*. The liturgies themselves, in their use and juxtaposition of scriptural texts, in their language of symbolic gestures and accouterments, “read” the scriptures in an authoritative way and necessarily promulgate those readings to those who attend them. Liturgies, particularly sacramental liturgies, are themselves also open to being read. Finally, the interpretations of scripture and patristic typological associations both taught by the liturgies and read in them foster works of devotion and literature marked by “liturgicity” when authors, compilers and readers both consciously and unconsciously draw upon this liturgical layer in the creation of the “devotional meaning” that each reading enacts.

### *Contemporary Reading Through Prayer*

The project of privileging the prayers in a text as sites of higher literary and devotional aspiration “through” which to engage the whole work might feel familiar to medieval readers. Our own cultural expectations about the aridity or lack of authenticity that might attach particularly to the formulaic, formal, or scripted prayer of rote devotions, pastiches of scriptural verses or liturgical compilations might discourage the careful scrutiny of these verbal artifacts. I suggest, however, that the medieval horizons of expectation for how these prayers would be

encountered were quite different from our own.<sup>54</sup> These texts are indeed intended to open onto a vast distance – that between a human pray-er and God. Approached with sensitivity to their cultural significance, I hope that these prayers will function then as windows through which we may also glimpse much of what their contemporary readers would see in *The Book of Nunnaminster*, *Elene* and *Seinte Margarete*. At the same time, I believe that the vistas made available to us by this method might sometimes surprise the men and women who first created and originally used these texts. We may see in *The Book of Nunnaminster* some suggestion that women’s religious communities gave rise to forms of devotion that filled lacunae perhaps only dimly perceived in their non-clerical religious life. In *Elene* we see the “spectral” presence of Jewish modes of scriptural reading and forms of worship that liturgical prayer seeks to contain or suppress. In *Seinte Margarete* the virgin martyr’s powerful presbyterial role seems to authorize popular devotions in ways perhaps not fully intended by its contemporary author.

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<sup>1</sup> The notion has also been popularized. Books about the spiritual practice of *Lectio divina* fill the shelves in Christian bookstores today, sometimes promulgating a highly diluted practice that while perhaps spiritually efficacious would be unrecognizable as *lectio divina* to a medieval monk. There are however several excellent recent books on *lectio divina* which, while intended for popular reading and devotional instruction, also give excellent historical overviews of the topic. These include works by Studzinski and Casey.

<sup>2</sup> Jeanneret, a linguist, proposes that the prayers in the works of Virgil are more readily identified at the level of causal function than at the level of formal structure; Bridges studies the “narrative engendering” and “narrative inhibiting” functions of prayer, presuming that the verbal objects of her study are self-evident.

<sup>3</sup> Robbins extracts short rhymed prayers from their manuscript contexts, where they may be found on fly leaves or even “embedded” in longer unrhymed “prose prayers.” He cross-references them in Carleton Brown’s catalogues of religious lyrics, when possible, but concludes by seeming to collapse any distinction between verse prayer and lyric by asserting, “Any consideration of the Middle English religious lyric must take into account these forgotten prayers of the common people” (350).

<sup>4</sup> See Woolf’s Introduction to her study of religious lyrics (3-4), as well as Brantley’s discussion of the “frustratingly circular” nature of Woolf’s taxonomy in its refusal, ultimately, to re-categorize these “poems” as pieces for prayerful, meditative use (Brantley 123, especially note 13).

<sup>5</sup> Revell vii.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this study, I will use the term “pray-er,” to mean the individual who prays. Although somewhat inelegant, this term better expresses the more general meaning I intend than, for instance “orant,” which suggests a specific prayer stance or function, or “petitioner,” which points to a particular type of prayer.

<sup>7</sup> On the necessity for discrete vocal or verbal prayers vs. the continuous interior prayer of a life oriented towards God (the most common interpretation of Paul’s dictum to “Pray without ceasing” [Sine intermissione orate; 1 Th 5:17]), see Henriët’s first chapter: “La prière des saints moines (XIe-XIIe siècles): sources et modèles,” especially 22-29.

<sup>8</sup> Hand 10.

<sup>9</sup> Letter 130, Vol. 10, p. 389 in *Letters*. Further discussion of the necessity for humans to verbalize their prayers *for their own sake* can be found in Augustine’s dialogue on the subject with Adeodatus in *De Magistro*, I, 2 (CCSL 29, 158-59).

<sup>10</sup> Medieval teachings on prayer were influenced first by those scriptural admonitions on the subject to be found in the gospels and epistles (for instance, the advice to pray alone without too many words, Mt 6:5-8 and the giving of the Lord’s prayer, Mt 6:9-13 & Lk 11:2-4; the admonishment “ask and you shall receive,” Mt 7:7-11 & Lk 11:9-13; the example of Jesus in Gethsemane, Mk 14:35-36; Paul’s mandate to pray unceasingly, 1 Th 5:17) and patristic commentaries on these passages or discourses on the nature of prayer. See for example, Cyprian of Carthage, *Treatise 4* (On the Lord’s Prayer); Tertullian, *On Prayer*; Augustine, *Sermon 8* (on the Lord’s Prayer) from *Selected Sermons on the New Testament* and *Expositions on the Psalms* (Psalm 86[85]). Instruction on prayer life in the monastic setting would be taken from Benedict’s *Rule* and Cassian’s *Conferences* (especially ch. 9). See Benedicta Ward’s chapter, “Anglo-Saxon prayers” (75-94), for a discussion of Bede’s teachings on prayer and evidence of the tenor of devotional life in this period; see also Bzdył’s dissertation, *Prayer in Old English Narratives*, ch. 1, for the monastic instructions for prayer during this period as these are captured in the *Regularis Concordia* and further discussion of Bede’s pastoral teachings on prayer (1-18). In the 12<sup>th</sup> century Hugh of St. Victor (in *The Didascalicon*), Guigo II (in *The Ladder of Monks*), and Bernard of Clairvaux (in *Sermons on the Song of Songs*) wrote influentially on the subject of prayer.

<sup>11</sup> Of interest in this regard as well is the vocabulary of prayer used in patristic and medieval hagiographic writing. Henriët briefly presents some research on this topic noting subtle differences in the use of “preces,” “oratio,” “invocatio,” and “precor” in both *vitae* and *miraculæ*. He finds, for instance, that a much wider variety of less liturgically resonant terms are employed in miracles, where saints’ prayers may be introduced not only by the aforementioned words, but also by “*exorare, supplicare, interpellare, efflagitare, implorare, adorare, sollicitare, erumpere*” (53).

<sup>12</sup> “On Psalm 86”, I, from the *Expositions on the Psalms* as translated and quoted in Hand 8.

<sup>13</sup> Fulton 707. Henriët likewise observes these two aspects of prayer: “[L]’oraison ne relève pas seulement de la répétition rituelle d’un verbe sacré mais aussi de la prise de parole, voire de l’action” (19).

<sup>14</sup> Dagenais, for instance, emphasizes the different set of expectations for literary praxis that a manuscript culture creates. He writes, “The ‘ethics of reading’ implies, and the fact of the medieval scriptum demands, a redefinition of the concept of ‘literature’ as it relates to the Middle

Ages. We can do this only if we recognize that in the Middle Ages the primary ‘literary’ activity was not writing, and certainly not ‘authoring’ or ‘creating,’ but ‘reading’”(22).

<sup>15</sup> See Dawson for a discussion of Augustine’s sign theory. Vance and Irvine, among others, demonstrate the uses to which medieval authors put these semiotic theories.

<sup>16</sup> Dagenais 15.

<sup>17</sup> Dagenais 8 and 7.

<sup>18</sup> Cramer 216-17.

<sup>19</sup> Denys Gorce’s 1925 study traces the sources of Benedict’s notion of the *lectio divina*, finding its roots in the practices of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 6<sup>th</sup> century Fathers, including Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory; the first of two projected volumes (the second of which was never completed), this study is focused on the life, letters and commentary of Jerome. Before similarly acknowledging the influence of the four great Western Fathers, Beryl Smalley’s *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* considers the impact of Philo and Origen, who first promulgated the practice of allegorizing Scriptures, on later western habits of reading. Leclercq writes extensively about *lectio*; his best-known work, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God*, explores the impact of Gregory, the Father perhaps best known to medieval England, on the development of the practice. My indebtedness to more contemporary critics who have explored the contours of *lectio divina* specifically or other related habits of meditative reading will be clear throughout the chapters. The insights of Carruthers, Illich, Saenger, Jager, Huot, Hutchinson, and Stock inform my thinking about prayerful reading in a general sense. Brantley, Dagenais, S. Lewis, and Ò Carragàin have helped shape my understanding of the ways these reading practices informed the construction of and offered access to specific works.

<sup>20</sup> Huot, in “Polytextual Reading,” defines her term thus, “By this I mean a type of reading taught in devotional manuals for the laity, fostered by the presence in Books of Hours and other devotional manuscripts of vivid marginal illustrations, and encouraged through more learned techniques of exegesis, glossing, and meditative reading. Through all of these means, the reading of one text becomes a process of reading multiple ‘virtual’ texts” (203). Christopher Jones’ offers a useful overview of recent scholarship on the more widely-construed “idea of the book” wherein other realities – the self, nature, the world – become “legible” at the beginning of his own work on the “book” of the liturgy. See Jones 659 n.1.

<sup>21</sup> Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 111.

<sup>22</sup> Benedict, *Rule*, ch. 48, trans. Fry 248.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 251. Symons’ estimates of the time allotted for *lectio* can be found in his Introduction to his edition of the *Regularis Concordia* (xxxiii-xxxiv) and rely on the work of Dom David Knowles.

<sup>24</sup> Symons xxxiv.

<sup>25</sup> On the probable reading habits of the anchoresses for whom the Katherine Group legends were copied, see Robertson, “This Living Hand,” 13-15. Another aspect of *lectio* that I have not explored here, but that bears mentioning, is its physicality. As discussed by Illich (58-61) the prayer and reading that took so many hours of the monastic day were, like the murmuring reading of Rabbinic tradition, usually mouthed, mumbled or murmured in the process of memorization; like the daily chanting of psalms in the *Opus Dei*, the very physically involved work of reading would contribute to the intimacy with which the practitioners of *lectio* came to know the scriptures -- with a kind of muscle-memory as well.

<sup>26</sup> See Leclercq, “La ‘Lecture Divine,’” who notes “aux premières siècles de l’Église, il n’existait pas l’autre littérature sacrée que les livres inspirés” (23).

<sup>27</sup> cf. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 17 and note 7.

<sup>28</sup> A later development towards more broadly construed devotional reading will come to be known as *lectio spiritualis*. See Illich, who notes the difference between this more diffuse practice and true *lectio divina* (64).

<sup>29</sup> A genre much like the *florilegium* is that of the “little books derived from liturgy and scripture” that Owen Chadwick, in the Introduction to Luibheid’s translation of Cassian’s *Conferences*, suggests were “framed as helps to guide the mind to prayer” (34). Long before Books of Hours with their compilation of Psalms, prayers, and poems developed for lay people, florilegium-like prayer books, like *The Book of Nunnaminster*, were created within monasteries as aids to personal devotion and, I suggest, as material appropriate for *lectio divina*.

<sup>30</sup> *Confessions* III v, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Smalley 27.

<sup>32</sup> Gorce 182.

<sup>33</sup> Cyprian of Carthage, *Ad Donatum*, 15 (as cited in Gorce 183).

<sup>34</sup> *Ennarratio in Psalmos* 85.7 (CCSL, 39, 1182), my translation.

<sup>35</sup> See Prayer 2 discussed in Chapter Four below.

<sup>36</sup> Gorce describes the process by which a monastic practitioner of *lectio* naturally culls biblical phrases from memory to express his own ideas: “L’ascète qui écrit, ne fait pas autre chose que rassembler en un bouquet, à l’adresse d’un correspondant, des fleurs variées cueillies ça et là parmi les pages de la Bible, non point au hasard certes, mais de telle façon que son choix révèle ses préférences, et manifeste ses positions intimes de parfum qui s’en dégage, est dès lors un peu le parfum de sa propre âme. Si ce bouquet spirituel répand la bonne odeur du Christ, celle des Prophètes et des Apôtres, on en conclurra aisément que le moine ou la vierge qui l’ont composé, n’ignorent aucune des ressources, aucun des agréments de ce parterre choisi de l’Époux que sont les Divines Écritures, mais en connaissent au contraire toutes les fleurs et en sont en quelque sortes les jardiniers expérimentés” (325).

<sup>37</sup> Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 100.

<sup>38</sup> Henri Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis*, vol. 2, *The Four Senses of Scripture* (164-66), quotes various medieval exegetes on this theme, starting with Bede (notes 33-36). Among the earlier Fathers, Augustine refers to the nourishing kernel of wheat in a context involving right reading, but does so within a work whose explicit purpose is to pursue a better understanding of the “husk” as well, namely *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*, Bk I, chs 20-21 (or sections 40-41).

<sup>39</sup> Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 70.

<sup>40</sup> See discussion in Chapter Three below of Augustine’s *On the Literal Meaning of Genesis*.

<sup>41</sup> See Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, chapter Four (65-86) and Illich 35-38.

<sup>42</sup> Mayeski 61.

<sup>43</sup> Louise Batstone likewise observes that “the liturgy itself was a very significant teacher of the doctrine of the church” (186). Batstone is referring here to the doctrinal material, including typological interpretations of scripture, culled from patristic sermons, which makes its way into both the readings for the Divine Office and even becomes embedded in prayers such as the Preface.

<sup>44</sup> Mayeski 74.

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<sup>45</sup> Daniélou 5.

<sup>46</sup> Jones 659. Although Amalarius's work was only known for most of the Anglo Saxon period in an abridged, derivative version, the influence was nevertheless significant. See Jones 676 ff.

<sup>47</sup> See the article "Expositiones Missae," by Wilmart in Cabrol and Leclercq, *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, V:1014-27.

<sup>48</sup> Cramer 218.

<sup>49</sup> Vitz, "Liturgy and Vernacular Literature," 612.

<sup>50</sup> Vitz, "Liturgy and Vernacular Literature," 553.

<sup>51</sup> Flanigan, Ashley and Sheingorn urge that "If we take an ethnographic and cultural approach, in which what has been called 'liturgy' is viewed within the larger and more inclusive category of 'ritual,' then we can explore more fully how the liturgy could be the arena of intense communication of cultural values and the negotiation of power within social formations at given historical moments" (714). Beth Williamson, in a study of altarpieces, also examines the interrelatedness of liturgy and popular devotional practices and finds that "devotion could be closely informed by the liturgy or could be liturgically structured. Equally, liturgy is not hermetically sealed from devotional context or activity .... Therefore, when considering the use and reception of religious images, having recognized the complex, diffuse, multivalent relationship between form and function, function and location, location and form, we can similarly recognize the correspondingly fluid relationship between types and varieties of religious activity that we sometimes term in shorthand, 'liturgy and devotion'" (406).

<sup>52</sup> Brantley 305.

<sup>53</sup> Brantley 2.

<sup>54</sup> I take the term, "horizons of expectation," and my interest in the reception of these prayers and of the contexts in which they appear, from Jauss's seminal work on reception theory.

## Chapter Two

### Reading *The Book of Nunnaminster*, Building the Body of Christ: A Hermeneutics of Healing

Personal books of prayer and devotion may have reached the height of their popularity and availability in the later middle ages when *Horae* or *Books of Hours* were essentially the “best-sellers” of their time,<sup>1</sup> but codices containing other types of prayer collections also apparently intended for private use survive from much earlier in the medieval period. *The Book of Nunnaminster* (London, British Library, Harley 2965)<sup>2</sup> is one such very early prayer collection that belongs to an idiosyncratic genre of ninth century devotional literature: the Insular prayerbook. Like each of the other codices in the small but significant group to which it belongs -- *The Book of Cerne* (Cambridge, University Library Ll.1.10)<sup>3</sup>, the *Royal Prayerbook* (B.L. Royal 2 A xx), and the fragmentary *Harleian Prayerbook* (B. L. Harley 7653)<sup>4</sup> -- and like every true miscellany, *The Book of Nunnaminster* is utterly unique, having been created in one place at one time in response to the specific needs and desires of some individual or group.<sup>5</sup> The four surviving Insular prayerbooks probably represent a larger corpus of lost books of similar intent and construction, and all four draw on a common body of Anglo-Latin prayers, but none of the four is identical to another. The variation even within a prayer that is found in any two of the codices is a natural by-product of manuscript culture in an era when even public liturgical forms might be called “fluid.”<sup>6</sup> This prayerbook bespeaks a literary and devotional mindset that most often produces a book – compiles, edits, copies, annotates – for the spiritual and practical exigencies of its particular time and place. We imagine the scribe at work, knowing that the book under her hands will enrich the life of her own religious community.<sup>7</sup>

In our time, *The Book of Nunnaminster* has reached a wider audience, of course, first in Walter de Gray Birch's 1889 edition, which is now even available online through Googlebooks. Over the years of its modern availability, with exceptions to be discussed below, the book has been of interest mostly to students of medieval liturgy and codicology; very recently it has been mined by devotional writers for prayers to enrich contemporary meditation.<sup>8</sup> But the collection deserves wider attention, particularly from students of literature and literary history. *The Book of Nunnaminster* is a striking example of a devotional miscellany that evinces a high degree of what we might call "literary" qualities – a strong sense of thematic shaping, use of imaginative detail and decorative language. To encounter the whole book as a product of particular habits of reading – to see it shaped by the practices of *lectio divina* and "liturgical reading" – is to more fully appreciate the artistry inherent in its selection and arrangement of texts. Likewise to view the individual compositions as products of a monastic culture that reverences "word" as a sign for The Word, allows us to see the prayers' linguistic exuberance and keenly-drawn analogies as ornament which both delights the senses and serves the sense of the collection. Beyond its aesthetic pleasures, *The Book of Nunnaminster* also affords valuable insights into the medieval literary and religious milieu which produced, preserved, and prayed with it over the course of at least a century.

The genre of the prayerbook -- as distinct from the much later Book of Hours -- has happily elicited a wider range of critical response in recent years in tandem with the growth of interest in devotional literacy and literature in general. Beate Gunzel's 1993 edition of Aelfwine's prayerbook includes an appendix listing sixteen British manuscripts before the twelfth century containing "private prayers," including the late eighth and early ninth century collections of special concern to us here.<sup>9</sup> In medieval manuscript catalogues, all of these prayer

manuscripts had long been grouped with service books – for instance collectars and sacramentaries -- removing them from the view of literary historians when they are determining what monastic “reading” material might be.<sup>10</sup> Just as collectars and sacramentaries seem to offer little scope for probing medieval reading habits, so too, the prayer collections, despite the fact that they are often catalogued as “private prayers,” have for too long been treated as mere repositories of quasi-liturgical set pieces; as lists memorializing the devotional favorites of the day.

Scholarship over the last two decades has begun to challenge such assumptions about these manuscripts, particularly in the cases in which a more discrete and unified “prayerbook” exists (rather than prayers following a psalter or collectar). For example, London, B. L. Cotton Galba A XIV was published by the Henry Bradshaw Society in 1988 as *A Pre-Conquest Prayerbook*.<sup>11</sup> *Ælfwine’s Prayerbook* (mentioned above) soon followed in the series, and of the latter, Paul E. Szarmach, reviewing this edition in *Speculum*, said:

...there are more literary texts than are contained in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records. *Ælfwine’s Prayerbook* is one of these. Not only does it offer ‘liturgical literature,’ which might inspire aesthetic response, it offers information on the issues that seem to be of greater interest to many Anglo Saxonists at this time. These include gender issues ... but more broadly within the prayers there is embedded much about ‘the construction of the self’ as a praying, sinning thing in relation to a perceived, transcendent power. The roots of the concept of the individual may very well lie in such texts.<sup>12</sup>

Like *Ælfwine’s Prayerbook*, the much earlier *Book of Nunnaminster* clearly constructs a coherent “praying, sinning” self in a mode that is uniquely possible through the discourse of

prayer as it is shaped into a collection. Perhaps nowhere else in Anglo-Saxon literary culture do we find such pure examples of the compiler's art as we see in this and the other early Insular prayerbooks -- *Cerne* and *Royal* -- where deeply expressive individual pieces are ordered into compellingly coherent thematic programs.

The three earliest complete prayerbooks are, in fact, the most generically self-assured: manuscripts clearly compiled not as devotional "reference works," but as intended for private reading. The three complete books all begin with Gospel extracts followed by compilations of prayers. These early prayerbooks, all initially published around the turn of the nineteenth century,<sup>13</sup> have been cited frequently since, particularly in accounts of the ecclesiastical, liturgical, and devotional history of the English church. And illuminating work has been done on the sources of their prayers.<sup>14</sup> In 1986, Thomas Bestul suggested, like Szarmach, that these collections would bear more serious "literary" scrutiny, and several more detailed studies have answered Bestul's challenge.<sup>15</sup>

Jennifer Morrish was the first to discuss the thematic nature of the prayerbooks in her unpublished PhD dissertation and found a particularly strong thematic unity in the *Royal* prayerbook's emphasis on Christ as the healer of mankind. In her view *The Book of Nunnaminster* focuses on the Passion of Christ, and *The Book of Cerne* on God the Father and God the Son as the "defense of sinners in this life and their salvation, should they seek it, for the world to come."<sup>16</sup> In his *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*, Patrick Sims-Williams also considers the *Royal Prayerbook* and the Harley fragment at some length in his chapter on the connections between prayer and magic at this period in Anglo-Saxon England. Michelle Brown's book-length study of *The Book of Cerne* is certainly the most important work on this prayerbook as well as on *Nunnaminster* and *Royal*. Brown calls the survival of three

complete prayerbooks, and one fragment (Harley), from this early period “remarkable” and notes that certainly these survivors represent a more broadly popular type of collection circulating at the time in codex or perhaps pamphlet formats. According to Brown, this genre of devotional literature, the “themed” private prayerbook, seems to have developed in the later eighth and early ninth century in Mercia, flourished for about a century, even spreading to the continent, probably through Alcuin’s influence, before dying out.

Remarkable as well is the fact that three of these four books were probably intended for use by women. In his edition, Birch noted the two instances in *Nunnaminster* where feminine forms are indicated in the prayers (out of some 34 gender-specific forms) and suggested that while the preponderance of masculine forms would be natural in a collection drawn from a variety of sources, feminine forms “indicate that the MS. is the work of a woman unconsciously using a feminine word, and ... intended for a woman’s use.”<sup>17</sup> Michelle Brown concurs in her most recent work on the collection where she asserts:

Elements of [*Nunnaminster*’s] text indicate that it was probably made for and perhaps by a woman. By the end of [the ninth century] it was associated with, and likely owned by, a Mercian woman who became the wife of King Alfred.

Although the Ealswith/*Nunnaminster* connection cannot be conclusively substantiated, *The Book of Nunnaminster* certainly appears to have been in female ownership in Winchester during the late ninth and early tenth centuries ....

Additional material indicates that *The Book of Nunnaminster* remained in female hands, probably religious, during the early tenth century and that it was in a Benedictine house during the latter part of the century.<sup>18</sup>

Of the four Insular prayerbooks, only *Cerne* lacks evidence of female ownership.

How were these unique books intended to be used by the women or men who compiled and possessed them? I will be discussing the possible use of *The Book of Nunnaminster* as material appropriate for individual meditation and the consequent “constructing of a self” in that dynamic process. Others have proposed more public or pragmatic uses. Morrish proposes that these thematically arranged prayerbooks represented a time when liturgical texts were consciously supplemented by such para-liturgical collections. She even suggests that the medically-themed *Royal Prayerbook* might have been used by a female physician in a monastery.<sup>19</sup> Sims-Williams and to a lesser degree Brown feel that the *Royal Prayerbook*, Harley fragment and even to some extent *Nunnaminster* show evidence of quasi-magical or talismanic use for the warding off of evil and protection or healing of the body. I will not be dealing extensively with *Royal* or Harley 7653, but my analysis of *Nunnaminster* convinces me that the “magical” element of this book is significantly more “reformed” than it is perhaps in the *Royal* and Harley collections, which are of earlier composition.<sup>20</sup> The textual and contextual Christianizing of charms and more ancient prayer forms in *Nunnaminster* is, I believe, thoroughgoing enough to dismiss the possibility that superstitious use was the primary purpose of the book. That these elements remain un-reformed to any degree here does reflect a moment in English ecclesiastical history when traditions and forms of prayer and worship were still evolving from a variety of sources as well as a generalized worldview in which miracles of healing might be legitimately requested. Susan Boynton proposed recently that the eleventh- and twelfth-century *libelli precum* attached to continental psalters, although apparently “private devotions,” were actually intended for public, communal use, falling “within the spectrum of liturgical performance”; in a concluding caveat she admits that we really know little about how

books in monastic libraries were used, and we do not.<sup>21</sup> However, these earlier Insular prayerbooks have been presumed by most scholars to have been private in their function.

Most significantly, *Nunnaminster*'s almost complete use of the singular personal pronoun in its prayers (of the sixty-nine items in the collection, only six are in the first person plural form) and its relatively small size would seem to mitigate against the suggestion that it is an actual "service" book intended for any kind of public use, even of a para-liturgical nature. That is not to say that liturgical elements are absent from the collection: indeed they are pronounced. I would suggest, however, that this is a book intended for private, meditative reading which draws its inspiration, poetry and structure from the scriptures, patristic writings and from a variety of liturgical sources, especially the liturgy of the Eucharist and rites associated with the anointing of the sick and dying. The "self" it constructs is a pray-er before God who, as she reads her prayers, hopes to "read" her own individual body into communion with the Mystical Body of Christ. This pray-er meditates on scriptural texts in the tradition of *lectio divina*, but also "liturgically reads" the on-going history of salvation that continues to be enacted in each person's life.

### *The Body of Christ*

Just as in *The Book of Cerne*, over and over in the *Nunnaminster* prayers, the patriarchs, prophets, disciples, and saints are invoked and the speaker prays to be counted among them. In her masterly study of the codex from paleographical, codicological, historical and literary perspectives, Michelle Brown finds in *The Book of Cerne* a strong thematic unity as a meditation on the *communio sanctorum*. It might be said that the theme of *Nunnaminster* is likewise that same holy communion, but cast rather under its more liturgically resonant title: the Body of

Christ. The Communion of Saints *is*, of course, also the mystical Body of Christ, i.e. the Church, whose head is Christ.<sup>22</sup> The doctrine of the Communion of Saints, although an article of the Creed, is a later, more highly theorized development of the basic concept of the organic unity of the Church which is evoked most fully in the Gospel of John and the Pauline epistles. The Church as the mystical Body of Christ is perhaps most famously expressed in Romans 12: 4-6, where Paul writes, “For as in one body we have many members, but all the members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ; and every one members one of another: And having different gifts, according to the grace that is given us ...”.<sup>23</sup> Even more apropos of the *Nunnaminster* prayers is Paul’s more physically evocative passage in Corinthians:

For as the body is one and has many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body: So also is Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, whether bond or free: and in one Spirit we have all been made to drink. For the body also is not one member, but many. If the foot should say: Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body: Is it therefore not of the Body? And if the ear should say: Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body: Is it therefore not of the body? If the whole body were the eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, every one of them, in the body as it has pleased him. And if they all were one member, where would be the body? But now there are many members indeed, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand: I need not your help. Nor again the head to the feet: I have no need of you. Yea, much more those that seem to be the more feeble members of the body are more necessary. And such as we think to be the less honourable

members of the body, about these we put more abundant honour: and those that are our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. But our comely parts have no need: but God has tempered the body together, giving to that which wanted the more abundant honour. That there might be no schism in the body: but the members might be mutually careful one for another. And if one member suffer anything, all the members suffer with it: or if one member glory, all the members rejoice with it. [I Corinthians 12: 14-26]

The somatic imagery of Paul's letters seems woven through the *Nunnaminster* collection, most particularly in its central sequence of the "Christ Prayers" which are focused on identifying with various parts of Christ's body. These prayers invoke a cosmic Christ who nevertheless endured a life bound in a bodily existence on which the pray-er dwells in meditative detail. These forty-four prayers (Prayers 5-48)<sup>24</sup> voice a profound desire to sanctify the everyday life and sufferings of monastic devotion by identifying with the physical experiences of Jesus. The prayers focus quite explicitly not only on the eyes, ears, hands, and feet of Paul's letter, but also on less "honorable" parts such as the bowels. Immediately following the Christ prayers a "Sacramental Hymn" (Prayer 49) celebrates the life-giving Eucharistic Body of Christ. Later in the collection, other prayers reiterate the theme of enumeration of body parts. The famous "Lorica of Laidcennn" (Prayer 63), which catalogues parts of the body in need of protection, is astonishing in its anatomical specificity. *The Book of Nunnaminster* also includes several brief prayers for healing and the whole collection concludes with a curious prayer that begins, "Caput Christi, oculos Gesaeie" (Prayer 65). There is a marked preoccupation throughout the collection with a desire for heaven where the pray-er will join other members of Christ's body, for example, at the eternal wedding feast (Prayer 28) or "in locum refrigerii pacis et lucis et quietis"

(in the place of the relief [lit. ‘coolness’] of peace and light and rest) (Prayer 55). The healing and protection of the earthly body is always contextualized here as an instrumental good through which one seeks to attain the far more important spiritual health of the soul. The “Lorica of Laidcenn” concludes, for example, by asking to be kept alive amidst plague, fever, weakness and other forms of physical infirmity and suffering: “Donec iam Deo dante seneam,/ Et peccata mea bonis deleam,/ Ut de carne iens imis caream/ et ad alta euolare ualeam,/ Et misero Deo ad aetheria,/laetus regni uechar refrigeria.” (Until, with God’s gift of old age, I blot out my sins with good works; And, in departing from the flesh, am freed from the depths [of “hell” or the “lowest things”] and able to fly to the heights, and by the mercy of God, may be borne in joy to the heavenly cool retreats of his kingdom.)

The concern with body parts or bodily experiences that are sanctified, protected, and healed so that the pray-er may achieve eternal salvation can hardly fail to suggest the analogous importance of individual members of the Church upon whose salvation depends the building up of the Mystical Body. Paul describes the “growth” of the individual member as well as the “increase” of the whole body in Ephesians 4:15-16: “But doing the truth in charity, we may in all things grow up in him who is the head, even Christ: From whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity.” Augustine and other Fathers, both Western and Eastern, considered the question of the degree to which the individual might be “needed” to complete the Body of Christ. In a meditation on the sufferings of Christians, Augustine writes, “anything you suffer...was wanting in the sufferings of Christ. It is added because it was wanting; you fill up the measure....You suffer exactly as

much as was to be contributed from your sufferings to the whole suffering of Christ, who suffered as our head and still suffers in his members, that is, in us.”<sup>25</sup>

The dependence upon the individual for the health of the whole Church is a doctrine of long-standing whose scriptural underpinnings are well summarized in the 1908 version of the Catholic Encyclopedia:

[T]he mystical body, like a physical body, grows and increases. This growth is twofold. It takes place in the individual, inasmuch as each Christian gradually grows into the "perfect man", into the image of Christ (Ephesians 4:13, 15; Romans 8:29). But there is also a growth in the whole body. As time goes on, the Church is to increase and multiply till it fills the earth. So intimate is the union between Christ and His members, that the Apostle speaks of the Church as the "fullness" (*pleroma*) of Christ (Ephesians 1:23; 4:13), as though apart from His members something were lacking to the head. He even speaks of it as Christ: "As all the members of the body whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:12). And to establish the reality of this union he refers it to the efficacious instrumentality of the Holy Eucharist: "We being many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of that one bread" (1 Corinthians 10:17 ).<sup>26</sup>

Perhaps this essential interdependence within the whole Church may also be said to be analogous, although on a more microcosmic level, to that communal emphasis in the life of the Benedictine convent where the spiritual growth of the individual is pursued first and foremost for the sake of the spiritual growth of the monastic community as a family.<sup>27</sup>

The dynamic reciprocity of relationship between the members of the Body of Christ -- the living pray for the dead, the saints intercede for the living, all join the angels in praise of God in

the holy sacrifice of the Mass – is that noted by Michelle Brown when she writes: “[*T*]he *Book of Cerne* may, at one level, be interpreted as a meditation upon the Communion of Saints and as a tool for its implementation, the prayers of the user serving to invoke the intercession of all the faithful on his behalf and in turn contributing to the common good of all.”<sup>28</sup> Brown clearly evokes here the special nature of prayer speech discussed in Chapter One, above, in that the prayers not only reflect upon this theme, but seek at the same time to place the speaker within the communion he invokes. Here the aspect of prayerful reading that I have called “liturgical” comes into play. It is not that the book itself is necessarily intended for any public liturgical function. Rather the shaping of such a text where readings and prayers are in dialogue can hardly escape the influence of the habit of liturgically “reading” both the scriptures and the community’s life that have been developed through daily experiences of worship. Just as the language and imagery of monastic prayers echo back the literary style and preoccupations of the scriptures, so too in their attention to ordering principles and overarching themes, the prayerbooks seem to mirror the shape of liturgical experience where eternal significance is made present in the now, particularly through sacramental rituals.

In the case of *The Book of Nunnaminster*, I would suggest that the liturgical resonance is particularly strong and that the collection, shaped as it is by concern for bodily experience and the redemption of that experience as a member of the Body of Christ, actually, from the point of view of a believer, “works” to effect the increase of that corporate body. The sincere pray-er of the collection continually reaffirms her place in the Mystical Body of Christ to which she already belongs by virtue of her baptism into the Church Militant. Also in the here and now, the pray-er’s attention to her own spiritual health will strengthen the monastic family to which she belongs and with which she regularly celebrates the sacrament of the Body of Christ in

Eucharistic liturgies. Ultimately, should the person who reads and prays with this collection be granted the forgiveness she repeatedly requests, she will, in death, attain heaven and a place in the Church Triumphant. In this sense, to the believing imagination, the private devotions have an intrinsically communal function that makes the individual reading (*lectio divina*) also an act of “liturgical reading,” rich with present and eschatological significance for the individual, her immediate community, and the whole Church to which she belongs.

### *Sections of the Book*

*The Book of Nunnaminster* is, as suggested above, a unified and focused collection.

Before we examine this thematic unity in more detail, it may be helpful to map out the contents as follows:

Passion narratives from the Gospels (4 intended/ 3 actual) [folios 1a -16a]

#### Prayers

Introductory Prayers (nos. 1-4) [folios 16b – 19b]

Christ Prayers (nos. 5-48) and a Sacramental Hymn (no. 49) [folios 20a -32b]

Prayers on Penitence, Confession, Last Judgment, Fate of the Soul (nos. 50-57)

(eight prayers: one confession, four penitential prayers, three suffrages)

[folios 33a – 36a]

Prayers for Protection, Healing, Fate of the Body (nos. 58-65)

(eight prayers including all “magical” material) [folios 36b -40b]

Ancillary material (material by a later hand and 3 prayers on fly leaf ) (nos. 66-68)

[folios 40b-41]

These units of division are my own interpretation of the order; perhaps the compiler would have suggested other groupings; we do not know, for instance, what material may be missing from the leaf lost between folios 33 and 34, but it is easy to see already that *Nunnaminster* is more than a haphazard collection. Within each of these sections I will discuss representative individual pieces (particularly focusing on pieces that are not found in any other Insular prayerbook) and also consider the ways in which the practices of *lectio divina* and liturgical reading may have influenced the subjects, language, and imagery of the prayers as well as the shape of the whole collection.

### *The Passion Narratives*

In *Nunnaminster*, (as in *Cerne* and *Royal*) the prayers are preceded by Gospel extracts. Unlike the *libelli precum* of the later continental psalters, the prayer collections in the Insular prayerbooks are responses to Gospel material. Perhaps as a result, the prayers in *Nunnaminster* are not as indebted to the psalms for their subjects, imagery and phrasing as they are to the Gospels, patristic sources, and liturgical borrowings.<sup>29</sup> The main sequence of prayers, the forty-four prayers which meditate on the life and Passion of Christ, are clearly a direct response to the Passions of the four gospels with which, in its original form, the codex began. *Nunnaminster*'s Gospel extracts are perhaps the most narrowly focused collection in all of the Insular prayerbooks. The *Royal* Gospel lections are described by Sims-Williams as "unconnected extracts which hardly mention the central mysteries of the faith," though both he and Morrish note that the lections do include miracles of healing, appropriate to the theme of *Christus*

*medicus* they both find in that collection.<sup>30</sup> *Cerne* includes Passion and Resurrection narratives. *Nunnaminster* appears to stay tightly focused on the suffering Christ, giving only the Passion narratives proper. It is important to note that the Passion narratives are incomplete in the manuscript today. The first quire of the manuscript is missing, estimated by Birch to have contained “eight or ten double pages.”<sup>31</sup> This loss as well as a missing leaf between folios 10b and 11a (a lacuna not noted in Birch’s edition), means that some incipits and explicits for the Passions as well as all of Matthew’s Passion are missing. Nevertheless a general sense of the intended scope of these narratives is possible to discern from what survives and by comparing these Passion accounts with those in *Cerne*.

As noted, in *Nunnaminster* the first Passion narrative, from Matthew, is missing, as is part of that from Mark, which begins, acephalous, at Mark 14:61 (Pilate's interrogation of Jesus), and ends at 15:46 (the stone laid across the tomb). The Passion according to Luke begins at Luke 22:1 with the Feast of the Unleavened Bread and concludes abruptly at Luke 23:44 (darkness at the ninth hour) because of the missing leaf. Presumably the Lucan extract would also have ended, as do Mark and John, with the entombment. The Passion according to John begins at John 18:1 (betrayal by Judas) and concludes at John 19: 42 (the entombment).

The Passion narratives were of course proclaimed for the congregation both on Palm Sunday and on Good Friday, and it is entirely possible that *The Book of Nunnaminster*, with its strong emphasis both on the Passion and on penitence might have been compiled for use especially during this most solemn week of the liturgical calendar.<sup>32</sup> Brown suggests a Paschal use but also notes that readings of the Passions were sometimes offered in commemorations for the dead.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the Passions were also often read at the bedside of the dying in the various rituals which developed from the ancient Roman *ordo defunctorum*.<sup>34</sup> This last use of the

Passions may have informed the shape of the collection as will be discussed below. But the devotional program of the whole prayer collection is in fact broader than simply a focus on the Passion of Christ and might therefore have been appropriate to use more generally. Even the central sequence of prayers which are addressed to Christ include episodes from his earlier life and ministry as well as the resurrection, ascension and future judgment. Perhaps influenced by the presence of the Passion narratives and eliding over prayers which address other aspects of Christ's life, both Brown and Morrish suggest the theme of the whole *Nunnaminster* collection is Christ's Passion. But the Gospel material may be said itself to have a more general thematic concern with the Body of Christ.

Of course the codex is incomplete so we cannot know for certain, but the evidence suggests that the scope of the *Nunnaminster* Passion lections seems to have been intended to include material covering only the period from the Last Supper to the Entombment.<sup>35</sup> The reader's imagination is specifically fixed on Christ's suffering human body: betrayed, tortured, crucified, pierced and laid into the earth; but the story of that suffering begins at the Passover table with the institution of the sacrament which epitomizes the theological significance of that bodily sacrifice: the Eucharist. The focus, then, is sharply on the Body of Christ both literally and liturgically. When the devotions from the second half of the book are considered, the thematic resonance deepens further as the metaphoric Body of Christ, the Church, is evoked as well.

Further proof of this thematic emphasis and also evidence for the use of the codex may be suggested by the very structure of *Nunnaminster* which begins with the (intended) inclusion of four "complete" Gospel Passions. It is not perhaps as clear how the pray-er of *Royal* may have used the "unconnected" Gospel extracts, but in *Nunnaminster* and in *Cerne*, where the lections

are whole, unified portions of the four gospels, the reading strategy required seems likely to be the sustained meditative engagement of *lectio divina*. This scriptural material is undoubtedly appropriate for *lectio divina*; the devotional section may be viewed as a compiler's or even composer's response to that reading, which then, in turn, becomes a subject for further prayerful reflection. Studies of the Insular prayerbooks have considered how the scriptural portions of the books are integrated into the whole in terms of their thematic resonances, but not in terms of the structural unity of the volumes. Jerome in particular emphasized the dialogic quality of *lectio divina* in which God speaks to the soul through the scriptures and the reader responds in prayer. This "dialogic" quality of these volumes is striking.

The compiler of *Nunnaminster* may also have found the "completeness" of including all four passions compelling.<sup>36</sup> To offer all four Passions provides for a more nuanced picture of Christ's suffering because some details are only preserved in one or another of the accounts. The *Nunnaminster* "Christ Prayers" respond to this scriptural "completeness" by offering details from all four of the Passions in their own attempt to provide a richly-imagined meditation on the suffering of Jesus. At the same time, as the Church fathers were well aware, even the casual reader of the four gospels will find discrepancies and apparent contradictions in the reporting of events. An important strain of patristic commentary sought to "harmonize" the gospels by rationalizing these discrepancies in the accounts. Augustine's *De consensu evangelistarum* is particularly interesting in that he draws on the image of the Body of Christ in discussing the way in which the Gospels were written not by Christ himself but by his disciples:

Therefore, when those disciples have written matters which He declared and spake to them, it ought not by any means to be said that He has written nothing Himself; since the truth is, that His members have accomplished only what they

became acquainted with by the repeated statements of the Head. For all that He was minded to give for our perusal on the subject of His own doings and sayings, He commanded to be written by those disciples, whom He thus used as if they were His own hands. Whoever apprehends this correspondence of unity and this concordant service of the members, all in harmony in the discharge of diverse offices under the Head, will receive the account which he gets in the Gospel through the narratives constructed by the disciples, in the same kind of spirit in which he might look upon the actual hand of the Lord Himself, which He bore in that body which was made His own, were he to see it engaged in the act of writing. For this reason let us now rather proceed to examine into the real character of those passages in which these critics suppose the evangelists to have given contradictory accounts (a thing which only those who fail to understand the matter aright can fancy to be the case); so that, when these problems are solved, it may also be made apparent that the members in that body have preserved a befitting harmony in the unity of the body itself, not only by identity in sentiment, but also by constructing records consonant with that identity. [Book I, Chapter XXXV]<sup>37</sup>

By this understanding, the gospel Passions in and of themselves are the work of members of the Body of Christ, responding to the “doings and sayings” of the Head, Christ. We might also see the *Nunnaminster* prayers as the writerly response of members of the body to the “doings and sayings” of the Head as represented by the gospel material.

*The Introductory Prayers*

The prayer collection begins with four prayers that I have called “Introductory” because they come before the sequence of the forty-four Christ Prayers that are undoubtedly the heart of the collection. In point of fact there may be two introductory “moments” at work here: first, Prayer 1, *Oratio Sancti Gregorii*, addressed to the Trinity and expansively suggesting themes which will be important for the whole collection; second, Prayers 2, 3, and 4 – a trio of prayers addressed to the Father as Creator [respectively to the Father (through the Trinity), the Father, and the Father (through the Trinity)] and which offer thanksgiving and praise before the forty-four petitionary prayers addressed to Christ begin. The Prayer of Saint Gregory is marked by a zoomorphic initial “D,” perhaps dragon-like in its design, and the rubric, “*Incipit Oratio Sancti Gregorii Papae Urbis Romae*” (Here begins the Prayer of Saint Gregory Pope of the City of Rome) in majuscules.<sup>38</sup> The next prayer (2) also begins with a rubric, “*Incipit Oratio Sancti Augustini in Sanctis Sollemnitatibus*” (Here begins the Prayer of Saint Augustine on Holy Solemnities), which may mark it as another “beginning” point. It is followed by *De Angelorum Conditione* (Concerning the Creation of Angels) (3), which meditates upon the creation of the angels, and *Laus Dei Omnipotentis* (Praise of God Almighty) (4), which is a pure expression of praise for the work God has already done in creating the world. In general we may note that these four prayers are addressed to the all-powerful creator God, and with the exception of only Prayer 3, invoke the Trinity. The strong invocation of the Trinity at the beginning of the collection is significant when we come to consider (below) the liturgical shape of the entire collection.

The lengthy *Oratio Sancti Gregorii Papae* (Prayer of Pope Saint Gregory) (1) certainly merits its place as the first prayer of the compilation in that its form, language, and theme introduce motifs which will recur throughout the whole. This prayer is attributed to St. Gregory in a number of early prayer books.<sup>39</sup> It is not, however, actually traceable to Gregory's corpus and participates, as does the St. Augustine prayer which follows, in the tradition of authorizing prayers by ascribing their composition to various Church fathers.

There is a litany-like quality to this prayer which is typical of many of the prayers in the early prayerbooks and which has led to the identification of this prayer as, in fact, a *lorica* in some studies.<sup>40</sup> The prayer invokes by name some thirty-one figures from the Old Testament and thirteen from the New Testament. These figures may be grouped with numerological significances, for instance the prayer lists thirteen patriarchs and major prophets, the three boys freed from the fire, thirteen prophets (although twelve are promised), thirteen apostles, paired but for the "Tres Iacobi."<sup>41</sup> The prayer continues with a catalogue of seven sins from which the prayer hopes to be delivered by the seven virtues subsequently requested. The numbers represented here (where threes and sevens predominate) and in the *Nunnaminster* collection as a whole (characterized by threes and fours) may very well have had significance for the original composers and compiler. The delight in numerological design is typical of monastic commentaries on the scriptures and seductive both for the composers and for later students of the prayers. We may hazard many guesses about the significance of the numbers: threes of course have Trinitarian import (as may thirteen: one plus three), while seven is the number of perfection. But without more definite evidence of the compiler's numerological intentions, it may be wiser to remember the caution offered by Irenaeus against the excesses of this method,

“God is not to be sought after by means of letters, syllables, and numbers,” and his concomitant insistence upon the “necessity of humility in such investigations.”<sup>42</sup>

This enumerative quality is considered by many -- from Bishop in his famous “Liturgical Note” to Kuiper’s edition of *Cerne*, through Brown and Sims-Williams in their recent studies -- to be “Irish” or “Spanish” in quality, typical of many of the oldest prayers of this period. In this particular prayer the Irish qualities have been described as present, but subdued.<sup>43</sup> The enumeration and confessional elements are neither as specific nor as florid as they are in some other early private prayers.<sup>44</sup> On the other hand, Lapidge has also linked some of these characteristics to even earlier prayers and rites from the Greek and Syriac traditions.

The prayer begins, as noted, with a powerful invocation of the Trinity, evocative of the similarly Trinitarian opening of the *Lorica of Saint Patrick*, and moves quickly into the litanic mode also characteristic of the more famous prayer:

Dominator dominus Deus omnipotens,  
 Qui es trinitas una  
     pater in filio  
     et filius in patre  
     cum spiritu sancto,  
 Qui es semper in omnibus,  
     Et eras ante omnia,  
     Et eris per omnia  
 Deus benedictus in secula,  
 Commendo animam meam in manus potentiae tuae  
     ut custodias eam  
         diebus ac noctibus  
         horis atque momentis,  
 Miserere mei Deus angelorum  
 Dirige me rex archangelorum,  
 Custodi me per orationes patriarcharum,  
     per merita prophetarum,  
     per suffragia apostolorum,  
     per uictorias martyrum,  
     per fidem confessorum  
         qui placuerunt tibi ab initio mundi<sup>45</sup>

[Sovereign Lord God almighty, you Who are One Trinity: Father in the Son and Son in the Father with the Holy Spirit, Who are always in all things, and were before all things, and will be through all things, God, blessed into generations, I commend my spirit into the hands of your power so that you may protect it day and night, every hour, every moment, Have mercy on me God of angels, Direct me King of archangels, Protect me through the prayers of the patriarchs, through the merits of the prophets, through the suffrages of the apostles, through the victories of the martyrs, through the faith of the confessors who have pleased you from the beginning of the world,]

The lines as I have arranged them further highlight the prayer's use of threes (three phrases to describe the Trinity: God who is, was, and will be in all); three requests (*Miserere mei*, *Dirige me*, *Custodi me*) and seven groups of those exalted in heaven (angels, archangels, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors). Repetition of whole phrases or of syntactical structure (with an internal variation in the phrasing and vocabulary) is the signal characteristic of litanic prayer.<sup>46</sup> The prayer also relies heavily on the case endings to create rhyming units, further emphasizing the relationships of ideas and subjects. Litanic prayer is an ancient form found in many religious traditions, often intended for processional use, where strong meter and rhyme served to set the pace and aid public recitation.<sup>47</sup> The litanic prayers of the "Hosanna hymns" were probably sung, for instance, in Jewish liturgies contemporary with the *Oratio Sanctii Gregorii* while congregants circled the reading desk or raised platform of the synagogue.<sup>48</sup> The rhythmic, incantatory effect of such public processional prayers is captured here for private spiritual journeying.

Litanies which name particular saints are a later development within the genre. Michael Lapidge's work on the early development of the Litany of the Saints in England notes that there are no litanies containing petitions to individual saints in Western/Latin liturgical sources before the eighth century – nor is there a "litany of the saints" strictly speaking in the *Nunnaminster* collection (there are however important early examples of the genre in the *Royal Prayerbook* and the Harley fragment). But the Gregory prayer comes close to the origins of this sub-genre as they

are traced by Lapidge, who locates the sources of lists of saints in ancient Greek and Syriac litanies. The Syriac litany (probably originally Greek from Antioch) that he prints as a parallel to the earliest English Litany of the Saints (found in Cotton Galba A.xviii) is striking in that it begins:

O omnino sancta domina nostra Dei genitrix  
 supplicare pro nobis peccatoribus.  
 Exercitus caelestium angelorum et archangelorum  
 supplicamini pro nobis peccatoribus.  
 Sancte domne Iohannes baptista propheta et nunti et praecursor  
 supplicare pro nobis peccatoribus.  
 Prophetae Dei Moyses et Elia et Isaia et Abacuc et Daniel et omnes prophetae  
 supplicamini pro nobis peccatoribus.  
 Sancti apostoli domne Petre et Paule, Iohannes, Matthaee, Luca, Marce, Andrea,  
 Bartholomaeae, Iacobi, Phillippe, Thoma et omnes apostoli  
 supplicamini pro nobis peccatoribus....<sup>49</sup>

[O entirely holy One, our Lady, mother of God, intercede for us sinners. Hosts of heavenly angels and archangels, intercede for us sinners. Holy lord John the Baptist, prophet and messenger and precursor, intercede for us sinners. Prophets of God Moses and Elijah and Isaiah and Habacuc and Daniel and all the prophets, intercede for us sinners. Holy apostles, " lord Peter and Paul, John, Matthew, Luke, Mark, Andrew, Bartholomew, Jameses, Phillip, Thomas and all apostles, intercede for us sinners.]

Here we find references to the angels, archangels, named prophets, and an idiosyncratic list of apostles, as in the beginning of the Gregory prayer, as well as a penitential purpose that also characterizes the *Nunnaminster* prayer (also two of the three particular saints later referenced in the *Nunnaminster* collection: Mary and John the Baptist). Lapidge notes that the earliest litanies were used in public penitential rites; the Gregory prayer begins a collection of prayers that meditate on the transformation of an individual life by striking a penitential note.

How would that transformation be effected? The middle portion of the prayer, which is a litanic meditation on scriptural figures, offers one answer. In addition to the lists of minor prophets and apostles, the prayer more particularly invokes thirteen Old Testament figures, offering epigrammatic epitomes of their lives or achievements:

Oret pro me Sanctus Abel  
 qui primus coronatus est martyrio,  
 Oret pro me Sanctus Enoch  
 qui ambulauit cum Deo et translatus est a mundo,  
 Oret pro me Sanctus Noe  
 quem Deus seruauit in diluuiio propter iustitiam,  
 Roget pro me fidelis Abraham  
 qui primus credidit Deo cui reputata est fides ad iustitiam,  
 Intercedet pro me iustus Isaac  
 qui fuit oboediens patri usque ad mortem in exemplum  
 domini nostri Ihesu Christi  
 qui oblatu est Deo patri pro salute mundi,  
 Postulet pro me felix Iacob  
 qui uidit angelos Dei uenientes in auxilium sibi,  
 Oret pro me sanctus Moses  
 cum quo locutus est dominus facie ad faciem,  
 Subueniat mihi sanctus Daudid  
 quem elegisti secundum cor tuum domine,  
 Deprecetur pro me sanctus Helias propheta  
 quem eleuasti in curro igneo usque ad caelum,  
 Oret pro me sanctus sanctus Eliseus  
 qui suscitauit mortuum post mortem,  
 Oret pro me sanctus Esaias  
 cuius labia mundata sunt igni caelesti,  
 Adsit mihi beatus Hieremias  
 quem sanctificasti in utero matris,  
 Oret pro me sanctus Ezechihel,  
 qui uidit uisiones mirabiles Dei,  
 Deprecetur pro me electus Danihel desiderabilis Dei  
 qui soluit somnia regis et interpretatus est et bis liberatus est de lacu leonum,

[May he pray for me, Holy Abel who was first crowned with martyrdom, May he pray for me, Holy Enoch who walked with God and was translated out of this world, May he pray for me, Holy Noah whom God preserved in the flood on account of his righteousness, May he ask for me, faithful Abraham who first believed in the God to whom faith was reckoned to him as righteousness, May he intercede for me, righteous Isaac who was obedient to the father even to death in the pattern [or “as a type”] of our Lord Jesus Christ who was sacrificed by God the Father for the salvation of the world, May he ask for me, happy Jacob who saw the angels of God coming to his aid, May he pray for me, holy Moses with whom the Lord spoke face to face, May holy David succor me, whom you chose, Lord, after your own heart, May he entreat for me, holy Helias (Elijah) the prophet whom you raised in the chariot of fire even toward the sky, May he pray for me, holy Elisha who raised the dead after death, May he pray for me, holy Isaiah whose lips were purified with heavenly fire, May he assist me, blessed Jeremiah whom you sanctified in the womb of his mother, May he pray for me, holy Ezekiel who saw the

wondrous visions of God, May he entreat for me, Daniel the chosen one, beloved of God, who explained and interpreted the dreams of the king and was twice freed from the den of the lions,] Prayers which dwell on scriptural history are a part of a long tradition in English piety, surviving even in the lengthy prayers which characterize Old Testament episodes of the Corpus Christi drama.<sup>50</sup> The very shape and spirit of this portion of the prayer evokes the practice and purpose of *lectio divina*. The series of encapsulated Old Testament narratives suggests the reading and rumination upon the scriptures as each patriarch is not only named, but his significance interpreted. The particular figures chosen here are found in other prayers of similar construction, but the aspects of their stories dwelt upon here include phrases keyed to bodily life (for instance “walking,” “lips,” “womb,” “face,” “visions”) which seem to support the bodily theme of the whole collection and make the inclusion of this prayer especially apt.<sup>51</sup> The sweep of salvation history (Heilsgeschichte) enacted in the first half of the prayer introduces the specific list of personal petitions with which it will conclude: requests for a transformed spirit sweeping now through the heart of the pray-er in response to that Biblical encounter. There is an implied connection of the life of the pray-er with those of the Old Testament figures she has invoked: purified, translated, chosen as they were, she will hope to join them around the heavenly throne. The prayer concludes:

Depelle a me domine concupiscentiam gulae,  
 Et da mihi uirtutem abstinentiae,  
 Fuge a me spiritum fornicationis,  
 Et da mihi amorem castitatis,  
 Extingue a me cupiditatem,  
 Et da mihi uoluntariam paupertatem,  
 Cohibe iracuntiam meam  
 Et accende in me nimiam suauitatem et caritatem Dei et proximi,  
 Abscide a me domine tristitiam seculi  
 et auge mihi gaudium spiritalem,  
 Depelle a me domine iactantiam mentis,  
 Et tribue mihi compunctionem cordis,  
 Minue superbiam meam

et perfice in me humilitatem ueram,  
 Indignus ego sum et infelix homo, Quis me liberauit de corpore mortis huius peccati  
 nisi gratia domini nostri Ihesu Christi  
 Quia ego peccator sum et innumerabilia sunt delicta mea  
 Et non sum dignus uocari seruus tuus,  
 Suscita in me fletum, mollifica cor meum durum et lapideum,  
 Et accende in me ignem timoris tui quia ego sum cinis mortuus,  
 Libera animam meam ab omnibus insidiis inimici  
 et conserua me in tua uoluntate, doce me facere uoluntate tuam,  
 quia Deus meus es tu, Tibi honor et gloria per omnia saecula saeculorum, Amen;

[Drive away from me Lord the concupiscence of gluttony, And give me the virtue of abstinence, Put to flight from me the spirit of fornication, And give me a love of chastity, Extinguish in me covetousness, And give to me voluntary poverty, Confine my anger, And enkindle in me a very great attraction for and love of God and my neighbor, Destroy in me Lord the sadness of the world And increase for me the spiritual joy, Drive off from me arrogant thoughts, And give to me compunction of heart, Diminish my pride And perfect in me true humility. *I am an unworthy and unhappy person , Who will free me from the body of this death of sin except the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 7:24-25), because I am a sinner and innumerable are my offenses, and I am not worthy to be called your servant, Awake in me tears softening my hard and stony heart, And enkindle in me the fire of fear of you, because I am dead ashes, Free my soul from the snares of the enemy and keep me in your will, Teach me to do your will because you are my God, To you be honor and glory through all generations of generations, Amen.]*

Frantzen has suggested in his studies of the Anglo-Saxon Penitentials that private “body part” prayers such as the “Lorica of Laidcenn” or a confessional prayer in *Cerne* (Number 8 of that collection), might be linked not to sacramental confession, but to “devotional confession,” in which a pray-er thoroughly examined his or her own sinful tendencies, perhaps in preparation for receiving the sacrament of penance.<sup>52</sup> The closing movement of this prayer, with its series of end-rhymed clauses, working systematically (and in an easily memorizable form) through the vices and virtues, might have a similar purpose; certainly in this portion of the prayer the speaker asks to reject worldly temptations by arming herself with virtues, several of which seem characteristic of monastic life: for instance “abstinentiae” (abstinence) and “voluntarium paupertatem” (voluntary poverty). The prayer concludes with a desire for compunction of heart which is the prerequisite for the forgiveness that is necessary for the speaker’s spiritual future.<sup>53</sup>

The prayer attributed to Gregory, Father of the Church, places him squarely in the line of Scriptural fathers (of both the Old and New Testaments) and does the same thing for the pray-er who assumes the Gregorian “I” upon recitation.<sup>54</sup> This move is quintessentially that of the *lectio divina*, casting the pray-er as a fully engaged reader of scripture. At the same time, the petitions suggest the speaker’s desire for full incorporation into a monastic milieu and someday into the heavenly company of those patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs and confessors who have pleased God “from the beginning of the world” and upon whose intercession the pray-er’s transformation depends. The collection begins then with a selection that evokes the transformative power of both the private individual prayer of reading and the public congregational prayer of communion.

Whereas Morrish has noted that the first four prayers of the *Nunnaminster* book bear no relation to the series on Christ which will follow, I suggest that they offer a fitting prologue to that sequence in a number of ways.<sup>55</sup> These four prayers focus on the Trinity or just the Father as the creator of the world and humanity (Prayers 2 & 4) and of the angels (Prayers 2 & 3), and dwell most specifically on the actions of God that are known to readers not only of Genesis but of other portions of the “Old Testament” (Prayer 1). The prayers express praise for the Triune God or God the Father who is transcendent and all powerful, but they also bring us to the point where the cosmic Christ (who has been present at creation) enters history as a man and we are prepared for the meditations on Jesus’s life and passion which are to follow. In the three prayers after the Gregory prayer, the “second beginning,” one is reminded of the technique of meditative reading itself, which first opens the mind by offering prayers of praise and thanksgiving before attempting an encounter with the text and an application of the text to the life of the reader. This pattern is itself repeated in miniature in each of the forty-four prayers on Christ’s life. The

prayers open with an invocation recalling Christ's transcendent nature, move to consider events in Jesus' life on earth as it is recorded in the Scriptures, and then draw a connection between the pray-er's life and that of Jesus, asking the Lord for help in conforming one's own life to the divine template.

*Christ Prayers and the Sacramental Hymn*

Their original editor, Walter de Gray Birch, called these prayers on Jesus' life and passion "a small collection of ancient prayers possessing an almost epigrammatic beauty of construction" also noting that they are in character "short and apposite, several of them indicating considerable thought in their composition."<sup>56</sup> Meyer-Harting found them to be "marked by open if restrained fervor" attributing their focus on an emotional identification with Christ's suffering to the influence of Byzantine or Syrian devotion as "mediated to it through some Spanish or Gaulish channel."<sup>57</sup> One such "Spanish" or in some accounts "Hibernian" element of these Christ Prayers is their emotional fervor. Another, also noted by Meyer-Harting, is their orientation towards Christ himself. As Devereux reminds us, most Roman prayers of this time were addressed to the Father through Christ by edict of the Council of Hippo.<sup>58</sup>

As noted above, each of the forty-four prayers in this sequence is a three-part collect, although the traditional balance of a Roman collect is observed in very few of the prayers.<sup>59</sup> The structure of a Roman collect, an "invocation, followed by relative clauses (qui ...) and main clause petitions,"<sup>60</sup> may be seen for instance in Prayer 9, *De Circumcisione* (Concerning the Circumcision):

O inchoatio et perfectio omnium bonorum,  
apud te igitur

totum providentia geritur,  
totum ratione subsistit,

Qui ut nos gravi seruitute legis eximeris,  
legem circumcisionis non dedignaueris excipere,  
et humanam naturam vetustate expoliens innouaris,

Ideo non immerito magnificentiam tuam laudo  
ac per hoc obnixe adiuro te,  
circumcide in me cuncta uitia cordis et corporis mei,

Domine Ihesu Christe, Amen.,

[O Beginning and perfection of all good things, with whom before you, therefore, everything happens according to your providence, everything exists according to reason, You Who did not scorn to accept (or submit to) the law of circumcision, in order to free us from the burdensome slavery of the Law, to cleanse and polish our human nature and in our old age to make it new, therefore I praise your magnificence not undeservedly, yet obstinately I abjure you through this: circumcise in me all sins of my heart and body, Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.,]

Sims-Williams points out the antithetical “ Qui ----circumcisionis non dedignaueris excipere...circumcide in me” as also typical of a Roman collect. In addition to the balanced clauses, this prayer employs balanced phrases (“totum providentia geritur/totum ratione subsistit”) and further antithetical or perhaps chiasmic echoing in the play of *legis/legem* and *eximeris/ non...excipere* of the *qui* clause. We also find some use of alliteration, especially in paired phrases (“circumcide in me cuncta uitia cordis et corporis mei”) which is a favorite kind of verbal ornament in this collection. This prayer also meditates upon the theme of reforming human nature, which is central to the Christ Prayers sequence, interestingly linking the possibility of that redemption to the cleansing and polishing achieved through old age “vetustate expoliens.” As in the “Lorica of Laidcenn” later in the collection, the pray-er asks, in effect, for time on earth for the work of redemption. The juxtaposition of the infant Jesus at his circumcision, his first bodily wounding endured for the sake of humanity (“ut nos gravi seruitute legis eximeris”), and the desire to be circumcised of sins or vices, especially into old age, is then

both a linking of the pray-er's life to Christ's, but also an acknowledgement of the speaker's own, quite different, real-life circumstances.<sup>61</sup>

Most of these 44 prayers are not so evenly balanced, giving greater weight or "space" often to the relative clause or the final petition. The invocations may be very short, or occasionally elaborated as well, and they serve most often to emphasize the transcendent nature of Christ. He is "mundi redemptor et humani generis gubernator" (the redeemer of the world and governor of human kind) (Prayer 5), "uerae beatitudinis auctor atque aeternae claritatis indultor" (author of true blessedness and granter of eternal glory) (6), "Omnipotens astrorum conditor" (all powerful establisher of the stars) (10), "infinitae misericordiae et immensae bonitatis auctor" (author of infinite mercy and great good) (15), and "summa singularisque pietas" (highest and unique kindness) (27). This is a Johannine vision of Christ, who is already present at creation and through whom the world is made. Twice in the sequence, Christ is even referred to as "pater": "O clementissime pater, domine saluator meus" (O most merciful Father, Lord my savior) begins a prayer on the death of Christ (36) and "O te oro omnium clementissime pater" (O you I beg most merciful Father of all) begins another (38) which goes on to meditate on the closing of the nostrils of Christ. In her own observations on this phenomenon, Barbara Raw reminds us that Isaiah's prophecies refer to the Messiah as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). Raw concludes "This is the God of Augustine's *Soliloquia* and *De Videndo Deo*, the one who is both *pater* and *causa*, and, at the same time, the one in whom death was swallowed up in victory, who holds all things in being, who loves all that he has made, yet is completely inaccessible via the senses."<sup>62</sup>

These invocations, even when most elaborate, remain, however, the briefest part of the prayers. They serve to set the stage for the remarkable shift in the relative clause from the cosmic

Christ of the invocation to the Jesus who took on human life and acted in this world and therefore may indeed be known through the senses. The meditations in the “qui” clauses often focus on Jesus’ humbling of himself, his condescending or not disdainful to confine himself to the human body for our sakes. Prayer 6 observes of the birth: “in tanta humilitate uenisti ut seruilem formam adsumere dignatus es” (you came in so much humility when you deigned to assume a lowly body) and Prayer 7 notes, “non solum claustra carnis sed etiam presepis angustias uitae largitor uoluisti pertulere” (generous bestower of life, you were willing to endure not only the cage of the flesh, but also the narrow crib ). The human form is a “prison” for Christ; human life is like a “narrow crib.” This emphasis on the degradation of the human condition is also found in many of the final petitions. Prayer 19 asks for release from “sordibus humanae conuersationibus” (the filth of human association); Prayer 15 asks for deliverance from “somno peccati et a sopori humanae pigritudinis uel malae consuetudinis” (the sleep of sin and the slumber of human laziness and evil habits).

While not all of the depictions of the parts of the human body or of life in this world are so negative, they are certainly particularly singled out and meditated upon. In recounting the story of Christ’s life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension, the prayers dwell on all of the following parts of Jesus’ body and aspects of his bodily existence:

the infant body:

- wrapped in swaddling clothes
- laid in a manger
- suckled
- circumcised

the adult body:

- baptized
- emptied by fasting
- which walked in ministry
- wept over Jerusalem
- bent the knee in prayer
- was kissed by Judas and manhandled by grasping hands

heard false judgment  
 was scourged, bound, spit upon, slapped  
 crowned with thorns  
 which listened silently to derision  
 lifted a cross on his shoulders  
 was stripped naked  
 bent the neck for the cross  
 extended arms on the cross and had hands pierced  
 whose breast enclosed the gifts of the Holy Spirit  
 was lifted up on the cross  
 which tasted vinegar and gall  
 breathed a last breath  
 closed eyes  
 closed nostrils  
 closed ears  
 was pierced with a lance  
 laid in a sepulcher  
 smashed the bolts of hell and bonds of death  
 spoke to Mary Magdalen  
 ascended to heaven

This list represents the prayers where the imagination is focused on Jesus' own sensory experiences, particularly the tactile. The list does not include the prayers on "enfleshed" actions, such as those in which Jesus is performing miracles, which the pray-er might "see" happening or the prayers which report the very words of Christ – meditative material to "hear." The miracles and words of Christ in the prayers are themselves, of course, all about the life of the body: Christ feeds the five thousand, turns water to wine, heals the ear of the high priest's servant, washes the feet of the apostles, offers the bread and cup of his own body.

That the senses offer access to God, through imaginative participation in Jesus' experience or in the actual bodily life of the petitioner as it is revealed in the final clause, is a motif that is introduced, by way of antithesis, in the first prayer of the sequence, *Oratio de Natale Domini* (Concerning the Birth of the Lord) (Prayer 5). Here the weight of the prayer rests in the extended "qui clause" which dwells not on the earthly Jesus, but on the Transcendent Christ, described here as a co-creator in terms which segue almost seamlessly from the "Deus

formator reformatorque humane naturae” (God the creator and recreator of human kind) invoked in the “introductory” praise prayer to the Father (*Laus Dei Omnipotentis*, Prayer 4) preceding the “Christ Prayers” sequence. One has a dizzying sense in Prayer 5 of Christ the Pantocrator expansively filling the heavens before his sudden, jolting confinement to earth where he will be bound tightly in the swaddling clothes of Prayer 6 or the “presepis angustias” (narrow crib) of Prayer 7:

O mundi redemptor et humani generis gubernator  
 domine Ihesu Christe uerus Dei filius,  
 Qui non solum potens sed etiam omnipotens es,  
 Heres parentis, Patrique conregnans, Cuncta cum ipso creans,  
 Semper cum illo, Et nusquam sine illo,  
 In sublimissimo spiritalium throno regnans,  
 Omnia implens, Omnia circumplectens,  
 Superexcedens omni et sustinens omnia,  
 Qui ubique es et ubique totus es,  
 Sentiri potes, Et uideri non potes,  
 Qui ubique presens es et vix inueniri possis,  
 Quem nullus iniuste sed iuste laudare potest,  
 Qui misertis humanis erroribus de uirgine nasci dignatus es,  
 Ut dilectam tibi nostri generis creaturam  
 de profundo mortis periculo liberatam  
 ad dignitatem tuae imaginis reformaris,  
 Unde per omnia ago tibi gratias et per hoc altissime adiuro te,  
 Conserua in me misero  
 uirginalis pudicitiae propositum,  
 Mentisque puritatem,  
 Et cordis innocentiam,  
 Et omnes quos reddidisti mihi  
 tu ipse per uirginitatis premium perduc ad regnum gloriae tuae,  
 Domine Ihesu Christe amen.

[O redeemer of the world and governor of human kind, lord Jesus Christ true son of God, who is not only powerful, but also all powerful, Heir of the father, and with the Father co-reigning, creating all things with him, always with him and never without him; reigning on the most exalted throne of spirits, All satisfying, All surrounding, towering above and sustaining all (i.e. above and below everything), Who is everywhere and everywhere is all/ the whole, You are able to be perceived, And not able to be seen. You who are existing everywhere and are scarcely able to be discovered. Whom none is able unjustly but only justly to praise, You who had mercy on human transgressions, and deigned to be born of the virgin so that you might set free, from the deep peril of death, your beloved creation, human kind, and reform them to the dignity of your

image, Whence through all I give thanks to you and through this, most exalted one I adjure you, Preserve in miserable me the intention of virginal chastity, and purity of mind/spirit, and innocence of heart, and all whom you have bestowed upon me [or ‘entrusted to me’], through the gift of virginity, lead them yourself to the kingdom of your glory, Lord Jesus Christ, amen.]

The prayer describes this Cosmic Christ as one who is “able to be perceived and not able to be seen” and who is “existing everywhere and ... scarcely able to be discovered.” These lines try to express the essential “problem” of knowing the transcendent God, to which Christ’s Incarnation offers the solution. The *Oratio Sancti Augustini* (Prayer 2) suggests the same, beginning: “Deus dilecti, et benedicti filii tui Ihesus Christi pater, Per quem tui agnitionem suscipimus” (God the Father of your beloved and blessed son Jesus Christ, through whom we receive knowledge of you). The rest of the prayers in the Christ Prayers sequence will dwell with eyes, ears, touch, taste and smell on the fully human Jesus who made himself available to that sensory investigation. While all of the senses are variously called upon in the Christ Prayers, many of the most striking petitions ask for a tactile experience of redemption. There are prayers in which the speaker imagines her soul fattened by Christ’s love and observance of his laws (Prayer 8), her bowels emptied of vices and filled with virtues (12); she envisions being washed with the spit Christ bore on his face (24), being lifted like a lamb onto Christ’s shoulders (32), knocking at and entering the wound in Christ’s side (40). There is also a motif of actually hearing Christ speak, sometimes even in scriptural words addressed directly to the pray-er (Prayers 18, 21, 23, 39, 48). It is notable in Prayer 5 that the pray-er particularly laments the impossibility of “seeing” and finding Christ when a later prayer (or “charm”) in the collection (64) asks for healing of the eyes and two other prayers are addressed to “Deus qui conspicis” (God who sees) (60 and 61). Prayers in the Christ prayers sequence which focus on visual imagery or seeing include Prayers 10, 37, 41, 44. Prayer 37, *De Luminibus Clausis* (Concerning

the Closed Eyes) is, in fact, an addition unique to *Nunnaminster* to a sub-grouping also found in *Royal* (discussed below) focused on apertures of the senses.<sup>63</sup> Prayer 47, *De Pentecosten* (Concerning Pentecost) which is the last complete prayer in the sequence, includes a petition that the Lord will “pour out for my senses some portion” of the blessedness of Pentecost (“Ut illius aliquam partem sensibus meis benignus infunde”). As Christ ascends to heaven and is “replaced” on earth by the Holy Spirit, perhaps the “problem” of sensory knowledge of God returns. I will discuss below the solution to this problem that the prayers also suggest.

In the petition clause of Prayer 5 we find details which locate the pray-er in a specifically monastic milieu, perhaps even, as Birch suggested, as the abbess of a monastery. That the speaker prays not only for her own faithfulness to the vow of virginity, but that “omnes quos reddidisti mihi” (all of those whom you have entrusted to me) will likewise maintain their vows, further emphasizes the implicitly communal nature of even individual prayer, perhaps especially in religious life, where the spiritual health of one member may have profound implications for the health of her community. Other prayers in the sequence which seem to offer details specifically evocative of monastic life or related to monastic vows include: Prayer 6 (regretting needless concern with clothes), Prayer 12 (fasting), Prayer 15 (the sins of laziness and sexual impurity), Prayer 20 (sleepiness during devotions), Prayer 22 (unkind thoughts about others or failure to rejoice in another’s fortune), Prayer 29 (humility), Prayer 30 (guarding “opera manum mearum,”[the works of my hands]), Prayer 35 (speaking empty, sinful words), Prayer 45 (making public confession).

Although an entirely appropriate beginning to the Christ Prayers, Prayer 5, in its protracted initial focus on the Trancendent Christ, lacks the analogic exuberance which is the signal characteristic of the sequence. In most of the prayers, the detailed focus on Christ’s body

and his sensory experiences on earth are introduced in the “qui clauses,” then echoed in the petitions as the prayer establishes those aforementioned connections between the human petitioner and the God to whom she prays. These deeply imagined analogies create the real heart and appeal of the devotions. The connections drawn offer a literary satisfaction in the rounding out of each brief prayer. In Prayer 10 the pray-er begs the “establisher of the stars” to whom the wise men brought treasures that “in mea semper mente appareat stella iustitiae et tua confessione meus sit thesaurus” (in my mind the star of righteousness may always appear and my treasure may be in confessing you ). She asks to weep over her sins just as Christ wept over Jerusalem (17), to be awake and vigilant in prayer just as Christ was (and his disciples were not) in Gethsemane (20). In the speaker’s meditation on the crown of thorns, she feels overwhelmed by her sins, and will be “spinis circumdatus” ([as if] surrounded by thorns) if not protected by Christ (25). In prayers concerning the closing of Christ’s eyes (37), nostrils (38), and ears (39) at the moment of death, the pray-er begs for release from the evils that may have entered her own body through these particular apertures.

In Prayer 14, recalling the wedding feast at Cana and the abundance of fine wine there, the pray-er conjures an image of her own inebriated abandon into the arms of the heavenly spouse. This prayer, which is unique to the *Nunnaminster* collection, serves to demonstrate the complexity of some of these analogies.

*De Aqua in Uinum Conuersa* (Concerning the Water Turned into Wine)

Deus

Qui ad declaranda maiestatis tuae  
 miracula in Cana Galilaeae,  
 in conuiuio nuptiali  
 aquas in uinum conuertisti,  
 Gratias tibi reffero domine mi,  
 Et te caelestem sponsum  
 exorando interpello,

Ut tua Christe caritas et doctrina noui testamenti  
 me inrigata inebriat,  
 Ut mens mea  
 oblita presentium desideriorum  
 sola futura commercia  
 adipisci recurrat  
 per te, Domine Ihesu Christe Amen.,

[God who, to make public the wonders of your majesty, converted the water into wine at the wedding feast of Cana in Galilee, I give thanks, my Lord, and entreating you as the heavenly bridegroom I appeal to you that I may be flooded and inebriated with your love and the teaching of the New Testament, so that my mind, having forgotten the desires of the present may come back only to obtaining the future intercourse, through you, Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.,]

In this remarkable prayer both the invocation and the *qui* clause are abbreviated and the focus is on the keenly-imagined petition. In a syntactically complex clause, the pray-er asks Christ her “heavenly bridegroom” that she may be “flooded and inebriated with your love and the teaching of the New Testament” so that her mind, “having forgotten the desires of the present” may come back (when the inebriation subsides) only to the “futura commercia” “obtained through you, Lord Jesus Christ.” “Commercias” meaning “intercourse” or “communication” or “fellowship” may also have commercial overtones, but in the context of the wedding feast and the desire for personal transformation that the whole sequence evinces, the meanings related to intimate communion, perhaps even of a sexual nature, seem most appropriate. The fervor of this imagery is striking as is the sense that the story of the wedding feast has been imaginatively inhabited by the composer of this prayer. Of course there is no mention of drunkenness in the story of the wedding feast at Cana, but the miraculous wine served at this celebration is linked in patristic commentaries both to the Song of Songs and to the Eucharist.<sup>64</sup>

“Inebrio” and “ebrio” are used frequently in the Vulgate, often with negative connotations, particularly in the New Testament. However, in more poetic passages in the

wisdom literature, psalms and prophets, these words are used to suggest a satiety associated with fertility, rather than drunkenness.<sup>65</sup> In the Song of Songs, we find a verse (5:1) which was commented on extensively by the Church Fathers and which speaks of the same inebriation in love: “Veniat dilectus meus in hortum suum et comedat fructum pomorum suorum veni in hortum meum soror mea sponsa messui murrum meum cum aromatibus meis comedi favum cum melle meo bibi vinum meum cum lacte meo comedite amici bibite et inebriamini carissimi” (Let my beloved come into his garden, and eat the fruit of his apple trees. I am come into my garden, O my sister, my spouse, I have gathered my myrrh, with my aromatical spices: I have eaten the honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk: eat, O friends, and drink, and be inebriated, my dearly beloved). The commentaries give various interpretations, but this verse was often considered to pre-figure the Holy Eucharist to which the faithful would be called as friends. The “*caritas et doctrina novi testamenti*” that will inebriate in the *Nunnaminster* prayer may be linked to commentaries on this verse that analogize the myrrh and spice, honeycomb and honey, wine and milk in a variety of creative ways as figures variously for Christ’s suffering (myrrh), “the sweetness of the Godhead stored in Christ’s human body” (honey), preachers of the scriptures (honeycomb and wine) or saints who delight in the study of scriptures (honeycomb and honey). Finally the notions of forgetfulness in that inebriation and waking to a new life with Christ are recalled in commentaries which teach that “the Blood of the Lord and the Cup of Salvation cast out the memory of the former self and the oppression of sins with the joy of pardon”<sup>66</sup>

Clearly this brief prayer is rich in ideas and images that resonate with not only the referenced Gospel story (The Wedding Feast at Cana) but with other scripture passages and with patristic scriptural commentary as well. The weaving of such an exegetical web is the essential

process of *lectio divina*. The prayer's themes also reverberate throughout the *Nunnaminster* collection, certainly intended to reveal themselves in the repeated readings and meditative, interior ranging over the texts that characterize *lectio*. The gospel narratives of the Last Supper at the beginning of the volume, Prayers 18 and 19 on the Last Supper, the nursing of the infant Jesus in Prayer 8, the miracle of the loaves and the fishes in prayer 16, heaven as a wedding feast in prayer 28, the blessing of the cup in the "magical" prayer 62, the sacramental hymn of prayer 49 – all resonate with this prayer's Eucharistic and eschatological overtones. Indeed an important theme of the Christ Prayers sequence may be epitomized in this meditation on the transformation of one ordinary substance or sinner into an extraordinary proof of Christ's redeeming power.

The thematic concerns of the Christ Prayers include, then, paired emphases on the cosmic Christ and the enfleshed Jesus, a validation of the senses as instruments for knowing God, monastic life as the milieu for this speaker's identification with Christ, and a desire for Christ to transform the speaker's sinful human nature so that she will merit a place in his heavenly kingdom. This last theme is, perhaps, the most fully developed, being, as it were, the ultimate purpose that the whole *Nunnaminster* prayer collection is constructed to serve.

As the occasions for sin in monastic life catalogued above suggest, the Christ prayers view human nature at work in the human body as prone to sinful failure. However, just as Jesus turned the water into wine at Cana, Jesus used his own human body to achieve eternal redemption for all; because of that sacrifice, the pray-er is emboldened to imagine herself meriting redemption *through*, and ultimately *of*, her body by linking her own enfleshed life to Christ's. In other words, although the prayers refer at times to the "narrowness," "filthiness," and "sinfulness" of "this mud of the body" ("hac lutea corporis," Prayer 33), the spiritual program they pursue is to seek union with Christ through real and imagined sensory or somatic

experience. God would not be fully knowable without the Incarnation of Christ; the pray-er could not know Christ as she does without her body, albeit a sinful one.

That transformation of human nature and the earthly body is predicated, of course, not only on the pray-er's imaginative identification with Christ, but on the compunction of heart that experience will engender, her subsequent penitence, and God's love and forgiveness, particularly as these are expressed in the sacraments. Every single one of these Christ prayers asks forgiveness of sins or perseverance in virtue in some form. Compunction metaphorically expressed as a piercing of the breast and symbolically attested in tears is specifically referenced in Prayers 30 and 17, respectively. Further references to compunction of heart appear in Prayer 54 following the Christ prayers and conclude the Prayer of St. Gregory which begins the collection. The petition clauses evoke the final judgment in Prayers 36 and 39 and the whole prayer takes up that theme in Prayer 48, the last prayer of the sequence as it stands (a leaf being lost at this point). The Final Judgment also figures in Prayers 51 and 54 after the Christ prayers. The *Nunnaminster* compiler has included prayers not found in *Royal* or *Cerne* which bring a cast of sinful "extras" into the sequence: Judas (21), the Good Thief (34), Mary Magdalen (44), and Peter (45), all of whom, with the exception of Judas, merit redemption through Christ's forgiveness and mercy. Finally there are recurring references to the "spiritual medicine" that Christ offers, i.e. forgiveness of sins.

We find the following instances of language specifically related to health and medicine:

- Prayer 15: "Omnemque infirmitatem in populo curasti" (and all infirmity of the people you cured) and "Da mihi quaeso spiritalem medicinam mentis et corporis" (give to me I beg spiritual medicine of mind and body)
- Prayer 18: "Deus...Salusque miserorum" (God...health of the miserable) and "ac salutifero pretio purificatus" (purified by that most health-giving ransom)
- Prayer 30: "O Dei dextera donatorque salutis" (O right hand of God and giver of health)

Prayer 40: “O medicinae diuinae mirabilis dispensator” (O miraculous dispenser of divine medicine) and “per misericordiae tuae medicamen sana” (heal through the medicine of your mercy)

Prayer 43: “O uita morientium salus infirmantium” (O life of the dying, health of the sick)

References to health and medicine are also found in some of the prayers which follow the Christ Prayers sequence (especially Prayers 60 and following), including two (64, 65) which may have been used as medical charms. Several of the prayers in *Nunnaminster* related to medicine are also found in the *Royal* collection, which has a clear theme of *Christus medicus*, but the concepts of health and medicine are more completely spiritualized here where these references remain a motif serving *Nunnaminster's* own ordering principal: the Body of Christ. For instance, although there are a few prayers which naturally consider the saving power of the blood of Christ, there are no prayers which dwell on human bleeding or bloodletting, such as are found in the *Royal Prayerbook*. Blood here is always symbolic or sacramental.

The *Christus medicus* motif is also more subtly suggested in *Nunnaminster* in prayers concerned with religious observances that will lead to spiritual well-being. Steps can be taken to stay spiritually “healthy,” this compiler seems to insist, particularly by adherence to a disciplined life and by participation in the sacramental life of the Church. God’s love and the observance of his commands fattens/nourishes the soul so that it may thrive (“ut anima mea amore tuo saginata in observatione mandatorum conualescat,” Prayer 8) and the pray-er meditates on the miracle of the loaves and fishes by asking for “renewal through nourishment” (“ut mens nostra tuae reparationis effectus,” Prayer 16). The spiritual/surgical ritual of circumcision is metaphorically linked to absolution in Prayer 9, fasting as a cleansing practice (literally an emptying of the bowels) stands for a spiritual discipline in Prayer 12; several prayers suggest washing – in the waters of baptism (11), with tears of repentance (17), like the feet of the apostles (19), with the

spittle of derision (24) – that will cleanse the soul of sin. Baptism (Prayer 11) and Eucharist (Prayers 18 and 19) are specifically mentioned. Rites of penance and absolution are potentially evoked each time the pray-er asks for forgiveness, but are more particularly suggested by Prayers 9, 11, 24, 34 and 45. Prayers which dwell on feeding and nourishment with scripture, bread and wine suggest the Eucharist (Prayers 8, 14, 16, 17, 19, 48). Finally there is a suite of prayers within the sequence that seem related to Anglo-Saxon liturgical rites for visitation of the sick and the dying.

Sims-Williams touches on the possible connections between the *Christus medicus* theme and the unction rites used for visiting the sick which were more fully developed by Insular churches from Irish origins, but in any case attested in the Stowe missal and in appendages to the Gospel books of Mulling, Dimma, and Deer.<sup>67</sup> In his study of the development of the rite, H. B. Porter notes that when the Carolingian bishops sought to adopt some formal rite of unction of the sick into the Roman liturgy, they looked to a type of formula developed from the Celtic baptismal rite which “by the eighth century had a firm place in the mixed Gallican and Roman rite used in Frankland.” By the middle of the ninth century, those sacramentaries that do include an unction rite have one that is “long and elaborate.”<sup>68</sup> Over time the rite developed from the earlier blessing of just the front and back of the neck and the front and back of the breast to also include blessings of the senses (which became the dominating theme of the rite) and eventually an almost “limitless” number of body parts.<sup>69</sup> Porter also observes an important change in the ritual, “As time went on, there was more and more stress on the spiritual and absolutionary effect of unction, and less and less expectation of accomplishing any physical cure ... Brief forms, concerned purely with the forgiveness of sin, thus became the permanent characteristics of the later Roman office”<sup>70</sup>

Federick S. Paxton's excellent book-length discussion of the development of the anointing rites from the earliest days of the Church through the ninth century traces this increasing spiritualization of the concept of healing. Earlier Roman anointing for physical healing is eventually superseded by a more fully elaborated rite of mixed origin (including Irish elements) for the "moments" of death from the sick bed, through viaticum, to burial and commemoration. I will discuss below how this ritual material has influenced the composition of the whole *Nunnaminster* collection, but it is without doubt threaded through the Christ Prayers sequence, where the compiler has quite consciously included sacramental referents and employed liturgical patterns in shaping the devotional recounting of Christ's passion. The concern for health of body *and* spirit and the ultimate focus on penitence and forgiveness would place the liturgical patterns exploited here firmly in the family of rites related to anointing for the sick and dying, rather than rites of penance, baptism or exorcism. More work could certainly be done on locating probable sources and more subtle influences for the Insular prayerbook selections from this family of liturgical ritual. But that some such ritual is a part of the *Nunnaminster* compiler's experience and vocabulary is abundantly clear.

For example, literally at the "crucial" point in the sequence where Christ hangs on the cross, facing death, the prayers begin to meditate on the following body parts: his neck (Prayer 29, *Oratio de Collo*, Prayer of the Neck), his arms and hands (Prayer 30, *De Brachis et Manibus*, Concerning the Arms and Hands), his breast (Prayer 31, *De VII Donis Spiritus Sancti*, Concerning the 7 Gifts of the Holy Spirit), his shoulders (Prayer 32, *Item De Passione Crucis*, Another Concerning the Suffering on the Cross). The last two prayers listed do not announce their bodily foci as do the rubrics for the first two, but in Prayer 31 the gifts of the Holy Spirit are in Christ "semper in pectore claudendo" (always enclosed in the breast) and the prayer clearly

asks in Prayer 32 to be like the once-lost sheep, lifted onto Christ's shoulders. Somewhat later, associated with a meditation, on the Giving up of the Spirit (Prayer 36, *Tradidit Spiritum*), are some prayers on the senses of the head: the mouth (in *De Aceto et Felle*, Concerning the Vinegar and Gall, 35), eyes (*De Luminibus Clausis*, Concerning the Closing of the Eyes, 37), nostrils (*De Naribus*, Concerning the Nostrils, 38), and ears (*De Auribus*, Concerning the Ears, 39). All of these body parts are specifically mentioned in the rites for the sick and dying discussed above. Next, Prayer 40, *De Latere Domini* (Concerning the Side of the Lord) juxtaposes explicitly Eucharistic language with the imagery of medicine and healing for the wounds of sin, a combination suggestive of the Rite of Communion that is the central act of the visitation liturgy. Finally, Prayers 41 and 43 meditate on death and resurrection in ways that would seem appropriate for visitation rites where the priest prays for recovery, but more importantly for forgiveness of the sins of the infirm or dying, since heaven, rather than health, is of course the ultimate goal of Christian life.

This is not to say that the *Nunnaminster* prayers constitute an actual rite of anointing or visitation. They remain first-person meditations, in which there is no mention of oil, and the phrasing of the prayers is not drawn from any visitation prayers I have found.<sup>71</sup> Nevertheless, the coincidence of meditations on these very body parts inserted at this point in the passion narrative can hardly be accidental. These are prayers at least similar to those the pray-er might expect to hear in the face of illness or death, and they are offered to and for Christ at the moment of his death. This is a striking instance of "liturgical reading" in that not only is the rite of spiritual healing suggested for the pray-er's own life, but this liturgical anointing is, in effect, meditatively offered to Christ.<sup>72</sup> Perhaps the compiler imagines the origins of the rituals in Christ's own experiences and authorizes them by locating them there. Perhaps, as in the much

later meditations of Marjorie Kempe, who saw herself as a midwife at Christ's birth, the pray-er could imagine placing a healing touch on Christ's neck, arms, hands, breast, shoulders, mouth, eyes, nostrils and ears as she called upon them in prayer.<sup>73</sup> Meditative reading practices ranging "back" into the sacred scriptures find expression in the subject matter and acutely imagined details of the Christ Prayers; at the same time the celebration of the sacraments and the liturgical rituals referenced and reiterated in the collection carry the promise of that scripturally-experienced passion "forward" into the current life of the pray-er and her community.

The intimate relationship between spiritual health, redemption, forgiveness, and the Body of Christ is well-illustrated by Prayer 40, *De Latere Domini*, which is also, I suggest, a part of that "anointing sub-group:"

O medicinae diuinae  
 mirabilis dispensator  
 qui tibi lancea latus aperire permisisti,  
 Aperi mihi quaeso pulsanti ianuam uitae,  
 Ingressusque per eam  
 confitebor tibi per tui uulnus lateris  
 omnium uitiorum meorum uulnera  
 per misericordiae tuae medicamen sana,  
 Ne umquam indignus presum'p'tor  
 tui corporis et sanguinis reus efficiar,  
 Pro meritis propriis meorum peccatorum,  
 Sed ut anima mea miserationum  
 tuarum abundantia repleata,  
 Ut qui mihi es pretium ipse sis et praemium ,  
 Domine Ihesu Christe Amen.,

[O wonderful dispenser of divine medicine you who allowed your side to be opened with the lance, open to me, I beseech you, knocking at the doorway of life, and having entered through it, I will confess to you, through the wound in your side, the wounds of all my vices; heal (me) through the medicine of your mercy, lest I should ever become presumptuous and, in my guilt, unworthy to partake of your body and blood, in punishment for my own sins, but that you may fill my soul from the waters of your compassion, so that you who are my ransom may yourself also be my reward, Lord Jesus Christ, amen]

The complicated imagery here is a fine example of the “precocious” affectivity of these prayers; the pray-er imagines herself knocking at and entering into the “ianuam vitae” (doorway of life) which is the wound in Christ’s side. She enters into the body of Christ and also takes Christ’s body into her own when she receives the Body and Blood of the Eucharist. The prayer evinces a concern with “proper” reception of the sacrament, which must only be taken after a confession of her sins -- “confitebor tibi per tui uulnus lateris omnium uitiorum meorum uulnera” (I will confess to you, through the wound in your side, the wounds of all my vices) -- and having been healed by “misericordiae tuae medicamen” (the medicine of your mercy). The sacraments of the Church, and most especially the “chief” sacrament of the Eucharist, are the means by which believers who did not live with the incarnate Jesus, and are therefore faced with the “problem” of knowing the Transcendent God, come to experience him in their own bodily life. If a return to this problem concludes the Pentecost prayer, the solution is also there: the pouring out of the Spirit is itself one of the sacraments (confirmation); sacramental life is the solution and full participation in that life requires spiritual health. The motifs of healing throughout the collection are always at work in the service of the greater goods: physical health purchases time for the forgiveness of sins; purity of heart and life merits reception of the Eucharist; sacramental life guarantees eternal life and the building up of the Mystical Body of Christ.

The Christ Prayers sequence concludes with five prayers that contemplate the meaning of Christ’s life and death for members of the Christian community and the heavenly assembly. Prayer 44, a second prayer concerning the resurrection, focuses on Mary Magdalen’s experience with the risen Christ, Prayer 45 on Peter’s repentance, Prayer 46 on the Apostles’ presence at the Ascension, and Prayer 47 on Mary’s presence at Pentecost; Prayer 48 (which may or may not have been the final prayer of the collection) concerns the Future Judgment. We see here at the

end a gathering of the scriptural representatives of the faithful: Mary Magdalen, Peter, the apostles and Mary – the sinners and founder, the followers and perfect disciple -- all marshaled to point to an eschatological conclusion to the sequence. For the imagery of the last five prayers is insistently that of the heavenly communion of the saints, those to whom the speaker is already metaphysically joined as a member of the Body of Christ, but whom she also hopes to join in the interim paradise, a place of coolness, light and peace after death, where they will await together the Final Judgment.<sup>74</sup> In Prayer 44 the speaker asks to be placed “in conspectus diuinae maiestatis” (in full sight of your divine majesty); in Prayer 45 she requests never to be separated “a familiaritatis tuae contubernio” (from companionship and intimacy with you [or literally, “from sharing the tent of friendship with you”]) where “gratia tua copiosa resplendet” (your plentiful grace may glitter); in Prayer 46 she longs for heaven, to be “cum aquilis congregantibus” (with the eagles gathered) (cf. Matt. 24:28; Luc. 17:37). The eschatological imagery of the “pearl,” here associated with Mary, concludes Prayer 47. Finally, in Prayer 48, the speaker longs to hear the scriptural invitation: “Come, blessed of my Father, occupy the realm which has been prepared for you from the beginning of the world,” so that she may be “Ubi sancti sine fine requiescunt, Et ibi aepulentur omnes amici tui ...” (Where the saints without end rest and there all of your friends feast together). The vision of this place where the saints “rest” and “feast” is vivid. These final prayers create a clear picture of the longed for “there,” but also continue to emphasize the speaker’s need for forgiveness in order to be fully incorporated into that heavenly communion.

Immediately following the Christ Prayers, a Sacramental Hymn (Prayer 49) creates a sense of liturgical completeness that might be variously experienced or described. We might say that “listening to” the stories of Christ’s life and passion, as they are read and prayed over in the

Gospel lections and Christ Prayers, leads to the liturgically-inspired “action” of the Sacramental Hymn: a rhythm not unlike that of the mass itself where the Liturgy of the Word precedes the Liturgy of the Eucharist. Or perhaps the overall experience of the Christ Prayers as a type of spiritualized anointing ritual is one that would also liturgically issue into a rite of communion. Certainly the thematic emphases on the Body of Christ throughout the Christ Prayers prepare us for the particular focus of Prayer 48 on the heavenly company, feasting in the presence of God, which is a Eucharistic moment aptly celebrated by the hymn of Prayer 49. Birch calls the section which begins at Folio 38 with the Sacramental Hymn (his title) a “fresh collection of pieces” because he considers any “liturgical” aspect that might have been present in the group of 44 collects to terminate at this point.<sup>75</sup> I group the sacramental hymn here with the Christ Prayers only to suggest how apt the compiler’s decision seems in placing this prayer, which celebrates “Uerus enim cibus” (True food indeed) and “uerus potus fidelium” (true drink of the faithful), immediately after the Christ Prayers.

This prayer is one of the few in the collection that is not in the first person singular, but rather, as would befit a hymn, in the first person plural. The prayer is particularly concerned with the “incorporating” effect of the Eucharist: the speaker petitions God, “nos consortes facias” (make us brothers/sisters) through its communal reception. The petition asks to be worthy to share in the mystery of the sacrament with all of the saints and notes that it is through Christ’s sacrifice, both in his earthly life, but also as it is re-enacted in each celebration of the Eucharist, that his followers are sustained in their ability to love one another:

Dignare ergo petimus  
 sancti huius mysterii  
 particeps nos fieri  
 ad laudem tui nominis ,  
 Christe tuum preceptum est  
 ut diligamus inuicem ,

Sed hoc implere possumus  
adiuti tuo munere

[We ask therefore to be worthy to share in this sacred mystery to the praise of your name. Christ your teaching is that we might love one another, but we are able to satisfy this (only) with the gift of your aid.]

The *Nunnaminster* collection is dominated by this powerful central block of the Christ Prayers and the Sacramental Hymn. Individual prayers in the last two sections of the book never achieve the poetic satisfaction or theological sophistication of the prayers in the Christ Prayers sequence. After the “mountaintop” experiences of meditative encounters with the enfleshed Christ, contemplative dwelling on the heavenly communion of saints, and sacramental transformation suggested by the Eucharistic hymn, the pray-er is returned, as it were, to the valley of “nocturnal worries” that “preoccupied the imagination” according to Kabir’s study of the Anglo-Saxon understanding of the fate of the individual after death.<sup>76</sup> The remaining two sections of the collection are, however, thematically coherent in their foci on the inter-related concerns of repentance and judgment, sickness and danger which the pray-er faces both spiritually and physically, in soul and in body.

*Penitence/Judgment/Fate of the Soul Prayers (8: 1 confession, 4 penitential prayers,  
3 suffrages)*

The next eight prayers all continue the collection’s emphasis on penitence, but focus more keenly here on seeking forgiveness in anticipation of Judgment: both that of the individual and of the Last Judgment that all will face in the second coming. Each of the prayers in some way expresses remorse for sins, asks for absolution, or requests mercy at the time of judgment. Like Prayer 49, Prayer 50 is a hymn (specifically a matutinal hymn), and also in the first person

plural, addressing, in effect, the spiritual challenges of a “new day.” This hymn begins a section of the book that could be said to focus on the fate of the soul, which might, after rites of healing and Eucharistic participation, find itself this day before the heavenly judge. This is not to say that there is a lack of bodily imagery still present – the whole collection’s “bodily” emphasis remains strong even here. Rather the “moment” of particular concern in this section, that of judgment, is by definition a moment that will be experienced by only the soul when the body and soul part company after death.

The simple petition of Prayer 50, “Peccata nostra ablue/Miserere nobis Deus” would be followed (if a leaf were not missing after the first line of the prayer) with the more vivid request found in the popular “Prayer of Saint Ephaim, Deacon” as it is recorded in the *Book of Cerne* (Prayer 45):

Erue me de cœno iniquitatum mearum,  
                   ut non infigar in æternum.  
 Libera me de ore inimici mei:  
                   ecce enim ut leo rugiens devorare me cupit.  
 Excita potentiam tuam,  
                   et veni, ut salvum me facias;  
 corusca coruscationes tuas.  
 Disperge virtutem inimici,  
                   amator hominum benignissime.<sup>77</sup>

[Dig me up from the mud of my sins, so that I may not be stuck fast in them in eternity. Free me from the mouth of my enemy: behold indeed that raging lion desires to devour me. Rouse up your power, and come, so that you may achieve my salvation; Flash your lightning. Disperse the strengths of enemies, Most kindly Lover of men]

The beginning of *Nunnaminster*’s lengthy prayer of confession, Prayer 52, is lost with the missing leaf, but it is also found, complete in *Cerne*. The pray-er invokes Christ with a litany of his attributes leading up to his role as the one seated at the right hand of the Father, to whom the speaker brings her request for remission of sins. Christ is the person of the Trinity to whom the particular power of judging at the Last Judgment is usually imputed; here Christ is the Confessor,

Judge, Defender and Teacher to whom the penitent pray-er appeals. The missing leaf includes the greater part of the “examination of conscience,” which catalogues many specific categories of sin (those committed through pride, gluttony, blasphemy, earthly delights, etc.) as well as bodily apertures of sin including some very reminiscent of the “anointing” sub-group in the Christ prayers:

peccauī in oculis meis et in auribus meis  
 peccauī in naribus et in auribus  
 peccauī in manibus et pedibus  
 peccauī in lingua et guttore  
 peccauī in collo et in pectore<sup>78</sup>

[I have sinned in my eyes and in my ears, I have sinned in my nostrils and in my ears, I have sinned in my hands and feet, I have sinned in my tongue and throat, I have sinned in my neck and breast.]

This bodily confession goes on to include, as it picks up in the surviving portion in *Nunnaminster*, the sins of the bone and flesh, marrow and kidneys, before concluding that the speaker has sinned “in anima mea et in omni corpore meo.” The litanic physical specificity of this prayer clearly links it with both the preceding Christ Prayers sequence and the “Lorica of Laidcenn” to follow.

Prayer 53 imagines those sins being washed away (in a prayer that may in fact be taken from a baptismal rite<sup>79</sup> which leads into another, longer prayer (54) that likewise links the sacraments of baptism, which washed away original sin, with the tears of penitence and the blood of Christ’s sacrifice which serve to wash away the sins committed in life. The last three prayers in this Penitence/Judgment “grouping” are suffrages to three particular saints: the Archangel Michael, the Virgin Mary, and John the Baptist. All three are asked for help specifically in the pray-er’s judgment before God. The pray-er petitions Michael, “Subueni mihi apud altissimum iudicem”(assist me before the most high judge); Mary, “Esto mihi [p]ia

dominatrix , Et cordis mei inluminatrix , Et adiutrix apud Deum patrem omnipotentem”(be to me a kind patroness and enlightener of my heart and helper before God, the omnipotent Father); and John the Baptist, “Esto mihi pius interuentor apud misericordem Deum redemptorem nostrum” (be a kind intercessor for me in the presence of the merciful God our redeemer). Brown notes that these three saints appear in their “historic order.”<sup>80</sup> It is perhaps also pertinent that as a group these three saints are particularly invoked in some versions of the Confiteor, although this prayer has existed in many forms which call upon a variable pantheon of intercessors. These three saints are, however, are often included at the beginning of such litanies.<sup>81</sup>

These eight prayers following the Christ Prayers are strongly unified in subject matter and recurring motifs: forgiveness of sins (all), Judgment of the individual soul (52, 54, 55, 56, 57), Last Judgment (51, and referred to in 52, 54 and 55), and baptism (53, 54, 57). The prayers express a desire for heaven (50, 54, 55, 56, 57) and a fear of hell (51, 52, 56), although the hopeful vision of the former dominates here and throughout the *Nunnaminster* collection. As the *Oratio ad Sanctum Michaelum* concludes: “te preclarum atque decorem summae diuinita[tis] ministrum, Ut in nouissimo die benigne susci[pi]as animam meam in sinu tuo sanctissimo , Et per[du]cas eam in locum refrigerii pacis et lucis et quietis, [U]bi sanctorum animae cum laetitia et innumerabile [ga]udio futurum iudicium et gloriam beatae resur[re]ctionis expectant” (I beg you, noble and splendid minister of the supreme Godhead, that on the last day with kindness you may lift up my soul in your most holy embrace, and you may lead her into the place of refreshment, peace, light and rest, where the souls of the saints, with gladness and unmeasurable joy, await the future judgment and the blessed glory of the resurrection). The tone throughout this section is one of calm assurance that despite the dangers, the speaker’s soul will attain that joyful place by Christ’s intercession. Imagining herself in the third *Oratio* (Prayer 54) “ad

portam salutis aeternae” (at the gates of eternal salvation), in an apocalyptic frenzy of danger, the pray-er still will be saved by the merciful action of Jesus:

Tu conspicias domine pericula mea in quibus consisto ,  
 Et quibus malis circumdatus sum ,  
 Quantisque per meritum meum premor aduersitatibus  
 libera me , salua me , Protege me , defende me ,  
 Ut non rideant de me inimici mei ,  
 Tu es Deus solus spes mea ,  
 In te solum confido  
 de nullius hominum solacio spero,  
 Guberna me ut pius pater ,  
 Ut post tantas talesque procellas seculi huius  
 undique saeuientes  
 ad portam salutis aeternae  
 te duce peruenire merear ,  
 Et cum aliis quos eripuisti  
 bone Ihesu  
 te laudare merear  
 Deus per infinita secula seculorum amen.,<sup>82</sup>

[You see, Lord, my dangers, amidst which I stand, and the evils by which I am surrounded, And by how many adversaries I am pressed through my own fault, Free me, save me, protect me, defend me, so that my enemies may not mock me. You alone, God, are my hope, in you alone I trust and I expect solace from no man, Guide me, as a holy father, so that after the great and fearsome storms of this age, raging everywhere, I may deserve to arrive at the gate of eternal salvation, led by you, and with others whom you snatched away, Good Jesus, I may deserve to praise you, God through infinite generations of generations, amen]

These dangers that “God sees,” which have threatened especially the body in this world, are the thematic concern of the final section of the book.

*Protection/Healing/Fate of the Body Prayers (8: including all “magical” material)*

The last eight items in the collection are prayers for protection and healing, ranging from the very brief borrowings from Mass prayers (60 and 61) to the lengthy *Lorica of Laidcenn* (63) and including two brief “lorica-like” prayers (58 and 59) and so-called “charms” against poison (62) and for the eyes (64) and perhaps headache (65). In this final section we seem to be returned

to the fate of the body, with no further specific attention given to the scenes of judgment. Literally the prayers ask to return the body to a state of health and protect it in this life, but possibilities for metaphorical readings abound in light of the whole collection's equation of physical and spiritual health. And when a final section of "bodily" concern is juxtaposed with the preceding section focused on the soul, we may suspect that the compiler is again making use of the liturgical vocabulary of death in which ritual attention is given to the separate journeys of the soul and body.<sup>83</sup>

As noted above, I believe a careful reader of this material will find that the "magical" element has been exaggerated by some modern commentators. The prayer for the eyes *Pro Dolore Oculorum* (64), for instance, while specifically requesting a cure for the eyes, is entirely "orthodox":

+ O Ihesu  
 adesto cum uisu  
 es oculos meos  
 saluator meos  
 medice diuine  
 omnium es prime  
 dic sanabo  
 te ab omni malo  
 qui potest saluare  
 da mihi donare  
 lumen oculorum  
 rector sæculorum  
 amen ,

[O Jesus be present with the power of sight, you are my eyes (and) my savior, divine physician, first (cause) of all things, , say (this), "I will heal (you) of every evil," (you) who can save; give the gift to me, light of the eyes, Ruler of the ages, amen.]

We have already seen that the compiler is working with the motif of "eyes," "seeing," and "sight" throughout the collection and even in this section culls two brief prayers from Mass collects for Epiphany and Advent (60 and 61) which begin by calling on the God "who sees."

Prayer 60 connects God's ability to see our endangered condition with his power to give us health: "Deus qui nos in tantis periculis constitutos humana conspicias fragilitate non posse subsistere, Da nobis salutem mentis et corporis ut ea quae pro peccatis nostris patimur te adiuuante uincamus per." (God, you who see us placed in so many dangers, not able to subsist in human frailty, Give to us health of mind and body so that with your help we may overcome those [dangers] which we suffer for our sins, through ...) This prayer is well attested, appearing twice in the Leofric Missal and also in the Gregorian Sacramentary edited by Menard as well as in many later service books under a variety of rubrics.<sup>84</sup> It is not farfetched to suggest then that the analogizing imagination behind the *Nunnaminster* compilation could include a prayer of healing for the eyes to also metaphorically include a desire for healing of the spiritual "eyes" with which she has so minutely imagined Jesus's life. *Nunnaminster's* preoccupation with eyes may be part of a larger cultural fascination noted by Raw, who writes, "The emphasis placed by writers such as Bede and Ælfric on the making visible of the divine recalls two features of their outlook: first, the prominent positions given by the Anglo-Saxon artists to the sense of sight and, secondly, the love of light, apparent in Old English poetry and in Anglo-Saxon jewelry."<sup>85</sup> Eyes and spiritual sight are important, too, because heaven is imagined throughout the collection and in prayers for the dying as a place of light. Paxton notes that prayers written by Caesarius of Arles for a service over the dead body and at the grave sum up "the antique inheritance of Christian belief about the afterlife....The soul's destination is a realm of light that it reaches after crossing a region of darkness and shadows."<sup>86</sup>

The inclusion of Prayer 62 (*Contra Uenenum*, Against Poison) by another contemporary hand, suggests that the person who added this material here could discern its appropriateness for the collection at this point, for it is a prayer that does include references to God's sight, eyes that

can see, and enlightenment. This well-known prayer, extracted from the Apocryphal Acts of John was, according to Sims-Williams “widely used in the Middle Ages as a charm against poison and as a liturgical blessing for wine.”<sup>87</sup> It is worth remembering that in its context in the *Acta Iohannis*, the miracle by which John remains unharmed when he drinks poison, and for which this prayer also asks, was requested and performed as an act of faith in the hopes of converting those who witnessed it. John asks, in a phrase that well suggests the aptness of the prayer’s inclusion here: “et da in conspectu tuo omnibus his quos tu creasti, cculos ut videant, aures ut audiant, et cor ut magnitudinem tuam intelligant” (and grant in your sight to all of these whom you have created eyes that they may see and ears that they may hear and a heart that may understand your greatness).<sup>88</sup> The prayer’s use as a liturgical blessing for wine also reinforces the Eucharistic theme that permeates the entire *Nunnaminster* collection.

I will not address the “Lorica of Laidcenn” (“Hanc Luricam Lodgen . . .,” 63) at any length here as it is one of the better studied pieces in the collection, except to re-state, as noted above, that although the incantational specificity of the prayer and its traditional rubric (which is included in *Nunnaminster*) may lead to suspicions of magical use, the literal purpose proclaimed in its conclusion is entirely orthodox: a petition to live long, so that the speaker may repent of all sins.<sup>89</sup> For centuries a popular petition in Christian prayer has been to be protected from sudden death, arising from a widespread belief in the importance of having time before death for repentance and forgiveness. As also noted, the emphasis on body parts is a central theme of the *Nunnaminster* collection, making the inclusion of this prayer natural. Again, as with other potentially “magical” material, it is possible that the compiler has intentionally focused on setting this ancient form of prayer in a more fully spiritualizing context. Lorica prayers have, of course, ample scriptural precedent, including Job 29:14, Isaiah 11:5, Isaiah 59:17, Luke 12:35,

Romans 13:12, Ephesians 6:13, 1 Thessalonians 5:8, and 1 Peter 1:13. And in terms of liturgical overtones, the oil of the anointing ritual is in at least one version specifically likened to armor. In the St. Gall sacramentary a prayer *Ad infirmum unguendum*, which may have been used for the sick or for prayer over the dying, begins, “Ungo te de oleo sanctificato, ut more militis uncti praeparatus ad luctam possis aereas superare catervas” (I anoint you with sanctified oil so that in the manner of a warrior prepared through anointing for battle you will be able to prevail over the airy hordes).<sup>90</sup> The metaphorical clothing of the body in the lorica may also resonate with a prayer from the Vatican Gelasian meant to be said while the body was being laid out, washed, and re clothed. In this prayer a heavenly re-clothing parallels the earthly attentions to the body: “Suscipe, domine, animam serui tui...[in] uestem caelestem indue eam et laua eam sanctum fontem uitae aeternae” (Receive, Lord, the soul of your servant...clothe it in heavenly vestments and wash it in the holy font of eternal life.)<sup>91</sup> The passage from Isaiah (59:17: “He put on righteousness as his breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on his head; he put on the garments of vengeance and wrapped himself in zeal as in a cloak,” ) as it will be further refracted through Ephesians 6:11-17 (“And take unto you the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit [which is the word of God]”) is clearly behind Prayer 58, *Sequitur Oratio*, which by its presence in the collection before the *Lorica of Laidcenn* also helps to authorize by scriptural pedigree and monastic reference the seventh-century Irish prayer:

Fiat mihi quaeso domine  
 uera caritas supereminens cuncta  
 fides firma in corde ,  
 Galea salutis in capite  
 Signum Christi in fronte .  
 Uerbum salutis in ore ,  
 Uoluntas bona in mente,  
 Precinctio castitatis in circuitu ,  
 Honestas actionis in opere  
 Sobrietas in consuetudine,

Humilitas in prosperitate,  
 Patientia in tribulatione,  
 Spes in creatore,  
 Amor uitae aeternae perseuerantia  
 usque in finem amen.,

[I beg you O Lord, let (these things) be mine: True Charity which surpasses all things, faith, firm in heart, a helmet of salvation on the head, the sign of Christ on the forehead, the word of health/salvation in the mouth, good will in the mind, the belt of chastity around (me/my loins implied), honesty in the work I carry out, sobriety in habit, humility in prosperity, patience in tribulation, hope in my creator, Love of eternal life, steadfastness until the end, amen.]

The development within this prayer itself is instructive, perhaps, in offering a way of reading the whole final section of prayers. The pray-er moves from requests for virtues imaginatively located in or on six body parts (heart, head, forehead, mouth, mind, loins [implied]) to petitions for spiritual vigor in six types of more abstract situations, several of which seem to suggest monastic life (works, habits, prosperity, tribulation, hope in the creator, steadfastness). The virtues are figured here as spiritual armor girding an actual physical body as it ventures out into a world of situational temptations. For even as the final section may be linked to rituals for the dying and dead, the person who prays this collection can of course only be contemplating those connections as an exercise in *memento mori*. The pray-er is not dead, and the armor she puts on must serve her first in this world if she is ever to be clothed in her *uestem caelestem*.

The prologue to the *Rule of Saint Benedict* also includes the imagery of “putting on” the armor of the Lord. Saint Benedict urged his followers: “Clothed then with faith and the performance of good works, let us set out on this way, with the Gospel as our guide, that we may deserve to see him *who has called us to his kingdom* (1 Thess 2:12).”<sup>92</sup> Later in the Prologue another passage strikes the same theme as the conclusion of the *Lorica of Laidcenn*, to the effect that time in the flesh is precious because it affords the possibility of gaining eternal life:

Brothers, now that we have asked the Lord who will dwell in his tent, we have heard the instruction for dwelling in it, but only if we fulfill the obligations of those who live there. We must, then, prepare our hearts and bodies for the battle of holy obedience to his instructions. What is not possible to us by nature, let us ask the Lord to supply by the help of his grace. If we wish to reach eternal life, even as we avoid the torments of hell, then -- while there is still time, while we are in this body and have the time to accomplish all these things by the light of life -- we must run and do now what will profit us forever.<sup>93</sup>

The very last piece in the *Book of Nunnaminster* is a brief prayer that does have a history of use as a medical charm (Prayer 65). Immediately following the prayer for a cure for the eyes noted above, and without any new rubric we find:

Caput Christi oculos Gesaeie frons nasuum Noe labia lingua Salomonis collum Timothei, mens Benjamin, pectus Pauli , iunctus lohannis , fides Abrahae , sanctus sanctus sanctus usque ad finem

Head of Christ, Eyes of Isaiah, forehead [of Elijah], Nose of Noah, lip [of Job], tongue of Solomon, neck of Timothy, mind/heart of Benjamin, breast of Paul, joints of John, faith of Abraham, Holy, Holy, Holy, until the end.

The bracketed emendations are from Sims-Williams' chapter on "Prayer and Magic" where in discussing the Irish origins of this "charm" he quotes the following Old Irish rubric, copied in a ninth-century Irish hand in a gospel book now at St. Gallen: "This is sung every day about your head against headache. After singing it you put your spittle into your palm, and you put it around your two temples and on the back of your head, and then you sing your paternoster thrice and you put a cross of your spittle on the crown of your head and then you make this sign five times on your head."<sup>94</sup> No doubt this item is indeed a "charm" with contemporary magical-medical use in the world of the *Nunnaminster* compiler. It does not, however, include a rubric for such use

here, nor, although it is the last item in the collection, is it “marginalized” by inclusion by a different hand on a fly leaf or literally in a margin, as are the more “magical” pieces in the *Royal* prayerbook.<sup>95</sup> Michelle Brown suggests that in the whole final section of *Nunnaminster* (folios 37-41, prayers 60-65) the script and decoration change, although the hand appears to be the same.<sup>96</sup> Birch had noted that the hand slowly devolves into a different form throughout the text.<sup>97</sup> Both attribute the changes to the influence of the exemplar(s) in some form, Brown suspecting a new exemplar especially for the last section. Should this be the case, however, it only strengthens the sense that this predominantly “Irish Material” is being consciously and quite purposefully included into this already clearly focused compilation.

In any case, this seemingly bizarre and unsophisticated prayer, “*Caput Christi, oculos Geseie*,” manages to conclude the collection in a stunningly appropriate manner, invoking one final time, in its listing of saintly limbs, the collection’s pervasive imagery of the physical and mystical body of which Christ is the head, but in such a way as to recall at the same time the gathered communion of Old and New Testament “saints” who figure more comprehensively in the opening prayer of St. Gregory and whose intercessory power is also invoked in the *Lorica* on the previous page. The final image of the book is, then, of this varied holy communion singing the “Holy, Holy Holy,” the prayer of angelic praise which is sung before the celestial throne of God, reminding us once more of heaven, the destination so longingly invoked at the conclusion of the Christ Prayers (Prayer 48, *De Iudicio Futuro*): “Ubi sancti sine fine requiescunt, Et ibi aepulentur omnes amici tui ...” (Where the saints rest without end and there all your friends may be feasting). For, the *Sanctus* of course is also sung at Mass after the Preface but before the Canon, alerting the faithful to the presence of the whole communion of saints at each celebration of the Eucharist. *The Book of Nunnaminster* circles back at this moment to the Eucharistic theme

sounded often throughout the codex and with which it would presumably have begun (but for the missing quire), that is, with the preparations for the last supper in the Gospel of Matthew, the first gathering of Jesus's friends at the feast which instituted the Sacrament of the Body of Christ.

### *Ancillary Material*

*The Book of Nunnaminster* includes a note in a later tenth-century hand on folio 40b that outlines the boundaries of the property which Queen Ealhswið had in Winchester (Item 66), indicating that the book had a close connection with the Abbey she founded there. Whether she was the possessor of the book at one time has been debated, but it is possible.<sup>98</sup>

Three brief prayers are also found on the flyleaf, likewise in a later hand: A formula for confession in the first person singular, adapted for use by either a woman (soror/peccatrice) or a man (frater/peccatori) (Prayer 67); a formula of absolution addressed to an individual (Prayer 68); and a brief bidding that God will "attend to our prayers" (Prayer 69). The insertion by a later hand of confessional formulae here suggests that as much as a century later, the book might well have been in use in preparation for private penance -- very much in keeping with the personal meditative self-fashioning I have suggested here.

### *Composing Prayer, Compilatio, and Lectio Divina*

Rachel Fulton has recently suggested that in order for modern readers to appreciate how prayer texts function, that is, how a written text can lead the mind or heart into an actual

experience of transcendent communication, it is necessary to “use” them. Acknowledging the oddity of this approach for her scholarly, rather than devotional, context, she nevertheless attempts to demonstrate by leading her readers through the contemplative engagement with a prayer from Anselm’s meditations as they are recorded in Admont MS 289.<sup>99</sup> Fulton asks first, “Why make new prayers?” as Anselm did. She suggests that prayers are made when the old ones no longer “work,” but also nods to the possibility of a purely artistic impulse. In either case, she suggests that the prayer “artifact,” the written record we have of it, is intimately related to the craft of memory, as it is described by Mary Carruthers. Private prayers such as Anselm’s, or those circulating in the common corpus of prayers from which the *Nunnaminster* compiler drew, are, as individual pieces, examples of the craft of “making thoughts about God,” and therefore are created from the storehouses of memory and with the mnemonic tools that Carruthers has explored so deeply.<sup>100</sup> For this reason, Fulton suggests, such prayers are short and replete with rhyme and rhetorical flourishes that will make them memorable.

I concur and would add that these prayers are also inherently memorable because they *are* small examples of memory-made-visible, in a sense. Their images, vocabulary and even full phrases flow from the practice of *lectio* and are intended, in Fulton’s terms, both as “artifacts” of that experience and “tools” for the continued practice of it. The composer of Prayer 28, *De Veste Eiusdem*, for example, may have read many times the account of the casting of lots for Christ’s garment (found in all four gospels), recognized the allusion to Psalm 22 that the relevant verses in Luke and Mark contain, and also have known patristic sources which likened Christ’s clothing to his humanity, as well as those which reflect on the shame associated with nakedness that resulted from Adam’s sin. The idea of a “garment” likewise calls to mind the parables about proper attire for a wedding feast, which is of course, as suggested both within the gospels and by

the Fathers, a figure for the Kingdom of God. The composer of Prayer 28 references all of this material, and more, in a prayer of only sixty-four words.

Because the prayers of the Insular prayerbooks are so intensely allusive, we can say that at some point the composition of each one afforded someone an opportunity to link his or her own desires to the patterns of Christian history as these had been discovered in the Scriptures and the Fathers. Many of the individual prayers are exuberantly associative (for instance *De Aqua Conuersa*, 14, discussed above); others delight in the numerological significance (1, *Oratio Sancti Gregorii*) or alphabetical play (the *Royal* abecedary sequence or the *Cerne* acrostics) or arcane knowledge (apocryphal material such as the *Contra Uenenum* or Hebrew words as found in the *Lorica of Laidcenn*) that are also typical fruits of *lectio* as discussed in Chapter One, above. Each prayer is the product of someone's intimate knowledge of the authoritative texts of the tradition garnered by prayerful engagement. There are prayers within the *Nunnaminster* collection, including sixteen prayers in the Christ sequence, that have no known exemplar. Perhaps these were composed by the *Nunnaminster* scribe/compiler in response to her own prayerful reading of the gospel passions, among other texts. Each individual prayer stands, then, as a written testimony to some unknown composer's experience of *lectio*.

As a compilation, *The Book of Nunnaminster* might be said, likewise, to be both an "artifact" and a "tool" for the practice of prayerful reading. In this case, the act of compilation and arrangement itself may, in effect, mimic or recapitulate the meditative experience of *lectio* for the compiler. The book, then, as a collection, is a fixed memorialization of that process which nevertheless can be to some degree experienced again by each new reader of the codex as it is arranged.

For the compiler of *The Book of Nunnaminster* drew expertly on a wide range of sources

to create a unique volume with a strong thematic program whose resonances and meanings only deepen with repeated reading. For instance, material culled from all four gospels is certainly represented in the Christ prayers sequence where *compilatio* is clearly used to round out the meditation. The compiler chooses to “fill in” extra material – and deepen the web of associations – by including more than one prayer on several key topics. There are three different birth prayers as well as two each on the Last Supper, the suffering on the cross, and the resurrection. Different aspects of the same event, drawn from different Gospel accounts, are emphasized with the inclusion of another prayer on the same subject. For instance, Prayer 6, the second birth prayer (*De Natale Domini*), focuses on Christ’s humbling of himself to be wrapped in swaddling clothes while Prayer 7, (*In Natale Domini*), the third birth prayer, focuses on Christ’s humbling of himself to be swathed in a human body. The juxtaposition of these two prayers further highlights the connections between “clothes” and “body” in the collection. Likewise the washing of the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper (found only in John) is represented in the second prayer (*In Cæna Domini*), deepening further the bodily implications of that episode.<sup>101</sup>

Another aspect of the *compilatio* evident in the collection is the inclusion of liturgically resonant groupings, which the compiler has likewise augmented as necessary to complete a thematic motif. Early in the sequence a liturgical emphasis seems clear as prayers 5-12 cover the Birth, Circumcision, Baptism, and Forty Days Fast. But what then, one wonders, is the source of Prayer 8 in the middle of this grouping: *De Cibo*? This celebration of the first nursing is non-scriptural, and, as far as I know, non-liturgical, but its inclusion here does serve to thematically link the prayers on Christ’s infancy to those later in the sequence that have sacramental, and specifically Eucharistic resonance. Likewise, within the “anointing” prayers of similar construction and purpose (29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40) which can be immediately traced

to an abecedary prayer from the *Royal* prayerbook and suggest as well liturgical origins, *De Luminibus Clausis* (37) is interpolated from an unknown source or perhaps composed to fulfill the pattern of liturgical association which is central to *Nunnaminster's* penitential program while also serving the motif on sight and vision discussed above.<sup>102</sup>

Certainly the compiler may have experienced the crafting of the collection as an opportunity for continued meditation on the subjects and themes under her hands as she worked. What is more readily knowable is that the book as it has been shaped seems to offer the possibility of re-creating such a meditative engagement for each reader who takes it up. As noted above the very basic “dialogic” nature of the codex insists that *lectio* and *oratio* are two aspects of an encounter with the texts within it. In addition, I hope I have demonstrated in my detailed discussions of the sections of the book and individual prayers from each section how the themes and motifs are woven throughout the collection as it has been arranged through this act of *compilatio*.

Rachel Fulton meditates on one prayer to Mary from the illustrated Admont MS 289, and finds that its proper “use” creates a pattern of thought ranging back and forth through the prayer text itself, the liturgical intertexts it suggests, and the visual art it references. Fulton writes, “There is a restlessness to the experience, almost as if the various textual, visual, and contextual recollections have been intercut for the screen, but there is also a stillness, as the recollections converge on the making of the artifact of prayer.”<sup>103</sup> I have suggested above that the same might be said for the “working” of Prayer 28 (*De Ueste Eiusdem*, On His Garment). But Prayer 28 does not stand alone; its place within a compilation means that other layers of association are built, or “crafted” by the art of *compilatio*, into its immediate context, deepening the possibilities for *The Book of Nunnaminster's* fruitful use in *lectio*. The pray-er encounters *De Ueste Eiusdem* at the

mid-point in a codex-wide exploration of the motif of “clothing,” certainly a subject of considerable interest in a book with a central theme of the Body of Christ. Prayer 28 hearkens back then not only to its scriptural referents (Matt 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34; John 19:23-34), but also to the prayer about Christ’s swaddling clothes at the beginning of the sequence (Prayer 6, *De Natale Domini*). The motif of clothing is central to the Lorica prayers (58 and 63 and even the *Oratio Sancti Gregorii*) which imagine Christ and the virtues as clothing for the faithful. Prayer 28 also includes references to the nakedness of Adam, and asks that the “drape of sins” be removed from the sinner so that she may “deserve to enter the wedding feast, not naked, but clothed in the wedding garment” (“in illo nuptiali conuiuio non nudus sed indutus ueste nuptiali intrare merear”). We are returned to the wedding feast of heaven also suggested in the prayer on the wedding feast of Cana (14, *De Aqua in Uinum Conversa*) and in the prayer still to come on Future Judgment (48). The wedding feast is also the Eucharistic feast suggested in many of the Christ Prayers and celebrated in the Sacramental hymn; it is the feast first instituted at the Last Supper, recounted at the beginning of *Nunnaminster* in the Gospel lections and which the final note of the whole collection: “Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus,” also announces.

To the extent that the collection is shaped specifically as a meditative reading experience, the pray-er who takes it up and reads/prays through it is “constructed” as a self engaged in the transformative experience of *lectio*. She asks throughout the collection to be changed by her encounters with the Christ of the Scriptures and with the Christ of her ranging, deeply imagined meditations. The change she prays for is ultimately nothing less than an incorporation of her individual body and soul into the Mystical Body of Christ. To finally effect this transformation, the pray-er needs not only to “read” herself there as an individual, but to widen the hermeneutic beyond her cell.

*Compilatio and Liturgical Reading*

For this act of drawing together prayers from disparate sources and arranging them into a coherent, richly resonant spiritual experience is not only an exercise in re-creating the meditative associativeness typical of individual *lectio*; I propose as well that the whole compilation here is shaped as an experience of “liturgical reading.”

The liturgical elements of the *Book of Nunnaminster* might be summarized as follows:

- 1) Liturgical allusiveness in the vocabulary and phrasing within individual prayers.
- 2) Calendrical subject matter in the Christ Prayers.
- 3) Sacramental subject matter throughout the codex.
- 4) Liturgically-inspired shaping of private prayers.
- 4) Overarching “sacramental” or “liturgical” shaping to the whole collection which raises the mind to the shared implications of private prayer.

The pervasiveness of the first three elements has been suggested in the detailed analysis of the codex undertaken in this chapter. First, regarding the verbal allusiveness, I have touched on the many instances throughout the collection when whole prayers or phrases are culled from the Mass and other non-Eucharistic liturgies, particularly those associated with sickness and death. Similarly, scriptural, and especially psalm allusions are often also borrowings from the Divine Office (as indicated by Kuypers, Birch, and Brown in their editions). Second, as to the Calendrical overlay in the Christ Prayers, we have seen that early in the sequence a group of prayers are suggestive of feasts celebrated throughout the liturgical year, and not just during Holy Week. More work could certainly be done on the “liturgical shape” of the Christ Prayers sequence itself and the way that those forty-four prayers use the liturgical calendar to raise the mind to “God’s time.” My conclusions here, however, are focused on the whole book. Third, I hope I have shown that sacramental subjects, particularly Eucharist but also Baptism, Penance

and Anointing, are contemplated throughout the book. I have suggested in fact that “sacraments” is the answer the *Book of Nunnaminster* offers to the questions: How does one come to know the transcendent Christ? How does one ultimately become a fully incorporated member of the Mystical Body of which Christ is the Head?

The last two liturgical elements listed above both involve the act of shaping -- the structuring and ordering -- both of the individual prayers and the whole collection into forms that have liturgical resonance. On the level of the individual prayer, I would like to offer a few reflections on three prayer forms which are especially important in this collection: the collect, the litany, and the lorica. It is worth considering that many prayers throughout the collection, including all of the Christ Prayers, are collects. The collect is the quintessentially communal prayer which gathers or “collects” the desires of the faithful at Mass, here re-purposed as a form for prayers of personal devotion, as indeed it had been for several centuries by the time these prayers were written.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, the individual who uses this prayer form to articulate her own needs, perhaps hears in the balanced clauses the echoing patterns so familiarly intoned in public liturgies. Likewise litanies had well-known public use, as noted above, especially in penitential processions. Behind each “Oret pro me,” of the important opening prayer of Saint Gregory (Prayer 1, *Oratio Sancti Gregorii*) we may hear the echo of the repeated “Ora pro nobis” of the Litany of the Saints used in Mass settings, for instance at the Easter Vigil, and offered to a variable cast of saints. This “echo” places the individual pray-er of the “*Oratio Sancti Gregorii*,” in a spiritual chamber usually crowded with both earthly supplicants and heavenly intercessors. While the collect and litany when used as a private form may carry with them associations with public, liturgical use, the lorica that is by its nature an individual’s private prayer, is pulled here into the realm of liturgy by its presence in this compilation. The lengthy

Prayer of Saint Gregory at the beginning is balanced by the even longer *Lorica of Laidcenn* (63) near the end of the collection, to which it is also linked by decoration.<sup>105</sup> In a sense, the lorica, which employs litanic repetition, is a mirror image of the liturgical litany of the saints. The litany looks “outward” to those members of Christ’s body who have preceded the supplicant into heavenly communion, calling upon their aid to merit a place with them. The lorica calls Christ’s blessing and protection “inward” upon the members of the individual’s body, but ultimately for the same incorporating end.

The fact that the whole collection moves, in some sense, from “litany” to “lorica” brings us back to a consideration of the shape of the whole. The ordering of the text by the compiler has a liturgically resonant shape which might be variously described by different interpreters.<sup>106</sup> As indicated above, I believe that the various liturgies that were still evolving at this time to ritualize healing and dying, through the rites for the Visitation of the Sick, are especially pertinent to the shape of the whole collection. No particular known ritual corresponds exactly to the shape of *Nunnaminster*, but within this family of rites we find use of the Gospel passions, Trinitarian opening formulae (used in the blessing of the oil), anointing of particular body parts, reception of the Eucharist, prayers for the soul’s journey to judgment and prayers over the body to be buried. In addition, the rites for healing were moving towards an increasingly spiritualized emphasis on penance and forgiveness that is certainly an overarching concern in the *Nunnaminster* collection. For even if the individual pray-er of these “private” prayers is actually sick, or even dying, her prayers can really “only” be for spiritual health. These prayers are not actually rubrics for ritual use: the pray-er does not directly speak of anointing and cannot actually take the Eucharist or prepare her own body for a heavenly clothing.<sup>107</sup> Rather, she imaginatively exploits these liturgical conventions, in this case “constructing a self” who ministers to her own soul, healing it

by contemplating its final destiny, both for her own sake and for the sake of the whole Mystical Body. She serves through this program of individual prayer the needs of her own body and soul – the lorica impulse – but for the purpose of joining the heavenly body of saints invoked in litanies: the health of the one body is not merely a synecdochical figure for the health of the whole, but a constitutive element.

The compiler who created this remarkable and unique prayerbook arrives at a conclusion within this collection of texts-to-be-read that reading alone, no matter how deeply imagined, will never be the complete answer to the problem of knowing the Incarnate God in and with her own human body. Liturgical, and specifically, sacramental life is the answer that *The Book of Nunnaminster* not only endorses, but also seeks to embody. The experience it affords an individual pray-er at her *lectio* is quite consciously compiled and shaped to evoke and effect both individual spiritual healing and ultimately communal mystical incorporation.

A letter of Saint Augustine expresses well the ultimate theme and promise of *The Book of Nunnaminster*, which despite its disparate parts may serve as an exemplum of the healthy and harmonious functioning of a composite whole:

But all of these things one and the same Spirit worketh, dividing to every one according as he will [I Cor 12:11]; dividing, therefore, but not Himself, those diversities [which] are spoken of as members in the body, because the ears have not the same function as the eyes, and, so, divided, because He Himself is one and the same. Thus, different duties are harmoniously allotted to the different members. However, when we are in good health, in spite of these members being different, they rejoice in common and equal health, all together, not separately, not one with more, another with less. *The head of this body is Christ, the unity of*

*this body is proved by our sacrifice*, which the Apostle refers to briefly when he says: ‘For we being many are one bread, one body’ [1 Cor 10:17].<sup>108</sup>

*The Book of Nunnaminster*, is a compilation of textual threads of potentially competing character -- Irish and Roman, scriptural and apocryphal, liturgical and magical, litany and lorica – knit together with extraordinary skill to form an almost seamless spiritual “garment” for the pray-er who desires to “put on” Christ.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wieck 9.

<sup>2</sup> Birch 35-97.

<sup>3</sup> Kuypers 1-198.

<sup>4</sup> See below, note 11.

<sup>5</sup> On the nature of miscellanies, see Hanna and the “Introduction” to Nichols and Wenzel.

<sup>6</sup> Paxton 13.

<sup>7</sup> The probable use by women of *The Book of Nunnaminster* and other Insular prayer books is proposed by Michelle Brown and will be further discussed below. She writes, “...within three of the Mercian prayerbooks there is a steady stream of evidence, all of it circumstantial, pointing to female ownership,” in Brown, “Female Book Ownership,” 58.

<sup>8</sup> See for instance Dales and Scott.

<sup>9</sup> See Günzel. The English prayerbook manuscripts include eight psalters with collections of private prayers attached, all dating from the mid to late 11th century; two other psalter/prayer collections which date from the 8<sup>th</sup> century and the 9th/10th century, respectively; two collectors and one sacramentary, from the 10th or 11th century; London, B.L. Cotton Galba A.xiv of the first half of the 11th century and Aelfwine’s prayerbook itself (of the same period) both of which are miscellaneous collections of litanies, prayers, calendars, computistical information, and collects, in both Latin and Old English, similar in their variety, if not in purpose.

<sup>10</sup> A collectar is a service book containing the collects for the canonical hours of the Divine Office; a sacramentary is a service book containing the prayers recited by the celebrant during high mass.

<sup>11</sup> B. L. Cotton Galba A.xiv + Nero A.ii, ed. Muir.

<sup>12</sup> Szarmach 100.

<sup>13</sup> That of Birch with descriptions of contents of Royal 2 Axx and the fragmentary Harley 7653, in appendix; that of Kuypers with full texts of Royal 2Axx and Harley 7653 in appendices.

<sup>14</sup> For discussion of the place of the prayerbooks in English ecclesial history, see Clayton (*The Cult of the Virgin*), Deansley, Dumville, Hughes, and Ward. On source studies see works by Bestul (“Continental Sources”), Birch, Brown (*Book of Cerne*), Bishop’s “Liturgical Note” in Kuypers, Raw (*Trinity and Incarnation*), and Wilmart (*Precum libelli*).

<sup>15</sup> Bestul 119.

<sup>16</sup> Morrish, “An examination of literacy,” 519.

<sup>17</sup> Birch 17.

<sup>18</sup> Brown, “Female Book Ownership,” 55.

<sup>19</sup> Morrish as reported and seconded by Brown in “Female Book Ownership,” 57.

<sup>20</sup> Brown calls *Nunnaminster* a middle point in the development of this prayerbook genre, suggesting that magical elements were even less prevalent in the later *Cerne*. Sims-Williams (*Religion and Literature*) notes that such elements are absent entirely from the Continental prayerbooks (the *libelli precum*) which may have been influenced by the earlier English tradition. Like Karen Louise Jolly and others who have studied Anglo-Saxon charms, however, I believe that even the presence of “charms” in prayerbooks does not suggest that their use was actually “magical,” but may rather in fact suggest the conscious attempt by the compiler to put ancient beliefs and practices into Christian context. See for example Jolly; also Hill (“The Aecerbot Charm”).

<sup>21</sup> Boynton 897.

<sup>22</sup> For the theology of the Body of Christ see Tillard whose extensive notes and thorough scriptural index offer a useful introduction to this theologically complex ancient doctrine. Likewise the endnotes to Pius XII’s 1943 encyclical *Mystici corporis Christi* marshal scriptural and patristic support for that modern synthesis and restatement of the belief.

<sup>23</sup> Scriptural references to the Church as the Body of Christ include but are not limited to John 15:5-8; Ephesians 4:4-13; Colossians 1:18. Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Bible are given in the Douay-Rheims translation.

<sup>24</sup> I have followed Birch’s itemization of the prayers as found on pp. 35-37 of his edition (with minor alteration as noted), but I have numbered each item for ease of reference. The Appendix offers a complete list of the prayers including page numbers from Birch’s edition.

<sup>25</sup> *Exp on Ps* 62 [61].2, in Schaff 8:251-52 as quoted and discussed by Tillard; he relies on Augustine as his “witness of the west” and uses Chrysostom and Cyril to represent the Eastern traditions that likewise emphasize the “somatic ecclesiology” of Paul.

<sup>26</sup> Joyce 751. For a discussion of scriptural and patristic testimony to the interdependence of the whole Body of Christ, see the article “Communion des Saints” in Cabrol and Leclercq, who notes, “Cette unité totale est si réelle que l’état particulier, bon ou mauvais ou médiocre, de chaque membre se répercute dans le corps entier, car l’Esprit, de qui provient de cette union, relie entre eux tous les membres par la charité, de même qu’il répartit entre eux les ministères et les fonctions. Le principe vital qui circule entre les âmes saintes, qui rattache entres elles, se manifeste, s’entretient et se développe par la mise en commun des mérites individuels et par l’échange des biens spirituels en vue du progrès et d’amélioration de tous” (2448). Leclercq points to, for instance, the medical analogy offered by Tertullian who compared a man ashamed and embarrassed to publicly repent of sins with a person who feared going to the doctor because the malady afflicts the “more private parts” of his body, and so perished. Tertullian admonishes such a man for the harm he does to the whole community, writing: “I give no place to bashfulness when I am a gainer by its loss; when itself in some sort exhorts the man, saying, ‘Respect not me; it is better that I perish through you, *i.e. than you through me.*’ At all events, the time when (if ever) its danger is serious, is when it is a butt for jeering speech in the presence of insulters, where one man raises himself on his neighbour’s ruin, where there is upward clambering over the prostrate. But among brethren and fellow-servants, where there is common hope, fear, joy, grief, suffering, because there is a common Spirit from a common Lord and Father, why do you think these *brothers* to be anything other than yourself? Why flee from the partners of your own mischances, as from such as will derisively cheer them? The body cannot feel gladness at the trouble of any one member, (1 Corinthians 12:26) it must necessarily join with one consent in the

grief, and in labouring for the remedy. In a company of two is the church; but the church is Christ. When, then, you cast yourself at the brethren's knees, you are handling *Christ*, you are entreating *Christ*. In like manner, when they shed tears over you, it is *Christ* who suffers, *Christ* who prays the Father for mercy." Tertullian, "On Repentance," 664b.

<sup>27</sup> Knowles 4.

<sup>28</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, 148.

<sup>29</sup> There are, of course, still many allusions to the psalms throughout.

<sup>30</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 290; Morrish, "Dated and Datable Manuscripts," 519.

<sup>31</sup> Birch 9.

<sup>32</sup> In Scott's contemporary devotional edition of some of the prayers he imagines an Anglo-Saxon nun copying out the prayer book as a devotional exercise during Holy Week.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, 149.

<sup>34</sup> The history and development of the rites for the sick and dying are thoroughly discussed in Paxton.

<sup>35</sup> The Last Supper is represented here only in Luke, because the beginning of Mark and all of Matthew are lost; as synoptic Gospels we can imagine they would have started at the same episode, as indeed the synoptic passion narratives do in the *Book of Cerne*. In *Cerne* the Passions of Matthew and Mark begin with preparations for the pasch, including the anointing by the sinful woman, and the full accounts of the Last Supper. To include John's quite different version of the Last Supper (which does not in any case record the Words of Institution, but rather the lengthy Last Discourse which is unique to that version) would have taken a great deal more space.

<sup>36</sup> Similarly, Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, discusses the extent to which *initia* of the four Gospels which are included in *Royal* were considered to have talismanic properties and would be in keeping with the magical elements he discerns in that collection (291-94). Although the *Royal* readings are disjointed, the "completeness" of offering all four *initia* with the healing miracles and other material seems important to the compiler's thematic program in that volume.

<sup>37</sup> Itaque cum illi scripserunt quae ille ostendit et dixit, nequaquam dicendum est quod ipse non scripserit; quandoquidem membra eius id operata sunt, quod dictante capite cognoverunt. Quidquid enim ille de suis factis et dictis nos legere voluit, hoc scribendum illis tamquam suis manibus imperavit. Hoc unitatis consortium et in diversis officiis concordium membrorum sub uno capite ministerium quisquis intellexerit non aliter accipiet quod narrantibus discipulis Christi in Evangelio legerit, quam si ipsam manum Domini, quam in proprio corpore gestabat, scribentem conspexerit. Quamobrem illa potius iam videamus qualia sint quae putant evangelistas sibimet scripsisse contraria (quod parum intellegentibus videri potest), ut his quaestionibus dissolutis ex hoc quoque appareat illius capitis membra non solum idem sentiendo, verum etiam convenientia scribendo, in corporis ipsius unitate germanam servasse concordiam. PL 34 1069-1070; trans S. D. F. Salmond, ed. Kevin Knight, in Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, vol. 6, online at <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1602135.htm>.

<sup>38</sup> Interestingly, given the relationship of this prayer to *loricae*, the only other prayer original to the collection to merit similar decoration is the "Lorica of Laidcenn." (Prayer 62, interpolated by a different hand, also has a smaller decorated initial.)

<sup>39</sup> According to Brown, *Book of Cerne*, 141, the prayer is included in *The Book of Cerne*, the fragment Harley 7653, the *Fleury Prayerbook* (Orleans, Bibl. Mun., MS 184), and a collection of *Orationes et preces* attributed to Thomas Aquinas (Vatican, Vat. lat. 84).

<sup>40</sup> A lorica is a prayer for protection, characteristically invoking the Trinity and litanic in design. See for example Hill, "Invocation of the Trinity," 264-65 and notes 5 and 17; also Gougaud 265-81.

<sup>41</sup> The "Three Jameses" in this list of apostles does not conform to scriptural accounts -- which are themselves lacking in agreement about the names of the apostles.

<sup>42</sup> This admonishment is taken from the title of Book II, Chapter 25 of Iranaeus' "Against Heresies."

<sup>43</sup> Hughes 61.

<sup>44</sup> Bishop ("Liturgical Note" in Kuypers, 234ff.) divided the prayers into those he believed had Roman origins, being the more restrained and sober, and those which betrayed a Spanish/Mozarabic/Visigothic/Irish influence, being more florid and emotional. Subsequent scholars, especially Hughes and Wright have traced the influence of Irish piety on early Anglo-Saxon devotions. Frantzen has remarked a tendency to exaggerate these 'competing' traditions in liturgical scholarship. See Frantzen 90.

<sup>45</sup> The prayer is of course not arranged with these line breaks in its manuscript context, but I will be presenting prayer texts here in ways which highlight their structures.

<sup>46</sup> Psalm 136 with its repeated refrain "For his loving kindness is forever," is a scriptural example of the genre, as is the song of the three boys in the fire, in Daniel 3:57-87. The "call and response" element associated with the Litany of the Saints may also be a typical feature, but performance of litanies is not necessarily responsive. See the articles on "Litany" by Solomon and Mershman.

<sup>47</sup> See Heinemann, especially 145-52, for a discussion of meter, alphabetical acrostic, and rhyme in the development of the Jewish litany, Hoshanot.

<sup>48</sup> The Hoshanot or "Hosanna Hymns" remain an important part of the celebration of Sukkot today.

<sup>49</sup> Lapidge 17.

<sup>50</sup> This type of prayer also has roots in the Jewish *aneni* hymn, preserved in the Seilhot, in which the congregation asks the Lord to answer its prayers, just as he answered the prayers of a chronologically-listed series of biblical figures. See Solomon 230.

<sup>51</sup> A similar litanic prayer found in a rite for the Commendation of the Soul in the Gellone Sacramentary recapitulates many of the figures here, but draws upon different moments in their stories to support a theme of freeing the soul. Gellone, no. 2893: "Libera domine animam serui tui ... sicut liberasti Noë per diluuium ... Heliã de communi morte mundi ... moysen de manu pharaonis regis egyptiorum... iob de passionibus suis... danihelem de lacum leonis .. etc." As found in Paxton 118, no.79.

<sup>52</sup> Frantzen 87-88.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Chapter Two of Leclercq's *Love of Learning* on the theme of compunction in monastic literature as a special legacy of Gregory's theology.

<sup>54</sup> In this regard the use of the book by women is interesting; to what extent does the identification with patriarchs and later, Christ, perhaps empower women in a patriarchal world? Certainly more work remains to be done on the gender issues suggested in this text.

<sup>55</sup> Morrish finds that “...texts in the ‘Book of Nunnmaister’ lack strict organization, for while many of them relate to a theme of thanksgiving for Christ’s Passion, others occur which are extraneous to the central idea, repetitive, or out of logical order.” Morrish, “Dated and Datable Manuscripts,” 519.

<sup>56</sup> Birch 23-24.

<sup>57</sup> Mayr-Harting 188.

<sup>58</sup> Devereux 12.

<sup>59</sup> On the structure of collects see also Klauser and Devereux; on the “rhythm and balance” of Roman collects, see Kuypers xxvii; for a more detailed discussion of the use of the *cursus* in Roman collects, see Devereux; I have not yet had the opportunity to analyze the rhythmic patterns in the *Nunnaminster* collects.

<sup>60</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 311.

<sup>61</sup> A figurative interpretation of circumcision is first referenced in Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6 and was carried into patristic commentary where circumcision was sometimes understood as a type for baptism. See Daniélou 63-69.

<sup>62</sup> Raw, “Alfredian Piety,” 150-51. See also Raw’s book-length study, *Trinity and Incarnation*, on the later Anglo-Saxon fascination with the “Cosmic Christ”.

<sup>63</sup> Raw also discusses the emphasis in the writings of Bede and Ælfric on Christ as “God made visible.” She writes, “for Ælfric, Christ became man in order to suffer and to be seen,” (*Trinity and Incarnation*, 68). I will return to this important motif of sight and seeing below.

<sup>64</sup> There is, however, an apologetic commentary tradition which *denies* that there was drunkenness at Cana, addressing itself to those who would suggest there had not in fact been any miracle, but only some hoax played on revelers too debauched to discern the truth (cf. Pope 510). For patristic commentary see for example Augustine, PL 34:372, 925 and 41:556 as well as Gregory the Great PL 74:471, 905.

<sup>65</sup> In Psalm 22:5, “calix meus inebrians,” (“my chalice which inebriateth me”) is paired with the bountiful table of the Lord. And in Psalm 35: 9 we find, “inebriabuntur de pinguidine domus tuae et torrente deliciarum tuarum potabis eos.” (“They shall be inebriated with the plenty of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the torrent of thy pleasure.”) In Psalm 64:11: “sulcos eius inebria, multiplica fruges eius, pluviis inriga eam et germi eius benedic” (“saturate [*inebria*] its furrows, multiply its fruits, refresh it with showers, and bless its growth”) and in Proverbs 5:19 a young man is urged to enjoy the embraces of his faithful wife: “cerva carissima et gratissimus hinulus ubera eius inebrient te omni tempore in amore illius delectare iugiter” (“Let her be thy dearest hind, and most agreeable fawn: let her breasts inebriate thee at all times: be thou delighted continually with her love”).

<sup>66</sup> Pope 510. For patristic commentary which especially influenced Anselm of Laon’s *Glossa Ordinaria* on the Songs, see Dove’s book-length discussion. She cites Origen, Gregory, Bede, Alcuin and Hrabanus Maurus as influences on the 11<sup>th</sup> century commentary on the work. Bede’s influential gloss on this passage says, “Hoc est enim post esum nos faui et mellis postque potum uini et lactis inebriari non solum de mirandis bonorum uirtutibus gaudere sed has quoque sequi ac per earum retractationem torporem nostrae mentis excutere atque ad amorem aeternorum uiuacius accendere. Cui contra dicit propheta quibusdam: *Comedistis et non estis saturati bibistis et non estis inebriati*; comedit namque epulas mensae uitalis sed non satiatur bibit calicem salutaris sed non inebriatur qui uerba quidem scripturarum didicit iustorum exempla cognouit nec suam terrenam uitam mutauit nec mores suos correxit, bibit sed non

inebriatur qui praecepta uitae laetabundus audit sed haec implenda torpens ac piger remanet” (Bede, “In Cantica Canticorum,” 273). [ For us to become drunken, after eating honeycomb and honey and drinking wine and milk, means not only to celebrate the wondrous virtues of good men but also to practice them and relive them so as to shake off our mental lethargy and burn more brightly with love of eternal things. On the other hand, to some men the prophet says: *You have eaten, but you are not satisfied; you have drunk but you are not drunken* {Haggai 1:6}. For the one who has eaten of the dishes at the table of life, but is not filled, and has drunk from the cup of salvation but is not drunken, is he who has learned the words of scripture and come to know the exemplary deeds of the righteous, but who has not changed his earthly life nor corrected his morals; he who drinks but does not get drunk is the one who happily hears the commandments of life but remains sluggish and lazy about fulfilling them.]

<sup>67</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 296.

<sup>68</sup> Porter 213-14.

<sup>69</sup> There are also parallel traditions of rites of exorcism of body parts in the Celtic tradition and an old Gallican ceremony for catechumens related to the *Effeta* in which body parts are blessed without oil. Porter notes that the latter ceremony survived for use in exorcisms (as found in *The Missale Gothicum* and *The Missal of Robert of Jumièges*), and even beyond in rites for Adult Baptism. Sims-Williams mentions the enumerating of body parts, especially in a 10<sup>th</sup> century prayer of exorcism and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century “Lorica of Laidcenn,” as related to this tradition, both of which illumine his discussion of the *Royal* prayerbook. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 296-98.

<sup>70</sup> Porter 220.

<sup>71</sup> It is worth remembering that if the gospel lections were complete, two of them would most likely have begun with the stories of the woman who anointed Christ’s feet (see Matt 26:12; Mark 14:8).

<sup>72</sup> Christ does not, of course, *need* spiritual healing; nor, however, did he need to be washed of original sin in baptism, yet he chose to be baptized by John the Baptist, thereby instituting the sacrament.

<sup>73</sup> See Chapter 6 of *The Book of Margery Kempe*.

<sup>74</sup> The theme of two paradises – one which the worthy attained after individual judgment, a second to be subsequently entered into after Doomsday – is a preoccupation traced in the literature of this period in Kabir, specifically addressing the degree to which the Insular prayerbooks enter into contemporary theological debate regarding the nature of the “interim paradise.” For more on these recurring themes in the description of heaven, see Bishop’s “Liturgical Note,” item 69, in Kuypers 266 ff. See also Mohrmann, “Locus refrigerii” in *L’ordinaire de la Messe* and “Locus refrigerii” in *Questions liturgiques*. As noted below, Raw has more to say on the “light” of heaven.

<sup>75</sup> Birch 25.

<sup>76</sup> Kabir 125.

<sup>77</sup> Kuypers 141. For a litanic prayer, from the liturgy for the dying in the Gellone sacramentary, asking that the soul of the dying person be freed from all the dangers it faces, see above, note 52.

<sup>78</sup> *Alma Confessio* (Prayer 10), Kuypers 95.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. Kuypers 125.

<sup>80</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, 139.

<sup>81</sup> For instance, in the admittedly later Tridentine Rite: Confiteor Deo omnipotenti, beatae Mariae semper Virgini, beato Michaeli Archangelo, beato Ioanni Baptistae, sanctis Apostolis Petro et Paulo, omnibus Sanctis, et vobis, fratres: quia peccavi nimis cogitatione, verbo et opere: (percutit sibi pectus ter, dicens ) mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa. Ideo precor beatam Mariam semper Virginem, beatum Michaellem Archangelum, beatum Ioannem Baptistam, sanctos Apostolos Petrum et Paulum, omnes Sanctos, et vos, fratres, orare pro me ad Dominum Deum nostrum.

<sup>82</sup> A prayer for recitation over the dead from in the Vatican Gelasian, no. 1610, cited by Paxton, p.64, no. 71 includes a petition to God familiar from the older Roman ritual: “Aperi ei portas iusticiae et repelle ab ea principes tenebrarum.” [Open to him the gates of justice and repel from him the prince of darkness.]

<sup>83</sup> See Paxton 54-55 on a ritual composed by Caesarius of Arles, for instance, in which graveside prayers speak of the separate fates of the body and soul.

<sup>84</sup> As attested in *Corpus Orationum*, III D where the prayer is number 1898 (CCSL 160B: 92-93).

<sup>85</sup> Raw, *Trinity and Incarnation*, 71.

<sup>86</sup> Paxton 54.

<sup>87</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 302.

<sup>88</sup> Junod and Kaestli, CCSA, p. 825 ll. 56-58; trans. Elliott 344.

<sup>89</sup> For discussions of the *Lorica of Laidcenn* see Bishop’s “Liturgical Note” in Kuypers; also Gougoud, Esposito, Herren, and Grattan and Singer.

<sup>90</sup> St. Gall 233, as cited in Paxton 111 and note 58.

<sup>91</sup> Gelasian, no. 1611, cited in Paxton 65 and no. 72. Another liturgical intertext may be baptismal rites that speak of being clothed in Christ; the close association between baptism and death is re-iterated in the funeral rites even today: “In baptism N. died with Christ, may s/he now share His resurrection.”

<sup>92</sup> “Succinctis ergo fide vel observantia bonorum actuum lumbis nostris, per ducatum evangelii pergamus itinera eius, ut mereamur eum *qui nos vocavit in regnum suum* videre.”(Prologue 21 Benedict 160 and 161), where Fry notes that the word he translates “clothed,” *succinctis*, has more usually been rendered as “with our loins girded,” and that it is probably an allusion, especially when linked as here with “faith” and “gospel,” to Eph 6: 14-16.

<sup>93</sup> “Cum ergo interrogassemus Dominum, fratres, de habitatore tabernaculi eius, audivimus habitandi praeceptum, sed si compleamus habitatoris officium. Ergo praeparanda sunt corda nostra et corpora sanctae praeceptorum oboedientiae militanda, et quod minus habet in nos natura possibile, rogemus Dominum ut gratiae suae iubeat nobis adiutorium ministrare. Et si, fugientes gehennae poenas, ad vitam volumus pervenire perpetuam, dum adhuc vacat et in hoc corpore sumus et haec omnia per hanc lucis vitam vacat implere, currendum et agendum est modo quod in perpetuo nobis expediat.” Prologue, 39-44. Benedict 164 and 165.

<sup>94</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 301.

<sup>95</sup> Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 301-302.

<sup>96</sup> Brown, *Book of Cerne*, 154.

<sup>97</sup> Birch 17.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Brown, “Female Book Ownership,” 168.

<sup>99</sup> Fulton’s approach to the questions of medieval prayer making and prayer use is very similar to my own. I share her interest in the concept of prayer as both an “artifact” and a “tool,”

although I have, in Chapter One, used the words “artifact” and “activity” for the functions she describes. I have, perhaps uncritically, presumed the potential efficacy of these artifacts and tools for those who used them, whereas Fulton endeavors to “prove,” to those skeptical about the sincerity of “scripted” monastic prayer, that these surviving prayer texts were capable of “moving those skilled in their manipulation along the path from exterior participation to interior effervescence” (732).

<sup>100</sup> Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 2, note 13.

<sup>101</sup> Three of the prayers are devoted to his birth (5-7), four to his infancy (8-11) seven to his ministry (12-18), twenty-three to his passion (19-41), and some eight or more (recall the leaf lost here) to the time of his death (42-49). Again, these numbers themselves *may* be significant to the compiler and may suggest the habits of mind developed by *lectio*. Certainly these numbers are potent: three for the Trinity; seven, an essential biblical number; twenty-three for the letters of the alphabet – a number which was often used to suggest Christ, the Alpha and the Omega -- and eight, the number of eternity, a favorite in this collection.

<sup>102</sup> See Raw, “Alfredian Piety,” on the correspondences between the *Royal* abecedary prayers and the *Nunnaminster* prayers.

<sup>103</sup> Fulton 730. At this point in her discussion Fulton refers to the “artifact” of prayer but does not mean the written “tool;” I might use the word “experience” or “activity” to capture her meaning.

<sup>104</sup> On the essentially “communal” nature of collects, see Cabrol, *Liturgical Prayer*, 35-36. Also Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature*, 313.

<sup>105</sup> Only prayers 1, 62 and 63 have large decorated initials. It may be significant as well that prayers 1 and 63, both original to the collection, represent the two liturgical traditions upon which the codex draws: the Roman and the Irish.

<sup>106</sup> As noted above another possible reading of *Nunnaminster*’s liturgical shape is in terms of the Mass itself, where the “Liturgy of the Word,” here the Gospels’ Passion narrative, is followed by the “Liturgy of the Eucharist,” here embodied in the Christ Prayers, followed in turn by concluding rites in which the congregation is sent forth into the world: *Ite, Missa est*. That return to “ordinary” life might be taken up by the prayers for spiritual and bodily succor in *Nunnaminster*’s last two sections. Perhaps other possible liturgical shapes may be found in the forms developing for use in private and public penance at this time.

<sup>107</sup> Notwithstanding the history of lay use of blessed oil, discussed for instance in Didier 35-41. To the degree that *Nunnaminster* and at least two of the other Insular prayer books may be associated with creation, ownership and use by women, this genre, which did disappear in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, could possibly represent attempts to fill some lacunae in the liturgical life particularly of women religious that could not be met by the clerical resources available to them – i.e. on occasions when no priest was available to minister to a dying sister. But the intensely personal and individual character of this collection, as well as the lack of directive rubrics for such use, suggests that a metaphoric, meditative use of the ritual is more likely.

<sup>108</sup> Augustine, Letter 187.20 (*Letters*, Vol 4: 236-37).

<sup>109</sup> Cf. Romans 13:14 and Galatians 3:27.

### Chapter Three

#### Reading the Cross: Jewish Prayer, Conversion, and Incorporation in Cynewulf's *Elene*

A private prayerbook, such as *Nunnaminster*, may, as we have seen, reveal a compiler or pray-er “constructing a self” through the manipulation of prayers culled from a variety of sources. This pray-er mouths the prayers in the quiet moments of *lectio*, and with the biblically allusive words and figures both recalls salvation history and “reads” herself into the on-going drama. Likewise in the liturgical resonance of the prayer forms and phrases, the individual praying alone reads herself into the worshipping communities, both temporal and eternal, to which she belongs and aspires. The compiler or pray-er of a prayerbook stands outside of this literary and devotional text, constructing a self with real world bodily and spiritual presence. Another genre of monastic literature – hagiography – is, on the other hand, replete with prayers used to construct selves on multiple narratological planes. Hagiographic narratives have authors, scribes and readers for whom the prayerful encounters with these saints’ stories and the intoning of the frequently-appended concluding prayers will be acts of homage and aspiration, occasions for the praise and petition which help to shape their own spiritual lives. At the same time we have the characters within the stories, the saints themselves, whose prayers may be represented as constitutive elements of their own self-fashioning. And as they do in the prayers of *Nunnaminster*, the prayers in a given hagiographic text may foreground the prayerful reading strategies of *lectio divina* and “liturgical reading” as ways of correctly interpreting the cosmos and one’s place in it.

The Old English poem *Elene* is a hagiographic text in which both the framing prayer of the author, Cynewulf, and the prayers of the central figure, Judas/Cyriacus, reveal an author and

a character constructing selves as readers – of texts about the cross and of the cross itself as a text. At all narratological levels, the poem explores the interrelatedness of reading, prayer, interpretation and conversion for the narrator/poet, for the protagonist, and for the communities of readers, both Christians and Jews, whose different approaches to scripture are also represented and interrogated in this figural narrative. The carefully crafted prayers of *Elene* suggest that reading “through prayer” is an essential practice without which correct interpretation and authentic conversion cannot be achieved. At the same time we will see that these prayers are sites in the poem for reflecting upon and wrestling with some of the major themes it addresses in its focus on conversion: free will and right choice, purgation and punishment, inclusion within and exclusion from the Body of Christ.

### *Textual History*

*Elene* is of course a much more widely known and studied text than the *Book of Nunnaminster*, needing far less textual introduction.<sup>1</sup> *Elene* has been called a literary *vita*, principally to distinguish it from those intended for public reading as the prose lives in a legendary might be.<sup>2</sup> *Elene* is believed to have been produced in a male monastic setting in the first half of the ninth century, and carefully compiled into a 10th-century collection, the Vercelli Book, with homilies and poems which seem to share some common thematic concerns.<sup>3</sup> *Elene* is one of the two Old English poems signed by Cynewulf found in the Vercelli Book, and despite the title modern editors have given it, it would more accurately be called a legend of the Invention of the Cross than a strict life of Saint Helen.

Stories about the discovery of the True Cross by the Empress Helena began to circulate by the late fourth and early fifth century, some fifty years after the supposed event, and were reported in the writings of Ambrose of Milan, Rufinus of Aquileia, and Paulinus of Nola, among others.<sup>4</sup> To the earlier versions of the story, which concerned themselves with the discovery of the cross by Helen and the subsequent use of the recovered cross and nails to authorize the newly Christianized imperial power, new elements were attached in the anonymous version which began to circulate as early as the fifth century in Palestine. This anonymous version of the *Inventio Sanctae Crucis* (henceforth *Inventio*) now incorporated another narrative detailing the empress's interrogations of the Jewish population of Jerusalem and the dramatic conversion of one representative Jew, Judas. The *Inventio* quickly became immensely popular and widely disseminated and is the version of the Invention legend upon which *Elene* is based.<sup>5</sup>

While many hagiographic texts contain examples of prayers that suggest the prayer/reading nexus, for a number of reasons *Elene* is a particularly good place to begin to explore the way these interrelated epistemologies function in hagiography.<sup>6</sup> First, the Latin *Inventio* upon which *Elene* is based is itself thematically very concerned with the question of the “right reading,” most obviously, of the Hebrew Scriptures. Then, in his literary re-working and translation of the legendary material, Cynewulf makes additions and changes of emphasis or detail which further emphasize the themes of oral and written memory and interpretation.<sup>7</sup> The poem is also, to some degree, centered around a single very long and important prayer which results in the climactic finding of the cross; prior to this prayer there is no prayer at all and after its utterance further revelations and prayers multiply.<sup>8</sup> The poem clearly builds to this central prayer whose spiritual dividends it then explores. Finally, Cynewulf explicitly dwells on the connections between prayer, reading, and his own process of poetic invention in the famous

colophon which concludes the poem: some eighty-five lines that are set apart in the manuscript by the rubric, “XV,” and usually referred to as the epilogue. In these lines Cynewulf identifies himself as an old man, ready to abandon his mortal body (“frod ond fus þurh þæt fæcne hus” l. 1236) [“being old and ready to go because of this fickle carcass”], who has woven the poem *Elene* after long periods of reading about and prayerfully pondering the story of the cross.<sup>9</sup>

The epilogue concludes the poem, but it may also be said to set the Invention story in a meta-narratological frame. Before looking at the uses of prayer within the story, it will be helpful first to look more closely at this concluding meta-narrative of prayerful reading. As noted already and as we will see below, throughout *Elene*, Cynewulf makes changes to his main source, the *Inventio*, which shift the emphases, suggesting the act of translation as an interpretative encounter with the Invention legend.<sup>10</sup> But the epilogue is Cynewulf’s own unique contribution to his version of the legend, that is, not an adaptation from his Latin source or sources, and in which, therefore, we may expect to find his particular literary and devotional concerns most clearly articulated.<sup>11</sup> A close reading of the epilogue suggests that Cynewulf has taken a story that was already “about” interpretation and conversion, and has further emphasized the degree to which these related processes are dependent upon prayer, not only for the characters in the legend, but for the poet and his reader as well.

### *The Epilogue: Prayer, Reading, and Conversion*

The Cynewulf depicted in his epilogue is a monastic reader with, presumably, a monastic audience and “textual community.” Martin Irvine has suggested, “[Cynewulf’s] colophon provides a valuable statement of the interpretive procedures at work in the poem as a whole: the

poem is produced by a reading of other texts – the act of composition understood as an act of interpretation -- which seeks to disclose the meaning of the cross through an intertextual frame presupposed by the textual community to which Cynewulf belongs.”<sup>12</sup> Irvine aptly demonstrates many instances in the poem when Cynewulf’s reworking of his Latin source foregrounds issues of textuality and interpretation. He finds as well that within the poem proper, the “network of discourses and codes” which the Jews cannot master includes the “hagiographical, exegetical, [and] poetic.”<sup>13</sup> Irvine does not, however, explore the role that the specific discourse of “prayer,” either personal or liturgical, plays in the monastic tradition of reading and interpretation suggested by the epilogue or in the drama of interpretation played out in the conflict between Elene and the Jews. Recent work by Éammon Ó Carragáin has served to re-emphasize the ways in which Cynewulf’s poem is a product of a specific type of prayerful reading: *lectio divina*. Ó Carragáin believes that Cynewulf offers in the epilogue a self-portrait of a monastic reader “clearly intended to emphasize his efforts as a meditative reader, rather than his skill as a poet.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, some 35 years earlier, Catharine Regan had reminded readers that the whole poem “can best and most logically, be comprehended as a product of the poet’s meditation on the *Acta Cyriaci*, not merely as a versification of his Latin source.”<sup>15</sup>

There are three sections in the epilogue: lines 1236-1256a (the poet’s description of his reading/praying/writing process); lines 1256b-1276a (the poet’s runic signature); lines 1276b-1321 (the poet’s description of Judgment Day). The first of these sections is most relevant to the issues of reading and prayer, but the other two are not unrelated. The runic signature of the second section inserts the poet’s particular identity into the poem and, as is the case in a range of colophons, from those of anonymous scribes to Chaucer’s famous Retractions, suggests that each reading of the poem is an occasion to pray for the poet, thereby inviting each individual who

encounters it to take on the role of prayerful reader.<sup>16</sup> The detailed description of the Final Judgment in the third section provides a powerful incentive for such prayer in its vivid account of the winnowing process God will use to determine each individual's fate.<sup>17</sup> The inevitability imagined, that each individual – Cynewulf or the reader – will face that final eternal judgment, is the ontological context in which the prayerful reading described in the first section of the epilogue and solicited in the second takes place; right reading and the grace it will enable the poet to experience will lead not only to the “unlocking of the heart and poetic facility” (“breostlocan onwand/ leoðucræft onleac,” ll. 1249b-1250a), but more importantly, to “eternal reward” (“eces eadwelan,” l. 1316a). A failure to read rightly – to never find, as Cynewulf did, the true meaning of the cross – would have consequences far beyond the literary.

In the Final Judgment depicted here, Cynewulf unusually (but not without precedent) divides the judged into three “parts” – the virtuous, the redeemable sinners, the damned – and envisions all three groups enduring a fiery testing.<sup>18</sup> The first two groups are purified as needed and are granted the beatific vision (“Moton engla frean / geseon, sigora god,” ll.1307b-1308a) [“They will be allowed to see the Lord of angels, the God of victories”], the third consigned to eternal flames. Significantly, the third group is described in terms which are also used within the Invention story to describe both fallen angels and the most recalcitrant Jews, as will be discussed in further detail below. It is sufficient to note here that the epilogue's description of the Judgment recapitulates a motif emphasized throughout Cynewulf's version of the Invention story itself – that purgation or punishment are the natural consequence of human choices, meted out by God not in vengeance, but in justice.

But Cynewulf's description of his own prayerful reading in the first part of the epilogue resonates even more deeply with the central thematic concerns of his poem. Ó Carragáin finds in

the epilogue three distinct episodes of prayerful reading which provide “a paradigm or model for what devotional reading should involve.”<sup>19</sup> Cynewulf as a prayerful reader, according to Ó Carragáin, is led through a progression from fear, through anxious meditation on texts about the cross, to enlightenment. The process is described as a monastic devotional program which includes nighttime vigils, reading texts “painstakingly at night” (“nihtes nearwe,” l. 1239), a dwelling on one’s own sinfulness (“Ic wæs weorcum fah,/synnum asæled, sorgum gewæled,” ll. 1242b-1243) [“I was soiled by my deeds, shackled by my sins, harassed by cares”], and the prayerful pondering of a text that is clearly *lectio divina*:

Ic þæs wuldres treowes  
oft, nales æne,      hæfde ingemynd  
ær ic þæt wundor      onwriġen hæfde  
ymb þone beorhtan beam,      swa ic on bocum fand,  
wyrda gangum,      on gewritum cyðan  
be ðam sigebeacne.      (ll. 1251b-1256a)

[Not once but often I made inward remembrance of the tree of glory before I discovered the miracle concerning that illustrious timber, according to what, in the course of events, I found in books, related in writings, about the symbol of victory.]

Having placed himself in the proper frame of mind and heart through these ascetic practices, the poet is prepared to receive the grace of enlightenment which God grants. This divine gift unlocks both his heart (l.1249b) and the art of poetry (l.1250a). The enlightenment brings personal benefit (“gamelum to geoce,” l. 1246a) [“solace to an old man”] and a benefit to the world, in that the poet has “used” (“breac,” l.1250b) his poetic gifts joyfully, “willum in worlde” (l. 1251a) [“with a will in the world”].

In this first part of the epilogue we are alerted, then, to a theme which also pervades the poem: that individual conversions have communal implications. As we saw in *The Book of Nunnaminster*, that the spiritual health of one pray-er would have ramifications for the health of

the whole Body of Christ, we see repeatedly in *Elene* that one conversion begets others in ever-widening circles of confession. We see this particular theme highlighted in the epilogue's three-part structure. It begins with the first-person reminiscences of the poet's devotional and creative process, moves into a third person singular meditation on the man named Cynewulf whose life's trajectory epitomizes the common fate of man, and concludes in the whole-world-encompassing third person plural, meditating upon the fate of "everyone below heaven" ("æghwam bið /læne under lyfte," ll. 1269b-1270a). The anxious solitary reader who has contemplated the cross can only become more deeply aware of the universality of his condition and concludes therefore with a vision of all of humanity united in their subjection to the Final Judgment. The concluding note of the poem is hopeful, for the poet imagines a merciful God who will reward those who have turned from their sins and called upon the Son of God in prayer:

	Him bið engla weard
milde ond bliðe,	þæs ðe hie mana gehwylc
forsawon, synna weorc,	ond to suna metudes
wordum cleopodon.	Forðan hie nu on wlite scinaþ
englum gelice,	yrfes brucaþ
wuldorcyniges	to widan feore.
Amen.	(ll. 1316b-1321)

[The Guardian Lord of the angels will be gentle and kindly to them because they despised every wickedness and the commission of sins, and called aloud upon the Son of the ordaining Lord. Therefore they now shine forth in beauty like the angels and enjoy the heritage of the King of glory through existence infinite. Amen.]

Note especially that those who have used "words," "to suna metudes /wordum cleopodon"

["called aloud upon the Son of the ordaining Lord"], will be saved and enjoy forever an angel-like existence. The epilogue has both described a prayerful reading process and prescribed the essential role of prayer in attaining salvation, both for the poet and for his reader. Likewise the poem *Elene* is both product of prayer and a prompt for prayer. The poet's personal reading and

prayer have issued in a narrative that can be a part of the salvific, meditative reading of others and that in fact concludes (cf. ll.1228b-1235), as we shall see, in a prayer evoking the same beatific vision that is joyfully anticipated here in the epilogue. This movement from personal to imagined communal prayer, I have described in my discussion of *The Book of Nunnaminster* as the move from *lectio divina* to “liturgical reading.” We see a similar progression from the prayers of one individual to those of ever wider liturgical communities in the narrative arc of *Elene* itself.

#### *Prayerful Reading and Conversion Narratives Throughout Elene*

Since prayerful reading practices appear to have been essential to the composition of the poem – that is to the poet’s “conversion” from a fearful solitary reader to an enlightened poetic evangelist -- we might expect to see prayerful reading modeled within the poem as an element of the various conversion stories related therein. That *Elene* is, at its heart, a story of conversion (as it is achieved through “right reading”) and a figural narrative (which therefore demands reading on multiple levels) has been widely recognized since the seminal interpretive work of Hill, Campbell, Regan, and Whatley.<sup>20</sup> The conflict at its core, as discussed in these earlier studies and many others since is, as Hill wrote, “the conflict between literal and spiritual understanding” as these different modes are represented by the Jews and the Christians or in Regan’s terms, Judas’ movement towards *sapientia* which can only follow upon his instruction and baptism under the influence of Elene as a figure for the Church.<sup>21</sup> Whatley persuasively extends the understanding of the drama of conversion to the initial episodes of Constantine’s conversion, highlighting the unity of the poem in each of its “divisions” around this central theme.<sup>22</sup>

What can a closer focus on prayer in the poem add to this widely-accepted reading of the poem as a drama of interpretation and conversion? I believe that Cynewulf's use of prayer in *Elene* reveals evidence to support the thesis that right reading and interpretation of texts -- whether actual (scripture), symbolic (the cross) or metaphoric (lived experience or the world as book) -- is an activity understood in Cynewulf's monastic culture to be possible *only* through prayer. Without the prayerful reading strategies associated with *lectio divina* and "liturgical reading," neither individual nor corporate interpretation is possible. At the same time, attention to who prays in the poem, and when, also yields evidence that the Jews are not the only characters whose interpretive powers stand in need of conversion or completion.

Prayer texts, then, are the points of entry for the present reading of the poem, but it is worth noting first and reflecting upon the fact that explicit prayer speech does not begin until half way through the narrative. What might it mean that before Judas' conversion, other conversion dramas -- Constantine's spontaneous conversion, Elene's accounts of her transformative spiritual reading, and the Jews' failure to convert in their councils with Elene -- have played out without any verbatim record of the prayer that one might expect to be a significant element of these processes? In the first half of *Elene*, we hear passing references to the catechesis and baptism of Constantine; we witness Elene performing pilgrimage, exegesis, and catechetical interrogation of the Jewish councils; but direct prayer speech is not recorded until line 725.<sup>23</sup> When it occurs, the significant prayer of Judas in *fitt ix* explicitly models a moment of prayer as interpretive reading -- in a multi-valent mode that suggests Jewish prayer traditions, the monastic practice of *lectio divina* and the public prayer of the Christian liturgy. Further prayer speech follows this extended prayer, of a more exclusively Christian liturgical cast -- communal, public prayer according to the readings established by the Church. Clearly, the delayed representation of explicit prayer until

the lengthy prayer of Judas alerts the reader that something quite different has happened at *this* moment of conversion. This conversion is different from that of Constantine and Elene and not only because Judas/Cyriacus will become an ecclesiastic figure while the emperor and his mother might be considered lay people, therefore less apt than clerics for uttering public prayer.<sup>24</sup> For Constantine and Elene are also, of course, figures for the Christian state and the Church. Why do they, as emperor and empress or as figures for State and Church, need Judas's prayer to find the cross?

I would suggest that Judas's conversion is the focal point for this legend because his arrival at right reading, which is enacted by his prayer, marks the yoking back together of the "Jewish" or literal reading of scriptures (which are based on his people's lived experiences) and the figurative interpretations of those same scriptures by Christian readers whose access to the stories is necessarily "only" textual or symbolic. We shall see the prayer Judas offers to effect that joining is itself about the essential interconnectedness of literal and spiritual truths. The prayer is also to some degree *about* prayer – about how this special category of verbal utterance is a necessary element of finding, interpretation, and conversion.

Most often readings of the poem that emphasize typological interpretation have read the conversion of Judas, and by analogy the Jews in general, as an abandonment of the Jewish knowledge and modes of interpretation. But Judas *as Jew* is necessary to Constantine and Elene in their quest for the cross. Without him, without the Jewish knowledge that he represents, the cross remains elusive. Christina Heckman has written recently about the "secret, ancestral knowledge" which the Jews possess and which marks the limit of Christian learning – the point beyond which Christian dialectic cannot pass in its efforts to prove the truth of the Christian message. Heckman argues that for Cynewulf, "Jewish conversion becomes a means through

which to eradicate the threat of thousands of years of Jewish learning in order to assert the primacy of both Christian learning and a Christian empire.”<sup>25</sup> But Heckman, who focuses on the poem’s engagement with the classical tradition of dialectics, never fully identifies what the Jews “ancestral knowledge” might be. In focusing my own analysis on the modes of monastic, spiritual reading at play rather than on the elements of classical argument and disputation, I identify that “Jewish” knowledge with the literalism so widely acknowledged as its hallmark and I locate that literal level in the “lived experience” of the Jewish community as it is represented by Judas. Moreover the lens of the prayerful practices of *lectio* and “liturgical reading” reveals that “to eradicate” Jewish knowledge is neither desirable nor even possible if the cross is to be discovered – either literally or figuratively. Stacy Klein’s insightful historicist reading of *Elene* reminds us that our own contemporary reading of the poem is diminished if we neglect the literal queenship of Elene within the narrative in an exclusive focus on her typological identification as *Ecclesia*. It is a lesson, Klein acknowledges, that is inherent within the poem itself:

For while Cynewulf privileges abstract over literal interpretation, he never discounts literal reading; instead, he prompts readers to see it as the necessary first step in Christian understanding, a point neatly illustrated through the poem’s treatment of its main theme, conversion. If, as numerous critics have argued, *Elene* is a poem that is largely about conversion and the individual’s discovery of Christianity, this quest for spiritual enlightenment is depicted as a very literal search mission. Discovering the meaning of the Cross is shown to be profoundly dependent upon first actually finding it.<sup>26</sup>

Searching for the cross is both a physical and a textual process; a Jew must literally reveal the cross’s whereabouts because an important missing piece of that literal knowledge belongs to his people. That literal knowledge must therefore be brought through his conversion

within the interpretive fold of the Church or the Church's own interpretive powers will continue to be incomplete. Only a converted Jew can be the human vehicle of that joining of the literal and figurative interpretations – one who fully embodies the history and knowledge of the Jews in Jerusalem, but can also fully take on belief in Christ. Logically, a Christian converting back to Judaism would no longer be in search of the cross. What other figure, then, can represent the unity of that knowledge, when even for the most erudite of Christians, the study of the literal level of the text could prove difficult?

Late in his life, in evaluating his own works, Augustine writes in his *Retractions* about his own failed efforts on several occasions to effectively deal with the literal meaning of Genesis. He recalls, “I wanted to see what I could accomplish in the laborious and difficult task of literal interpretation; and I collapsed under the weight of a burden I could not bear.”<sup>27</sup> Augustine also admits that “whenever I was unable to discover the literal meaning of a passage, I explained its figurative meaning as briefly and as clearly as I was able.”<sup>28</sup> But to deal only with the figurative meaning is a failure that Augustine will finally rectify in his twelve-volume work, *De genesii ad litteram*. The literal and figurative meanings together reveal the complete truth of the scriptures. The need then for Judas, the figure of the Jew who embodies that literal knowledge, to find the cross is marked by the lengthy prayer to which the first half of the poem builds and is underscored by the determined absence of direct prayer until that point. Let us examine then the conversion episodes and discourse prior to Judas's prayer to see how the necessity for that moment is established.

*Constantine's Spontaneous Conversion and the Cross as Sign*

The Emperor Constantine is the first to convert in the poem, and he encounters the cross as far from its literal meaning as is possible. It is for him at first only a sign, and one whose meaning even as a sign is unclear. When Constantine miraculously dreams of the cross, he has been asleep “eofurcumble beþeaht” (“canopied by the boar-adorned standard,” l.76) – a symbol of his pagan beliefs. In viewing the enemy hordes “Cyning wæs afyrhted,/ egsan geaclad” (“the king was daunted and dismayed by fear,” ll.56b-57a) and “Modsorge wæg/Romwara cyning” (“The king of the Romans nursed a heartfelt anxiety,” ll. 61b-62a). When commanded by the radiant, unknown man, Constantine “hreðerlocan onspeon” (“laid open his heart,” l. 86b), looks up, and sees the vision of the cross upon which words are inscribed: “Mid þys beacne ðu on þam frecnan fære feond oferswiðesð,/geletest lað werod” (“With this emblem you will overpower the enemy in the perilous offensive; you will halt the hostile armies,” ll.92b-94a). The cross is to Constantine a “sign” (“beacen,” ll. 92, 100, 163) or an “emblem of victory” (“sigebeacne,” l. 168) or a symbol (“tacen,” ll. 164, 171), especially of victory (“sigores tacen,” ll.85, 184) first seen at a distance, dazzling the emperor as a “lovely vision” (“fægeran gesyhð,” l. 98b) and subsequently dispersing his enemies. The emphasis on the “sight” of the vision and the consequent “problem” of its correct interpretation reinforce the symbolic nature of the cross and its initial distance, both literally and figuratively.

Upon encountering this sign, however, “Cyning wæs þy bliðra/ond þe sorgleasra, secga aldor,/ on fyrhðsefan þurh þa fægeran gesyhð” (“The king, the lord of men, was the happier, the less anxious at heart, for the lovely vision,” ll.96b-98). Throughout this section there are repeated references to Constantine’s breast and heart/mind/spirit as the seat of his conversion. Pamela Gradon observes in a note to line 86b that in *Christ* l.1055, “hreðerloca” “is the part of the body containing thoughts.”<sup>29</sup> She also refers the reader to l. 1249 in the epilogue to *Elene*

where the poet writes of laying open his breast/heart to unlock the art of poetry. As Carruthers and Jager among other recent studies have shown, the heart was conceived as the seat of memory and the site of the interior writing that marks one as a Christian.<sup>30</sup> The freedom from anxiety which follows right reading is, as noted above and discussed by Ó Carragáin, a motif in the epilogue. In addition to his source, Cynewulf also emphasizes throughout the poem the freedom from anxiety and consequent joy which finding the cross at any interpretive level effects (cf. ll. 96b-98; ll. 839-842a; ll. 848b-849a; ll. 874b-875; ll. 894-898a). But in the case of Constantine, although his heart may be converted and he has at some rudimentary level “read the cross,” the ability to fully understand the cross is incomplete without instruction in the scriptures and prayer, which will open to him its meaning.

There is a pagan cacophony around the symbol of the cross in the battle scenes, when the trumpets blare and the wolf howls, armies clash and a song of victory is chanted (l.168) but no word of prayer prefaces the fight. Donald Byzdyl’s study of prayer in OE narratives describes eight typical contexts for prayer, including before battles.<sup>31</sup> Whatley, in fact, refers to this episode as a “ghastly but stirring parody of the psalmody more usually associated with processions of the Holy Rood.”<sup>32</sup> The reader who knows what the cross represents is “in” on the secret of Constantine’s success and may enjoy the anticipation which builds as Constantine moves towards interpretation of the powerful sign, but encounters at first only the ignorant silence of his wisest men: “Hio him ondsware ænige ne meahton/ agifan togenes, ne ful gearu cuðon/ sweotole geseccgan be þam sigebeacne” (“They could not return him any answer nor could they very readily speak precisely about this emblem of victory,” ll.166-168). But the “few” who have been baptized are able to give catechesis (ll.170 ff) and Constantine converts.

The pagan Emperor's change of heart is a spontaneous event in which catechesis follows the life-altering experience. Whatley has discussed the differences between this "Gentile conversion" story and the "Jewish conversion" of Judas which will follow, finding the distinction between the spontaneous convert and the reluctant convert each man represents to be in keeping with their types in the anti-Judaic apologetic tradition.<sup>33</sup>

Indeed this distinction is significant for the poem: the pagan Constantine is a blank slate, as it were, in his knowledge of the sign of the cross. He is granted the grace of a vision which his open heart (l.86) accepts. He recognizes the cross as a sign in need of interpretation (l.153ff.) and seeks the meaning of it. Catechesis, leading to sacramental initiation (l.171b-193), and study of the scriptures (ll. 202b-204) will enable Constantine's fuller understanding of this strange sign and inspire his desire to possess it in its most literal form. Constantine has only had "indirect" access to Christ through signs -- miraculous visions, sacraments, and scriptures-- but once he learns from his reading where the real-life object may be found, he is "conscious in spirit of that glorious tree" ("forð gemyndig/ymb þæt mære treo," ll.213b-214a) and determined "zealously to search out" ("georne secan," l.216b) where it lies. The spiritual imperative for discovery will be pronounced for Elene as well.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, Judas, as a representative of the Jewish people of Jerusalem, has a racial memory of the actual crucifixion, but is unwilling to acknowledge the cross as a transcendent sign of Christian victory; despite the fact that his father has professed his own belief in the "rodera wealdend" ("Ruler of the skies;" l.482b) who hung upon it, Judas will resist that belief and continue to hide the literal object lest its revelation and the spread of the faith it will engender should mark the end of Judaism as an earthly kingdom (see ll. 448-53).

*Failed Conversion: The Jews, Literalism, and Wrong Reading*

The Jews, according to Augustine, were under bondage to signs that they were unable to interpret in any way but the literal and this association of the Jews in *Elene* with hard-hearted literalism has been well studied.<sup>35</sup> In Cynewulf’s poem the Jews are strongly associated with the literal events of the crucifixion – *Elene* emphasizes Jewish complicity in making the cross the instrument of Christ’s death, placing the Jewish community within the narrative of the historical events studied by the newly-converted emperor. The poem reports that Constantine learned from the scriptures, “through his teacher’s help” [“þurh larsmiðas”], not only where the crucifixion took place, but how the Jewish people were deceived into performing this “spiteful” act which will earn them eternal punishment:

þa se æðeling fand,  
leodgebyrga, þurh larsmiðas,  
guðheard, garþrist, on godes bocum  
hwær ahangen wæs heriges beorhtme  
on rode treo rodora waldend  
æfstum þurh inwit, swa se ealda feond  
forlærde ligesearwum, leode fortyhte,  
Iudea cyn, þæt hie god sylfne  
ahengon, herga fruman. þæs hie in hynðum sculon  
to widan feore wergðu dreogan! (ll. 202b-211)

[Then the prince, the people’s surety, hardy in battle and daring with the spear, learned from God’s Scriptures, through his teachers’ help, where the Ruler of the heavens had been spitefully (or maliciously out of envy) hanged on the rood-tree to the multitude’s acclaim (or ‘amidst the tumult of an armed host)– through guile, in that the ancient enemy with his deceitful wiles seduced the Jewish nation and led the people astray so that they hanged God himself, the multitudes’ Creator. For this they must needs suffer damnation amid humiliations throughout an infinite existence.]<sup>36</sup>

Here the depiction of the Jews as misled, deceived or even mistaught [“forlærde ligesearwum”], suggests perhaps some sympathy for their position – having been led astray and now doomed to

suffer damnation. Andrew Scheil notes the “residual ambiguities” in the poem’s analysis of the issues of Jewish culpability and understanding.<sup>37</sup> The poem posits several contradictory explanations for the deicide, with varying attendant levels of guilt; congenital Jewish blindness, active intention to deceive, and diabolical influence are all suggested as motive for the crucifixion in the poem. Scheil suggests that these different reasons may serve the emotional and intellectual needs of a variety of readers. I will suggest that Cynewulf’s “use” of the Jews is careful, although not entirely consistent nor free of invective. But whatever the precise artistic or theological motive, the further insertion of the Jews here is Cynewulf’s innovation, having no precedent in the Latin *Inventio*. It seems important to locate the Jews at the site of the crucifixion because the poem, following the Latin legend, will later insist on the survival of a particular Jewish memory of the event. Somehow the necessity for locating the cross is tied to the actions and fate of the Jews from the moment it occurs to Constantine.

As the action turns to Constantine’s desire to locate the actual cross and his commissioning of his mother to do so, Cynewulf leaves out his source’s brief description of Elene’s conversion and the hunger for the cross itself that is engendered by her reading of the scriptures.<sup>38</sup> The *Inventio* notes, “She studied all the holy writings and took boundless delight in our Lord Jesus Christ .... When she had read intently of the coming of the savior of humankind, of our Lord Jesus Christ, and how he was taken up on the cross and raised again from the dead, she would not be satisfied until she found Christ’s victorious wood, to which the divine and holy body was nailed.”<sup>39</sup> Once again, no direct prayer speech is reported from Elene at this time in the source or in *Elene*, but in her subsequent interrogation of the assembled Jews she significantly models for them a type of non-literal scriptural reading which clearly evokes the prayerful

practice of *lectio divina*. As she accuses the Jews of their failure to properly read, she also demonstrates what the fruit of proper reading should be.

Mario Masini's recent work on the practice of *Lectio divina* recalls a popular trope of monastic culture found in Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome: that the person of Jesus represents the "abbreviated" Word of God. Masini writes: "The Fathers of the early Church revealed that in Old Testament times, a multiplicity of divine words could be heard: 'God had pronounced only one Word (His own Word), but many words were heard' (Ambrose). Such a multiplicity allowed 'the expansion of the one Word of God into the whole of Scripture' (Augustine), and still its readers never did succeed in recognizing the bright thread that tied all of them together into one."<sup>40</sup> The *Inventio* story explores the question of why the Jews have not "recognized the bright thread" in their readings of the Hebrew Scriptures. The story also raises the issue that the Jews in Jerusalem would be presumed to have had some living memory of the life and crucifixion of the person of Jesus who had walked in their recent forebears' midst. In the poem, the assembled Jews at first know nothing of the crucifixion story that Judas presently relates to them. Whereas the episode of Constantine's conversion emphasized the right reading of a sign, i.e. the symbol of the cross, the focus in the episodes where Elene interrogates the Jews is on the right reading of written texts and lived experience. In Elene's dealing with the assembled Jews her ire is provoked by their inability to interpret passages from the Hebrew Scriptures that prophesied Christ's coming or to recall and understand episodes from their ancestors' own encounters with Jesus. In either case, the assembled Jews fail to rightly read.

Elene begins her interrogation of the 3000 Jews by asserting her own ability to read rightly in the texts of the Old Testament:

Ic þæt gearolice      ongiten hæbbe  
þurg witgena      wordgeryno

on godes bocum      þæt ge geardagum  
 wyrðe wæron      wuldorcyninge,  
 dryhtne dyre      ond dædhwæte. (ll. 288-292)

[I have clearly understood(, through) the mystic sayings of the prophets in the books of God(,) that in former days you were esteemed by the king of glory, dear to God and zealous in his work.]

Cynewulf subtly alters his source, which describes the Old Testament readings as simply “sanctis prophetis” (Holder 1.73) [the books of the holy prophets], to suggest the mysterious nature of the prophetic books – their need for mystical interpretation; they are “witgena wordgeryno,” mysterious sayings. Immediately, Elene turns to New Testament texts which have provided her own encounter with Christ and given her the ability to “read” the history of the people who stand before her. Even though it is not a prayer, this passage deserves careful attention because it models the practices of prayerful reading that Elene suggests the Jews have failed to do:

Hwæt, ge ealle snyttro      unwislice,  
 wraðe wiðweorpon,      þa ge wergdon þane  
 þe eow of wergðe      þurh his wuldres miht,  
 fram ligcwale,      lysan þohte,  
 of hæftnede.      Ge mid horu speowdon  
 on þæs ondwlitan      þe eow eagenaleoht,  
 fram blindnesse      bote gefremede  
 edniowunga      þurh þæt æðele spald,  
 ond fram unclænum      oft generede  
 deofla gastum.      Ge to deaþe þone  
 deman ongunnon,      se ðe of deaðe sylf  
 woruld awehte      on wera corþre  
 in þæt ærre lif      eowres cynnes.  
 Swa ge modblinde      mangan ongunnon  
 lige wið soðe,      leoht wið þystrum,  
 æfst wið are,      inwitþancum  
 wroht webbedan.      Eow seo wergðu forðan  
 sceðþeð scyldfullum.      Ge þa sciran miht  
 deman ongunnon,      ond gedweolan lifdon,  
 þeostrum geþancum,      oð þysne dæg. (ll. 293-312)

[But alas! you (all) foolishly spurned that wisdom in your fury, when you cursed him who thought to redeem you from your curse, through the power of his glory, from the fiery torment and the bondage. Filthily you spat into the face of him who by his precious spittle cured as new

from blindness the light of your eyes and often saved you from the unclean spirits of the devils. Him you condemned to death who himself awakened the world from death among the multitude of the people during the earlier life of your nation. Thus spiritually blind, you confused falsehood with truth, light with darkness, malice with mercy; guilefully you fabricated a false accusation – therefore this curse will crush you, the guilty ones. You condemned the light-giving power and have lived in delusion with your dark thoughts to this day.]

To one familiar with the passion prayers of the *Nunnaminster* book, the play of verbal parallels in this passage is a striking reminder that the monastic milieu, from which both the *Inventio* and Cynewulf's poem emerges, insists that a personal, meditative engagement with scripture is the crucial element of right reading. Just as the *Nunnaminster* prayer linked, for instance, the wine of Cana with her own inebriation in the Lord, Elene pairs events recorded in the scriptures with the lives of the Jews. The Latin source plays with the parallelism of phrase and situation emphasized in these pairs of words: “maledicto/maledixistis” (the cursed one/cursed), “sputum/sputis” (spittle/spittle), and “mortuos/mortem” (your dead/death).<sup>41</sup> Cynewulf takes care to retain the element of verbal pairing here: “wergdon/wergðe,” “horu speowdon/”spald” and “deape/deaðe.”<sup>42</sup> Elene contrasts the behavior of the Jews who persecuted and killed Jesus with actions in Christ's own lifetime among the Jews when he cured and saved Jewish people. The episodes here all figure in the scriptures – largely the New Testament, but the particular way in which they are yoked together as types and antitypes is fruit more typical of patristic reflection on the events – itself both the result of and then further material for prayerful reading.<sup>43</sup> Does Elene suggest here that the Jews should know even the Gospel stories in which their own people figure? Reading in both testaments of “godes bocum” has given her the knowledge of the events described there; further prayerful reflection or reading has enabled her both to see Christ as the savior and to see that the Jews have failed to make that interpretation. Elene seems to suggest that the Jews, on the other hand, needed to “read” Jesus' saving actions

of healing, raising up, and redeeming when he touched their faces and walked among them in their literal, bodily community.

As she will go on to elaborate in her next confrontation with the 1000 Jews, Jesus' coming and ministry were foretold by the prophets; presumably had they known how to read their own scriptures, the Jews would have recognized Jesus when they learned the circumstances of his birth (as she says these were predicted by Moses), or saw that his own people were rejecting him (as foretold in Isaiah 1:2-3). For paradoxically, one strand of Old Testament prophecy about the Messiah which is borne out by Christ's life is that he was destined to be rejected by his own people. The Jews have played that part already in historic terms and their prophecy-fulfilling rejection is now recorded in the New Testament. Elene also seems to call the Jews of Jerusalem here to *read again* their people's life and experience as it has now been filtered through Christian writing, exegesis and *lectio*.

And indeed in the brief example of meditative reading that Elene offers here, the story of Christ's healing with his "spittle" has deep associations in patristic commentary with the failure of the Jews to properly interpret their own texts. Augustine elaborates on the significance of the miracle Christ performed when he cured the blind man with his spittle, which even in the gospel itself is cast as a direct rebuke to the Jewish practice of prioritizing the letter of the law over its spirit. In the aftermath of the miracle, the reaction of the Pharisees was to object to the fact that it had been performed on the Sabbath (cf. John 9:16). In Sermon 86 Augustine writes about this miracle in such a way as to anticipate many of the basic accusations, ideas, and antitheses attributed to Helena in the *Inventio* and Cynewulf's rendering of it. Augustine suggests that the Jews interpret the Sabbath in only the "carnal manner," i.e. literally, when the Sabbath is itself a figure for Christ. For Augustine, "the earth" stands for a literal interpretation which must be

mixed with the spirit of Christ, represented by his spittle, in order to produce the healing clay which will open the eyes of the blind man – or the Jews who are so blindly attached to their Law that they fail to recognize Christ. He writes,

In this earth of the sabbath look also for the spittle of Christ, and you will understand that by the sabbath Christ was prophesied. But you, because you have not the spittle of Christ in the earth upon your eyes, you have not come unto Siloa, and have not washed the face, and have continued blind, blind to the good of this blind man, yea now no longer blind either in body or heart.... [The Jews] see; they read what the Law said. For it was enjoined that whosoever should break the sabbath day, should be stoned. Therefore said they that He was not of God; but though seeing, they were blind to this, that for judgment He came into the world who is to be the Judge of quick and dead.<sup>44</sup>

Augustine also notes the irony that “the defenders of the Law, Doctors of the Law, the teachers of the Law, the understanders of the Law, crucified the Author of the Law.” He builds to the conclusion that “They who boasted that they saw the light, being more hardened, being made blind, crucified the Light.” In the *Inventio*, in an epithet reminiscent of Augustine’s catalogue of Jewish experts, the councils of the Jews include the “legis doctores” (l.113). In Cynewulf’s rendering of the legend, Elene’s speech to the Jews will go on to accuse them of being “modblinde” (mind/heart blind) because they confuse light with darkness and the theme of the “hardness” of the Jews will also be taken up further in the poem.<sup>45</sup> Augustine’s repeated reference to the fact that the Jews have the earth or clay, but lack the transformative spittle also resonates with the whole poem’s association of the Jews with the earth, as discussed below.

Elene expounds her own Christ-centered (or in Regan's terms, "kerygmatic") interpretation of their prophets for the assembly of 1000 Jews who are described as "in sorry mood" ("reonigmode," ll.320b) and "harassed by fear, miserable with anxieties" ("egesan gepreade, /gehðum geomre," ll.321b-322a) – clear signs that they have not "read rightly."<sup>46</sup> As Cynewulf crafts these three confrontations, Elene reveals a different failure of the Jews to read rightly in each subsequent council. First, they failed to recognize Jesus in his deeds when he walked among them. Second, they failed to recognize him in the words of their own prophets. In the third council, before the 500 Jews, Elene says that their greatest failure is "næfre furður þonne nu" ("never moreso than now," l.388) when they have, in effect, not listened to her teaching on the subject. She rehearses the question of their blindness, raised in her first address, and a prophecy about the birth of the Messiah such as characterized her second address. If we follow Hill and others in seeing Elene as a figure for the Church, her third council suggests that the third failure of the Jews is in not accepting the kerygmatic preaching of the Church itself which has been made available to them historically in the persons of the apostles in Jerusalem itself and in Stephen's peroration before the Jewish elders and now again in her presence among them. The dwindling group of men continues to protest: they have learned the Hebrew law and yet do not understand their offense (ll.397-403). At this point Judas enters the story and his conversion becomes the focal point of this drama of interpretation.

### *Jewish Knowledge, Literalism, and Spectrality*

That the Jews in their literal interpretation of their scriptures, in their blindness to the signs of miracles that Jesus worked among them, and in their deafness to the preaching Church

should fail to achieve *sapientia* or to decode properly has been well discussed. But the knowledge the Jews *do* have remains important in some way to the recovery of the cross, not only for their own conversion, but also for Elene/the Church's sake.<sup>47</sup> This knowledge is embodied in the figure of Judas.

Elene's intimate knowledge of Scripture is highlighted throughout the poem, and yet her interpretive powers are incomplete. To find the three crosses, to identify the one true cross, and to find the nails, she must rely on more than her extensive knowledge of the scriptures and her powers of meditative reading. She can identify "Christ," the anointed one, in the Jewish scriptures, but she does not know precisely where the historical "Jesus" suffered. Judas, of course, has what might be called experiential knowledge, directly passed down to him from his father, of the crucifixion.<sup>48</sup> His father, Symon, witnessed the event (although he opposed the killing), knew of the resurrection, and watched his own son, Stephen, become the first martyr for Christ when he was stoned at the urging of Paul.<sup>49</sup> His father's story, as related by Judas, filled with familiar names from scripture and purporting to offer extra-canonical details of the well-known events, would read, were it written down, like one of the many apocryphal gospels, acts of the apostles, or epistles which circulated during the first centuries of Christianity.<sup>50</sup> But in this case the story is even more obscure and inaccessible than the written apocrypha; it has been passed down orally and well hidden, even from the rest of the Jews in Jerusalem, who profess that they have never before heard it. What is essential about this orally-preserved story which lives not in a scroll or codex, but in the memory of Judas? Why will only its possessor be able to locate the cross, and then only after his purgative suffering and prayer?

The story itself corroborates, from outside the Christian textual tradition, that the crucifixion took place and that Jesus rose from the dead. In this sense it is like the wood of the

cross and the nails, like any relic, in that it provides a sensory link to events that are by the late patristic period in which the *Inventio* took shape, otherwise known only indirectly: through text, sign, sacrament, or tradition. The temporal distance is of course even greater by the time Cynewulf is drawn to the story. To touch the wood of the actual cross is to touch wood that Christ's own body touched. Judas's own father sat in conferences where the crucifixion was plotted; his brother Stephen felt the stones of martyrdom pelt his body. The chronology is stretched, but it must be so to keep the link direct.<sup>51</sup> And Judas, this representative Jew, representative as well of literal-mindedness, attests that the crucifixion, the resurrection, and even the belief these events would engender in Symon and Stephen, are literally true. For the patristic and medieval periods these imagined Jews of early fourth-century Palestine may be said to witness to the truth of Christianity on two textual levels: they "stand for" their own scriptures, which when read allegorically offer the prophecies of Christ's coming, and they also physically embody the lived experiences of their people which are the material recorded as the literal level of both Testaments. Elene has demonstrated to them that they have failed to "read" correctly on both levels, because she has read extensively in "Godes bocum." But this "extra" story Judas knows is beyond her knowledge because it is not found in any text; it resides in his memory, i.e. within his body.<sup>52</sup>

Steven Kruger's recent *The Spectral Jew* takes up the important question, already widely discussed, of what the "Jew" represents to the later medieval imagination.<sup>53</sup> He touches directly on this issue of the Jews as witnesses to the truth of Christianity in his discussion of Augustine's role as the "prime theorist of the new Christian history ... that reflects the double sense of the past chosen-ness and present obsolescence of Jews."<sup>54</sup> The Jews preserve and authenticate the ancient texts that prophesied Christ's coming and they also persist physically, albeit as a

superceded people, but in that very marginalized survival witnessing to the triumph of Christianity.<sup>55</sup> Their influence as textual and real markers of pastness constitutes what Kruger calls, in Derrida's terms, the "spectral" presence of the Jew in the medieval imagination. Kruger writes:

If Christianity works radically to reduce the "heterogeneity" of Judaism [i.e. that complexity which resists reduction], to claim for itself the one proper "reading" of the Jewish "legacy," and a reading that denies validity to Jewish readings, the felt necessity of keeping Judaism and Jews in play, to provide testimony both through the divine punishment they are believed to be undergoing and through their preservation of Hebrew scriptures, allows for a Jewish presence that is spectral – consigned to a time other than the present and yet "haunting" the present ....<sup>56</sup>

One way in which the Jew "haunts" the Christian imagination is as a figure for the corporeal, the bodily, in contrast to the Christian "spiritual."<sup>57</sup> Kruger also discusses the significance of the converted Jew as a figure for the Jewish origins of Christianity which while "converted" still, in the very narrative of that conversion, persist, perhaps disruptively. Kruger's study focuses on the specter of the Jew as it is "conjured" in a variety of texts during and after the long twelfth century. The "idea" of the Jew in the fifth century *Inventio* or in Cynewulf's poem will not be, perhaps, as completely developed as a cultural signifier prior to the "more intensive encounter with Jewish texts, ideas, beliefs, and practices" that will characterize the later Middle Ages.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, the actual Jewish presence in England at the time of Cynewulf's composition is so minimal that the Jew for him can only really be "an idea," one that has not yet attracted the full range of meanings it will accrue, but neither has yet ossified into an anti-semitic caricature. The representative Jew, Judas, is undeniably a signifier in this figural narrative who stands not

only for the Jewish people, but also for their literal and experiential knowledge of scriptural material that is contained, ultimately, in his own body.

Scheil confirms that the association of the Jew with the bodily was current specifically in the Anglo-Saxon period, but focuses his attention on the “corrupt” nature of the Jewish body which has the potential to pollute the Christian community and which is therefore marginalized.<sup>59</sup> In *Elene* the bodily Jewish presence is perhaps best understood as, paradoxically, an allegorical bodiliness. The Jewish body of Judas is the figure for the literal reading of the scriptures and perhaps extra-canonical Jewish knowledge of the story of salvation. This body ultimately cannot be marginalized, but must be incorporated; it does not pollute, but rather completes the Christian hermeneutic. Indeed, until it is enclosed completely within the Church’s interpretive hegemony, this Jewish knowledge is potentially disruptive. What might the Jews know about the crucifixion that they have never revealed? Perhaps this inherent anxiety about Jewish knowledge explains the intensity of the conversion/torture episode in the legend and the poem.

In this most vexed episode of the poem, the scene of Judas’s torture which immediately precedes his prayer and conversion, we see his physical body, the repository of that literal knowledge of the crucifixion, brought to the brink of literal starvation. When he emerges from the pit to show Elene the way to the buried cross, Judas has been brought to know that what he needs to ask for is not literal bread and nourishment, but the spiritual bread of belief and sacrament. The episode disturbs us and does not allow, in Andrew Scheil’s terms, for an “optimistic” reading which would deny its inherent anti-Semitism.<sup>60</sup> But the starving Jewish body that drags itself to the spot where the cross is buried, prays, and digs down into the earth to recover it is, ultimately, not only essential to that physical recovery, but becomes in its

conversion a figure for the Church's ongoing need for the Jewish knowledge Judas embodies. The anti-Judaic nature of the story is, perhaps unsatisfactorily, and yet undeniably tempered by the poem's grappling with the primacy and necessity for Jewish experiences, texts and modes of reading.

*The Torture of Judas and the Limits of Literalism*

The period of starvation and torture has been widely read as an allegory for the ascetic exercise of fasting that is a part of the preparation for the baptism of Judas, although this reading is certainly not universally accepted.<sup>61</sup> Just before Judas is handed over for his own ordeal, Elene "threatens" the assembled Jews with immolation if they do not produce a representative to endure her interrogation. Klein describes the "chilling treatment of the Jews" as both typical of the violence characterizing Anglo-Saxon conversion stories and as the element of the story that most distances modern readers from the poem's own contemporary readership, which would not have been scandalized by these violent words and actions.<sup>62</sup> While I agree with those who find the identification of Judas' banishment to the pit as a penitential fast to be too facile, there is undeniably both a penitential purpose and a figurative level of meaning to this simultaneously brutal literal starvation. I also believe that the threats that Elene makes to both the assembled Jews and to Judas in particular are crafted by Cynewulf to suggest that the dire consequences she predicts or imposes are only those which their own obstinate choices merit; punishment (or torture or ordeal) as a suffering that one's own sinful deeds merit is also emphasized by Cynewulf in Judas's cursing of the devil, as discussed below, and in the scenes of Judgment so vividly imagined in the epilogue. I acknowledge the violence of this episode, and yet allow for

its historically contextualized logic both on the literal and figural levels. Cynewulf, in my view, works very carefully with the Jewish material of his source, because it is so essential to the meaning of the poem. The Jew, as a representative figure, is necessary to finding the cross – that is to right reading of the scriptures; Judas as an imagined, historicized individual makes a choice which will lead to his torture, just as each man makes choices which impact his eternal destiny. It is uncomfortable today to read the Jewish refusal to cooperate with *Ecclesia* as a sinful choice meriting violent rebuke and punitive penitential reformation, but that is the internal logic of the poem and its world, and it is applied not only to the Jews, but to all men and, initially, angels. Indeed, as the epilogue itself suggests, Cynewulf's early medieval worldview clearly expects painful purgation to be the lot, to some extent, of everyone, even those eventually destined for heaven.

Elene's words to the assembled Jews offer a vivid depiction of the fate which awaits them should they continue to deny any knowledge of the cross she is seeking:

"Ic eow to soðe        segan wille,  
 ond þæs in life        lige ne wyrðeð,  
 gif ge þissum lease        leng gefylgað  
 mid fæcne gefice,        þe me fore standað,  
 þæt eow in beorge        bæl fornimeð,  
 hattost heaðowelma,        ond eower hra bryttað,  
 lacende lig,        þæt eow sceal þæt leas  
 apundrad weorðan        to woruldgedale.  
 Ne magon ge ða word geseðan        þe ge hwile nu on unriht  
 wrigon under womma sceatum,        ne magon ge þa wyrd bemiðan,  
 bedyrnan þa deopan mihte." (ll. 574-584a)

[I mean to tell you plainly – and upon my life it shall not prove a lie – that if you who stand before me continue in this deceit for long with your fraudulent lying, a blaze of hottest billowing ferocity will do away with you upon the hill and leaping flames will destroy your corpses, for that deceit shall be deemed for you a matter for death. Even though you may not affirm those sayings – which you have for some time now wrongfully cloaked beneath the garments of your shameful deeds – you will not be able to conceal the event nor keep secret that profound miracle.]

The fiery immolation described here will be directly echoed in the epilogue's depiction of the torments endured by all the damned of the third group on the Day of Judgment. Both ordeals will be marked by billows or surges ("heaðowelma," l. 579, "heaðuwlme," l. 1305) and flame ("lig," l. 580, l.1300); the "womsceaða" ("sin do-ers," l. 1299), echo the "womma" (l. 583) of the Jews here, whose lying, "leas," emphasized twice here (ll.576, 580), is also the chief characteristic of the deceitful persecutors in eternal torment ("lease leodhatan," l. 1300); finally the bitter foes of the epilogue ("torngeniðlan," l. 1306) recall the bitter foes ("torngeniðlan," l. 568) here to whom Elene addresses this speech.<sup>63</sup>

The Jews take Elene to be speaking only literally of their immanent earthly death, and so hand over Judas to her, but while this act may preserve them momentarily from the flames, the medieval reader believes that their continued failure to acknowledge the truth of the cross, which Judas has by this time already revealed to them, will also someday merit final damnation. According to the logic of the poem it is not Elene who will condemn them, but their own deceitfulness ("þæt eow sceal þæt leas/ apundrad weorðan to woruldgedale," ll. 580b-581) ["for that deceit shall be deemed in you a matter for death"]. We see this fine distinction between punishment or torture imposed and that which is the necessary, purgative consequence for those who do not choose rightly, explored again in Cynewulf's handling of both Judas's "stone vs. bread" exchange with Elene and Judas's subsequent torture.

When in her interrogation of Judas Elene offers him the choice of life or death, he replies with a rhetorical question, as to whether a man starving in the desert, who comes upon hard stone and soft bread, would choose the stone instead of the bread to assuage his hunger (*Elene* ll. 611-18), which has been taken to echo Matthew 7: 9 and Luke 11:11, "Or what man is there of you, who, if his son ask bread, will give him a stone?" In resisting or deflecting Elene's further

questions, however, Judas chooses death. As Whatley has argued, Judas's choice of the figurative stone represents his, and by extension, the Jews,' stubborn and "hard-hearted" refusal to move beyond the literal, an interpretation reinforced by Cynewulf, at other key moments in the poem, in describing the Jews themselves or Judas as stone-like or hard. The physical starvation to which Judas is condemned in a dry pit, a place of earth and stones, is an allegory for the spiritual starvation that ensues when one chooses a stone (hard-heartedness and literal-mindedness) over the bread of spiritual understanding.<sup>64</sup>

The pit into which Judas is thrown has many patristic analogues as a place of penitence, not only for Jews, but for any who have not fully accepted the word of God. The pit as a place of purgation is an image found in Psalm 55, upon which Augustine, discussing the fate of heretics, comments, "The pit of corruption is the darkness of sinking under. 'When blind leads blind, they both fall into a ditch.' (Matthew 15:14) God bringeth them down into the pit of corruption, not because He is the author of their own guilt, but because He is Himself the judge of their iniquities. 'For God has delivered them unto the desires of their heart.' (Romans 1:24) For they have loved darkness, and not light; they have loved blindness, and not seeing."<sup>65</sup>

In this commentary we see a pit specifically linked to a willful blindness to the truth of Christ. A pit is also, of course, a place sunk into the earth.<sup>66</sup> Being "in the earth" or "of the earth" when in a state of spiritual darkness and sin is also a patristic trope for specifically Jewish unbelief. We saw above the association of the Jews with mere earth – lacking Christ's transformative spittle – in Augustine's sermon 86. Other passages in Augustine likewise link the Jews with the barren earth -- that which, for instance, cannot be fruitfully tilled after Cain (understood as a type for the Jews) kills Abel (a type for Christ). Augustine in *Contra Faustum* explicitly links the tilling of the earth to the non-literal reading of the scriptures which the

Jews/Cain cannot perform: “In this way the Jewish people, like Cain, continue tilling the ground, in the carnal observance of the law, which does not yield to them its strength, because they do not perceive in it the grace of Christ.”<sup>67</sup>

The literal starvation Judas endures in the pit is the physical manifestation of a choice to forgo spiritual nourishment – i.e. by not choosing the bread.<sup>68</sup> Likewise, the earth into which he is thrown is the literal manifestation of the earthly interpretation of scripture in which Judas is mired as the natural consequence of *not asking* for anything at all.

For it is worth noting that when Elene encourages Judas to choose life or death, his reply reveals a failure to fully understand the mechanism by which he might find himself in possession of life-giving nourishment. If we agree that the scriptural text to which Judas’s hypothetical question most clearly alludes is Matthew 7:11, as a Christian reader would surely hear it, we must note the irony that Judas, as a Jew would not, perhaps be familiar with that New Testament passage it represents. Or if he is familiar with it, he has deliberately distorted its main sense by ignoring the broader scriptural context. Patristic commentary on the verse to which Judas alludes highlights the importance of asking for the right thing.<sup>69</sup> Indeed, as Whatley suggests, Cynewulf brings issues of choice to the fore here, and as I have also suggested emphasizes throughout the poem that the “natural” consequence of wrong choices will be punishment. But the Gospel passage to which Judas alludes is not only about choosing, but more centrally, about asking, that is, about prayer.

The passage begins, famously, “Ask and it shall be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7) and continues with a “son” asking for bread, at which point Jesus rhetorically questions whether any father could give that son a stone instead. As Judas is cast as playing with the motif, he imagines simply someone hungry,

wandering in the desert who comes upon his choice of bread or stone. Perhaps unwittingly, Judas has removed the bread-giving father from the scenario entirely and has therefore also removed the possibility of *asking* for either thing. The stone is what he “chooses” by default, because no act of asking is even envisioned.<sup>70</sup> But asking, i.e. prayer, is necessary for correct interpretation as it is for salvation; the epilogue will suggest that those who “called aloud upon the Son of the ordaining Lord” (“ond to suna metudes/wordum cleopodon,” ll. 1318b-1319a) were purged of their sins by the refining fire. Here we build to the moment when Judas’s purgation, his literal torture in the pit, teaches him that he is also figuratively starving and impels him to ask, in effect, for that spiritual bread in the first actual prayer text of the poem, which is indeed addressed to the Savior, “Dryhten hælend,” (l. 725a), “Lord, Saviour.”<sup>71</sup> If he once knew where the cross was buried, he is now “hungre gehyned” (“reduced by starvation,” l. 720a), and he must formally request God’s help to find it.<sup>72</sup>

The prayer to which the whole first half of the poem has built captures Judas poised between two worlds – the Jewish and the Christian. We may say, in fact, that through this prayer, Judas is constructed as a prayerful reader in the process of converting, which process includes coming to recognize the necessity for prayer. The prayer is a speech act of syntactic and structural complexity, dense allusiveness, and poetic exuberance. It is public in nature and liturgical in shape, while also having a deeply personal desire at the core of its main petition:

Forlæt nu, lifes fruma,	
of ðam wangstede	wynsumne up
under radores ryne	rec astigan
lyftlacende.	Ic gelyfe þe sel
ond þy fæstlicor	ferhð staðelige,
hyht untweondne,	on þone ahangnan Crist,
þæt he sie soðlice	sawla nergend,
ece ælmihtig,	Israhela cining,
walde widan ferhð	wuldres on heofenum,
a butan ende	ecra gestealda. (ll. 792-801)

[‘Author of Life! let a pleasant smoke now rise up from the spot, drifting on the air beneath the sky’s expanse. I shall the better believe and the more firmly found my spirit and my undoubting hope upon the crucified Christ, that he is truly the Saviour of souls, eternal, almighty King of Israel and shall everlastingly command the eternal abodes of glory in the heavens, for ever without end.]

The public necessity for which Judas petitions the Lord in this prayer – that the pleasant smoke may arise at the spot where the cross lies buried – is here married to the personal belief he must attain in order to assuage the terrible hunger with which he has emerged from the pit. The prayer both enacts and verbally encloses the spiritual climax of the poem: the two halves (in ll. 725-800 and in 807-826) bookend the moment in which the miraculous smoke reveals the location of the cross (literal Jewish knowledge) to the Christian queen, and Judas finds that the cross has meaning beyond the literal when he converts to belief in Christ. Elene needs the Jew, Judas, to lead her to the cross of the Jesus whom his father saw crucified, but Judas needs to be converted to belief in Christ, “the Saviour of souls eternal, almighty King of Israel,” which transformation can only occur through prayer, and specifically for a Jew, prayer that is addressed to Jesus.

*The Prayer of Judas in the Inventio: Structure and Substance*

Since Cynewulf preserves from his Latin source the structure and substance of the prayer as it is recorded there, I will discuss first these essential elements which are shared by the source text and the prayer in *Elene*, before going on to consider how Cynewulf’s poetic re-working and general expansion of the prayer function to further highlight the thematic concerns of the whole poem. The prayer in the *Inventio* may be divided into sections in terms of the distinct thoughts expressed, which I have schematized below. The lines from *Elene*, which adheres strictly to this design, are indicated in brackets.

## I. Praise of God

A. as the creator [ll. 725-730]

B. and as the one enthroned in heaven to whom angels

minister [ll. 731-742]

i. four of whom are singing before God's throne: [ll. 743-753a]

“Sanctus, sanctus, sanctus” (Holder l. 239),

“Halig is se halga heahengla god”(l. 750)

ii. and two of whom are guarding the Tree of Life [ll. 753b-759a]

II. Depiction of God as victor over the rebellious angels and vision of their present torments [ll. 759b-771]

III. Introduction of the main petition(s) with a review of proofs that Jesus is indeed the Son of God [ll.772-782]

IV. A petition to be heard just as Moses was heard when he sought the bones of Joseph [ll. 783-788a]

V. A petition that the sign of smoke will reveal the “treasure:” “thesaurum” (Holder l.255), “goldhord”(l.790a) so that Judas may believe in the crucified Christ [ll. 788b-801]

*After this petition, the smoke appears. Judas claps his hands and exclaims[ll.802-806]:*

VI. Acclamation: In truth, Christ, you are the savior of the world! [ll. 807-809a]

VII. Thanksgiving [ll. 809b-812]

VIII. A petition to God to forget Judas's sins; contrition [ll.813-817a]<sup>73</sup>

IX. A petition to be numbered with his brother Stephen “who has been written about:” “qui scribitur in duodecim apostolorum tuorum” (Holder l. 268), “Sint in bocum his wundor þa he worhte/on gewritum cyðed”(ll. 825b-826) [ll.817b-826]

The prayer as it found in the source is, as Borgehammar suggests, reminiscent in situation and form of a number of “great Scriptural prayers, especially those of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:15-

19; Isaiah 37:16-20) and Mordecai (Esther 13:9-1 Vg; 4:17c LXX)".<sup>74</sup> These prayers are offered in situations of desperation or distress and begin by calling upon God as the all-powerful creator before moving on to a specific petition. But in fact, beyond praise and petition, the prayer develops almost as an anthology of prayer intentions: praise, petition, acclamation, thanksgiving and contrition. In these various attitudes of prayer we see Judas locating himself in what the poem's contemporary audience would see as his rightful position in salvation history. He can properly praise God (Part I) because he now recognizes the failure of the unbelieving angels – that they would resist God's command (Part II). He knows the truth of the Scriptures: that the Son of Mary is God's Son (Part III). Perhaps more significantly he knows that even his own people's experiences may be interpreted to foretell the coming of Christ, just as Moses' discovery of the bones of Joseph may pre-figure the discovery he is about to make (Part IV). He understands that what he needs is not only an object, but belief (Part V) and experiences true joy when his prayer is heard (Part VI). Gratitude to God (Part VII) naturally leads to a sense of unworthiness and feeling of compunction (Part VIII) which can be properly tempered by the hope of heaven (Part IX). The prayer is theologically sophisticated and syntactically complex, lending an appropriate sense of weight to the moment.<sup>75</sup> But most importantly, its substance reveals Judas correctly interpreting his place in the world and in scriptures. Two key structural elements of the prayer serve this portrait of Judas-as-reader as well: first, its high degree of allusiveness and second, its repeated use of seemingly dichotomous pairings which are nevertheless yoked together under God's dispensation. Both of these structural elements serve to highlight the sense that in this act of right reading, communion is being effected: of the Jew and the Christian, the literal and the spiritual, human speech and divine word.

Part I of the prayer immediately brings into play a wide range of Jewish and Christian associations, setting the tone for the rest of this highly allusive text which freely references passages from Genesis through Revelation. The prayer's use of the *Sanctus* alone, a text also used at the heart of the Christian Eucharistic liturgy and which is drawn from the vision of Isaiah as described in Isaiah 6:1-3 and recapitulated in the New Testament, creates a rich web of intertexts and also serves the overarching thematic concern in the prayer with the union of the bodily and the spiritual. As Bryan Spinks notes in a recent book-length study of the *Sanctus*, its use in both Jewish and Christian liturgies served to evoke "[t]he 'mystical tendency' of the joining of heaven and earth in praise to God [which] was kept alive and developed in various Jewish groups....and also influenced certain Christian groups, as witnessed by John 12:41, Revelation 4 and the *Passio* of Perpetua and Felicity."<sup>76</sup>

The "mystical tendency" to see heaven and earth united is itself embodied not only in the heavenly vision from which the *Sanctus* derives, but in the very act of embedding the words of this scriptural prayer within Judas's own earthly prayer of praise: that is, in the nature of scripturally allusive prayer itself.<sup>77</sup> In Chapter One I discussed an important feature of *Lectio divina*: its dialogic quality. As a reader prayerfully encounters a text, *lectio* (in which he hears the voice of God) yields to *oratio* (when he offers back the very words of God in prayer). Throughout the prayer, Judas offers aloud the words of God from the scriptures, Jewish and Christian; those scriptural passages issue from his mouth, his body, and rise up, their efficaciousness – the fact that he has read them rightly – marked by the miraculous response.<sup>78</sup> The beginning of the prayer especially alludes to Isaiah, Genesis, Ezekiel, Chronicles, and Psalms.<sup>79</sup> Later we find references to Matthew, Mark, John, Acts and Revelation. Some of the New Testament allusions may also be construed as references to the Hebrew Scriptures to which

these verses themselves point – further evidence of the inherently “dual” nature of the prayer. For instance, the reference to the fall of the angels, glossed by Whatley as an allusion to 2 Peter 2:4 echoes the affirmation in Sirach 16:7-9 that no one escapes the judgment of God. Likewise the apparent allusions to Revelation can also be references to visions of the angels found in Ezekiel and Isaiah, among other places.

The presence of these scriptural texts, both Jewish and Christian, in this prayer is proof that Judas has incorporated the words of God into his own human understanding, perhaps even, in a sense, ingested them: Judas seems to have satisfied his hunger, indeed not with “bread alone,” but by learning how to “eat God’s book,” in the *ruminatio* that is a part of *lectio*.<sup>80</sup> He is now capable of the kind of right reading of scriptures that Elene believed the assembled Jews were unable to perform. In Part I of the prayer the voice which once called out from the dry pit has been lifted “up” to join that of the angels on high. Later in the prayer Judas makes typological associations between Moses and himself, demonstrating that he can even read the patterns of biblical history into his own lived experience. This facility, too, had been beyond the capacity of the forebears of the Jews interrogated by Elene who did not see biblical history unfolding in their own lives when Jesus walked among them.

The other salient structural feature of the prayer, its “pairing” design, is evident when the the heavenly vision of Part I, where God is invoked as the one who “measured out heaven with the palm of your hand and spanned the earth with your fist” (“qui palmo metisti caelum et pugno terra mensuasti,” Holder II. 231-32)<sup>81</sup> swings down from angels, through a brief mention of mankind,<sup>82</sup> to the very depths of Tartarus where those who resist God’s command (“tuo praecepto contra dicere,” Holder I. 246) are tortured in Part II.<sup>83</sup> This dramatic movement from heaven to hell, from the heavenly host who praise God to those angels who spoke against him,

conveys the vast sweep of God's authority and the poles which are encompassed by his reign. The next three sections of the prayer, which develops from praise toward petition, show Judas engaging in scripturally-informed theological reflection on the divinity of Jesus (Part III) and referencing an extra-scriptural story about Moses from the Talmudic tradition (Part IV), thereby marrying the authorities of Christianity and Judaism, scripture and tradition, all in preparation for the two-fold petition at the core of the prayer, expressed in Part V. The *Inventio* is perhaps even more explicit than *Elene* in insisting that the literal discovery of the cross has as its true purpose the spiritual discovery of Christ by Judas: "Fac ab eodem loco fumum odoris aromatis suavitatis ascendere *ut* et ego credam crucifixo Christo..."(Holder 255-57) [Cause to arise from the place where it lies, a fire that smells of spices of sweetness, *that* I might believe in Christ crucified..."] (my emphasis). And this moment of discovery is on a structural level not only double, but perhaps chiasmic in that the literal discovery of the location of the cross is marked by a sign of fire (or smoke or vapor), while the spiritual discovery happens within the body of Judas, marked by the physical manifestations that he cries out to God and claps his hands.<sup>84</sup>

The parts of the prayer which follow the miracle yoke the unworthiness of Judas with the great grace he has nonetheless been granted, for which he expresses the spiritually "high" and "low" attitudes of thanksgiving and contrition (Parts VII and VIII). Finally, Judas asks to be counted with his brother, Stephen, whose deeds have been recorded in scriptural texts (Part IX). Here the unlikely pairing of the "brothers," suggests the integration of the two Laws through these two representative figures: Judas, whose name identifies him literally with the *Iudaei*, and Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew with a Greek name (meaning wreath or crown). Not only do the brothers represent opposing types of Jewish converts, their conversion narratives also stand in different relationship to the authorized or canonical texts of the Christian tradition. Stephen's

narrative is only glimpsed in the New Testament book of Acts, but is nevertheless represented there in the Christian Scriptures. Judas's story is, at least as he is living it, an unwritten life. After baptism, of course, he too will take a Greek name, Cyriacus (or Kyriakos, from *Kyrie*) and the reader perceives the irony that his story, while it can never be Biblically canonical, will be gathered as a hagiographic narrative into a legendary and then find its way into devotional poetry, such as *Elene*. But at the moment he utters the prayer, Judas is expressing a desire for a communion with a brother who is his antithesis in many ways, including textually. The prayer is about the ability to read those many opposing pairs back into relationship within God's plan. The promise of reconciliation for these brothers is being enacted by the prayer itself as Judas is converted to Christian belief within it.

As an act of self-construction, then, the prayer portrays Judas as that most elusive but necessary figure upon whom the discovery of the True Cross depends: the still-recognizably-Jewish "right reader." His immanent baptism as Cyriacus may erase his Jewishness, but here in the central prayer it remains pronounced. The *Inventio*, in fact, purports to give the prayer in Hebrew before offering the Latin translation. Several lines of garbled pseudo-Hebrew are prefaced by the announcement "he raised his voice to the Lord in the Hebrew tongue" ("leuauit uocem uocem suam ad dominum Hebraica," Holder II.224-25) and followed by "which means" ("quod interpretaetur," Holder I. 230) before the Latin prayer begins. Borgehammar has also suggested that this prayer in the Latin is specifically constructed "in imitation of Jewish styles of prayer" and takes the reference to the use of the Hebrew language in the prayer as "an endorsement of the idea that Hebrew is a sacred language."<sup>85</sup> At the same time the prayer is strongly evocative of the Christian practice of *lectio* and takes on an increasingly liturgical cast as it develops, especially in Cynewulf's version. However, even in moments when Cynewulf

“Christianizes” the prayer, it remains a prayer “in Hebrew” spoken by a Jew, who makes extensive use of the Hebrew Scriptures, and references a story from the Talmud. We may say that the prayer in both versions reveals the “spectral” presence of the Jewish scriptures and liturgical forms which constitute the origins of the Christian forms and prayers of worship.

Let us turn then to the specific ways in which Cynewulf alters his source to draw out the themes of his poem. As Marguerite-Marie DuBois notes of this prayer, “Nous retrouvons ici la trame du texte latin mais quel changement profond dans traitement de la matière!”<sup>86</sup> Catharine Regan praised Judas’ prayer as “one of the finest examples of Cynewulf’s visual imagination.”<sup>87</sup> The Old English prayer is indeed marked by vivid descriptive detail and other examples of poetic embellishment which serve to suggest its importance as a centerpiece and thematic fulcrum for the whole poem. Prayer texts, as records of the speech offered to God, are often sites of enriched imagery and other forms of linguistic exuberance, and in *Elene* we also find careful deployment of the repetition and stresses of the Old English poetic line which likewise serve to elevate the tone of the poem at this point.<sup>88</sup> But Cynewulf’s poetic treatment of the prayer achieves more than aesthetic effect. The poet enriches the prayer text of his source in ways that specifically work to strengthen the prayer’s association not only with the readerly practice of *lectio* but also with that genre of poetically elevated speech most familiar to and resonant for his monastic audience: liturgical prayer.

#### *Judas’s Prayer in Elene: Lectio*

Some specific details added by Cynewulf to the first half of the prayer include those in lines 757b-759a (the sword of the seraphim guarding paradise and the Tree of Life), lines 759b-

771b (the more vivid scene of hell) and lines 783-787 (the expanded reference to the Talmudic legend of Moses). In these details Judas's prayer reveals an engagement with typological exegesis that finds the story of the cross hidden everywhere in scripture and in salvation history. Such habits of reading are the fruit of *lectio* which also find expression in liturgical settings related to veneration of the cross.

As Louis Van Tongeren demonstrates in his thorough study of the Feast of the Exaltation in early medieval liturgy, the concept of "recirculation" (*recirculatio*) which derives from the Pauline doctrine that Christ is the new Adam (and which was most fully developed by Irenaeus of Lyons), invites a mode of reading in which the "antithetical parallel assumes a central place."<sup>89</sup> Medieval hymns and prayers on and to the cross make extensive use of the "antithetical typology" whereby the salvation gained on the limbs of the tree of the cross stands in stark contrast to the fall suffered under the branches of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Eden.<sup>90</sup> Tongeren, in tracing the prayers of the early medieval liturgies of the Exaltation, finds that many of them dwell on this recirculation motif and particularly on the contrast between the closing and reopening of paradise. In *Elene* the striking image of the sword of the Seraphim guarding paradise (ll. 757b-759a) is of course a reminder that paradise has been closed to mankind.<sup>91</sup> Here, the Seraphim guard the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:24) which has also long been associated with the cross in Christian iconography. Borgehammar, for instance, details the deep association in *Inventio Crucis* liturgy of the cross with its antitype, the Tree of Life.<sup>92</sup> The sword the angel wields is "fiery" ("legene," l. 756b) and "sharp" ("Heardecg," l. 757b); it is a "patterned blade" ("brogdenmael," l. 758a) that "shifts its hues" ("bleom wrixleð," l. 758b). The well-wrought and colorful blade protecting the iconic tree foreshadows the likewise well-wrought and colorful reliquary that will protect the re-discovered wood of the cross (cf. ll. 1022b-1026a),

deepening the association between this tree and the cross. Likewise, the vivid imagery of Hell added to the poem's prayer (ll. 759b-771b) lends emotional depth to the plight of the fallen angels and provokes a dread of the fate which may await other unbelievers. These are the very torments from which the cross of Christ promises salvation and from which the sinful can be preserved only by learning to call upon the Lord, that is, to pray, as Judas has discovered through his ordeal and the epilogue will repeat (ll. 1318b-1319a).

The Talmudic story of Moses is here expanded to suggest the time (“on þa æðelan tid,” l. 786b) and place (“under beorhhliðe,” l. 787a) where Joseph's bones were found. Bradley translates these phrases as “on that glorious occasion” and “beneath the pile of his burial-place;” other possibilities include “in that noble time” or “hour” and “under the rocky ledges” or “mountain slope.” The details lend a specificity to the event which link it more explicitly to the noble occasion about to occur when Judas will likewise dig beneath the earth. Borgehammar demonstrates that in the Rabbinic writings, the bones of Joseph were already associated with the Ark of the Covenant, so that to invoke the story of one is to suggest the other. Speculating about the inclusion of this allusion in the *Inventio*, Borgehammar concludes that it is there to invoke a parallel: “nothing seems more natural than that the casket containing the Cross should have been seen as the Ark of the New Covenant.”<sup>93</sup> Moses finding the bones of Joseph becomes a type for Judas finding the cross.<sup>94</sup> In linking his petition to the one made by Moses, Judas has cast himself as an antitype. He reads himself into the exegetical hermeneutic of Christian tradition and at the same time demonstrates that the story of the cross lies buried, typologically, not only in Hebrew scriptures, but in its extra-canonical traditions as well.<sup>95</sup> Cynewulf also reports that the Lord heard Moses “on meðle” (Bradley: “in his pleading,” but also possibly “in discourse” or

“in conclave”), suggesting a type of dialogic exchange with God that the highly allusive prayer he is uttering typifies.

The first half of this long prayer ends at line 801 with the conclusion of Judas’s petition for faith. At that moment, “ðā of ðære stowe steam up aras/ swylce rec under radorum” (“Then in that place rose up a vapour-like smoke beneath the skies”) at the site where the cross was buried. Upon seeing the vapor Judas claps his hands and resumes his prayer by proclaiming a formula of belief.<sup>96</sup> Judas’s proclamation of this formula in the Latin life, “In veritate, Christe, tu es salvator mundi,” which Cynewulf renders:

“Nu ic þurh soð hafu seolf gecnawe  
on heardum hige þæt ðu hælend eart  
middangeardes,”(807-809a)

is perhaps the high moment of the poem.<sup>97</sup> Appropriately then, Cynewulf suggests the meditative interiority of the conversion in its references to the process by which knowledge becomes belief. Bradley renders the Old English: “Now I have truly ascertained for myself in my obstinate mind that you are the Saviour of the world” or in Kemble’s translation: “Now I have in truth/ myself acknowledged/ in my hard heart, /that thou art the saviour/ of the world!”<sup>98</sup> As Whatley has suggested, the element of the “heardum hige” recalls the earlier references in the poem to Judas’s (and by extension) the Jewish people’s historic failure to choose the bread of life over the stone of unbelief, or to read and interpret their experiences and scripture properly. The interior process described here looks back to Jewish failures of interpretation or reading, but also anticipates the personal, meditative transformative reading experienced by Cynewulf himself in the epilogue.

It should be noted that one possible source text for this prayer of acclamation is the story of the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter four of John’s Gospel. In an “epilogue” to her story, John reports that the other Samaritans to whom she had told her story were then inspired to

go off and hear Jesus for themselves. When they return, John tells us: “And they said to the woman: ‘We now believe, not for thy saying: for we ourselves have heard him and know that this is indeed the saviour of the world’” (John 4:42). That Judas’ prayer should allude to this story seems apt. His belief has taken hold most completely in the moment of the miracle – God’s sign to him – after he has also heard the testimony of others. Interestingly, since the next episode in Judas’s story will be the miracle of the raising of a young man from the dead, the episode immediately following in John is the story of the raising up from his deathbed of the son of a ruler of Capharnaum -- a miracle which will cause not only the father but also his whole house to believe (John 4: 43-53). The narrative development of both of these gospel stories is the same as that for the Invention legend: a movement of belief outward from the conversion of one person, to her/his people, and then, in the story of Judas, to the wider world. In *Elene* this narrative movement outward is reflected as well in the development in Judas’s prayers towards greater liturgical allusiveness.

After the readerly and somewhat digressive allusiveness of the first half of the prayer, the second half of the prayer moves briskly through modes familiar to liturgical celebration: acclamation, thanksgiving, contrition, and petition. Judas asks specifically at the end of his long prayer, just before he digs for the cross, to be included and incorporated into a heavenly communion with his brother Stephen. He prays:

Læt mec, mihta god,  
on rintale        rices þines  
mid haligra        hlyte wunigan  
in þære beorhtan byrig,        þær is broðor min  
geweorðod in wuldre,        þæs he wære wið þec,  
Stephanus, heold,        þeah he stangreopum  
worpod wære.        He hafað wigges lean,  
blæd butan blinne.        Sint in bocum his  
wundor þa he worhte        on gewritum cyðed." (818b-826)

[Give me leave, mighty God, to dwell among the number of your kingdom, together with the congregation of the saints in the shining city where my brother is honoured in glory because he, Stephen, was faithful to you (or kept covenant with you), though he was done to death by stoning. He has the reward for the struggle, splendour without cease: the wonders he achieved are celebrated in books, in written records.]

The *Inventio* even more specifically mentions the Acts of the Apostles as the place where the story of Stephen may be found (“et adnumera me cum fratre meo Stephano, qui scribitur in duodecim actibus apostolorum,” Holder l. 268). Judas’s prayer to be “þær is broðor min” explicitly recalls Stephen’s place in heaven among the saints and also his place in the canon of scripture. I have suggested above that the Jewish knowledge of the crucifixion, the lived experience of the event and possible extra-canonical information about it, which is preserved in the memory/body of Judas, must be fully incorporated into the Church in order to complete the Christian hermeneutic. Here Judas asks to be brought specifically into a textual communion, and the story may enact the containment of possibly disruptive Jewish knowledge within the authorized canon of the Church.<sup>99</sup>

Having finished his prayer, Judas digs in the earth (“eorðan delfan/ under turfhagan, ll. 828b-829a), for the cross that his people put there. Judas has been able to find the cross by asking for God’s help through his prayer to the Savior. Borgehammar has suggested that the cross is, ultimately, a figure for scriptural interpretation itself, noting that “... so long as Jesus is not recognized as the one he is, the truth of Scriptures must remain hidden. And here we begin to see that there is a parallel between revelation and the finding of the Cross. When the Cross is brought up out of the dark, light is simultaneously shed on Scriptures.”<sup>100</sup> Irvine has similarly suggested, “The Cross is presented as the exegetical key, a fulcrum to the plan of sacred history, a crux in both senses, for the interpretation of the ancient Scriptures.”<sup>101</sup> If the recovered cross is the interpretive “key” to the Scriptures, it is easy to see why, as noted above, the legend of the

Finding of the Cross will go on to accrue so much additional material about the cross's own "secret" place in human history: its seed, and tree, and limbs, and wood woven like another "bright thread" through Old Testament stories, the Passion, and beyond. But before the thread is followed, the whole cloth must be made; before the prayerful "digging" of exegesis and *lectio*, the literal level must be encountered. Jerome advocated the study of ancient languages and geography as preparation for exegesis; as noted above, Augustine acknowledged the importance of grappling with the literal level of scriptural meaning when he set out to interpret Genesis "according to the plain meaning of the historical facts, not according to future events which they foreshadow."<sup>102</sup> Here the necessary presence of the Jew, Judas, who utters the long, central prayer at the heart of *Elene* suggests that the Jewish modes of reading and textual traditions he represents have been and will continue to be essential for the recovery of the cross, i.e. the correct interpretation of scripture. But the attendant, potentially disruptive correlative to the need for Judas will be his persistent presence. Containing that on-going presence requires that literal Jewish readings and texts be brought within the Church's interpretive fold where they can be shown to yield even greater riches. This incorporation of Jewish knowledge is figured here in the praying and digging Judas who has turned towards a new, salvific hermeneutic of right reading. That reading is scriptural, meditative, and personally engaged – like *lectio divina*. Such reading also ultimately issues properly into liturgical expression.

*Judas's Prayer in Elene: Liturgical Allusion and Sacramental Action*

As discussed in Chapter One under the heading "liturgical reading," it may be said that in the Christian tradition, liturgical settings become the sites where the authorized interpretations of

the scriptural texts from both testaments are promulgated. Liturgical resonances in the prayer of Judas suggest such an authorized containment of the Jewish and Christian scriptural texts, and also serve to re-inforce several of the poem's dominant themes. That Judas's interrogation, torture, and diabolic temptation may be read as elements of a figural baptismal liturgy has been well studied and so will be only touched upon here.<sup>103</sup> But baptism is not the only sacrament evoked in this moment of conversion. Judas's prayer is, as I have suggested, a direct result of the hunger he has experienced for that "bread" which is the word of God. The cross which he will dig from the earth is itself a figure for the Holy Scripture he has learned to read: God's words. But it is also the closest relic to the Word of God in the flesh, the Body of Christ, whose physical absence is remedied for the faithful to some degree by the recovery of that very relic, but more centrally in the Sacrament of the Eucharist. Tongeren also notes in his study of early Roman mass prayers for the Feast of the Exaltation that a prayer over the Eucharistic gifts (the secret) in the *Tridentinum* sacramentary "identifies the sacrificial gifts on the altar with Jesus, who was offered on the altar of the Cross."<sup>104</sup> Fittingly, the prayer of Judas has strong Eucharistic overtones, both present in the *Inventio* and enhanced by Cynewulf in *Elene*.

There are many possible allusions in Judas's prayer to the central moment of the Mass, some of which have been noted by other readers. First, the overall shape of the prayer, broken as it is into two parts which surround a moment of miraculous transformation, may be said to suggest the *anaphora*, or Eucharistic Prayer, of the Mass in which the sacred words of institution (which effect the transubstantiation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ) are introduced by a Preface and followed by prayers of acclamation, thanksgiving and petition. Here a *Sanctus* precedes the miracle, just as the *Sanctus* is part of the preface in most patristic and medieval *anaphoras*.<sup>105</sup> In Cynewulf's expansion, the simple Trisactus of the Latin text is

reduced to two repetitions of the word Holy, but simultaneously expanded to include more of the text of the prayer as it is used in the Eucharistic setting:

'Halig is se halga	heahengla god,
weoroda wealdend!	Is ðæs wuldres ful
heofun ond eorðe	ond eall heahmægen,
tire getacnod.'	(ll. 750-753a)

[Holy is the holy God of the archangels, the Ruler of the hosts; heaven and earth are full of his glory and all his sublime might is illustriously witnessed.]<sup>106</sup>

The first part of the prayer which discusses seraphim and cherubim and leads to the angelic song has also included additional references to angels, as in addresses to God as “wealdend engla” (l. 772b), “þeoden engla” (l. 776b) and “fæder engla” (l. 783a), which are not found in the *Inventio*. Borgehammar particularly notes that this prayer in the Latin “dwells on the angelic world”; Cynewulf has strengthened this motif.<sup>107</sup> As pointed out by Daniélou, a belief in the presence of the angels at the mass was widely noted by fourth century authors.<sup>108</sup> In Cynewulf’s poem the eucharistic liturgy attended by angelic participants is powerfully suggested by these repeated allusions to angels and by his double use of the word “þegnunge” (l. 738a and l.744a) to translate the Latin “ministerium.” Both words mean “service” in the sense of “being in attendance” on God, but the Old English þegnunge also means a liturgical “service,” which is exactly what they are singing.<sup>109</sup>

At the moment of his conversion, the formula of belief which Judas uses (“In veritate, Christe, tu es salvator mundi,”) is in fact used today in Roman Catholic liturgy as part of one of the Memorial Acclamations spoken by the assembly immediately after the consecration.<sup>110</sup> His joyous handclapping at this moment has biblical and patristic precedence, but may have liturgical significance as well. Augustine, in his commentary on Psalm 47, specifically links this physical sign to the joy of belief in Jesus that the blind Jews do not have: “O clap your hands, all you

nations [Psalm 46:1]. Were the people of the Jews all the nations? No, but blindness in part is happened to Israel ....”<sup>111</sup> But it is also possible that the vapor and hand clapping represent some very early suggestion of rites which accompany the Eucharistic prayers – perhaps the use of incense and a “clapper” like the wooden crotalus which replaces the Sanctus bells during the Lenten season. Finally, the prayers of thanksgiving and petition for a place among the saints, especially Stephen, which follow the miraculous sign are indeed also reminiscent of the *Nobis quoque* of the *anaphora* as suggested by Regan.<sup>112</sup>

Further research into when these precise innovations in the Eucharistic liturgy developed would reveal more completely the liturgical “intertexts” woven into both the *Inventio* and *Elene*, but that project is beyond the scope of this present study. It seems clear, however, that scriptural text, dialogic prayer, physical gesture, and miraculous sign are woven together to suggest the ritual words and actions of liturgy. And certainly we may say that in its rhetorical heft and in its rich scriptural and liturgical allusiveness, this complete prayer, taking a full one hundred lines of the poem, suggests a sacramental centrality to *this* moment for the story, the moment when belief in Christ penetrates Judas’s heart, not the moment when the wood of the cross is physically revealed. The moment could be called Eucharistic in the sense that the acclamation of belief Judas speaks would suggest to the poem’s monastic audience the building up of the mystical Body of Christ in the world by the incorporation of Judas that they promise. That this may be a move of containment as well remains undercut to some degree if we remember that this long prayer, so evocative of the most central of Christian liturgical celebrations, is nevertheless offered (or presided over) by Judas “on Ebrisc”(l. 724b).

Throughout the rest of the poem, Judas, or Cyriacus, becomes increasingly connected to sacramental action, liturgical prayer and clerical function. We will never again hear him pray

aloud, although he speaks to rebuke the devil and he is reported to pray and to lead people in prayers that are recorded. The fact that this single, long and verifiably efficacious prayer is the only one in the narrative itself spoken aloud by Judas (and in *Elene* offered completely in the first person singular)<sup>113</sup> adds to our sense that it serves as the primary site for the poem's construction of this central figure. In it he is Jewish and Christian, a practitioner of *lectio* and a liturgical presider, the revealer by word and action of both the literal truth of the crucifixion and the spiritual meaning of the cross.

*Judas/ Cyriacus: From Pray-er to Presider*

After his crucial prayer, the remaining events of the poem all reveal Judas/Cyriacus in priestly roles or as a subject himself of sacramental action. The first such episode in which he takes on the role of a public presider is in the determination of which of the three crosses is the True Cross: the miracle of authentication. Elene refers again, in a detail added to the legend by Cynewulf, to her own knowledge of scripture (now, from the New Testament):

"Hwæt, we þæt hyrdon      þurh halige bec  
 tacnum cyðan,      þæt twegen mid him  
 geþrowedon,      ond he wæs þridda sylf  
 on rode treo.      Rodor eal geswearc  
 on þa sliðan tid.      Saga, gif ðu cunne,  
 on hwylcre þyssa þreora      þeoden engla  
 geþrowode,      þrymmes hyrde." (ll. 852-858)

[Listen! we have heard it plainly proclaimed by sacred books that the two suffered with him and that he himself made the third on the rood-tree. The sky entirely darkened in that cruel hour. Say if you can on which of these three the Prince of angels, Shepherd of that host suffered.]

But despite her knowledge of the story, gained "þurh halige bec," Elene still needs Judas to truly recognize which of the three crosses is the Cross. Again, Judas "did not know for certain" ("ne

ful gere wiste,” l. 859b) which was the Cross and so turns to prayer – and in this case, communal prayer that suggests public liturgy.<sup>114</sup> Judas and the “sigerofe” (“men of victorious renown,” presumably Elene’s soldiers) sit around the crosses and sing “oð þa nigoðan tid” (“until the ninth hour,” l. 869b). It is as if the meditative, personal prayer born of the solitude of the pit has given way to the sung prayer of the choir at none.<sup>115</sup> After the singing, and as Cynewulf reminds us again, at the ninth hour, a corpse is brought before the “great crowd of people” (“folc unlytel,” l. 871a) which has gathered. Judas is “greatly exhilarated in his heart” (“on modsefan miclum geblissed,” l. 875) and “meditating deeply” (“fyrhðgleaw on fæðme,” l.880a) he holds up each cross above the corpse. The striking image of Judas holding up each cross while he simultaneously meditates upon it seems a rich figure for the meditative encounter with the scriptures that is *lectio*, but such an encounter is fruitless if the text or symbol meditated upon is not the Truth. When the third one, the “Prince’s cross” is so lifted up, the “soulless corpse of the deceased man bereft of life” (“sawlleasne, /life belidenes lic on eorðan,” ll. 876b-877) is reanimated. The spirit and the body are reunited, just as the spirit and the letter of the Law are co-joined again in the cross that is held up by Judas. And when after this highly symbolic “rite” of elevating each cross in turn, the True Cross reveals itself by this miraculous reanimation,

	þær wæs lof hafēn
fæger mid þy folce.	Fæder weorðodon,
ond þone soðan	sunu wealdendes
wordum heredon	Sie him wuldor ond þanc
a butan ende	eallra gesceafta! -- (ll. 889b-894)

[There was seemly praise exalted among the people; they honoured the Father and extolled aloud the true Son of the Ruler: ‘To him be glory and the thanks of all creatures for ever without end.’]

As Whatley has noted, Cynewulf’s version of the legend “celebrates more explicitly than the Latin original the transfer of the covenant from the Jews to the Christians and the reuniting of

divine and earthly power behind the sign of the cross.”<sup>116</sup> Indeed the poem celebrates the new era of political power for Christians, but as these lines suggest, celebrates as well the transfer of interpretive power over the cross, and by extension the scriptures, both Jewish and Christian. That trust is exercised both in the monastic *lectio* – the meditative pondering -- and in liturgical settings, where symbolic gestures and the words of the scriptures are woven together into evocative rites and the communal prayers of response like those of ll. 893b-894 quoted above. This line is a version of the lesser doxology, frequently used in the Divine Office. The custom of ending a rite with a formula of praise such as this comes into the Christian liturgy originally from the Synagogue and examples of such formulae abound in the Hebrew scriptures (see for example Tobit 13:23 or Psalm 83:5).<sup>117</sup> This doxology is similar to those St. Paul often uses to conclude his epistles (see Romans 11:36; Galatians 1:5; Ephesians 3:21) offered to honor the Father by extolling the True Son, but does not offer within its text proper a Trinitarian formula such as is typical of later Christian doxologies. Here we witness Judas already taking on a priestly role, enacting a ritual gesture (elevation of the cross) which provokes a liturgical response that has, at its root, scriptural texts from both testaments.

When the belief in Jesus has been established in the hearts/minds of Judas and the assembled people (ll.894b-895a), the devil rises to challenge the new faith. It has been noted that such a challenge is both frequent in hagiographic contexts and linked to the rejection of Satan that is part of the rite of Baptism.<sup>118</sup> In this episode and just after it we see Judas himself as subject to sacramental action in his formal Christian initiation; at the same time he may be seen in the priestly role of exorcist in his dealings with Satan.

Regan discusses the extent to which reading this section of the poem “as a dramatization of the catechumenate” helps give fuller meaning to this encounter with the devil and Judas’

subsequent infusion with a wisdom that she links to the patristic concept of *sapientia*.<sup>119</sup> Regan does not remark explicitly on the fact that in the early church the Sacraments of Initiation – Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist – were all celebrated at the same time. To the extent that Judas is now filled with the Holy Spirit, his Confirmation in Christ has been effected:

hæleð hildedeor,      (him wæs halig gast  
 befolen fæste,      fyrhat lufu,  
 weallende gewitt      þurh witgan snyttro),  
 ond þæt word gecwæð,      wisdomes ful:  
 Him ða gleawhydig      Iudas oncwæð, (ll.935-939).

[Then the shrewd-minded Judas, emboldened to the fight – for the Holy Spirit was firmly bestowed upon him, love ardent as fire and an ebullient intelligence – answered him with a soldier’s cleverness and, filled with wisdom, spoke these words:]

Cyril of Jerusalem, in a discussion of the sacrament of confirmation, invokes martial imagery as well: “For as Christ after his baptism and the visitation of the Holy Spirit, went and overthrew the adversary, so must you after holy baptism and the mystical Chrism, clad in the armor of the Holy Spirit, stand firm against the forces of the Enemy and overthrow him saying: ‘I can do all things in the Christ who strengthens me.’”<sup>120</sup> A direct reference to confirmation also seems intended when the actual baptism of Judas is noted in ll. 1032b-1038a and Cynewulf writes,

His geleafa wearð  
 fæst on ferhðe,      siððan frofre gast  
 wic gewunode      in þæs weres breostum,  
 bylde to bote. (ll. 1035b-1038a)

[His belief grew rooted in his soul when the Holy Ghost and Comforter occupied a dwelling in the man’s breast and moved him to penitence.]

To the baptismal typology whose presence in the poem has already been well established, the references to confirmation add another layer of sacramental significance to Judas’s new life.

At the same time that it may figurally reference his own baptismal renunciations, Judas’s battle with the devil is also resonant of the liturgical rite of exorcism, as has been discussed in a

recent article by David Johnson. I will only add to that discussion that while it is indeed correct to see the rite of exorcism as an “intertext” for this passage, Cynewulf has characteristically complicated the associations in his re-working of the *Inventio* and other source texts. In this case Cynewulf has chosen *not* to record Judas’ direct speech to the devil that the *Inventio* offers. For the *Inventio* records Judas’ direct curse: “Iudas autem ferbens iam spiritu sancto dixit: ‘Quique mortuos suscitavit Christus ipse te damnat in abyssum ignis aeterni,’” (Holder ll. 298-301) [“But Judas, burning in the Holy Spirit said, ‘Christ himself, who raised up the dead, will damn you to the abyss of eternal fire’”].<sup>121</sup> Cynewulf casts the speech more subtly into a prediction of what the “mihtiga cyning” (l. 941b) will do to the devil and the torments he will suffer because of his “unsnyttrum”(l. 946a). The Devil has just demonstrated a perverse “unwisdom” in the speech (ll. 902-933) where he reads salvation history from his own profoundly warped point of view. The very typological associations that Judas has learned to make himself are caricatured in Satan’s lament:

“Ic þurh Iudas ær  
hyhtful gewearð,      ond nu gehyned eom,  
goda geasne,      þurh Iudas eft,  
fah ond freondleas.” (ll.921b-924a)

[Through a Judas I was once filled with hope – and now I am humiliated, deprived of my goods, outlawed and friendless, once more through a Judas.]

Precisely in the antithetical typology here where a Christian would read the message of Christ’s saving power (a Judas has redeemed the sin of a Judas), the devil, despite the chiasmic structure of his own words, fails to truly “read the cross”; he understands that his rights of possession have been abrogated, but does not (or can no longer) choose belief as Judas has. And while the words of the *Inventio* (and their subsequent preservation in the legend’s textual tradition) may indeed suggest exorcism (“eicior,” as used in the *Inventio*, is used in the rite of exorcism), Cynewulf’s

expansion creates a more reasoned, reflective and theologically sophisticated exchange that supports the poem's thematic concerns. This priestly exorcist is also a prayerful reader who counsels the Devil to reflect on his loss:

Wite ðu þe gearwor  
 þæt ðu unsnyttrum      anforlete  
 leohta beorhtost      ond lufan dryhtnes,  
 þone fægran gefean...      (ll. 945b-948a)

[May you recognize the more clearly that you have imprudently lost the most sublime of existences and the love of the Lord, that joyous delight...]

What he has lost is described in terms of the fullness of joy that all the converts to Christianity have thus far experienced. Filled himself with the “firehot love” of the Holy Spirit, Judas knows that the fiery torments of hell are necessarily the province of those who have failed to recognize Christ. There is no need to damn to hell one who is already ontologically there. Or, in terms of the “natural” consequences of choices we have seen emphasized already throughout, Satan finds himself exactly where his actions have placed him.

After the encounter with the devil, an account of the dispatching of messengers to Rome with news of the finding, which has no precedent in the source, is inserted by Cynewulf. This episode serves to reinforce the theme of the widening circles of belief which ripple outward from this miraculous discovery. Judas is brought to belief in Christ, as witnessed by the miracle of the vapor, and again experiences great joy at the sight of the holy tree in the ground (“þa wæs modgemynd myclum geblissod, /hige onhyrded, þurh þæt halige treo, /inbryrded breostsefa, syððan beacen geseh, /halig under hrusan,” ll. 839-842b) [“Then his mind was greatly gladdened, his purpose fortified and his heart inspired by the holy tree, when he saw the holy emblem in the ground”].<sup>122</sup> But more men, presumably Elene's soldiers (“eorlas,” l. 847) and perhaps some of the Jews were elated (“anhydige,” l. 847) and “had gloriously discovered a new

happiness” (“hæfdon neowne gefean/mærðum gemeted,” ll. 869b-870a) after the second miracle, the proof of the True Cross.

Judas has now through prayer and ritual action located the spot where the cross was buried, authenticated the one True Cross, and cast out the devil. He has himself undergone sacramental initiation and is no longer merely acting the priestly part. Shortly after his baptism, he becomes a priest, is quickly also consecrated as a bishop, and is given a new name, Cyriacus (ll. 1043-1061).<sup>123</sup> Next, in the finding of the nails, Judas enacts another miracle of discovery (and attendant “right reading” and conversion) that is possible only through prayer – and specifically now, liturgical prayer. Elene now turns to him once more with an anxious heart and very formally requests his help (ll. 1073-1092), asking him to “send up” his prayer that the Almighty King will reveal the “hord under hrusan” (l. 1091a) of the nails:

	Nu ðu hrædlice
eallum eaðmedum,	ar selesta,
þine bene onsend	in ða beorhtan gesceaft,
on wuldres wyn.	Bide wigena þrym
þæt þe gecyðe,	cyning ælmihtig,
hord under hrusan	þæt gehyded gen,
duguðum dyrne,	deogol bideð. (ll. 1086b-1092)

[Quickly now, most excellent apostle, in all humility send up your prayer into that radiant creation, into the joy of heaven, and beseech the majestic Lord of his soldiers that he, the King almighty, reveal to you the treasure beneath the earth which yet remains hidden, secret and concealed from the people.]

Elene’s petition for a petition is quite explicit and literal in terms of what she desires – the revelation of another buried treasure. Once again, as in Judas’s prayer, and in an allusion now added to the source by Cynewulf, the physical relic that is sought is a buried treasure, “hord.” As Borgehammar has pointed out, several early liturgical books give the Gospel for the feast of *Inventio Crucis* as Matthew 13:44(-50), “The kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone has found.”<sup>124</sup> And so while Elene seems to be asking for the discovery of

only a literal object, Cynewulf's repetition of this liturgically resonant allusion strengthens the theme that each physical revelation brings spiritual growth as well.

This verbal echo of Judas's prayer in Elene's request highlights the connections between the two miracles of finding, or Inventions. The discovery of the nails is an instance of the duplication or recapitulation of narrative patterns and symbols that is often typical of hagiographic legends; we will discuss the use of such duplication in the legend of Saint Margaret in Chapter Four. In this sense, the miracle of the Invention is replicated here for emphasis. The nails, like the cross, may be another symbol of Jewish literalness, the physical and factual -- viewed as positive and necessary, complementing rather than opposing the spiritual and figural. The poem emphasizes the physical intimacy between the nails and Christ's body:

...ðæs nergendes  
 fet þurhwodon      ond his folme swa some,  
 mid þam on rode wæs      rodera wealdend  
 gefæstnod, frea mihtig      (ll. 1064b-1067a)

[“...the nails which pierced the Saviour's feet and likewise his hands with which the Ruler of the skies, the mighty Lord, was fastened on the Cross.”]

The physical discovery of the nails will then recapitulate the physical discovery of the cross, the literal objects enabling a spiritual finding as well: belief in Christ, but in this case not only for the individual seeker, Judas. Once again, Judas/Cyriacus is necessary to Elene's purpose, as is a prayer that he must offer. However, whereas the first-person prayer of Judas for the location of the cross brought him to his own acclamation of belief, here his liturgical prayer and action offered on behalf of the gathered people will bring belief, finally, for the other Jews there who “all with one accord” (“ealle anmode,” l.1117a) utter a liturgically resonant prayer of response.

The prayer for the nails is not given verbatim in either the *Inventio* or in *Elene*, although the essence of it is reported. Cynewulf, in fact, reports the content of the prayer even more briefly than the source, choosing instead to add details that emphasize the mindset and mode of Cyriacus more exactly. He also describes the miraculous results of this unrecorded prayer more vividly and allusively in ways that specifically suggest the spread of belief among the Jews and the gathering of Jews into Christian forms of worship.

The throng with whom Cyriacus approaches Calvary walks praising God, as if in liturgical procession (ll. 1093-1096a). In the poem at this point it is not specified whether those processing are Elene's men and/or only those Jews who had already turned to belief in Christ; perhaps the throng includes non-believing Jews as well. The Latin text emphasizes that Cyriacus prays, "blessing all who had believed in Christ and who were about to believe in his name" ("beatificans omnes quia crediderunt in Christo et qui credituri sunt," Holder ll.338-39). In *Elene*, after the miracle, Cynewulf finally identifies the assembled men who witnessed the sign and are about to pray as indeed those who had been Jews, noting, "before, through the devil's havoc, they had long remained in error, having turned from Christ" ("þeah hie ær wæron/ þurh deofles spild in gedwolan lange,/acyrred fram Criste," ll. 1117b-1119a).

We are told repeatedly of Cyriacus' spirit in approaching this task. He is "breostum onbryrdeð" ("inspired within his breast, l. 1094a), he goes "glædmod" ("kindly of heart," 1095a), and he prays "eallum eaðmedum" ("in all humility," l.1100). The poet's reluctance to record the actual words of the prayer seems highlighted when he describes the mode of prayer:

ond þa geornlice  
 Cyriacus on Caluariæ  
 hleor onhylde, hygerune ne mað,  
 gastes mihtum to gode cleopode  
 eallum eaðmedum (ll. 1096b-1100a).

[and when on Calvary Cyriacus diligently bowed down his face, he did not hide secret thoughts but by the power of the spirit he called upon God in all humility]

Whereas in the source Cyriacus looks up and beats his breast at prayer, here he has bowed down his face. The humility he displays in posture and attitude is matched by his new willingness not to hide secrets, but to call aloud upon God, just as the poet will recommend in the epilogue that those who survive the fiery purging will have “to suna metudes/ wordum cleopodon” (“called aloud upon the Son of the ordaining Lord,” ll.1318b-1319a). The poem suggests that those who know they need God to purge their sins and help them are humble and willing to pray. Judas has already expressed these attitudes in his own long prayer, and we do not need to hear Judas utter words of prayer again; the amplification of the narrative here depends not on a simple recapitulation of this spiritual Invention, but on the deepening of its resonance. It is more important to hear the assembled Jews pray; to hear them call aloud upon God so that they may avoid the fiery depths with which Elene had earlier threatened them.

Finally, as Cyriacus concludes his prayer, a sign appears:

ða cwom semninga      sunnan beorhtra  
 lacende lig.      Leode gesawon  
 hira willgifan      wundor cyðan,  
 ða ðær of heolstre,      swylce heofonsteorran  
 oððe goldgimmas,      grunde getenge,  
 næglas of nearwe      neoðan scinende  
 leohte lixton.      (ll. 1109-1115a)

[There suddenly appeared then a hovering flame brighter than the sun. The people saw their benefactor reveal a miracle, when from out of the darkness there, like stars of heaven or fine gems, near the bottom of the pit, the nails, shining from out of their confinement below, gleamed with light.]

The *Inventio* already reports that the nails shone with a radiance “brighter than the sun” (“clarior solis lumine,” Holder l. 346) and that the nails were “blazing like gold in the earth” (“aurum fulgen[te]s in terra,” Holder ll. 348-49). Cynewulf adds that the miraculous vision included a

“hovering flame” (“lacende lig”) and that the nails were like the stars of heaven or fine gems (“swylce heofonsteorran/ oððe goldgimmas”). These details serve to link the recovered nails visually with the cross vision of Constantine (ll. 88-90) and the reliquary made to enclose the True Cross (ll. 1022b-1025a) and perhaps even the blade guarding the Tree of Life in Judas’s prayer (ll. 757b-759a ). In other words, the miraculously recovered literal nails, still reposing in the earth (“grunde getenge,/ næglas of nearwe neoðan”), may be associated in their shining brightness with the symbols and accouterments of liturgy, such as reliquaries. Certainly, the brilliant, gem-like nails shining from the darkness of the pit offer a striking visual image of the literal and spiritual re-united.

The sign of the “hovering flame” (l.1110) that reveals the nails may also, like the smoky vapor (“steam,” l. 802b) Judas had requested and received (“Forlæt nu, lifes fruma,/ of ðam wangstede wynsumne up/ under radores ryne rec astigan,” ll.792b-794)[“Author of life! Let now a pleasant smoke rise up from the spot”], deepen the sacramental element of this conversion episode. Much has been made of the baptismal typology at play in the central episodes in which Judas finds the cross. If this second finding miracle serves to recapitulate the first, we might expect to find some baptismal element here, too. No water imagery is present in either episode, but the signs of a vaporous smoke and hovering flames may suggest the pillar of cloud (by day) of fire (by night) which accompanied the Jews during the Exodus.<sup>125</sup> Saint Paul suggested that being under the pillar was a figure for Baptism, a theme well explored by the Fathers.<sup>126</sup>

United in their great joy, the assembled multitude, at this point clearly identified as Jews (ll. 1117b-1119a), express their belief in God in a liturgically allusive prayer:

"Nu we seolfe geseoð        sigores tacen,  
soðwundor godes,        þeah we wiðsocun ær  
mid leasingum.        Nu is in leoht cymen,

onwriġen, wyrda bigang. Wuldor þæs age  
 on heannesse heofonrices god!" (ll.1120-1124)

[“Now we see for ourselves the sign of victory, a true miracle of God, although once we denied it with our falsehoods. Now the course of events is come to the light and revealed. For this let the God of heaven-kingdom have glory on high.”]

In their affirmation of faith here, the Jews, like a liturgical congregation, praise God with one voice (“sægdon wuldor gode/ ealle anmode,” ll. 1116b-17a). The prayer in the Old English is expanded from the simple Latin “Nunc cognoscimus in quo credimus” (Holder ll. 350-51; “Now we know in whom we believe”), which may allude to John 6:69. As reworked by Cynewulf, the prayer also echoes the Cantic of Simeon, the *Nunc dimittis*:

Nunc dimittis servum tuum Domine, secundum verbum tuum in pace: quia viderunt oculi mei salutare tuum, quod parasti ante faciem omnium populorum: lumen ad revelationem gentium, et gloriam plebis tuæ Israël. (Luke 2:29-32)

[Now dismiss your servant, O Lord, according to your word in peace: Because my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared before the face of all peoples: A light to the revelation of the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.]

Although “nu” is not emphasized by alliteration or primary accent in the meter of the line in *Elene*, it is a striking repetition, focusing attention on the word which is of course a translation of “nunc” in the *Inventio*. The imagery in both the *Elene* prayer and the *Nunc dimittis* is that of “seeing for oneself” (we seolfe geseoð /viderunt oculi mei) the “light” (leoht/lumen) of that which has been “revealed” (onwriġan/revelationem). Cynewulf makes a point here of identifying these men with the Jews “who once denied” the “sign of victory,” far more explicitly than the source does, and also reminds us immediately after the prayer that the bishop, Cyriacus, had likewise “turned to penitence through the Son of God” (“...to bote gehwearf/þurh bearn godes,” ll.1125b-1126a). Rather than the “Sunu” of God, the “bearn” may in this context call to mind the child brought to the temple; we may also recall that Judas’s father was a Symon (a variant of Simeon) who likewise had already believed in Christ. Finally, the *Nunc dimittis*, as the prayer of

a pious Jew who could properly read his own scriptures and therefore recognize Christ when he appeared,<sup>127</sup> seems a fitting liturgical allusion for this prayer offered by these Jews who are themselves now “right readers” of a sign which has come up out of the earth. Just as the *Nunc dimittis* is offered at the end of the liturgical day, in the hour of Compline, the prayer offered by the Jews at the end of this second Invention narrative brings a sense of completion to Elene’s spiritual quest. Not only have the literal nails been found; the belief they have engendered in the Jews has completed Elene’s own conversion in some significant way.

From the moment when in his own prayer he professes his belief to this moment, when the Jews gathered around him likewise offer a prayer of acclamation, Judas has been associated with liturgical words, gestures, and rites. We have seen him elevate the cross; lead processions; exorcise the devil; be baptized, confirmed, and consecrated both priest and bishop; pray on behalf of the Queen; discover relics; and preside at the conversion of ever-widening circles of believers. The once-recalcitrant Jew has adopted a priestly role (both figuratively and literally) which places him at the very heart of the Church, the Body of Christ. Whereas the first half of the poem emphasized questions of right reading – Jewish and Christian -- leading to a prayer where Jewish and Christian modes of reading were reunited, after that central prayer the poem insists upon the liturgical sphere as the proper setting (and safe vessel of containment) for that unlikely creature: the Jewish/Christian right reader, Judas/Cyriacus.

#### *Conversion Completed for Elene and Ecclesia*

After the prayer of the converted Jews, Cynewulf writes that their joy is mirrored by Cyriacus, who was “geblissod,” and then magnified by Elene whose tearful response to this final

fulfillment of her desires is overwhelming (ll. 1131b-1146). This intense joy is amplified from the source and seems directly tied to her possession now of physical evidence of the truth of her faith:

Gode þancode,  
sigora dryhtne,      þæs þe hio soð gecneow  
ondweardlice      þæt wæs oft bodod  
feor ær beforan      (ll. 1138b-1141a)

[She thanked God, the Lord of Victories, because she knew at first hand the truth which had often been proclaimed long previously...]

Cynewulf highlights the indispensable role that Cyriacus has played in Elene's "conversion" from anxious cares to complete spiritual fulfillment made possible by the recovery of the physical realities of the relics – which speak to the literal truth of the Scriptures.<sup>128</sup> Although the prayer is raised at her bidding, once again it is somehow still necessary for Cyriacus to offer it:

Hæfde Ciriacus  
all gefylled,      swa him seo æðele bebead,  
wifes willan.      (ll. 1129b-1131a)

[Cyriacus had fulfilled the woman's whole desire according as the noble lady had bidden him.]

Elene's actions for the rest of the poem are swift and decisive as she is enlivened by this new spiritual vigor. Although in earlier versions, including the *Inventio*, she herself decides what to do with the nails, and only summons a skilled artisan to execute her design, Cynewulf has her turn to "a man of pre-eminent wisdom" ("forðsnotterne," l. 1160) who is capable of advising her. Is he one of her "eorls"? A cleric? A converted Jew? Perhaps we may simply say that from the city of Jerusalem a man emerges with the correct answer, rightly reading a verse from the Hebrew Scriptures (Zechariah 14:20) as pre-figuring this moment in the life of the Church. Although the man is not identified as a converted Jew, Elene's successful sending forth for a wiseman from Jerusalem here mirrors her earlier, unsuccessful attempts to find a wiseman

among the Jews who could answer her question. Elene “speedily” (“ofstlice”) does as the wiseman instructs her, making and dispatching to Constantine a bridle for his horse fashioned from one of the holy nails.<sup>129</sup>

In the same spirit of energized action, Elene deals with the unconverted Jews of Jerusalem, but not, as the source insists, by summarily dispatching them. The *Inventio* reports that after she encouraged those in Jerusalem who did believe (presumably including new converts), she “visited persecution on the Jews who had remained unbelievers, and expelled them from Judea” (“persecutionem Iudaeis inmisit quia increduli facti sunt et minauit eos a Iudaea;” Holder ll.374-77). Cynewulf concludes instead:

Heht þa tosomne      þa heo seleste  
mid Iudeum      gumena wiste,  
hæleða cynnes,      to þære halgan byrig  
cuman in þa ceastre.      þa seo cwen ongan  
læran leofra heap      þæt hie lufan dryhtnes,  
ond sybbe swa same      sylfra betweenum,  
freondræddenne,      fæste gelæston  
leahtorlease      in hira lifes tid,  
ond þæs latteowes      larum hyrdon,  
cristenum þeawum,      þe him Cyriacus  
bude, boca gleaw.      (ll. 1201-1211a)

[Then she commanded those among the Jews whom she knew to be the finest of men and of humankind to come together to the holy city, into the fortress. Then the queen enjoined the assembly of dear friends that they should steadfastly maintain their love of the Lord and likewise peace and friendship among themselves, sinless during their lifetime, and that they should obey the teachings of their preceptor, those Christian usages which Cyriacus, learned in books, would decree for them.]

Here the newly widened circle of believers is gathered in to the Church; no Jews are reported to be exiled. This is not the apocalypse (when all Jews will be converted), but a vision of a loving and orthodox ecclesial communion -- an “assembly of dear friends” (“leofra heap”), following proper “Christian usages” and “teachings” (“larum hyrdon,/ cristenum þeawum”) as they are instructed by a “preceptor” (“latteow”) who is “learned in books” (“boca gleaw”). In fact it is of

interest that the people Elene calls into that communion are specifically still identified as Jews (“Tudeum”); whereas Judas’s name may be erased by his baptism as Cyriacus, the assembled converted Jews are not here referred to as Christians. Their Jewish identity persists, but is being called within the boundaries of a holy city (“halgan byrig”) or fortress (“ceastre”) under the Church’s law, represented by Cyriacus. The poem continues its description of the pastoral work of the Jewish/Christian Bishop who heals people in their fleshly lives: the lame, paralyzed, maimed, halt, mortally sick, leprous, blind, wretched and miserable (ll. 1212b-1215a), leaving us with this final word on the former Judas: “symle hælo þær /æt þam bisceope, bote fundon/ece to aldre” (“there at the bishop’s hands they always found healing and a cure lasting forever,” ll.1215b-1217a).<sup>130</sup> As “Cyriacus,” Judas is firmly ensconced in his ecclesiastic setting as are the other converted Jews. They are vanquished not by exile and extirpation, but by conversion and incorporation into *Ecclesia* in a vision of perfect communion articulated by Elene. The poem has steadfastly insisted throughout that this strategy of inclusion is necessary for the salvation of the Jews, but also, perhaps less obviously or consciously, for the completion of the Church’s interpretive powers and spiritual fulfillment. Elene’s spiritual yearning has only finally ended here, after the second Invention, with the more complete conversion of the Jews that discovery effects. Yet the poem has also insisted that the only way to achieve the union Elene describes (and *Ecclesia* experiences) is by choosing to call aloud on the Christian God in prayer. Fallen angels (ll. 759b-771), Satan (ll.939-952a), and those damned to eternal fires at Judgment (ll.1298b-1306a) all failed to choose correctly and are suffering vividly-imagined, terrible consequences. Have all of the obdurate Jews heeded Elene’s warning (ll.574-584a)? For that matter, has the reader of the poem? The final lines of the poem itself and the epilogue return us

to these soteriological questions of who is finally incorporated into or excluded from the Body of Christ.

*The Reader as Convert?*

The last lines of the poem proper pull back from a sharp focus on the harmony of the ecclesial communion in Jerusalem to a wide-angle view embracing “all those worshipping God on this earth” (“... þa eallum bebead/ on þam gumrice god hergendum,” ll. 1219b-1220) in a concluding call to prayerful observation of the Feast of the Invention, May 3. This plea is expanded from a mere mention in the *Inventio* to include several thematically apt additions:

ond þa eallum bebead  
 on þam gumrice      god hergendum,  
 werum ond wifum,      þæt hie weorðeden  
 mode ond mægene      þone mæran dæg,  
 heortan gehigdum,      in ðam sio halige rod  
 gemeted wæs,      mærost beama  
 þara þe of eorðan      up aweoxe,  
 geloden under leafum.      Wæs þa lencten agan  
 butan VI nihtum      ær sumeres cyme  
 on Maias kalend.      (ll. 1219b-1223a)

[And then she called upon all those worshipping God upon the earth, men and women, to honour with mind and main strength, with the heart’s contemplation, the glorious day on which the holy rood was found, the most glorious of trees which have grown up from the earth, burgeoning beneath their leaves. Spring had by then progressed into the month of May, only six days before the arrival of summer.]

Here Elene calls the widest possible circle of believers to a “reading” (“heortan gehigdum,” with heart’s contemplation ) of this celebration of the rood, an evocative blending of the interiority associated with *lectio* and the observance of a liturgical feast, perhaps suggesting the use to which this very narrative may be put on that day. Here the rood is imagined not as Constantine first saw it: in its glittering bejeweled incarnation as a “fægeran gesyhð” (l. 98b), but as the most

glorious of trees – like the living things which have grown up from the earth and which are “burgeoning beneath their leaves (“geloden under leafum”). The imagery is of growth and renewal, as living trees spread their canopies, the reach of the cross is extending to shelter all who will observe this liturgical feast – a celebration prescribed and promulgated, of course, by ecclesial authority. Finally, the date of the feast is recorded here in terms which suggest the further growth that ensues as spring progresses towards summer.

Fittingly then, the poem proper closes with the narrator’s prayer that, like the vision offered in the epilogue (ll. 1316b-1321), asks that the realm of the angels in heaven be unlocked for everyone (“þara manna gehwam,” l. 1228b)

...þe on gemynd nime  
 þære deorestan      dægweorðunga  
 rode under roderum,      þa se ricesta  
 ealles oferwealdend      earne beþeahte (ll. 1232b-1235)

[... who holds in remembrance the festival of the most precious rood beneath the skies which the most mighty, the sovereign Lord of all, overspread with his arms.]

Again the prayer emphasizes the interior contemplation (“on gemynd nime”) of the festival (“dægweorðunga”) and the salvific breadth of the Lord’s embrace, his arms overspreading the “deorstan” (most precious) cross. The vision has shifted again, the living tree once more a precious object, but over which the bodily arms of the Lord are stretched. The text concludes, “Finit,” and the prayerful epilogue begins.

In these concluding portions of the poem -- Elene’s call to prayer, the narrator’s prayer, and the epilogue -- the narratological distance between the reader and the subjects of the legend collapses. Elene, an actor within the story, marks where the narrative is memorialized on the liturgical calendar under which the reader lives by calling that reader himself to prayerful observation of a precise date. Subsequently, the narrator, as if in response to Elene’s call to

prayer, offers a prayer for everyone who does honor the Feast of the Invention. Finally, Cynewulf's epilogue, as discussed above, adds a meta-narratological layer of prayerful interaction with the story. The layered prayer texts at the end of *Elene* are like the ever-widening circles of belief described within the poetic narrative. These circles of belief within the legend, moving always towards conversions of greater completeness -- from Constantine to Judas to the Jews to Elene -- seem to continue to ripple outward beyond the temporal boundaries of the legend itself, encompassing the narrator, the poet, and finally seeking to pull the reader himself within the embrace of a final communion.

Margaret Bridges has noted that in concluding authorial prayers an author "points to the effects of his work beyond the continuity of the narrative proper" – a strategy which "suggests the inability of prayer or plea to produce anything other than further acts of prayer or pleading" and therefore serves to effect narrative closure.<sup>131</sup> The story is over (i.e. no further narrative will be "engendered"), because through this type of prayer-for-further-prayer, a narrative "stasis" is achieved. This analysis of the functioning of concluding authorial prayer is correct, of course, unless one allows for the belief that the poet himself, and the very world he represents, may be presumed to hold, that intercessory prayer is not an exercise in endless repetition and stasis, but rather an activity which acknowledges that the narrative just told has never really ended, nor, if the prayers he is requesting are efficacious, will the poet's own. Rather, the purpose of the re-telling and praying over these stories is to insert oneself into an all-encompassing narrative which continues for ever and ever. From the poem's contemporary point of view, the concluding prayers pose an invitation to the real-life reader to read and pray over the story to that incorporating end.

*The Jews: Heavenly Incorporation and Textual Spectrality?*

Just as the epilogue moves from the solitary reader, pondering the cross, to the shared beatific vision of those who have been purged of their sins on Judgment Day, the poem's prayers have moved from the prayer of Judas, the solitary "prayerful reader" pulled from the pit, to encompass the liturgical prayer of the converted Jews of Jerusalem and finally all people who "hold in remembrance" ("on gemynd nime" l. 1232b) the story that these pray-ers have enacted.

Cynewulf offers what to him must be a compellingly hopeful vision, but does he suggest that it really includes everyone? The note of "remembrance" ("on gemynd") may also recall to the reader's mind the "damned," the third group described in the epilogue with which this analysis began. Cynewulf writes of those forsaken souls, "Gode no syððan/ of ðam morðorhofe in gemynd cumað,/ wuldorcyninge" (Never again will they come into the remembrance of God, the King of glory, from out of that place of torment," ll. 1302b-1303). Ó Carragáin remarks that God's "sifting" action on Judgment Day is cast here in terms of memory, a faculty "particularly relevant to the activity of reading" and explicitly linked with the poet's own prayerful reading over or "sifting" of stories about the cross (cf. ll.1247 and 1252).<sup>132</sup> The image suggests that to be held in God's memory, as a text is held in *lectio*, is to be saved.

By the analogy he has suggested in the epilogue we may say that the poet of *Elene* who has prayerfully pondered stories of the cross seems also to have the ultimate fate of the Jews if not "in gemynd," clearly *on* his mind. The "residual ambiguities" Scheil noted in the poem's assessment of Jewish culpability for deicide are in play as the poem grapples with questions

about the final incorporation of the various “categories” of Jews into the heavenly communion. When the Jews are first introduced into the poem, in a Cynewulfian addition not found in the *Inventio*, those “historical Jews,” who were complicit in the crucifixion are quite clearly, and matter-of-factly judged: “they must needs suffer damnation amid humiliation throughout an infinite existence!” (“...hie in hyndūm sculon/ to widan feore wergðu dreogan!” ll. 210b-211). By the end of the Invention story, in another change from the source, no unconverted Jews are explicitly exiled, when Elene calls into her ecclesial communion “those among the Jews whom she knew to be the finest of men” (“þa heo seleste/ mid Iudeum gumena wiste,” ll. 1201a-1202) ushering them within the “holy city” (“halgan byrig,” l. 1203b), the “fortress” (“ceastre,” l. 1204a), that surely also prefigures the heavenly incorporation of these latter day Jews.

But this construction of the Christian community in Jerusalem, incorporating those “mid Iudeum” who are “seleste” begs the question of whether there are yet other unconverted Jews whose presence outside the fortress/city, and in the poem, has been elided. In verbal echoes in the epilogue we may see glimpses of those “spectral” Jews among both the damned and the saved. The recalcitrant Jews who handed Judas over and who were so vehemently threatened by Elene with immolation (“...eow in beorge bæl fornimeð,/hattost heaðowelma, ond eower hra bryttað,/ lacende lig,” ll. 574-584a) [“a blaze of hottest billowing ferocity will do away with you upon the hill and leaping flames will destroy your corpses”] are, as we saw above, verbally linked with the “third group” of the damned in the epilogue. In this verbal association, the poem may imply that these Jews have indeed been banished from God’s remembrance and damned.<sup>133</sup>

Then again, in other verbal echoes, Cynewulf may also suggest that any Jews who have not converted by the poem’s end could still be caught up into the ever-widening circles of belief that will embrace “manna gehwam,” everyone. Perhaps they are the “heane, hygegeomre”

(“wretched, and the miserable,” l.1215a) of Jerusalem to whom Bishop Cyriacus offers a cure “lasting forever” (“eccc to aldre,” l.1217a). They might then be found among the redeemable sinners, the second “part” of those subject to the purifying fire, likewise described as a “hæleð higegeomre” (“melancholy people,” l. 1297a) who eventually emerge from the flames.

The poem grapples throughout with issues of choice, free will and ultimate redemption across narrative and narratological divides: Judas, the Jews, the reader and the poet himself all sharply challenged – by torture, threat, and on pain of ultimate damnation – to conversions that should produce the earthly and heavenly harmony depicted with increasing fervor as the poem concludes. That some Jews may still remain unconverted despite the miraculous discoveries made in their midst (and the brutal coercion they have faced) is disruptive of that imagined communion. The ambiguity surrounding the fate of at least some of the Jews persists, created by the poet’s choice not to explicitly exile the unconverted, to clearly banish them from the holy city and the poem.

And finally in the poet’s *lectio* and in the poem which issues from it, Jewish presence also persists at the textual level because conversely, in this narrative of reading and interpretation, it simply cannot be elided. The literal readings of the Hebrew Scriptures and the lived experiences of the Jews are figured in the poem as a guide to the most sacred places and guarantor of the truth of the crucifixion. Scriptural interpretation is not complete without this layer of meaning; without it the cross cannot be found either literally or figuratively. That Judas and the Jews are the principal pray-ers throughout the poem re-enforces not only the centrality of prayer for “right reading,” but also the inescapable and potentially unsettling truth that Christian textual and devotional praxis have Jewish roots. Just as the wood of the cross is the treasure at the center of the golden reliquary, the literal truth of the Scriptures, as embodied by Judas, is

safeguarded and made public in its liturgical settings as these are presided over by Bishop Cyriacus. Cynewulf, working with and enhancing the themes already present in his source, creates a Judas who remains recognizably Jewish in his prayerful discovery, and then invests him, as Cyriacus, with increasingly ecclesiastic language, gesture, and authority which may, in effect, attempt to contain his necessarily persistent Jewish presence. But by a monastic audience as deeply steeped in the practices of *lectio* and in liturgical life as Cynewulf's contemporary readers must have been, the scriptural prayers of the Jew, Judas, would clearly still be heard in the liturgical rites presided over by Cyriacus.<sup>134</sup> In this sense, Judas is indeed the "spectral" Jew who haunts *Elene*, and I would suggest that Cynewulf, perhaps because he cannot, does not finally banish him from remembrance.

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<sup>1</sup> For the text of *Elene* I used Krapp's edition of the Vercelli Book, in the Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records, vol. II (online at the Labyrinth website: <http://labyrinth.georgetown.edu>). I have made use of Gradon's edition as well.

<sup>2</sup> The distinction between "public" and "private" is always tricky, especially in the case of vernacular texts. Ælfric's *Lives of the Saints*, for instance, was not ostensibly for a public context. On literary vitae see Hill, "Imago Dei."

<sup>3</sup> For the history of the Vercelli Book see Krapp's introduction. For discussions of the compilation of the text and the thematic unity of the collection, see Scragg; Zacher, "Preaching the Converted"; Treharne; and Ó Carragáin, "How Did the Vercelli Collector?"

<sup>4</sup> For a brief introduction to, and translations of, the Invention legends see Whatley, "Constantine the Great." More detailed and comprehensive background is provided in Borgehammar.

<sup>5</sup> On the *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*, see Borgehammar, including his edition (201-81) and translation (154-61) of the version numbered 4169 in *Bibliographica hagiographica latina* (BHL), Cynewulf's source. Borgehammar's edition, however, is a conjectural reconstruction of a lost Latin archetype, rather than a critical edition of an extant manuscript, so my quotations from the Latin *Inventio* are from Holder's (by line number), based on the oldest manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 2769). Allen & Calder's translation (59-68) is based on a late, interpolated text.

<sup>6</sup> Other hagiographic material that could be fruitfully explored on the question of the "prayer/reading" connections includes the lives of Jerome, Gregory, and Augustine, which freely incorporate material from their own writings about prayerful reading; the passions of several of the Virgin Martyrs, like Margaret (discussed in Chapter Four), whose prayers are richly scriptural; some of the Miracles of Our Lady mentioned in the Introduction, which suggest prayer as a substitute for literacy; and the lives of royal saints, such as Elizabeth of Hungary and

Margaret of Scotland whose time for prayer and skill at reading are privileges of the wealthy and powerful that inspire their devotion to charitable work.

<sup>7</sup> See for example the discussion of these changes in Irvine 166-171.

<sup>8</sup> Although, as we shall see, these later prayers are quite different in character from the central prayer spoken by Judas.

<sup>9</sup> All translations are by Bradley, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>10</sup> As Whatley notes in “Figure of Constantine” (161 n. 2) Cynewulf treats the *Inventio* “freely” in adapting his source.

<sup>11</sup> Of course the autobiographical epilogue requesting prayer from the reader is well established as a convention of Latin and vernacular literary production from the patristic through the medieval period. But the autobiographical details, devotional images, and thematic emphases are marshaled by Cynewulf here in ways specifically resonant of the Invention legend he has related. For a discussion of the connection between the poem and the epilogue, see Frese. See Allen and Calder (68-69) for an autobiographical epilogue that while similarly mentioning old age and repentance, lacks the thematic and devotional specificity of Cynewulf’s epilogue.

<sup>12</sup> Irvine 165.

<sup>13</sup> Irvine 171.

<sup>14</sup> Ó Carragáin, “Cynewulf’s Epilogue,” 191.

<sup>15</sup> Regan 253.

<sup>16</sup> The epilogues to the three other poems signed by Cynewulf all contain even more explicit requests for readers’ prayers.

<sup>17</sup> See Ó Carragáin’s excellent discussion of the devotional imperative of these last two sections (“Cynewulf’s Epilogue,” 187-191).

<sup>18</sup> See Gradon’s Introduction on this point (22); Gradon points to Alcuin and Ambrose, among others, as possible sources for this three-fold division.

<sup>19</sup> Ó Carragáin, “Cynewulf’s Epilogue,” 191.

<sup>20</sup> Building on this work, I too, read the poem as a figural narrative of conversion, hoping to remain aware of the inherent dangers in this approach. For as John Hermann has suggested, to uncritically participate in the figural reading of *Elene* may be to acquiesce to the inherent violence of the conversion story the poem relates. Hermann argues that typology itself “already opens onto violence, since it is the mechanism for one culture’s reappropriation of another: Christianity, no longer simply a variety of Judaism, cancels its origins through typology” (112). I would suggest that this is an oversimplification of the mechanism by which typology works, and that, in fact, a careful reading of *Elene* as a figural narrative serves to reveal, rather than repress, tensions and anxieties inherent in the poem’s engagement with the originary Jewish scriptures.

<sup>21</sup> Hill, “Sapiential Structure” 222 and Regan 255.

<sup>22</sup> Earlier neglect of the battle scenes and Constantine’s conversion have been rectified to see the poem as a unified whole. Hill and Regan assert that the whole poem must be read through the lens of themes of wisdom and evangelicalism, but focus on the conversion of Judas. I follow the lead of Whatley, Irvine, and Zollinger by interrogating the earlier episodes for their connection to these central themes of interpretation; Zollinger particularly focuses on the Battle/conversion as a crafting of history specifically as a unified narrative of salvation, both personal and cultural; Irvine considers this episode to be crucial to the drama of interpretation. Stacy Klein has also cautioned against abandoning the literal or historicist reading of the story in

the focus on its figural nature. As I will suggest below, I believe the poem itself insists upon the importance of multi-valenced reading strategies.

<sup>23</sup> Not only is there a lack of prayer speech from Constantine or Elene, but even the brief prayer uttered by Stephen in the *Inventio* is left unreported in *Elene*. In the *Inventio*, Stephen's prayer is recorded during Judas' recitation of his brother's fate. ["But that blessed man, as he gave up the ghost, stretching his hands towards heaven, prayed and said, 'Lord, blame not this sin on them.'"] The prayer is, of course, a direct quotation from the story in Acts 7:59. In Cynewulf's poem, the gist of the prayer is reported (ll.493-498a), but the direct prayer speech is not recorded.

<sup>24</sup> The Vercelli Book, into which *Elene* was compiled, is suffused with monastic concerns and flavor. Ruminative, meditation, interpretation, prayer, and reading are thematic elements for the whole Vercelli Book; they are also key strategies for encountering both the *compilatio* of the codex and individual works within it such as *Elene*. Into this hermeneutic enclosure, the spirits of Constantine and Elene, as exemplars of the devoted lay person abroad in the world, come striding, but prayer seems not to be within their spheres of public action.

<sup>25</sup> Heckman 450.

<sup>26</sup> Klein 54-55.

<sup>27</sup> From Augustine's *Retractions* 1.17 as quoted and translated in Taylor's Introduction to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (2).

<sup>28</sup> From Augustine's *A Commentary on Genesis: Two Books against the Manichees*, 8.2.5., as quoted and translated in Taylor's Introduction to *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* (2).

<sup>29</sup> Gradon 29, note on 86b.

<sup>30</sup> See especially Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 221-57. As Jager explains, "...medieval culture often treated the heart as the *literal* site of memory, understanding and imagination, and hence as the center of verbal and specifically textual activity"(2). See also Paul's letter to the Hebrews 8:9-10, for the notion that the Lord's new testament will be written in the hearts and minds of men, not, as it had been given to Moses – i.e. on stone.

<sup>31</sup> Bzdyl, "Prayer in Old English Narratives" (1982) 142-49.

<sup>32</sup> Whatley, "Figure of Constantine," 174.

<sup>33</sup> Whatley, "Figure of Constantine," 165-169.

<sup>34</sup> The empire-building imperative which undoubtedly also underlies this desire for the literal cross does not undermine the idea that a more complete personal experience of Christianity is also at stake for Constantine and his mother. The quest for understanding of the cross and for its actual discovery is depicted throughout the poem as a journey towards an emotional freedom from anxiety that is only truly achieved when the nails have been unearthed. It is interesting to note that his reading has left Constantine "gemyndig" of the cross, just as we have already seen in looking at the epilogue that the experience of readerly mindfulness is common to both the narrator over his texts about the cross and to God as he makes his judgments.

<sup>35</sup> On Augustine's view of the Jewish enslavement to "useful" signs (as contrasted with the signs under which pagans live) which they cannot interpret non-literally, see *De doctrina christiana* Book 3, Chapter 6, trans. Green p.143: 22-24. Dawson's analysis of Augustine's sign theory emphasizes that the non-literal meanings that Christian readers are able to find in the Jewish texts have "enabled the reader's soul to submit to the text as the literary representation of the incarnate and crucified messiah" (132). The Jewish reader lacks the tools (awareness of

types in his own Scriptures) to properly “submit” to the literal level. Dawson emphasizes, however, the fact that the literal level is never superseded, but rather yielded to, as the absolutely necessary site for complete meaning-making, when he writes that in proper Christian readings, “non-literal meanings (the motions of the proud reader’s soul) have capitulated to the literal text (which in both its theme, as well as its sublimely humble style, replicated the incarnation)” (132). On the literalism of the Jews in *Elene* see for instance Hill, “Sapiential Structure,” Regan, and Whatley, especially “Bread and Stone” and “Onomastics,” and Klein (54).

<sup>36</sup> The parenthetical translation alternatives here and throughout were suggested privately by Gordon Whatley.

<sup>37</sup> Scheil 227.

<sup>38</sup> Whatley (“Figure of Constantine,” 175-78) has suggested that the erasure of this detail may serve to strengthen the emphasis on Constantine’s role in instigating the mission to recover the cross, and also to further emphasize *Elene*’s typological association with Mother Church (which would not need “conversion”). Klein notes that *Elene* is the one character in the story who does not undergo conversion, although she acknowledges that her inner spiritual renewal as the poem progresses may be considered a type of conversion (61-62). See below for this “completed” conversion that *Elene* experiences after the nails are found.

<sup>39</sup> “Haec autem in omnibus domibus dominicis scribitur se exercibatur et nimiam In domino nostro Iesu Christo possedit dilectionem. Post modum autem et salutare sanctae crucis lignum exquisiuit. Cumque legisset autem intente aduentuum sanitatis saluatoris nostri Iesu Christi et crucis eius adsumptionem et mortuis resurrectionem non est se passa donec et uictorem Christi lignum crucis inueniret ubi domini confixum est corpus” (Holder ll.56-65; *abbreviations expanded; punctuation modern*).

<sup>40</sup> Masini 17-18.

<sup>41</sup> These pairs are all found in Holder ll. 75-79, with the exception of “sputis” which is listed as a variant on p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> And Cynewulf echoes “wergðu” one final time in the same passage at line 309b.

<sup>43</sup> For *Maledicto/maledixistis*, see Gal. 3:14, and cf. Gen. 3:14 and Deut. 21:23 (the latter treated by Augustine, *Reply to Faustus* 14, 1, as a curse laid upon Jesus by Moses); for *sputis/sputum*, see Mark 15:19 and John 9; for *mortuos/mortem*, see John 11: 41-44 (Lazarus), and Jesus’ death in all the gospels. I have not found these particular episodes all linked together in patristic commentary, but the first pair is anticipated in Augustine’s *Answer to the Letters of Petilian the Donatist* 2, 92 (“Where is the patience which He displayed when they spat upon His face, who Himself with His most holy spittle opened the eyes of the blind?”).

<sup>44</sup> Augustine, Sermon 86, in *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament* (515-516).

<sup>45</sup> On the theme of the blindness of the Jews in *Elene* see Hill, “Sapiential Structure,” 215 and on the theme more generally see for instance Kruger 94-95, Schlauch 452-53 and Scheil 46-50. On the Jews’ hardness of heart in the poem see Whatley, “Bread and Stone,” 555-59 and more generally, Scheil 32-33 and 41-42.

<sup>46</sup> Recall the freedom from anxiety which should accompany right reading.

<sup>47</sup> In an earlier version of the invention story *Elene* herself directly locates the cross with help from the Holy Spirit (cf. Ambrose of Milan’s *De obitu Theodosii*; see Mannix) In Rufinus’s version, Helena locates Calvary and identifies the True Cross with the aid of the prayer of the Christian Bishop of Jerusalem, Macarius. That specifically Jewish knowledge is necessary

to the finding of the cross is a theme introduced when the legends of the invention and the story of Judas/Cyriacus are combined into the 5<sup>th</sup> century *Inventio Sanctae Crucis*.

<sup>48</sup> Symon's father, Sachius, has also been introduced into the story (l. 437b) as one who knew the truth of the crucifixion. Possible confusion about whether it is Symon's or Sachius' account of the crucifixion that Judas is relating has been resolved in Bradley's translation to suggest that Symon is indeed speaking of his own experiences. This reading seems supported when Stephen, introduced here as "your brother" ("broðer þin," l. 489b) is later clearly identified as Judas' brother (l. 821b), and I have followed this genealogical evidence in likewise reading the crucifixion account as Symon's own witness, while remaining aware that the insertion of Sachius adds another layer of ancestral authority for this Jewish memory of the crucifixion.

<sup>49</sup> Borgehammar (173-74) finds that this passage has been misread by most who fail to recognize that Symon's response to the question, "How could the Jews have killed the Messiah?" is an allusion to Genesis 49:5, a passage which was later understood to prefigure Jesus' own provocation of Jewish leaders. Borgehammar may be correct as far as the Latin source is concerned, but as the episode is related in Cynewulf's poem, Symon clearly speaks in the first person about experiences he himself has had.

<sup>50</sup> Borgehammar also notes that the form of Simeon's address to Judas may have been influenced by the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* (175).

<sup>51</sup> As most readers have noted, to believe that Judas, a contemporary of Constantine and Elene, is also the brother of the first-century martyr Stephen requires a suspension of temporal logic. As Steven Kruger has suggested in private correspondence, this distortion of history may suggest that the Jews "as representatives of the 'old' dispensation are literally living in a different time from the Christians; or that they are stalled in time, and can't escape the moment of the Incarnation." Certainly this temporal dislocation alerts us both to the otherness of the Jews and to the figural nature of the story.

<sup>52</sup> Robert Markus discusses, analogously, the "Jew as hermeneutic device" in the writings of Gregory. He notes in contrasting the worlds of Gregory and Augustine that "The Jew was Augustine's metaphor for the constant peril of premature closure of the Christian understanding" (7). The knowledge that the Jews represent, both through the evidence of their scriptures and through their lived experiences with Jesus is also important in the early Church in its refutation of the Manicheans who did not believe Jesus had a mortal body. Since no relic of his resurrected body was available to counter the Manicheans' unbelief, the cross on which he died in the body became the proximate proof of his corporeality. The Christ attested by the Hebrew prophets is likewise that "real" person. Augustine writes in *Reply to Faustus the Manichæan*: "But because the Manichæans preach another Christ, and not Him whom the apostles preached, but a false Christ of their own false contrivance, in imitation of whose falsehood they themselves speak lies, though they may perhaps be believed when they are not ashamed to profess to be the followers of a deceiver, that has befallen them which the apostle asserts of the unbelieving Jews: 'When Moses is read, a veil is upon their heart.' Neither will this veil which keeps them from understanding Moses be taken away from them till they turn to Christ; not a Christ of their own making, but the Christ of the Hebrew prophets. For, as the apostle says, 'When you shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.' (2 Corinthians 3:15-16) We cannot wonder that they do not believe in the Christ who rose from the dead, and who said, 'All things must needs be fulfilled which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the Psalms, concerning me;' for this Christ has Himself told us what Abraham

said to a hard-hearted rich man when he was in torment in hell, and asked Abraham to send some one to his brothers to teach them, that they might not come too into that place of torment. Abraham's reply was: 'They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.' And when the rich man said that they would not believe unless some one rose from the dead, he received this most truthful answer: 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they believe even though one rose from the dead.' (Luke 16:27-31) Wherefore, the Manichæans will not hear Moses and the prophets, and so they do not believe Christ, though He rose from the dead. Indeed, they do not even believe that Christ rose from the dead. For how can they believe that He rose, when they do not believe that He died? For, again, how can they believe that He died, when they deny that He had a mortal body?" Here we see that evidence of Christ found in Jewish scriptures, while not properly interpreted by the Jews themselves, nevertheless offers proof of his true life and death that serves to refute Manichæan heresy.

<sup>53</sup> Kruger's Introduction (xiii-xxx) offers a useful survey of this literature. See also Parkes's seminal study of the history of Jewish/Christian relationships and the foundations of anti-semitism. For a more recent discussion which seeks to "shift the paradigm" to suggest that "the ways that parted" is a limiting model for scholarship on Jewish/Christian relationships in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, see the Introduction to Becker and Reed's collection of essays (1-33).

<sup>54</sup> Kruger 5.

<sup>55</sup> On these themes see also Augustine, *City of God*, (Chapters 28 and 29) and Cohen, *Living Letters*, 19-65.

<sup>56</sup> Kruger 11.

<sup>57</sup> Kruger acknowledges the paradox of a "spectral corporeality": "Though embodiment might be thought to be the opposite of spectrality, medieval Christian attention to the Jewish body stands in significant relationship to the spectral in Christian constructions of Jewish otherness" (13).

<sup>58</sup> I am only pursuing here the textual associations with the idea of the Jew; I am not, at this time, engaging with the full range of social, sexual, economic and religious identities associated with the Spectral Jew of Kruger's book, as to do so would be beyond the scope of this study.

<sup>59</sup> See Scheil, especially Part Three: "Jews, Fury and the Body."

<sup>60</sup> Scheil 260 and note 32 in response to Regan's reading.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Hill ("Sapiential Structure," 217-220) and Regan (268-70), for the reading of the torture as a fast, and Whatley's objections in "Bread and Stone." The problematic nature of this episode is well summarized in Heckman's recent evaluation of the Jewish secrets at the heart of the *Inventio*.

<sup>62</sup> Klein 62.

<sup>63</sup> Cyprian of Carthage comments on the necessity of correction by the Lord "Behold, the Lord is angry and wrathful, and threatens, because you turn not unto Him. ...the same God declares in the Holy Scriptures, saying, In vain have I smitten your children; they have not received correction. And the prophet devoted and dedicated to God answers to these words in the same strain, and says, You have stricken them, but they have not grieved; You have scourged them, but they have refused to receive correction. (Jeremiah 5:3) Lo, stripes are inflicted from God, and there is no fear of God. Lo, blows and scourgings from above are not wanting, and there is no trembling, no fear .... An ever-burning Gehenna will burn up the condemned, and a

punishment devouring with living flames; nor will there be any source whence at any time they may have either respite or end to their torments” (Treatise 5, chs. 7 & 24; *Treatises of Cyprian*, 459 and 464).

<sup>64</sup> Whatley, “Bread and Stone,” 559. The spiritual bread evoked here has, of course, resonance with the Eucharistic bread of communion in and with the Church and with the nourishment of God’s word which, even in the Hebrew scriptures, has been contrasted allegorically to merely literal bread (Deuteronomy 8:3: “Not in bread alone does man live, but in every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”).

<sup>65</sup> Augustine, *Expositions on the Psalms*, Psalm 55, Ch. 24 (217). Augustine discusses earlier in this exposition the unbelief of schismatic heretics, but compares their blindness to that of schismatic Jews as described in the book of Numbers, who were likewise punished: “ ‘Let there come death upon them, and let them go down unto Hell living’ (Ps.:15). How hath he cited and has made us call to mind that first beginning of schism, when in that first people of the Jews certain proud men separated themselves, and would without (*i.e. outside of the community*) have sacrificed? A new death upon them came: the earth opened herself, and swallowed them up alive. (Numbers 16:31) ‘Let there come,’ he saith, ‘death upon them, and let them go down into Hell living.’ What is ‘living’? knowing that they are perishing, and yet perishing. Hear of living men perishing and being swallowed up in a gulf of the earth, that is, being swallowed up in the voraciousness of earthly desires” (Ch. 15, 214-215, *my italics*).

<sup>66</sup> Cynewulf’s words, “in drygne seað”(l. 693a) may be translated “in a dry pit” or “in a dry well”; the *Inventio*’s “lacus” may be more specifically a dry cistern, although the word may also refer to a reservoir, prison, or tomb in patristic usage. In any case, in *Elene* it is a dry place below the surface of the earth from which he must be pulled “up” when he is ready to reveal his secret (cf. l.700b and l.712b). Another text from the period of the *Inventio*’s earliest development that likewise depicts a recalcitrant Jew, Ananias, sinking into the earth as he refuses to convert can be found in the apocryphal Acts of Phillip; the parallels between the stories may suggest that the association of the pit in the earth with the sinful unbelief of the Jews was perhaps of common currency

<sup>67</sup> The full passage reads: “Then, after saying, Cursed are you from the earth, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hand, what follows is not, For you shall till it, but, You shall till the earth, and it shall not yield to you its strength. The earth he is to till is not necessarily the same as that which opened its mouth to receive his brother's blood at his hand. From this earth he is cursed, and so he tills an earth which shall no longer yield to him its strength. That is, the Church admits and avows the Jewish people to be cursed, because after killing Christ they continue to till the ground of an earthly circumcision, an earthly Sabbath, an earthly passover, while the hidden strength or virtue of making known Christ, which this tilling contains, is not yielded to the Jews while they continue in impiety and unbelief, for it is revealed in the New Testament. (*Contra Faustum*, Bk. 12, Ch. 11; 187).

<sup>68</sup> The starvation of the Jews is also a powerful motif from the history of the fall of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Eusebius’ *Church History* ( III, 6) recounts in wrenching detail the starvation of the Jews at that time, introducing the episode in Chapter 5 by saying, “I think it necessary to relate only the misfortunes which the famine caused, that those who read this work may have some means of knowing that God was not long in executing vengeance upon them for their wickedness against the Christ of God.”

<sup>69</sup> Whatley, “Bread and Stone,” 554.

<sup>70</sup> I have found Andrew Scheil's work to be very helpful in locating the "hermeneutic Jew" in the Anglo-Saxon imagination; I disagree, however, with his reading of this particular passage, in which, he suggests Judas is figured as in fact choosing the bread because Jews are associated in the popular imagination with the stomach (the bodily) and gluttony. Scheil sees the bread as the choice to remain a Jew, rather than choosing the "privation of stone" (Scheil 261) that is Christian asceticism. I think the imagery of the whole poem supports the alternate reading suggested by Whatley and others that Judas is foolishly choosing the stone over the bread. "Bodily" in this poem is rather associated with "carnal" reading habits, with earth-bound literalism and by extension stoniness of heart and mind. The association of bread with the Eucharist (which is clearly evoked in Judas's subsequent prayer) further reinforces the idea that asking for bread is the way to salvation for Judas.

<sup>71</sup> The *Inventio* prayer is addressed simply to "Deus, Deus."

<sup>72</sup> Augustine also in his *Treatise on the Spirit and the Letter* (ch. 56) specifically associates the Jews who "hunger" for righteousness with this gospel passage from Matthew about the power of prayer, writing: "When indeed they utter this call, they seek something; and what do they seek, but that which they hunger and thirst after? And what else is this but that which is said of them, 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be filled?' (Matthew 5:6) Let, then, those who are under the law pass over hither, and become sons instead of slaves; and yet not so as to cease to be slaves, but so as, while they are sons, still to serve their Lord and Father freely. For even this have they received; for the Only-begotten gave them power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe in His name; (John 1:12) and He advised them to ask, to seek, and to knock, in order to receive, to find, and to have the gate opened to them, adding by way of rebuke, the words: 'If you, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him?'" (Matthew 7:11)" (108).

<sup>73</sup> The *Inventio* as edited by Holder clearly intends a petition for forgiveness at this point, but the text appear to be corrupt and he asks instead for punishment, "memor sis peccatorum meorum." Holder lists four variants for this reading, all of which ask God to forget his sins. For example, Variant B: "immemor esto peccata mea" (Holder 24).

<sup>74</sup> Borgehammar 171; for further prayers of similar structure see his note 54 on page 171.

<sup>75</sup> The prayer attempts, for instance, in Part I to record the precise descriptions and functions of the Cherubim and Seraphim (the confusion in having the cherubim singing the Sanctus is discussed and possibly explained by Borgehammar 176); later Part III successfully provides a theological rationale for the divinity of Christ (ll.772-782). The syntactical complexity of Part I, for instance, which is marked by the piling up of relative clauses and parenthetical asides, seems to mimic the very elaborate architecture of the heavenly society it describes, while the parenthetical asides of Part III suggest the careful parsing of scriptural evidence.

<sup>76</sup> Spinks, *The Sanctus*, 194.

<sup>77</sup> Borgehammar's inventory of these scriptural allusions in the Latin text is similar to that of DuBois, who, working directly with Cynewulf's version of the prayer, offers further line by line source possibilities, finding verbal parallels in the Psalms, Isaiah and Ezekial as well as in "Légende talmudique"(46-48). This source work is augmented in Whatley's translation ("Constantine the Great" 90) .

<sup>78</sup> Whereas earlier Judas may be said to have either “bungled” the scriptural allusion (stone vs. bread) or sought to subvert its meaning.

<sup>79</sup> Regan refers to the first part of the prayer, which Borgehammar identifies with Jewish prayers, as a sort of “Te Deum,” a Christian liturgical form. The “Te Deum” is itself, of course, indebted to the Hebrew Scriptures. We see already the multi-valent nature of the prayer which represents both traditions.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 90. For scriptural imagery of “eating God’s book” see both Ezekiel 2:9-3:4 and Revelation 10:9-10.

<sup>81</sup> This imagery is similar to that found in the praise of God as creator in the prayers grouped at the beginning of *The Book of Nunnaminster* (e.g., prayers 2, 3, 4).

<sup>82</sup> Cynewulf leaves out the reference to the fashioning of mankind, making the contrast between heaven and Tartarus even more stark. See Regan 280 note 33 for an interesting discussion of illustrations from the Junius manuscript which seem to parallel some of the visual details of Judas’s prayer, including the spatial relationship between heaven and hell depicted as an apposite pair at the top and bottom of a page.

<sup>83</sup> We may note here as well that Judas is publically proclaiming approval of God’s punishment of those who resisted him, a theme likewise explored in the threats against the Jews, his own imprisonment in the pit, and, in Cynewulf’s version, the epilogue.

<sup>84</sup> For discussion of another use of chiasmic structure in the prayer, see Schaar 122.

<sup>85</sup> Borgehammar 171.

<sup>86</sup> Dubois 108.

<sup>87</sup> Regan 271.

<sup>88</sup> A good example of the type of “linguistic exuberance” common in prayers might be the use of alphabetical elements, such as acrostics (found in the *Book of Cerne*) or abecedarian sequences (as in the *Royal prayerbook*). Here Cynewulf structures sections of Judas’s prayer chiasmically and uses runes for an acrostic signature that is part of his closing prayer. That the “Word,” who is the ultimate source for the verbal signs or “words” used here below, takes delight in such play was a commonplace that is explored in Gros’s study, *Le Poète marial et l’art graphique*. For just one example of the careful use of the alliterative line, note the placement of the stress in line 769b, highlighted below in the center of the passage:

þæs he in ermðum sceal,  
ealra fula ful,        fah þrowian,  
þeownd þolian.        Ðær he þin ne mæg  
word aweorpan ...

[for that, full of every foulness, outlawed, he must suffer miseries and endure subjugation. There he shall not be able to reject your word.] The placement of an alliterative stress on the pronoun “þin” is unusual, but serves beautifully here to emphasize that it is God’s word which cannot be cast aside.

<sup>89</sup> Tongeren 88-89.

<sup>90</sup> For the prevalence of this motif in texts of the medieval *Inventio Crucis* liturgy, see Borgehammar 193.

<sup>91</sup> The opening of paradise to mankind will, of course, be a part of the prayer of the epilogue.

<sup>92</sup> Borgehammar 193-194.

<sup>93</sup> Borgehammar 178.

<sup>94</sup> Joseph is also, himself, a type of Christ, of whom the wood of the cross is the main physical relic.

<sup>95</sup> Recall that the story is from the extended Hebrew canon of the Talmud; the story he is enacting will likewise become a part of the extended Christian “canon” of saints’ lives.

<sup>96</sup> These three “moments” --- a vapor rising, hand clapping, and a formulaic proclamation of faith --- are highly liturgical in character. The suggestiveness of these liturgically resonant responses will be discussed below.

<sup>97</sup> And the prayer of acclamation will become, over time, all that is left of Judas’s long prayer in many versions of the Invention legend. In this sense it is what I have called an “artifactual prayer” that can be removed from its narrative context and re-used in perhaps unrelated settings.

<sup>98</sup> The interiority of Judas’s conversion here seems to guarantee its sincerity. Although in the end, Gregory the Great “harbored no love for the Jews” (Cohen 79), several of his letters, which were widely promulgated, emphasize the importance that Jewish conversions be not forced but freely chosen. While the starvation of Judas, as discussed above, reads as coercion, this formula of assent may attempt to mitigate any concern about the authenticity of the conversion.

<sup>99</sup> By the time Cynewulf rewrites the legend, Judas speaks only of his brother as having been “celebrated in books, in written records” (“Sint in bocum his / wundor þa he worhte on gewritum cyðed”) which is, of course, where Judas’s own story has been preserved for hundreds of years. If questions of “apocryphal knowledge” and inclusion in the Scriptural canon are not at issue, hagiographic authenticity may be. In an era when canonization was a less regulated process and calendars were local, whose life was worthy of inclusion in the legendary? If, as Kruger suggests, the Jewish convert remains a “spectral” reminder of the Jewish origins of the Christian faith, his inclusion in the company of the saints, both in heaven and in books, also requires careful “recasting” or containment.

<sup>100</sup> Borgehammar 169. Recall that in Constantine’s vision as reported in the *Inventio* and in *Elene*, the cross is also a text to be read, inscribed with. e.g., “Conquer through this...” or “With this emblem...” . In Ambrose’s account, after Helen finds the three crosses she is confused about which is the true Cross, but then finds the “title” placed upon it by Pilate still affixed to it. Ambrose recalls Pilate’s words upon placing this title on the cross, “I have not written for you but for posterity,” and he reflects that these words might be understood as foreshadowing Helen’s discovery, “saying, as it were: ‘Let Helen have something to read, whereby she may recognize the cross of the Lord.’” Ambrose, *De obitu Theodosii* in Mannix 79.

<sup>101</sup> Irvine 169.

<sup>102</sup> *De Genesi ad Litteram*, 1.17.34 , “secundum proprietatem rerum gestarum, non secundum aenigmata futurarum” (39).

<sup>103</sup> See Hill, “Sapiential Structure,” and Regan, whose insights on the figural nature of the narrative and the baptismal motif are the starting points for subsequent interrogations of the poem such as Johnson’s.

<sup>104</sup> Tongeren 110. See also 47 for his dating of the *Tridentinum* sacramentary which preserves a seventh-century (i.e. pre-Hadrianic) version of the *Gregorianum* It is also interesting to note that some of the mass prayers Tongeren provides speak of Adam’s sin of “eating from the wood” in paradise, implying (although not stating) through the logic of *recirculatio* that a redeemed “eating” from the wood of the Cross will be salvific. See the Roman and Frankish prayers on

pages 86,134-35, and 138 for this theme. Vogel (100-01) links the prior history of the text represented in *Tridentinum* with Alcuin and York.

<sup>105</sup> See Spinks, *The Sanctus*, Chapters 4 and 5, for the use of the *Sanctus* in Eucharistic prayers of both the East and the West during these periods. Regan also suggests that these lines “call to mind the Preface and the Sanctus of the Mass, and just as these prayers announce the central act of the Mass ... so too does Judas’ prayer herald the revelation of the Cross”(271).

<sup>106</sup> See Hill, “Seraphim’s Song,” on the use of the *Sanctus* in Christ I. There he finds that the prayer is used to reinforce Trinitarian theology. The Trinitarian associations with the prayer would be of interest here as well as Judas turns to belief in the Christian God.

<sup>107</sup> Borgehammar 162.

<sup>108</sup> Daniélou 131.

<sup>109</sup> A *þenungboc* is a ‘mass-book.’

<sup>110</sup> I have not yet been successful in tracing the history of the use of this prayer within the Eucharistic liturgy; a familiar antiphon from the Divine Office noted in at least six manuscripts studied by Tongeren takes up the theme of this acclamation, in words that are reminiscent of it, “Adoramus te, Christe, et benedicimus tibi, quia per crucem tuam redimisti mundum” (“We adore Thee, O Christ, and we bless Thee, because by Thy Cross Thou hast redeemed the world”) (181).

<sup>111</sup> The full text of the quotation from Chapter 2 of the Exposition on Psalm 47 is as follows: “O clap your hands, all you nations (*Psalms 46:1*). Were the people of the Jews all the nations? No, but blindness in part is happened to Israel, that senseless children might cry, ‘Calve, Calve;’ and so the Lord might be crucified in the place of Calvary, that by His Blood shed He might redeem the Gentiles, and that might be fulfilled which says the Apostle, Blindness in part is happened unto Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. (*Romans 11:25*) Let them insult, then, the vain, and foolish, and senseless, and say, Calve, Calve; but you redeemed by His Blood which was shed in the place of Calvary, say, O clap your hands, all you nations; because to you has come down the Grace of God. O clap your hands. What is O clap? Rejoice. But wherefore with the hands? Because with good works. Do not rejoice with the mouth while idle with the hands. If you rejoice, clap your hands. The hands of the nations let Him see, who joys has deigned to give them. What is, the hands of the nations? The acts of them doing good works. O clap your hands, all you nations: shout unto God with the voice of triumph. Both with voice and with hands. If with the voice only it is not well, because the hands are slow; if only with the hands it is not well, because the tongue is mute. Agree together must the hands and tongue. Let this confess, these work. Shout unto God with the voice of triumph” (*Expositions on the Psalms* 161).

<sup>112</sup> See Regan 272.

<sup>113</sup> In the *Inventio* the prayer includes several references to “us” (“make this miracle for us,” “our father Joseph,” “show us the hidden treasure”) as would be more typical of a strictly liturgical prayer, although the central petition for belief is still offered in the first person singular. It may also be that the Judas of the *Inventio* is being associated through the plural even more naturalistically (rather than figuratively) with his people, the Jews.

<sup>114</sup> In the *Inventio*, Judas and Helena are merely said to be “expectantes gloriam Christi” (Holder l. 276, “await[ing] the glory of God”) in the center of Jerusalem, before the arrival of the cortège at the ninth hour.

<sup>115</sup> The ninth hour is significant in the synoptic gospels as the time when Jesus died on the cross and when, as Elene says, “rodor eal geswearc,” l. 855 (“the sky entirely darkened”). It is also the ninth hour when Peter performs his first miracle in Acts, lifting up a lame man, who is lying in a litter (Acts 3:1-11). See note 38 in Hill, “Sapiential Structure,” for a discussion of the liturgical resonance of this hour, which is identified in a pseudo-Ambrosian hymn as “the time Christ freed the world from death” (227 n.38).

<sup>116</sup> Whatley, “Figure of Constantine,” 202.

<sup>117</sup> For an introduction to doxologies, see Cabrol, *Liturgical Prayer*, 172-176. The *Inventio* at this point merely has: “et omnes qui aderant glorificauerunt dominum” (Holder II. 285-86), [“and all who were there glorified the Lord”].

<sup>118</sup> See Hill (“Sapiential Structure,” 220), Regan (274-76), and Johnson’s more recent and extensive discussion of this episode .

<sup>119</sup> Regan 274-75.

<sup>120</sup> Cyril, *Works*, Vol. 2, 172.

<sup>121</sup> Judas’s words to the devil will go on to become another popular, indeed “artifactual,” element of the story as it is told and re-told in the many versions represented in Appendix II.

<sup>122</sup> It is interesting that here his view of the cross has come to resemble Constantine’s – it is a sign he sees (“beacen geseh”).

<sup>123</sup> See Whatley, “Onomastics,” and Zacher, “Cynewulf at the Interface of Literacy and Orality” (374-378), on the significance of this name change.

<sup>124</sup> Borgehammar 191.

<sup>125</sup> See for instance Exodus 13:20-22, 14:24, and 40:36.

<sup>126</sup> See 1 Corinthians 10: 1,2,6. See also Daniélou 91 ff. for patristic commentary linking the pillar of cloud to the Holy Spirit and the pillar of fire to the Word. As Daniélou points out, the pillar of fire is already seen in the Book of Wisdom as an image of Wisdom, which itself will later be taken as a pre-figurement of the Word: “She will lead them by a way sown with marvels. And will be for them like the light of stars in the night” (Wisdom 10:17). We may hear perhaps in Cynewulf’s “heofonsteorran” (1112b) an allusion to this passage.

<sup>127</sup> The brief prayer alludes heavily to the Hebrew Scriptures, especially Isaiah 52:10, Psalm 97:2 and Isaiah 42:6; it is also worth remembering that Simeon had apparently *asked* to be allowed to live to see the Messiah. Scheil notes that Bede favorably compared the Jews, waiting to receive Christ, with Simeon and Anna, likewise waiting in the temple (69).

<sup>128</sup> Even as far back as the version of the story related by Gelasius of Caesarea (c. 390), the search for the nails is associated with Helen’s growth in faith. See Borgehammar 48.

<sup>129</sup> No mention is made here of the uses to which the other nails were put; according to tradition these included being set in a crown or helmet for the emperor as well.

<sup>130</sup> Bradley’s translation here suggests “hands” where the word itself does not actually appear. A more accurate translation might be simply, “from the bishop.”

<sup>131</sup> Bridges 81. Bridges’ interest is in late medieval texts, principally romances, but also hagiographic legends, as “narratives of wish-fulfillment” and her remarks about closing intercessory prayer are offered to contrast the “narrative inhibiting” functions of such authorial prayer with the “narrative engendering” supplicatory prayers of characters within these stories.

<sup>132</sup> Ó Carragáin, “Cynewulf’s Epilogue,” 189.

<sup>133</sup> The first mention of the Jews in the poem, when Constantine learns of their complicity in the crucifixion, likewise includes the rather matter-of-fact prediction that for this deed “they

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must needs suffer damnation amid humiliation throughout an infinite existence!” (“...hie in  
hynðum sculon/ to wídan feore werġðu dreogan!” ll. 210b-211).

<sup>134</sup> Recall the Jewish prophecies which underlie the Canticle of Simeon in Luke and which in turn enrich the use of the *Nunc dimittis* as it is liturgically set in the Hour of Compline; this layering of association Cynewulf exploits to great effect in his own allusion to the prayer in *Elene*.

## Chapter Four

### The Uses of Prayer in the Middle English *Seinte Margarete*: Reading the Texts of Tortures -- Blood, Fire, and Water -- Into Baptism

Brian McFadden writes of the Old English versions of the legends of Saint Margaret that they “do not merely replicate a Latin source text; each version reveals its author’s strategy for dealing with the controversial material while preserving elements judged most important for the textual communities using the legend.”<sup>1</sup> Certainly this assertion is true for every hagiographic text compiled and edited for a specific audience. As the Cynewulfian reworking of the *Inventio Sanctae Crucis* foregrounds Judas’s prayers as acts of interpretation – both individual and communal — with presumed resonance for his monastic readers, so too *Seinte Margarete*, the Middle English version (hereafter *SM*) of the Saint Margaret legend copied and collected with the thirteenth-century *Ancrene Wisse* and Katherine Group texts, preserves and expands upon the prayers of Margaret from its source in ways that speak to the very specific Christian textual communities for whom the later narrative was composed.

The Latin source of the Katherine Group’s *SM*, namely the so-called “Mombritius” version (BHL 5303) of the *Passio S. Margaretae* (henceforth referred to here simply as the *passio*),<sup>2</sup> grows out of the monastic tradition where *lectio divina* was daily practiced, so it is not surprising to find that in the *passio* the prayers of the saint are richly scriptural and Margaret does indeed model an individual’s reading both of scriptures and the world.<sup>3</sup> As we saw in *Nunnaminster* and *Elene*, such prayers that read the scriptures may serve to construct an identity for the pray-er and to claim for the pray-er a place in salvation history. We also saw that prayers could be shaped with liturgical resonance, both individually and as they are organized into a collection or narrative. Such liturgical reading is also at play in the Margaret *passio*, where it

appears that patristic writings about the sacraments and the ritual life of Christian communities, likewise familiar to the monks, may account for its liturgically-rich structure and theme. Indeed I would suggest that the Margaret in the Latin *passio* and its Middle English rendering, yields the full measure of its meaning only when the habits of *lectio* and the liturgical reading it insists upon are taken into account, revealing then that beyond the tale of a martyrdom, the narrative offers a meditation on the Sacraments of Initiation, particularly baptism. In what follows, I attempt to read the *passio* from this perspective, while simultaneously exploring the Middle English *SM*, to determine the extent to which these central elements of the Latin *passio* survive in its vernacular progeny. I will consider, for example, how the crucial prayer texts of this widely known legend are exploited and adapted to serve the non-monastic and specifically female audience for which the Middle English work was written. Finally, I will suggest that reading *SM* and its source text “through” Margaret’s prayers may serve to further resolve the mystery of how a virgin martyr came to be popular as an intercessor at childbirth.

### *Textual Background*

*SM* is found in two of a group of six related manuscripts that were originally written and copied in the thirteenth century in the English West Midlands for a particular kind of reader: an anchoress.<sup>4</sup> As Anne Savage and Nicholas Watson assert in their edition: “the group of works preserved in these six manuscripts represents something remarkable: a sustained attempt by a small group of early thirteenth-century religious to provide, over twenty or thirty years, a coherent program of spiritual reading for a number of anchoresses in their charge, in English prose whose quality of style and thought was not to be equaled for over a century.”<sup>5</sup> But while

later written down for enclosed women, *SM* probably began its career as a text for performance – composed first for the church or hall on the saint’s feast day.<sup>6</sup> The text addresses itself then to maidens, like the anchoresses, but to wider audiences as well, specifically mentioning, for instance, widows and the married. It is important, therefore, in reading for the ways in which this text is altered from its source, to keep in mind the “palimpsest” that *SM*’s presumed audience seems to be—both public and private, of the world and for vowed religious.

Millet and Wogan-Browne emphasize that the compilation of the three saints’ lives of the Katherine group reinforces their common subjects and themes.<sup>7</sup> While it is certainly true that the legends of these three virgin martyrs have much in common in subject, plot, and style, the elegance and prominence of prayers uttered by the saint are notably greater in *SM*.<sup>8</sup> As I will discuss, I believe that the legend of Saint Margaret in almost any telling places such emphasis on the nature and efficacy of the saint’s prayer that it becomes her legends’s constitutive element. Katherine may be known by her skills as an orator, Juliana by her combative style; Margaret stands as a figure for the power of prayer itself. Even when her actual prayers are removed from the legend in some of its later versions, the fact that Margaret prays continues to be reported; and her penultimate prayer, which is concerned with the power of intercessory prayer, is one of the most stable aspects of her legend, constituting what I have called in Chapter One an “artifactual” prayer.<sup>9</sup> Through this prayer Margaret creates her own cult, which will be powerful indeed throughout the medieval period.<sup>10</sup>

*The Centrality of Prayer in the Mombritius Version*

Studies of *SM* have established that the text's source is the Mombritius version of the Margaret *passio* and have emphasized the centrality of the prayers in that composition.<sup>11</sup> In her discussion of the source text, Mack notes that "In the Saint's prayers especially, where the lyrical feeling is strongly marked, full use has been made of the various rhetorical devices for the heightening of style: apostrophe and rhetorical questions, balance of phrase and sentence, iteration leading up to a marked climax, and a varied and effective prose rhythm."<sup>12</sup> Clayton and Magennis also recognize the extraordinary quality of the saint's prayers in the *passio*, which also served as the main source for the Anglo Saxon tradition. Clayton and Magennis note: "The language of the Mombritius and the pre-Mombritius versions is at its most heightened in the speeches, and particularly the prayers, of Margaret"; they find as well that the prayers are characterized by "formal and measured expression" and "a public and proclamatory mode which is apparent even when Margaret is on her own."<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Clayton and Magennis recognize the extent to which the prayer speech, "liturgical in expression," defines the Mombritius *passio*: "[i]ts rhapsodic tone is carried over into the OE, but compared to the Latin, with the heightened and breathless quality of the language, the OE is relatively restrained. Narrative is not submerged by incantation, as threatens in the Latin."<sup>14</sup>

In the Mombritius *passio* printed by Mack there are, by my count, twelve prayers of Margaret recorded as her direct speech to God and identified as prayer by introductory or concluding phrases such as "beata uirgo cepit inuocare Christum ac dicere" (129 ll.18-9) ["the blessed virgin began to call upon Christ and to say"].<sup>15</sup> Also in the particular manuscript represented by Mack's edition, four of the prayers are concluded by the word "Amen." In most manuscripts of this version, the *passio* in fact reports that Margaret's prayers were recorded by the narrator, Theotimus<sup>16</sup>, when he stood (with her foster mother) at her prison window: "Et

aspiciebant per fenestram et orationem eius scribebant” (133 ll.19-20) [“And they were looking through a window and writing down her prayer”]. And again at the conclusion of the passion, in Theotimus’s final testimony on the role he played in promulgating her cult, he avers: “et scripsi omnes orationes eius in libris cartaneis cum astutia multa, et transmisi omnibus Christianis hec omnia, in ueritate conscripta” (142 ll.5-8) [“And I have written all her prayers in the pages of books with great diligence and passed all these things on to all Christians, written in truth”]. The more we study the prayers of this particular *passio*, the clearer it becomes that this text is in fact a collection of prayers upon which a narrative has been hung.

Between the prayers, Margaret’s gestures (kneeling, extending her arms, making the sign of the cross) and responses to other characters (the soldiers, Olibrius, the bystanders and the devil) have a strong liturgical flavor as well. The actions done *to* her are also orchestrated in strongly ritualistic terms: she is interrogated, enclosed, raised up, beaten, thrown down into prison again, consumed, visited by the Holy Dove, burned, bathed, crowned, beheaded and finally her soul is assumed into heaven and her body dispersed as relics. Similar tortures are inflicted on other virgin martyrs and other martyrs also pray at points of particular peril, but the concordance of the actions with the prayers in this *passio* seems to me to be especially strong.

What does the author of *SM* “do” with all of this devotional and liturgical material in his source? While later versions of the Margaret legend might abridge or even remove some of her prayers entirely, the writers of all of the Katherine Group legends of the Virgin martyrs generally preserve and even expand the prayers of their Latin sources. What devotional, intellectual and cultural forces might shape the decisions of the ME authors in retaining these many elaborate prayers? Several recent scholarly studies have advanced answers to this question in their analyses of devotional material in the Katherine Group texts.

*Devotional Material in the Katherine Group Texts: A Survey and Critique of Recent Scholarship*

In her book *Virgin Martyrs*, Karen Winstead notes of the Katherine Group authors:

In part, these English writers may have remained relatively faithful to their sources because their own readers had needs akin to those of the readers of the Latin passions. If the intended readers of the Katherine Group legends were indeed anchoresses, the richly contemplative texture of the passions would certainly have been appropriate, because recluses, like members of traditional religious houses, were encouraged to regard reading as a form of prayer....The long declarations of devotion and the effusive celebrations of God's mercy and grandeur that pervade the legends of the Katherine Group were manifestly designed to be prayed and, in the course of being prayed, to arouse the passion that the *Wisse* writer claims comes from reading "geornliche & longe."<sup>17</sup>

In fact, Winstead charts the development of the lives of Margaret, Katherine, Juliana and their sister legends by noting the presence or absence of these long prayers. Winstead argues that in the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century versions of these legends, which became increasingly popular with lay readers, the removal of long devotional pieces and the emphasis on the "action" of the heroines served the cultural needs of an increasingly "unruly" laity. Subsequently, the return of the prayers in fifteenth-century versions such as those found in Bokenham's *Legends of Hooly Wommen* represents, she believes, a contemporary concern with suppressing Lollardy and "misdirected lay learning."<sup>18</sup> Winstead's attention to the presence or absence of the prayers in the various versions is astute; however, I believe that her reading of the "cultural work"

accomplished by the removal of prayer speech is based on a failure to understand the power that adheres in such speech. For indeed, the removal of prayers can conversely be construed as removal of authoritative, efficacious speech and reading – limiting the arena of influence and knowledge of women.

Winstead also finds that in general, the writers of the Katherine Group virgin martyr legends had a three-fold program in mind when they “englished” the Latin legends – to retain the prayers for devotion, to inspire female heroism, and to contain or safely direct that heroic impulse in women whose relative independence from male authority made them potentially subversive members of their communities. She notes, for instance, that *SM* manages to contain the issue of marital choice and parental authority it raises in part by addressing the father’s hostility only within the context of one long prayer addressed to God the Father. I will argue, however, that the turn towards including “real world” concerns and imagery in the prayers is not necessarily a strategy of containment. Rather, as we shall see, closer examination of all of the prayers of *SM* primarily reveals in such quotidian details a devotional development like that noted by Elizabeth Robertson in her recent discussions of *SM* and its textual companion, the *Ancrene Wisse*

Robertson finds the Latin passion to have been reworked in *SM* to emphasize the corporeality of Margaret’s sanctity – a trend she would say obtains in other virgin martyr legends of this period and is reflective of the kind of specifically feminine development in medieval spirituality that has been so thoroughly explored in the work of Caroline Walker Bynum.<sup>19</sup> Robertson further develops these insights about corporeality in a more recent discussion of the *Ancrene Wisse*. There she explores the characteristics and parameters of female literacy in the thirteenth-century as they might be revealed through the unique collection of texts

associated with the *Ancrene Wisse* and observes that the world of these female readers “is not a world of books.”<sup>20</sup>

Robertson notes a development in anchoritic literature away from books towards what she will now call not a feminized corporeality, but rather “materialist immanence.” Focusing on the kind of reading these texts require, Robertson finds that they demand “an incarnational mode of thought particularly available to [the anchoresses] not only as advanced religious ascetics but also as women.”<sup>21</sup> The turn toward the “world as book” is necessitated both by the degree to which the scriptures are becoming inaccessible to female readers with limited Latin literacy, and also by the broader devotional developments of the time that will increasingly emphasize affective approaches to reading. The flowering of incarnational theology from the roots of the Chartrian and Victorine exegetical models inspires the new world view of the author of the *Ancrene Wisse*, who, according to Robertson, focuses his readers’ attention on “the world in the present, rather than the world as it appears in the Bible.”<sup>22</sup>

Robertson’s readings of *SM* and of the literary milieu from which it emerges suggest that both Margaret within her story and the anchoresses who read about her are distanced by their corporeality and by their incarnational reading strategies from those structures of power and authority in the thirteenth-century Church which would still privilege more intellectual reading strategies and the “world of books.” Careful comparisons of Margaret’s prayers in *SM* and in the *passio* bear out Robertson’s assessment that this ME text indeed turns subtly away from the scriptures towards the “world in the present.” But significant scriptural knowledge is still demonstrated by the speaker of these prayers and available to enhance the reading experience of the anchoresses who ponder them. Furthermore, the prayers suggest patristic and liturgical intertexts that while not representative of “the world as it appears in the Bible” nevertheless

require modes of reading keyed to books, like *lectio* and “liturgical reading,” in addition to the incarnational strategies Robertson describes.

In writing about *SM*, Robertson bypasses Margaret’s prayers as a significant element of the power she models for her female audience when she writes, “In some other female saints’ lives, such as those of Katherine and Cecelia, it is the intellectual powers of female sanctity that seem to be praised, which may serve to complicate the picture of female sanctity here outlined.”<sup>23</sup> Margaret’s “intellectual powers” are not on display if prayer speech is construed as simply emotional expressions of need or rote repetition of standard forms. But if, as I suggest, Margaret’s prayers are rather “readings” of the scriptures, the Fathers, liturgical tradition and her own situation, her prayer speech does indeed demonstrate an intellectual acuity that “complicate[s] the picture.” That Margaret’s “readings” in *SM* range over books *and* her contemporary world supports Robertson’s insights about corporeality, but suggests that this Margaret retains as well some purchase on the authority that adheres in more traditional modes of spiritual reading.

Robertson rightly points to the gender issues that shape the creation and interpretation of texts like *SM*, and does so while remaining attuned to the shifting landscape and language of the contemporaneous devotional life, but not all feminist readings of the legend are as careful to contextualize their conclusions. The presence of the tortured virgin martyrs at the center of legends such as *SM* and the circumstances which have linked especially later medieval versions of such legends to female audiences have encouraged a critical response that too often asks questions from de-historicized feminist and gender theory perspectives to the exclusion of other possible approaches.<sup>24</sup> Such readings of the legend, attentive as they try to be to the cultural significance of hagiography for its female audience, may overlook the narrative and rhetorical

substance of the text and often neglect the insights of an earlier critical dispensation which mined “authoritative” patristic literary theories for insights into the ways that *passiones* are shaped, embellished and interpreted both within and beyond the monastic communities that originally created, preserved and disseminated them.

Incarnational reading strategies offer access to the spirituality of *SM* where the everyday world is indeed, as we shall see, gathered into the sphere of the prayers. Another mode of reading, typological interpretation, which is fostered by *lectio* and whose insights are deeply embedded in the liturgies of the Church, unlocks the specific set of signs that are “encoded” in the source narrative and constitutive of Margaret’s story both in the *passio* and in *SM*. To the extent that recent scholarship, particularly deriving from feminist approaches, finds that the female protagonists of the Katherine Group are limited to a corporeal sanctity, a corrective re-incorporation of this traditional critical tool may be helpful in re-evaluating Margaret’s intellectual acuity and agency in her story. Careful analysis of the prayers and gestures of this narrative demonstrates that the incarnational worldview *SM* evinces, which may be gender specific, is layered over a typologically rich structure deriving from the *passio*; when the author of *SM* chooses to retain the long devotional pieces of his source, he also reserves to Margaret, perhaps unknowingly, a measure of ecclesial power and the authority of patristic exegesis.

#### *A Typological Approach to Seinte Margarete*

Typological criticism, which is profoundly important for an understanding of *SM*, has been neglected in recent work on this ME narrative and the legend in general. As we have seen, seminal interpretations of Cynewulf’s *Elene* pointed to the significance of typology for the

reading of that legend; readings under any critical dispensation must also acknowledge the nature of the Margaret legend as a figural narrative. Several studies that touch on Margaret's passion as an imitation of Christ's passion or that consider her nature as a sign for others to read begin to explore this territory, but to my knowledge not much work has been done specifically on the typological level of meaning in the text since James Earl offered insights about the connections between the Saint Margaret of legend and the Pearl Maiden.<sup>25</sup> Exploring the typological structure of this passion only further confirms this saint's significance for her audience as an avatar for the power of prayer, both personal and communal, in the right reading of the world.

In some sense Margaret is, like all of the saints, re-enacting the passion of Christ through her suffering – the *Imitatio Christi* that all Christians are called to live. Katherine Lewis refutes a reading of Margaret's tortures as “pornographic” by reminding modern readers that Margaret willingly submits to her tortures as a Christian witness and in response to Christ's sacrifice; more generally, Earl elucidates the degree to which *Imitatio Christi* served as a generative element in all hagiographic *vitae*.<sup>26</sup> Earl also discusses how the well-known shift that occurred after Constantine from the hagiography of martyrdom to that of asceticism (a spiritual martyrdom) created a new emphasis on the “conventionality” of saints' lives, leading to the “gross copying of prefaces, stories, and whole Lives” which surely accounts for some of the striking similarities we can see among the Virgin Martyr stories of Margaret, Katherine and Juliana, for instance.<sup>27</sup>

These legends purport to be the stories of martyrs from the Diocletian and Maximian persecutions, and yet with the possible exception of Juliana, these young women did not actually exist (Margaret and Katherine were accordingly expunged from the calendar of the Universal Church in 1969). Nevertheless, these popular stories began to circulate in the fourth century. The earliest manuscripts we have of the Margaret (or Marina, as she is called in the Greek) legends

are from the ninth century in Greek and the eighth in Latin.<sup>28</sup> Although they are legends of martyrdoms, these stories have less of the historicity that Delehaye attributes to the early *passions historiques* and participate instead, as Earl suggests, in the more literary and theologically informed shaping that characterizes hagiography after the fourth century.<sup>29</sup> The thematic emphasis in Margaret's legend is on the Christian witness and martyrdom, but also on miraculous interventions, her ascetic choice of virginity, and the promulgation of her relics and cult. All of this material is shaped into a narrative arc that is resonant of baptismal liturgies – which are themselves, of course, like all liturgies, works of communal exegesis.

Just as the liturgical prayers of Cyriacus offered an authorized way to read the Hebrew Scriptures, so too do the prayers of the sacramental liturgies serve to teach typological readings. But the interpretations that these liturgies promote are not only readings “back” into the Hebrew Scriptures, finding for instance that the saving waters of the Red Sea in Exodus are a type for the waters of the River Jordan in which Christ was baptized. More significantly, the typology of baptism reaches “forward” to encompass the life of each newly-baptized Christian, pulling his or her story into the larger narrative of salvation history.<sup>30</sup> As Jean Daniélou pointed out some half-century ago: “... the eschatological typology of the Old Testament is accomplished not only in the person of Christ, but also in the Church. Besides Christological typology, therefore, there exists a sacramental typology ... this means furthermore that the sacraments carry on in our midst the *mirabilia*, the great works of God in the Old Testament and the New ....”<sup>31</sup>

To the extent, then, that the authors of both the *passio* and *SM* employ and preserve the typologically rich motifs of *Imitatio Christi* and baptismal imagery, they create a Saint Margaret who in her highly scriptural prayers and ritual actions embodies this completion of the hermeneutic circle. She was instructed in the Christian faith as a child and loved to hear of the

early martyrs; in the prayers and gestures – the “liturgy” of her own martyrdom – she reveals a right reading of these Christian stories and also offers the crowds assembled around her their own opportunities to “read” and prayerfully interpret her witness. The emphasis on Margaret herself as a “text” for interpretation is strengthened in *SM*; the ME prayers are also less strictly scriptural than the Latin and more fully embellished with detail and imagery drawn from the contemporary world of its early 13<sup>th</sup> century author. In both of these strategies we may see, with Robertson, that the move is “away from books” and towards an “incarnational” world view. But at this moment in the transmission of the Margaret legend, that shift in emphasis is still a development *within* a narrative framework that in its preservation of the more “orthodox” elements – the long prayers in particular – also preserves a model of a powerful female saint who, in the words of Jocelyn Price, “directs and stage manages her own martyrdom in a series of self-conscious demonstrations and imitations of Christ”<sup>32</sup> For Price’s “directs and stage-manages,” we might substitute “reads and presides over” to fully grasp the potentially subversive power of these prayers.<sup>33</sup>

With one important exception, Margaret’s prayers are not literally the prayers of the baptismal rites, but her *passio* is structured in such a way that it offers a sort of meditation on Christian initiation. Within her narrative we see her tortures figured as baptisms by blood, by fire, and by water. Often the signs and symbols that can be linked with baptism and the related rituals of confirmation and Eucharist seem to adhere in a loose way to the general shape of Western baptismal practices as they evolved in the Early Middle Ages and are reflected in, for instance, the Gelasian Sacramentary.<sup>34</sup> At other moments, however, the signs, symbols, words and gestures that evoke baptism may also reflect abandoned practices, the norms of Eastern rites, or simply the exuberance of the associative imagination which delighted in weaving this thread

through the narrative. The rhetorical device *amplificatio* may also account for the repetition of episodes: two demonic testings, three appearances of the dove; the recapitulation of miracles may work here, as we likewise saw in *Elene*, to progressively deepen their resonance.

In noting the many instances in the *passio* where baptismal imagery seems to be strongly present, it is not necessary then to find exact correspondences to the particular order of any ancient baptismal rite; the story of Saint Margaret as it comes to us in the *passio* does not purport to be an exact duplication of a baptism liturgy, but is rather the life of a saint shaped within a hermeneutic tradition where this layer of sacramental reference would add instructive resonance to the text.<sup>35</sup> To the extent that the *SM* author preserves (and even augments) the prayers and prayer gestures of his source, he preserves a life where the woman whose cult he promulgates enacts the work of the male presbyter – a potentially culturally disruptive, but also sometimes necessary, act.<sup>36</sup> She is, no matter what, a figure for liturgical performance – there is no doubt that she baptizes herself using a liturgical formula. It seems logical too, then, that the degree to which Margaret's narrative enacts the salvific promise of baptism helps to account also for this saint's power as an intercessor at childbirth, which has at times puzzled contemporary readers.

A virgin martyr seems little connected to a woman in travail – and so readers point to her emergence from the dragon's belly (or womb – in many texts) as a symbolic birth – as indeed it is.<sup>37</sup> Medieval iconography of Margaret does most often picture her thus as emerging from the dragon. But, of course, the interpretations of this dragon quickly move beyond the merely literal: he is also the devil and the representative of the sinful state from which baptism rescues believers. It was also popular to picture Margaret as a shepherdess and in her cauldron of water – and in many of her images with hands folded in prayer or clutching a cross – liturgically

evocative images which may suggest the promise of baptism that is also a crucial concern of women in childbirth.<sup>38</sup>

### *Seinte Margarete and Its Source: An Overview*

We can note first of all that *SM* preserves all of the twelve prayers from the *passio* and in the Bodley manuscript rubricates (or indicates that the rubric should be inserted for) the beginning of all but one of them, this one being nevertheless identified as “*Daviðes bone*” (David’s prayer). The prayers in *SM* do not conclude with “Amen;” but neither do the prayers in all the Latin texts. With few exceptions the prayers that carry over have been expanded from their sources, often doubling in length. Every one of the prayers is introduced by a verbal cue indicating that Margaret is praying, many of which also indicate a particular prayer gesture, as well.<sup>39</sup> All twelve prayers, although rich in language taken directly from the Hebrew Scriptures, are addressed to the second person of the Trinity. In addition to including all Margaret’s own prayers, *SM* follows the *passio* in building to an angelic chorus singing the triple *Sanctus* at her death, but also adds a further “authorial” prayer in verse at the conclusion of the narrative. The Bodley manuscript also begins with a prayer which is evocative of the baptismal formula itself: “*I þe feaderes ant i þes sunes ant i þes hali gastes nome, her biginneð þe liflade ant te passiun of seinte margarete*” (2 ll.1-2) [“In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost, here begins the life and the passion of Saint Margaret”]. In the general expansion of the text and with the particular new emphasis on the expanded “sermon” offered by the second devil, the sense of the narrative as a collection of prayers is somewhat diffused, but certainly still strong in *SM*.

The following chart summarizes my findings about the correspondences between the prayers of *SM* (and the underlying *passio*) and the ritual gestures and actions performed, especially as these suggest baptismal associations. I will then go on to read the prayers closely, both to examine the ways in which the ME texts move, in Robertson's terms, away from the "world of books" and to tease out the specific details of the correspondences between the prayers and the sacramental underpinnings of the legend. Page and line numbers are to Mack's editions of the ME and Latin prayers.

I. Introductory Material

- Reference to **Thecla/Susannah** (*passio* only)
- Theotimus refers to his own **baptism**;
- Margaret (hereafter M.) as shepherdess:  
**catechetical/baptismal imagery**

II. Prayers 1-4: Petitions That Read the Psalms; Enrollment, Scrutinies, Baptism by Blood

- 1) "Haue, lauerd, milce:" Petition for bodily and spiritual integrity (6 l.19-8 l.11)  
[*Miserere Mei, Domini*]  
(129 ll.20-34)
  - Enrollment**: Questions of Status, Identity, Belief
  - Profession of Faith**: "for him ane ich luuie"
  - Sealing**: "He haueð his merke on me iseiled  
with his in-seil."
  - M. is **stripped of clothing**, hung high, scourged
- 2) "Lauerd in þe is al min hope:" Petition for protection and healing (12 l.22-14 l.4)  
[*In te, Domini, speravi,*]  
(131 ll.8-15)
  - M. scourged until blood flows from her body  
"as stream deð of welle"      **Baptism by Blood**
- 3) "Helle-hundes lauerd:" Petition for protection and to see the enemy (16 ll. 7-22)  
[*Circumdederunt me canes*]  
(132 ll.8-21)
  - "**Scrutinies**" completed, M. imprisoned
  - M. signs self with the Cross: **sphragis**
- 4) "Deore-wurðe drihtin:" Praise of Creator and 4-fold petition (18 l.25-20 l.15)  
[*Deus qui iudicium*]  
(133 ll.3-17)
  - M. kneels and raises hands to heaven
  - M. swallowed by dragon

III. Prayers 5-7: Prayers of Praise: Devotional and Liturgical Exuberance; Baptismal Exorcism and Typology

- 5) "Unseheliche godd;" Praise of Creator and petition for protection (22 l. 11-24 l.7)  
[*Deus... inuisibilis*]  
(134 ll.3-12)
  - M. makes sign of the Cross: **sphragis**
  - M. emerges from the dragon: **baptismal typology**
- 6) "Brihetest bleo of alle:" Litany of praise and thanksgiving (24 l.27-26 l.28)  
[*Laudo et glorifico nomen tuum, Deus*]  
(134 l.21-135 l.9)
  - M. tested by black demon: **Descensus ad inferos:**  
**baptismal typology**
- 7) "Stute nu:" Exhortation renouncing the devil and acclamation of faith (28 ll. 14-28)  
[*Cessa de mea virginitate*]  
(135 ll.22-27)
  - Light, Cross, Dove appear: **allusions to Christ's**  
**baptism and confirmation**
  - Demonic sermon
  - Demon banished : **rite of exorcism**

IV. Prayers 8-10: Presider Prayer: Praying Torture into Baptism by Fire and Water

-M. **stripped**, hung high, burned: **Baptism by Fire**

8) “Heh healent godd:” Petition that fire will become desire (42 ll.18-20)

[Ure, Domine, renes meos et cor meum]

(138 ll.16-17)

- M. bound, thrown into cauldron of water

9) “Alre kingene king:” Petition that the water become a baptismal bath: (44 ll.1-12)

[*Domine, qui regnas in aeternum*]

(138 l.28- 139 l. 40)

**Baptism by Water**

-M.’s prayer includes **baptismal formula**

-Dove brings crown: **confirmation**

-M.’s bonds break and she shines brightly:  
suggestion of **baptismal garment**

10) “Mi lufsome lauerd:” Praise for the “**garments**” of the Lord (44 ll.19-22)

[*Dominus regnauit; decorem induit*]

(139 ll.9-11)

V. Prayers 11-12: Prayers of Memorialization; Communion and the Creation of Cult

-M. kneels down and raises hands

11) “Drihtin, leodes lauerd:” Petitions for those who remember her passion (46 l.17-48 l.6)

[*Deus, qui palmo caelum mensus es*]

(139 l.30-140 l.16)

-Thunder, dove descends with cross, responds to prayer

-M. exhorts witnesses to remember her and  
promises her intercessory prayer in heaven;

**Prayer of the Faithful/Preface**

-M. leads the crowd in prayer

12) “Leoteð nu ant leaueð:” Thanksgiving and doxology (50 ll.2-19)

[*Patres et matres*]

(141 ll.2-11)

-M. beheaded; demons acknowledge her;  
witnesses convert

-Angels sing the *Sanctus*

(take her soul to heaven – *SM*;

take her body, but leave relics – *Passio*)

- **Eucharistic** dispersal of her body (relics) and story

VI. Concluding Elements

- Theotomis authenticates M.’s story and promulgates  
her cult

The Concluding Prayer (52 l. 36-54 l.10)

### *I. Introductory Material*

In some manuscripts of the Mombritius version, Theotimus places Margaret in the company of others who have merited veneration including Thecla and Susanna.<sup>40</sup> Both of these women resisted attempts on their honor. They are both famous for “baths” as well – Susanna prepared to bathe as the evil Elders watched; Thecla (or Tecla) baptized herself when she was thrown to the wild beasts by jumping in a pool of water and reciting the baptismal formula.<sup>41</sup> Susannah is also invoked in baptismal prayers over females in the Gelasian Sacramentary and preserved in the Sarum rite.<sup>42</sup> The reference to these women is not carried over into the ME poem. It is also however, not present in all of the *passio* manuscripts, but figures in the early stages of the transmission of this narrative.<sup>43</sup>

Theotimus himself, as McFadden suggests, represents a literate reader and authorizer of the legend, but first, along with Margaret’s foster mother, he stands for the Christian community into which Margaret is received. Not only is he “ilered i godes lei”(2 l.14) [“learned in God’s law”], but he is a fully initiated Christian – one who has formally received the sacraments at a time in early Christian history when those who call themselves Christian may or may not have been so formally received by the community.<sup>44</sup> Theotimus introduces himself as one who has read all about Jesus and his followers in search of the truth. He therefore announces his affiliation with the baptismal formula which will be a crucial element of the legend. In the Latin: “Ego enim, Theotimus nomine, baptismum accepi, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, baptizatus in omni sapientia et scientia Dei” (128 ll.6-8) and preserved in *SM*: “Ich, fulhet i font o þe al-mihti fedres nome [ant o þe witti sunes nome] ant o þes hali gastes” (4 l.23-6 l.1) [I, who

was baptized in the almighty Father's name, and in the wise Son's name and in the Holy Ghost's"].<sup>45</sup> Margaret is introduced both in the *passio* and in *SM* as one who, although born of a pagan family, has been fostered by a Christian nurse-maid and inspired by the stories of the Christian martyrs. Although the *passio* notes twice that she was "Spiritu Sancto repleta" (128 1.24; 129 1.3) ["filled with the Holy Spirit"] which description may hint at some sacramental initiation for Margaret, no early version of the Latin or Greek text (to my knowledge) specifically answers the question about whether she had been formally received into the Church.

Early treatises on the question of baptism do in fact speculate about the fate of martyrs who are taken before their actual initiation into the Church with the rites of Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. As *The Apostolic Tradition* of Hippolytus notes: "If anyone being a catechumen should be apprehended for the Name, let him not be anxious about undergoing martyrdom. For if he suffer violence and be put to death before baptism, he shall be justified having been baptized in his own blood."<sup>46</sup> At a variety of levels, the legend of Saint Margaret reveals concern with the question of formal initiation and the possibility that there are other ways of attaining the grace of baptism. Here we have specific information about Theotomus's baptism juxtaposed with a notable lack of information about Margaret's precise sacramental history. Later in the story, the many pagan witnesses, including the executioner, who have just been converted by Margaret's witness, must be saved in their bloody martyrdoms.<sup>47</sup> The possibility left open here -- that Margaret although she has received catechesis has yet to be baptized -- increases her efficacy as a model for the similarly uninitiated witnesses on their own path to salvation by an alternate justification.

When the story begins, Margaret is, significantly, in the fields, looking after the sheep of her foster mother. In visual representations of her life, the early scenes depict her thus as a

shepherdess.<sup>48</sup> She is linked in this way with Christ, the Good Shepherd, and thus also immediately with the theme of baptism. As Daniélou points out, Psalm 22 with its pastoral themes was a crucial text for baptismal instruction, as it was believed to epitomize all of the sacraments, but most especially those of initiation.<sup>49</sup> As such, the psalm was an essential element of the instruction given to catechumens and early Christian baptistries were often decorated with images of the Good Shepherd in reference to this psalm. So the pastoral setting in which we and Olibrius first see Margaret raises immediately associations not only with Christ but with early Christian initiatory catechesis as well.

## *II. Prayers 1-4: Petitions That Reads the Psalms; Enrollment, Scrutinies, Baptism by Blood*

### 1. Prayers 1-4: Petitions that Read the Psalms

Margaret's first four prayers in both the *passio* and the ME *SM* are notable for their high degree of allusiveness, especially to the psalms. In the Latin source prayers, a clear pattern emerges that suggests a very heavy reliance on the reader's intimate knowledge of the psalms, such as would obtain in the monastic milieu from which the *passio* emerged. Here, in Robertson's terms, is the "world of books," specifically the scriptures, and these highly scriptural prayers would indeed yield riches to those practiced in *lectio*. In the ME versions of the prayers, a turn towards other, contemporaneous intertexts is discernable. Structurally, these first four prayers are interspersed with ritual dialogue and symbolic actions that serve the baptismal theme. I will examine these first four prayers together as a unit, before turning to the liturgically resonant narrative frame within which they are set, a strategy which may unfortunately suggest a

separation of *lectio* from liturgical or typological reading that I do not mean to imply. As in liturgy itself, the rich interplay of word and action in both the *passio* and *SM* intensifies the power of the drama being enacted. But treating the prayers first offers a more coherent view of their scriptural indebtedness and the ways in which Margaret uses scripturally allusive prayer to read herself and her world.

Prayer 1 occurs at the same point in the *passio* and *SM* narratives – as Margaret is approached by the henchmen of Olibrius seeking to determine her social status. The *passio* prayer references eight scriptural texts in about as many sentences. Mack suggests that “the whole matter of the prayers lacks originality” because they are so entirely composed of snippets from various scriptural sources.<sup>50</sup> But, as we have seen in other such carefully-crafted scriptural prayers, these verses are, in fact, given a clear shape that offers an astute commentary on Margaret’s immediate situation. Most of the references are to the psalms, and the prayer begins in the Latin with the familiar words, “Miserere mei, Domine,” found in at least six of the psalms and used in other biblical and liturgical contexts as well. For those familiar with the whole of Psalm 56, the first source text referenced here, there are other echoes in Margaret’s prayer and in her life of that psalm where the speaker is surrounded by hostile forces, may be “swallowed up” by enemies, find himself “among lions,” face the enemies’ tongues as “sharp as a sword,” or be cast into a pit.<sup>51</sup> But despite these trials, the speaker of Psalm 56 will keep his heart fixed on God to whom he will sing a song of praise before all the people.

This same spirit animates all of Margaret’s first prayer. More than anything else, Margaret prays for steadfastness of heart and mind so that she may profess Jesus despite the efforts of the wicked to destroy or defile her. She says in the *passio*: “Non coinquetur corpus meum, nec etiam immutetur scientia mea. [Non proiciatur margarita mea in lutum], nec minuatur

sensus meus a turpitudine iniqua, et insipientia diaboli. Sed trans mitte angelum gubernatorem ad aperiendum sensum et os meum, ad respondendum impio et iniquo prefecto sanguinario” (129 ll. 24-30) [“Let not my body be contaminated, let not my mind be changed, (let not my pearl be cast forth into the mud,) let not my understanding be changed by unjust wickedness and by the folly of the devil, but send me your holy angel as a guide to open the channels of my understanding, and my mouth so that I may reply with confidence to the wicked, unjust and bloodthirsty prefect”].<sup>52</sup> This extended petition begins with a plea for the preservation of her bodily purity, but the main thrust here is clearly on preserving the purity and integrity of her “scientia” and “sensus” so that she may profess the Lord. In this context, the “margarita” of which she speaks seems more clearly to refer to an intellectual or spiritual treasure rather than narrowly defined physical virginity.

From the outset, however, the ME version places an emphasis on the virginity and bodily integrity of Margaret that is not present to the same degree in the *passio*. *SM* elaborates here: “Lauerd, lustu to me. Ich habbe a deore gimstan, ant ich hit habbe igeue þe, mi meiðhad i mene, blostme brihstest i bodi þe hit bereð ant biwit wel; ne let tu neauer þe unhwit warpen hit i wurðinc, for hit is þe leof, ant him þinge loþest” (6 l.28-8 l.1) [“Lord, listen to me. I have a precious jewel – my virginity, I mean – brightest of blossoms in the body that bears and guards it well. Never let the Evil One cast it in the mire; because it is dear to you, he hates it most of all”].<sup>53</sup> The ME prayer goes on to request Christ’s direct intervention in the showdown ahead: “Ah send me þi sonde, helent, of heouene, þet cuðe me ant kenne hu ich onswerie schule þes schuckes schireue” (8 ll.5-6) [but send me your messenger, Saviour, from heaven, to tell me how to answer the Devil’s agent’]. It is interesting to note the slight shift in emphasis here in terms of the source of the forceful prayer speech that will later vanquish the adversaries. In the *passio*,

with words that echo the monastic prayers that begin the divine office (“Lord, open my lips, and my mouth shall proclaim your praise!” from Psalm 50), Margaret asks for an angel simply to open her understanding and her mouth; she will then make the necessary replies – which will be in the form of prayers composed of allusions to various scriptural sources. The prayer for that ability is indeed like a prayer before a monastic *lectio*—that she will be able to “read rightly” in the situations ahead. In *SM*, Margaret asks for the messenger from heaven to make known to her how to answer Olibrius. The implication is that words will be given directly to her – rather than, as in the *passio*, the ability to come up with the words herself. Finally, the prayer in both versions ends with vivid animal imagery drawn directly from the scriptures in which Margaret describes herself as beset by dangerous beasts and as an innocent trapped creature – a motif in several of her later prayers, suggestive perhaps of the public persecutions of some of the earlier martyrs (including Thecla) and marking the transitional period this narrative represents from the age of martyrdom to the age of asceticism.

In Prayer 1 we see many patterns established that will obtain in all of Margaret’s first four prayers. Prayer 1 is highly scriptural and takes its overarching theme from the first psalm referenced. In *SM* it remains similar to the *passio*, but has certainly been altered in subtle but significant ways. One such change is to emphasize, whenever possible, the importance of virginity – in keeping with the emphasis on virginity in all of the *Ancrene Wisse* texts. This focus on physical purity and the corresponding emphasis on Jesus as the courtly lover are the changes to the *passio* and its prayers most frequently noted by editors and readers as points of interest for understanding women’s reading practices.<sup>54</sup> Robertson’s theory that the spirituality envisioned in the *Ancrene Wisse* represents a turning away from books and towards the world itself as the source of knowledge seems already suggested here in the subtle moves away from the habits of

the purely monastic *lectio*. In *SM*, the greater emphasis on bodily integrity suggests the virginal body itself as a sign to be interpreted. Indeed Price has said, “Virginité here is principally a sign that Margaret is God’s creature.”<sup>55</sup> For the anchoresses their own daily experiences of living chastely were presumably opportunities for interpreting the will of God for them in their lives, their own bodies providing the “texts” for “incarnational reading.” As we shall discuss when Margaret does baptize herself, however, virginité which is given to Christ, an element of the *Sponsa Christi* motif, also has a typological significance related to baptism.

Prayer 2 is uttered by Margaret when, after she has completed a ritual dialogue with Olibrius, he orders her to be hung high and scourged. The prayer is relatively brief, but once again replete with scriptural reference, Clayton and Magennis identifying some twelve allusions in only seven lines of text in their edition of the *passio*.<sup>56</sup> This prayer, like Prayer 1, is also governed in an overarching way by the themes of the first psalm referenced in each of the two shorter prayers of which it is composed in the Latin: in this case, Psalm 30 for the first half and Psalm 85 for the second.<sup>57</sup> Psalm 30, whose first line is directly quoted as the first line of Margaret’s prayer, is, in its entirety, a plea for protection from one’s enemies, identified as those who regard vanities (“custodientes vanitates,” v.7). The prayer of Psalm 30 specifically petitions, “Let me not be confounded, O Lord, for I have called upon thee. Let the wicked be ashamed...,” (“non confundar quia invocavi te, confundantur impii,” v.18). That Margaret’s prayer not only quotes the first verse, but also calls to mind all of Psalm 30 is apt since in the verbal contest to follow, Margaret is indeed not “confounded” by the worldly (or “vanity regarding”) logic of Olibrius and the crowd. Perhaps more interestingly, Margaret is referencing the words and themes of a psalm with another particularly well-known verse that she does *not* directly quote, but that is also most appropriate to Margaret’s situation here as she hangs in the

air and is tortured: “In manus tuas commendabo spiritum meum”(“into your hands I commend my spirit” Ps.30:6). Similarly, Prayer 3, which will follow shortly and is also spoken while Margaret hangs high, takes Psalm 21 as its chief inspiration – the psalm in which we find “Deus, deus meus quare dereliquisti me” (“God, my God, why have you abandoned me?” Ps. 21:2). Though in neither case does the saint speak the words that Christ used on the cross, it seems clear that the author of the *passio* pieces together prayers that are like verbal puzzle boxes. Those who hear the direct verbal echoes of well-known psalm verses in the prayer find one layer of meaning; readers with deeper knowledge of the whole psalms referenced have the secret key to experiencing the prayer’s full power to evoke Margaret’s *Imitatio Christi*. Can we say that the same “deep knowledge” is suggested in the *SM* translations of these prayers as well?

In *SM*’s version of Prayer 2 the main intention remains the same as in the Latin prayer—to petition God for protection and healing. The ME prayer, however, removes several of the direct scriptural allusions found in the *passio* prayer, adding instead new material that turns attention to the crowd surrounding Margaret. This new emphasis, not present in the Latin, focuses on Margaret herself as a sign for others. The brief *SM* prayer digresses twice to consider what effect Margaret’s actions will have on those who are watching. Where the Latin prayer asks, “let not my enemies mock me,” the ME considers why they would do so: “ne lef þu neuer mine fan, þe feondes I mene, habben ne holden hare hoker of me, as he walden gef ha me mahten awarpen” (12 ll.24-27) [“and never let my enemies – the devils, I mean – hold me in contempt, as they would if they were able to overthrow me”]. And the healing she requests is not, as in the Latin simply “ut dolor meus requiescat et conuertatur in gaudium” (131 l.15) [“so that my sorrow may find repose and may be turned into joy”] but “þet hit ne seme nohwer, ne suteli o mi

semblant, þet ich derf drehe” (14 ll.2-4) [“so it may not appear, or show on my face, that I feel any pain”]. The face she turns to the world is the one that will effect conversions.

That Margaret points to herself as a sign, and verbally links her passion to Christ’s both here in Prayer 2 and next in Prayer 3, supports the typological reading of the gestures and actions that occur between these first four prayers, which will be discussed below. As we shall see, the preoccupation with the public “reading” of Margaret’s witness is inserted throughout the ME narrative, suggesting that the author of *SM* understood his protagonist’s martyrdom to have symbolic value, at least at the level of *Imitatio Christi*. But as the theme of Margaret as a sign is developed in this prayer, it may also provide evidence of some of the “deep knowledge” of the psalms, characteristic of *lectio*, that we have seen the *passio* itself requires.

Here the ME author *does* seem to emphasize unquoted verses from Psalm 85, which is the chief inspiration for the second half of the prayer. The psalm begins “Respice ad me et Miserere mei” (“Look upon me Lord and have pity on me, Ps. 85:16) and both the Latin and ME prayers echo these words. But as the psalmist continues, “*Fac mecum signum in bonitate et videant qui oderunt me et confundantur quia tu Domine auxiliatus es mihi et consolatus es me*” (Ps.85:17) [*Shew me (i.e. show me to be) a token for good, that they who hate me may see and be confounded, because thou, O Lord hast helped me and hast comforted me*] (my emphasis). Only the ME prayer, in its insistence upon Margaret as a sign for others, takes up the theme in the “verse-beneath-the-verse” to which the direct allusion to Psalm 85 may point. But whatever the ME author’s motive in developing the interplay between Margaret and her public, he has inserted these details in place of several other more direct scriptural references from his Latin source.<sup>58</sup>

Prayer 3 begins, as already noted, with a line from the well-known Psalm 21. Margaret’s prayer references not the verse that Christ quoted on the cross (Ps 21:2), but a memorable image

from verse 17 of the same psalm: “Circumdederunt me canes multi; concilium malignantium obsedit me” (132 ll. 8-9) [“For many dogs have encompassed me; the council of the malignant has besieged me”], rendered in *SM*: “[H]elle-hundes, lauerd habbet bitrummet me, ant hare read þet heaneð me haueð al biset me” (16 ll. 7-8) [“The hounds of hell, Lord, are all around me, and their malicious scheming has encompassed me completely”]. This prayer in both Latin and ME is more directly related to a single psalm than any of the others – two subsequent lines are taken directly from the psalmist: “Arude, reowfule godd, mi sawle of sweordes egge ant of h[u]ndes hond, for nabbe ich bute hire ane” (16 ll.9-11 from Ps.21:21) [“Make haste, Merciful God, rescue my soul from the blade of the sword and the grip of the hounds, for it is all I have”] and “Lowse me, lauerd ut of þe liunes muþ, ant mi meoke mildschipe of þe an-ihurnde hornes” (16 ll. 11-13 from Ps.21:22) [“Deliver me Lord, from the lion’s mouth, and my meek mildness from the unicorn’s horns”]. The motif of the speaker as surrounded by fiendish dogs, enemy blades, ravaging lions, and even unicorn’s horns once again evokes the age of martyrdoms and public executions that is giving way to the age of ascetism during the time when the legend may have been composed. And although no lion will rush into a stadium here, the ME author (following the *passio*) has already carefully identified Olibrius as both the dog and the lion when he has Margaret address him directly as “þu heaðene hund” [“you heathen dog”] and “þu luðere liun lað godd” [“you raging lion hateful to God”] (14 ll.28-9 and ll.32-3) just before she utters this third prayer. In this instance, the kind of interpretive associations one might presume the careful reader could make are made for her by the author of *SM*.<sup>59</sup>

The second part of Prayer 3 is a petition for two kinds of supernatural visitation – both of which will be granted during the course of Margaret’s passion. Margaret asks for a messenger from God “i culurene heowe” [“in the shape of a dove”] to help her preserve her virginity and

also that she may see “þe awariede wiht þe weorreð agein me” [“the accursed creature who is attacking me”] (16 l.15 and ll.17-18) so that God can show his power through her. Finally the prayer ends with a doxology: “Beo þi nome iblesced, alre bleo brihtest, in alre worldene worlt, aa on ecnesse” (16 ll. 21-22) [“Blessed be your name, whose beauty is brightest, world without end, for ever and ever.”] In having Margaret ask for both divine help and spiritual testing, and in the amount of text he devotes to the demonic visits, the author of *SM* closely follows (and even expands upon) the *passio*, which also emphasizes these elements. Because Margaret’s ordeal is informed by baptismal typology, the appearance of both of these otherworldly visitors will, as we shall see, be significant. The dove, iconographically linked with the Holy Spirit, descended at Christ’s own baptism in the Jordan; the devil is ritually exorcised in baptismal liturgies. Those who desire full communion with the faithful do indeed “ask for” both divine grace and spiritual testing when they choose to be initiated into the Christian community.

Prayer 4, spoken after Margaret is cast down into prison is similar in length to Prayers 1 and 3, yet is a more elaborate combination of praise and specific petition than any of her other prayers to this point. The ME author has also more fully expanded upon his Latin source here than he has previously. Whereas the other prayers to this point began with an emotional immediacy expressing a particular exigency (“Have mercy on me,” “In you is all my hope,” “Hell-hounds surround me,”), this prayer in ME begins with some ten phrases of praise (expanded from seven) addressed to God in the person of Jesus, cast here as the cosmic Christ, having attributes of creator, father, judge, that we often associate with God the Father. The “Deore-wurðe drihtin” (“Dear Lord”) is the source of best (though mysterious!) judgment, the One to whom the obedience and homage of all creation is owed, the hope and help of all who honour him (verbal embellishment is very strong in this prayer). The litany of praise continues:

“Ðu art foster ant feader to helplese children. Ðu art weddede weole, ant widewene warrant, ant meidenes mede. Ðu art wunne of þe world, Iesu Crist, kinebern; godd ikennet of godd, as liht is of leome” (18 ll.28-32) [“You are foster-parent and father to helpless children. You are the delight of the married, the protector of widows, and the virgins’ reward. You are the joy of the world, Jesus Christ, royal son: God begotten of God, as the light is of light”].

In this prayer we glimpse the ME text’s suspected provenance as a piece for public recitation; the wedded, and widows and maidens evoked here are also those who had been exhorted to listen well at the beginning of the passion (4 ll.7-14). The verbal echo calls them back to attention here just before the beginning of the most dramatic episode of Margaret’s story – the encounter with the devil in his various guises. The clear echo of the Nicene Creed here would also be familiar to those listening. “[L]umen de lumine” reads the Latin prayer, but the ME author expands the allusion: “godd ikennet of godd, as liht is of leome” (18 ll.31-32) [“God begotten of God, as light is of light”].<sup>60</sup> The Nicene Creed is of course known to the medieval Christian as the Mass Creed – in contrast with the Apostles Creed (or lesser creed) learned by the layman for private devotion.<sup>61</sup> It may also be pertinent that the Symbol or Creed is handed over to the catechumen after the third scrutiny in early baptismal liturgies. All of this praise is in keeping with the spirit of the first psalm directly quoted in the Latin prayer: Psalm 32, verse 8, where the psalmist praises God as creator and judge and promises victory over worldly powers for those who place their hope and trust in the Lord. The second psalm verse quoted also rewards knowledge of the whole – Psalm 141 where the speaker is one who has been cast down into prison. Again we see this pattern in the Latin prayer of referencing a psalm with particular relevance for the situation at hand, but not quoting the most obvious verse – those with intimate knowledge of the psalms will presumably “get it.” The ME author, however, seems more taken

with the possibilities for a type of “incarnational reading” offered in the next portion of the prayer.

After the verses of praise, the prayer moves on to specific petitions. By my count, Margaret makes four requests in the *passio*, all preserved and expanded upon in the ME: 1) have pity on me because I have been abandoned by my father, 2) help me and command that I may meet my adversary, face to face, 3) judge between us and do not be angry at me, 4) guard me against pollution/contamination of soul, body, or mind. The prayer concludes with a doxology. Here the *SM* prayer offers a clear example of the saint using her prayer to God as a means of interpreting her own life. Whereas the *passio* takes a single line to note: “respice in me, quia sola sum et unica patri, et ipse me dereliquit. Ne derelinquas me, Deus” (133 ll.6-8) [“Look upon me because I am the only daughter of my father, and he has abandoned me. Do not abandon me, God”], *SM* intensifies the analysis of Margaret’s situation: “Loke, Lauerd, to me: mi lif, mi luue, mi leofmon: ant milce me, þi meiden. Min ahne flesliche feader dude ant draf me awei, his an-lepi dohter, ant mine freond aren me, for þi luue, lauerd, famen ant feondes; ah þe ich halde, healent, ba for feader ant for freond: ne forlet tu me nawt,/liuiende lauerd” (18 l.32-20 l.1) [“Lord, watch over me, my life, my love, my lover, and have mercy on me, your maiden. My own natural father rejected me and drove me away, his only daughter, and my friends are my enemies to me and hostile to me because of your love, Lord; but I see you, Saviour, as both father and friend. Do not abandon me, living Lord”]. Just as above the image of God as the protector of orphans broadens out to include his relationship to the widows, married and maidens – the contemporary listeners—here too the image of Margaret as abandoned by her father seems to shade into the possible real life experience of the anchoresses – figuratively abandoned by family and friends (in the courtly sense of “protectors” – particularly, suitors).

The other notable expansion from the Latin occurs in the ME prayer's digression on the motivation for the enemy's hatred of Margaret. The *passio* poses a question in that Margaret says about her enemy, "quia quid illi nocuerim ignoro" (133 ll. 10-11) ["What I have done to harm him, I do not know"]. Here in the ME prayer, as also in *SM*'s version of the Devil's "sermon" to come, Margaret offers a theologically sophisticated answer to this problem when she suggests that the Devil's nature is to hate those who are simply good; no further provocation is required to enflame him. The motif of concern with the devil's motivation in attacking Margaret suggests a real life question for the anchoresses: why would women of such presumably humble and virtuous demeanor and lifestyle be subject to the kinds of demonic testing that all of the *Ancrene Wisse* texts attest to be their lived experience? Because, as *SM* answers: "euch hali þing ant halewinde is him lað" (20 ll.7-8) ["every holy or wholesome thing is hateful to him"]. Margaret of the *passio* concludes by asking protection for her soul and understanding (anima and sensus). *SM* asks for protection for her "meiðhad," "sawle," "wit" and "wisdom" before the concluding doxology.

In comparing the first four prayers of the ME *SM* with their counterparts in the source text, then, a pattern does emerge. The *passio* prayers are scripturally allusive in the sense that each verse can conjure a wider world of scriptural intertexts; in the ME the scriptural references remain, but conjure, in addition to the scriptural texts, intertexts of lived, contemporary experience. The ME prayers reference bodily sensations, emotions, and social contexts familiar to the contemporary audience.

While subtly different, the prayers have nevertheless, in both versions, revealed a woman who while calling for help, and even comparing herself to trapped animals, is paradoxically rhetorically in complete control of her situation. The scriptural allusions in her prayers serve to

link her trials and needs to those of the psalmist and to Christ himself, who likewise spoke the words of the psalms in the midst of his passion. In this way, Margaret's prayers locate her present ordeal within the overarching narrative of salvation history. To the extent that the ME version adds "contemporary" content to the prayers, it extends the sweep of that salvation history, and the power of the woman who reads it, into the time of the thirteenth-century readers and listeners.

## 2. Prayers 1-4: Enrollment, Scrutinies and Baptism by Blood

Margaret's power as a reader of her own story and centrality as a sign for others is also foregrounded in the ritual dialogue and in the liturgically suggestive actions that constitute the narrative context of the four prayers we have just reviewed. We will turn now to more closely scrutinize that framework of word, gesture, and action.

As a result of her first prayer for integrity of mind and body, Saint Margaret is identified by the "knihtes" as one who believes in Jesus Christ and is therefore ineligible to be married to Olibrius. Her prayer has set the stage for her public avowal of faith – a *credo* she offers as she stands in the fields, which will then cause her to be thrown into prison for the first time. This, the first interrogation that she endures in *SM*, is structured into three separate questions and responses, building in the specificity with which she proclaims her belief in Christ and the basic tenets of Christian faith. In *SM* Olibrius asks first for her status (Is she a freeman's child or a bondwoman?) and then, "hwet godd hehest ant herestu?" (8 l.23-24) ["What God do you honour and worship?"]. Margaret says: "Ich hehe...heh-feader, healent in heouene, ant his deorwurðe sune, Iesu Crist hatte; ant him ich habbe, meiden, mi meiðhad igettet, ant luuie to leofmon ant

leue ase lauerd” (8 ll.24-27) [I honour the Father on high, the Lord in Heaven, and his precious Son, who is called Jesus Christ; and have given my virginity inviolate to him, and love him as a lover and believe in him as Lord”]. The liturgical echoes are strong, of course, and even more pronounced in the *passio* where a third question between these two also asks for Margaret’s name. The three questions are reminiscent of the questions at the door of the church, which begin the baptismal liturgy as recorded, for instance, in the Sarum Missal.<sup>62</sup> These later “entrance” rites were the relics of the separate enrollment ceremony that once began the formal catechumenate at the beginning of Lent.

And although *SM* removes the question as to her name, the ritual dialogue nevertheless suggests the questions of enrollment that were not, historically, fixed texts, but generally sought to establish the social status, gender, life habits, name and intentions of potential catechumens, whether they were adults or, increasingly through the centuries, infants brought forward for initiation.<sup>63</sup> It may be of interest to note that the prayers offered by the presider following the questions of enrollment, as recorded, for instance, in the Gelasian Sacramentary and those much later in the Sarum Rite, are similar to the profession we hear Margaret make at this point in both the *passio* and in *SM* where her belief in Jesus Christ is also explicitly linked to the preservation of her chastity.<sup>64</sup>

Between Prayers 1 and 2, Olibrius goes off to worship his “heþene godes,” leaving Margaret in prison, but returns the next day to continue an interrogation which is once again ritualistic. Olibrius tempts Margaret to “haue merci and milce of þe seoluen” (10 l.9) [“take pity and have mercy on yourself”], clearly echoing her first prayer, “Haue, Lauerd, milce and merci of þi wummon” (6 l.19) [“Take pity, Lord, and have mercy on your maiden”]; she is tempted as Jesus was in the desert and on the cross to save her/himself. Also like Jesus in the desert,

Margaret is tempted by promises of the wealth and power she may have if she will think of her beauty (her source of power) and worship the idols of the heathens. Her response is again a creedal acclamation: “for him ane ich luuie ant habbe to bileue, þe weld ant wisseð wið his wit windes ant wederes, ant al þet biset is wið se ant wið sunne. Buuen ba ant bineoþen, al buhe[ð] to him [ant beieð]” (10 ll. 21-24) [“for the only man I love and put my faith in is the one who rules and guides with his wisdom winds and tempests, and all that is encircled by sea and sun. Both above and below, everything obeys him and does him homage”].

*SM* launches from this impressive Old Testament imagery (found also in the *passio*) to what has been described as the imagery of courtly romance in the description of Jesus Christ that follows: “he is leoflukest [lif for] to lokin upon ant swotest to smellen” (10 ll.25-26) [“he is the fairest of creatures to look at, and sweetest to smell”]. Here indeed it is easy to imagine not only the anchoresses, but also the “widows with married and maidens most of all” who might swoon at the description of this fair and noble lover, possessor of “swote sauour” (“sweet fragrance”), “almihti mihte” (“almighty power”), and “makelese lufsumlec” (“matchless beauty”).<sup>65</sup> But again, along with this layer of courtly reference, there are other additions to this passage that strengthen the sense that a ritually powerful dialogue is being enacted. The ironic echo of the first prayer as noted above is more evident in *SM* than in the source and creates the impression that Olibrius is paying close attention to the words that Margaret utters. In the middle of her rejection of his plea, she says, “ant unwurð, þet wite þu, me beoð þine wordes” (10 ll.20-21) [“And I want you to know that I scorn your words”] and he will begin his response by saying, “Let...ne beoð þes wordes noht wurhð” (10 ll. 29-30) [“Stop...What you say is worthless”]. And after her next prayer and the beginning of her torture, *SM* adds these words from Olibrius: “Stute nu ant stew þine unwitti wordes” (14 ll.8-9) [“Now stop saying such foolish things”]. While

pointing to the worthlessness of each other's speech, they are also, of course, emphasizing the speeches for the audience, encouraging auditors or readers to pay close attention to this ritual dialogue – to be, in effect, “liturgical readers”-- and judge which are truly the “unwitti wordes.”

After tempting her with worldly power, Olibrius threatens Margaret with torture, but she remains steadfast, and in fact vows to submit to suffering because “He haeð his merke on me iseiled wið his in-seil” (12 ll.12-13) [“He has set his mark on me, sealed me with his seal”].

What does Margaret mean by this assertion? In Prayer 1, Margaret also referenced her body that is “al bitaht to þe” (6 ll.25-26) [“dedicated to you”] and following her creedal confession announces: “he þe haeð iseilt me to him seolf” (10 l.16) [“he has sealed me to himself”].<sup>66</sup>

What kind of a sealing has happened? And when does it happen? In both the *passio* and the ME life, the words “consignavit” and “iseilt,” which have very specific associations with the baptismal liturgy (and later more particularly with the separate ceremony of confirmation), are not used until after her first prayer and her statement of belief. They evoke the signing with the cross – on the forehead and the breast – that in some early baptismal rituals occurred with the rite of enrollment at the beginning of the catechumenate.<sup>67</sup> The signing with the cross is today repeated within the liturgy of baptism, and it has been suggested that such repetition may also have occurred in earlier rites. Certainly we see Margaret make the sign of the cross at several key moments in her passion, though not here. Yet the words “consignavit” or “iseilt” do suggest that she has been so marked by this powerful sign, also called the *sphragis*. In writing about baptism, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote of the *sphragis*, “He does not give holy things to dogs, but as soon as he sees a right conscience, He imprints his wonderful and saving *sphragis* which is feared by the demons and recognized by the angels, so much so that the former flee and the latter accompany it as a friend.”<sup>68</sup> Such a passage, which links an allusion to Matthew 7:6 (“cast not your pearls

before swine”) with the power of the *sphragis* to both repel demons and attract heavenly aid, suggests that patristic meditations on baptismal themes must surely have been part of the *lectio* of the person who crafted this narrative of a “pearl” who will banish dragons and demons before being escorted by angels to heaven.

In any case, in response to this public profession, Olibrius taunts Margaret, then orders his men to strip her naked, hang her high and flog her. The stripping and elevation of Margaret here, and when she is later burned, are elements of her *Imitatio Christi*, linking her tortures with the crucifixion, but it is also possible that these strippings, mentioned just before two of the figurative baptisms she undergoes (by blood and by fire), suggest as well the nakedness historically associated with baptism.<sup>69</sup> As her first physical ordeal begins, she “ahēf hire heorte” (12 ll. 19-20) [“summoned up her courage”] in her third prayer.

The first torture that Margaret endures in her passion is a three-fold scourging that results in an effusion of blood so revolting to the crowd that they, and even Olibrius himself, cannot bear to watch.<sup>70</sup> But paradoxically the narrative’s insistence that this is a sight too horrible to witness rather calls attention to its importance as a visually-arresting sign. Three times both versions note the extent of Margaret’s bleeding; each time the blood is characterized by its flowing movement. Of particular interest is the explicit comparison of Margaert’s blood to flowing water, the sacramental substance of baptism.<sup>71</sup> In the *passio* “sanguis quasi aqua de fonte purissimo decurrebat” (131 l.17) [“blood flowed like water from the purest spring”] and in the ME, “tet blod bearst ut ant strac a-dun of hire bodi as stream deð of welle” (14 ll.5-6) [“blood burst out and ran down her body like a stream from a spring”]. Rubrics for baptism always indicate that the water be “natural and true water” or “living water.”<sup>72</sup> And as for the salvific element of this torture, Margaret instructs those who are loath to witness it: “sorhe ant licomes

sar is sawulene heale” (14 l.21) [“through sorrow and bodily pain, souls are saved”]. We have seen that Hippolytus considered the question of baptism by blood (*baptismus sanguinis*) for martyrs who were not yet fully initiated. The concept had scriptural precedent in that Christ referred to his own death as a baptism by blood.<sup>73</sup> In one sense then, as already noted, the whole narrative may recount such a story, in that Margaret’s death by torture and beheading effects the salvation of a martyr who may not have been already formally initiated. At the same time, as becomes clear here, the individual tortures within the narrative are each suggestive of a particular theological construct for baptism: Baptism by blood, by fire and by water. And finally, the progression of the narrative, as we see from these earliest episodes, is shaped to be evocative of the order of baptismal liturgies. With that third layer of baptismal relevance in mind, let us review the ritual words and actions up to this point in the narrative.

By the time we reach the fourth prayer, and just before the dragon appears, Margaret has been tested three times since she announced herself a Christian (with the ritual dialogue that evoked a catechumen’s enrollment):

- 1) Olibrius asks her to renounce her faith and join her body to his, promising her himself and his status. He tells her she will be physically tortured if she does not. She responds by vowing herself to Christ saying she is sealed with his seal. She is hung up and tortured. She prays (Prayer 2) “Lauerd in þe is al min hope.”
- 2) She continues to be beaten. Olibrius and the horrified onlookers beg her to give in to Olibrius’ desires and to give up her “misbileaue.” She exhorts them to faith in “þe liuende godd” and rejects their gods: “þe dumbe beoð ant deaue, ant blinde ant bute mihte, wið monnes hond imakede” (14 ll.25-26) [“who are

deaf and dumb, and blind and helpless, made by human hands”]. She denounces Olibrius as an offspring of the devil. He orders her to be beaten even more cruelly. She prays (Prayer 3): “Helle-hundes, Lauerd, habbet bitrummet me.”

- 3) She continues to be beaten so cruelly that all hide their faces. Olibrius questions her and orders her again “buh nu ant bei to me” (16 l.32) [“submit now and do me homage”]. Once again she rejects him and professes herself willing to die for Christ. He commands that she be cast into prison. In prison she prays (Prayer 4): “Deore-wurðe drihtin, þah þine domes dearne beon, alle ha beoð duhtie.”

Three times Margaret is asked to renounce her faith on pain of torture. Three times she steadfastly proclaims that faith, denounces Olibrius, and even exhorts others to belief. Baptismal liturgies are of course varied from East to West and also ever evolving from the earliest days of Christianity, through the medieval period and beyond, but some of the earliest which would have obtained in the age of the martyrs included three scrutinies.<sup>74</sup> The scrutinies were public occasions, as envisioned here, and although they did not, of course, involve torture, the questioning of the knowledge, lifestyle, and commitment of the catechumen could be extensive. The scrutinies also involved renunciation of Satan, as we see in Margaret’s denouncing of Olibrius as the son of the devil. The number three also suggests the three times Jesus rejects Satan when he faced temptation in the desert --the gospel story that was traditionally used for the First Sunday of Lent when catechumens were enrolled.<sup>75</sup>

### *III. Prayers 5-7: Prayers of Praise: Devotional and Liturgical Exuberance; Baptismal Exorcism and Typology*

#### 1. Prayers 5-7: Prayers of Praise: Devotional and Liturgical Exuberance

The Latin prayers to this point have drawn almost completely on deep knowledge of the psalms. Likewise, the ME prayers, while adding non-scriptural material that requires “incarnational reading,” have kept their textual allusions focused on those same psalms. The “world of books” from which the Latin and ME prayers are drawn will expand significantly in Prayers 5-7. That increase of possible intertexts is suggested in the lengths of two of these prayers, which occur during the episode with the dragon and his brother demon. Prayer 6 is the longer piece in both the *passio* and the ME, but both Prayers 5 and 6 are considerably longer than all of the prayers to this point; the ME versions are each more than twice as long as their Latin sources.<sup>76</sup>

Prayer 5 in the Latin and ME is essentially a petition for protection that includes a lengthy meditation on God as the creator – as the one who because he is the creator of all would naturally have the power to strengthen Margaret in her battle with this demon. Prayer 6 is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving once she has managed to do so that evokes a heavenly vision of bliss and concludes with a hymn to the Trinity. These two prayers are clearly companion pieces – alike in their length and tone. The prayers bookend Margaret’s miraculous emergence from the belly of the dragon, and in their paired concern with creation and heaven suggest a meditation on God as the Alpha and the Omega. These prayers are quite different in spirit from

the psalm-inspired prayers to this point, being less directly reliant on biblical language. The imagery remains scriptural, but exact correspondences are more difficult to pinpoint, and even those few correspondences that are present in the Latin become obscured by the effluence of contemporary devotional imagery that the ME author adds when he expands the prayers. A different liturgical moment seems to be occurring. Corresponding to this new moment, Margaret adopts a new attitude for prayer: she drops to her knees and raises her hands towards heaven.

Prayer 5 begins with an address to “Unseheliche godd, euch godes ful, hwas wreaððe is se gromful þet helle ware ant heouenes, ant alle cwike þinges, cwalieð þer-ageines” (22 ll.11-13) [“Invisible God, full of all goodness, whose wrath is so terrible that all inhabitants of hell and heaven, and all living things, tremble before it”]. The theme of God as the Creator that is taken up so completely here in Prayer 5 is central to baptismal liturgies, especially at the points of exorcising the devil and blessing the font. Some years ago, responding to readings which found the dragon episode in *SM* to be sensationalized, Jocelyn Price argued persuasively the ME text’s use of the dragon was rather a careful re-working of the *passio* material “on the whole more remarkable for its confident and informed orthodoxy than naiveté.”<sup>77</sup> The emphasis in this particular prayer on the visible, created world that God designed is an appropriate response to the appearance of an equally corporeal dragon. Price finds a theologically sophisticated motif throughout the text on the distinctions between the “un-sehen” (un-seen) and the “unsehelic” (un-see-able) which helps to explain Margaret’s insistence on seeing her enemy face to face. As Price says: “It is also noteworthy that especially in comparison with the interior settings of *Iuliene, Margarete* has a plethora of external messengers and signs, apart from the saint herself: the dove (cf. 16/15, 28/32, 44/13-15, 48/8), the light (28/30), the shining crosses, earthquakes and thunderings (28/32, 48/9, 44/13-15, 48/7) and the chorus of angels (52/4-5) are all retained

from the source with thematic consonance.”<sup>78</sup> Price is certainly correct in seeing the dragon itself as another carefully manipulated external sign, but she does not make the explicit connection that the language of “external signs” is also, of course, the language of the sacraments and sacramental liturgies.

In the baptismal liturgy as found in the Gelasian Sacramentary, the rite of exorcism begins, for females, with the prayer, “Deus caeli, Deus terrae, Deus angelorum, Deus archangelorum, Deus prophetarum, Deus martyrum, Deus omnium bene viventium, Deus cui omnis lingua confitetur caelestium, terrestrium et infernorum, te invoco Domine, ut has famulas tuas perducere et custodire digneris ad gratiam baptismi tui” [“God of heaven, God of the earth, God of angels, God of archangels, God of prophets, God of martyrs, God of all that live rightly, God to whom every tongue confesses of those in heaven, on the earth, and below, I invoke you, Lord, over this your (female) servant that you would deign to lead her and to guard her to the grace of your baptism”].<sup>79</sup> The language of the *passio* Prayer 5 is not similar, but the prayer clearly evokes the same creator God who rules the heavens, the earth, and the infernal regions: “qui formasti paradisum indeficientem” (134 l.4) [“who formed everlasting paradise”] “et mari terminum posuisti” (131 l.5) [“and established a boundary for the sea”] and “diabolum ligasti” (131 ll.6-7) [“bound the devil”] and ends with an almost parodic description of the dragon’s “leading” of this handmaid: “Et obsorbere me festinat, querens me perducere in caueam suam” (134 ll. 11-12) [“And it hastens to swallow me up and desires to lead me into his cave”]. The author of *SM* has embellished this prayer with detailed descriptions of the created beings who obey God’s commandments, though he cannot count “mankind” among them:

Du wrahtest ant wealdest alle wordliche þing. Ðeo þet te heieð ant herieð in heouene ant alle þe þinges þe eardið on eorðe: þe fisches þe i þe flodes fleoteð wið finnes, þe flihide fuheles þe fleoð bi þe lufte, ant al þet iwraht is, wurched þet ti wil is ant halt þine heastes, bute mon ane. Ðe sunne recceð hire rune

wiðuten each reste. Ðe mone ant te steorren þe walkeð bi þe lufte ne stutteð ne ne studegið, ah sturied aa mare; ne nohwider of þe wei þet tu hauest iwraht ham ne wrencheð ha neaure. Ðu steorest þe sea-strem, þet hit flede ne mot fir þen þu merkest. Ðe windes, þe wederes, þe wudes ant te weattres buheð þe ant beið. Feondes habbeð fearlac, ant engles, of þin eie. Ðe wurmes ant te wilde deor þet o þis wald wunieð libbet efter þe lahe þet tu ham hauest iloket, luuewende lauerd.... (22 ll. 14-29)

[You created and govern everything on earth. Those who glorify and praise you in heaven and all the creatures that inhabit the earth, the fish that flash with fins through the sea, the birds that fly through the air above, and all creation, do what your will is and keep your commandments, all but mankind. The sun travels its course without any rest; the moon and the stars moving through the air never cease or stop but are constantly in motion, and they never turn aside from the track you have marked out for them. You guide the sea's current so it cannot overflow the bounds that you gave it. The winds, the storms, the woods and the waters are all obedient to you and pay you homage. Devils fear your anger, and angels, too. The snakes and the wild beasts that live in the woods follow the law that you have ordained for them, beloved Lord..]

This very lengthy expansion of three lines in the *passio*, while clearly sharing biblical themes with Genesis and the psalms, seems a marked moment of poetic and spiritual exuberance on the part of the ME author. The appreciation for the beauty and order inherent in the created world as it is perceived by sight (“the fish that flash with fins through the sea”) and understood by human intellect (“the snakes and the wild beasts that live in the woods follow the law that you have ordained for them”) seems to owe at least as much to a direct observation of the world the author inhabits as to a cobbling of images from the world as it is described in Scripture. The basic theme of seeing God through his handiwork has scriptural precedence, such as the Benedicite canticle, and is common in religious poetry in English from the time of Caedmon, but the specificity with which the created world is celebrated as a sign of God's presence here suggests the contemporary world view that would inspire St. Francis' “Canticle of the Sun.”

The prayer raises the issue here of the sinfulness of mankind – man alone does not naturally follow the order of God's plan – preparing us for the sinfulness Margaret will ask to be

cleansed of in her bath. As we saw earlier (in Prayer 4), again here, and will see later in the “sermon” delivered by the second devil, *SM* raises questions about the potential for sinfulness in the lives of those who are righteous like Margaret, or monks or anchoresses who seem to have chosen lives of heroic virtue and have few occasions to sin. Two answers to this difficult question are proposed. The plaintive “bute mon ane” here hints at the inescapable problem of original sin amidst the goodness of created nature. Also, the devil will reveal that he and his fellow demons target those who are good because it is their nature to “ne neuer mare ne beo gleade bute of uel ane” (40 ll.7-8) [“never to be glad of anything but evil”]. We will see that Margaret does not hesitate to describe herself as sinful, but the number of times this question recurs both in the *passio* and the *SM* suggests that this is an essential question that the ME narrative addresses.<sup>80</sup>

Margaret concludes Prayer 5 by admitting that she herself has no power to fight off the devil, but places her trust in the Lord: “Wið þis uel wite me, for Ich truste al o þe, ant ti wil iwurðe hit, deorwurðe Lauerd, þet Ich þurh þi strengðe mahe stonden wið him” (24 ll. 1-4) [“Guard me against this evil, for my trust is all in you, and may it be your will, dear Lord, that I through your strength may stand against him”]. The notion that she cannot defeat the devil except with the help of God speaks directly to the theology of the sacraments whereby the grace of God is given to the recipients through these external signs.<sup>81</sup> Margaret’s confidence here that with God’s help she *will* stand against the devil offers a fitting preface to the defeat of the dragon and black demon that are about to take place; these typologically rich episodes will likewise celebrate the God who not only created the world, but crushed the devil who threatened it. Finally, in *SM*, Margaret concludes her prayer with ritual words and a gesture that invokes the power of the sign that is central to the sacrament of baptism: “Ah o þin blissfule nome ich blesci

me nuðe” [“But I cross myself now in your blessed name”], she says, before she “droh þa endelong hire, ant þwertouer þrefter, þe deorwurðe taken of þe deore rode þet he on reste” (24 ll. 7-8) [“traced on her body, downwards and then across, the precious sign of the beloved cross that he was raised on”]. Although in visual representations of the legend Margaret often emerges from the dragon holding a devotional cross, in the *passio* and *SM* it is the cross made upon her body itself which will burst the dragon asunder when he attempts to swallow her. The intangible “prayer cross” of gesture (and word, in *SM*) is what protects and liberates her. Here, in *SM*, the prayer of the sign of the cross is repeated just at the end of the expanded Prayer 5, as if to remind the reader that it has occurred -- for Margaret crossed herself upon entering prison both in the *passio* and in *SM*. This re-crossing does not occur in the *passio* – but different manuscripts are more or less explicit in reminding the reader that she had previously crossed herself, and the ME author, perhaps working from a less explicit text, may have felt the need to re-emphasize this powerful signing.<sup>82</sup>

*SM*'s Prayer 6 is elaborated from the parallel prayer in the *passio* so that the emotional exuberance of an already fulsome litany of praise is further heightened.<sup>83</sup> The prayer in Latin has a three part structure and is generally characterized by enumeration such as we find in litanies; the prayer begins, in fact, glorifying the name of Jesus by offering a list of his titles. He is the cornerstone, immortal king, pillar of faith, seat of wisdom, perpetual foundation of countless angels. The ME author embellishes the litany with titles that again recall the contemporary lyric tradition of his day. Christ is also: “Brihtest bleo of alle þet eauer weren iborene, blotsme iblowen ant iboren of meidenes bosom” (24 ll.27-28) [“Fairest of all who were ever born, blossom in full flower, born of a maiden's womb”]. After praising the name of God, Margaret turns to listing the wonders she has seen God perform during this very ordeal, the phrase,

“Vidi...,” being repeated six times in the Latin and in the ME, “Ich habbe (i)sehen,” five times. Further listing within these phrases increases the sense of joyful plenitude that a litany creates: God’s goodness is more than we can capture in mere words. For example, “Ich habbe isehen þe wurse of helle her awrapen, ant te monslahe islein, þe stronge þurs astoruen” (26 ll.4-6) [“I have seen the wolf of hell overthrown here and the murderer slaughtered, the mighty demon destroyed”]. While the titles of God evoked his eternal nature, this repetition of his deeds effectively creates a sense of God’s immediate presence in Margaret’s life. This rhetorical strategy is ancient, of course, but for modern-day readers suggests the cadences of a good evangelical preacher who compellingly reads the hand of God in the “signs of the times.”

One noteworthy item among the deeds of the Lord for which Margaret offers thanks in both versions, but which we as readers have not yet actually witnessed in either the *passio* or *SM* is holy oil coming to her. In the Latin: “oleum sanctum uenire uidi ad me” (135 l.1) [“I have seen holy oil come to me”] and in the ME: “Ich habbe isehen hali ant halwende eoli as hit lihte to me, ant ich me seolfe smelle of þe, swote Iesu, swopttre þen eauer eani þing þet is on eorðe” (26 ll.10-12) [“I have seen holy and healing oil as it descended to me, and I myself share your fragrance, sweet Jesus, sweeter than anything that there is on earth”]. In some baptismal liturgies, a blessing with holy oil occurs after the exorcisms, but before the immersion. Further association of oil with baptism and confirmation rituals will be discussed below, as will the sense that this detail, uncorroborated by narrative action, may be liturgically “out of place.”

This list of wonders builds to a climactic: “Ich habbe sehen blisse, ant ich blissi me þrof: I weole ant i wunne is nu þet ich wunie, ne nes me neauer se wa, as me is wel nu” (26 ll.12-15) [“I have seen bliss, and so am blissful; my dwelling-place now is in joy and delight, and I was never so unhappy as I am happy now”]. The final portion of the prayer is an act of thanksgiving,

which also returns to a litany of titles for the Lord. The *passio* prayer concludes: “Ideo gratias ago tibi, sancte [rex] immortalis et perpetuus imperator, refugium omnium peccatorum, gubernator et turris fortitudinis, corona martyrum, margaritarum uirga, aurea cathedra refectionis, lapis pretiosus, saluator omnium, Deus benedictus in secula seculorum. Amen” (135 ll.4-9) [“I give thanks to you, holy immortal king and everlasting emperor, refuge of all sinners, governor and tower of strength, crown of martyrs, rod of pearls, golden seat at the banquet, stone of great price, saviour of all, God, blessed for ever and ever. Amen”]. The ME characteristically elaborates on several of these titles, and concludes with a more theologically sophisticated doxology praising the Triune God -- “þrumnesse þreouald ant anuald þe-hweðere; þrile I þreo hades, ant an in an hehschipe” (26 ll.25-27) [“Trinity, threefold, and none the less one, triple in three persons and single in one glory”] -- a liturgical element that also very aptly evokes the essentially Trinitarian character of the baptismal formula.

It is the nature of litanic prayer like Prayer 6 to refer in fleeting instances to biblical imagery, for instance, to Jesus as the cornerstone, but most of these titles would be said to come from devotional meditations on biblical images rather than directly from scriptural sources. Indeed, Mack notes that these titles look to patristic writings and early Latin hymns for their sources.<sup>84</sup> This particular assemblage of titles may have some liturgical or devotional precedent, but what is most striking is the fact of its placement here. The devil in the guise of the black demon complains immediately in *SM*: “ne pine þe me na mare wið þe eadie beoden þet tu biddest se ofte; for ha bindeð me swiðe sare mid alle, ant makieð me se unstrong þet ich ne fele wið me nanes cunnes strengðe” (26 l.32-28 l. 1) [“Do not torture me anymore with the blessed prayers that you say so often; for all in all they bind me most painfully, and make me so weak that I cannot summon up any kind of strength”]. The Name of God, like the Sign of the Cross,

has long been considered a powerful weapon against the devil, who here is immobilized, bound, by the litany Margaret utters. Clayton and Magennis note that a “major theme” in the *passio* is the power of the name of God. They write, “The greatness of the name of the Lord is seen as a source of wonder and inspiration in the psalms, and this is strongly taken up in our *passio*. The name in this incantatory usage contains in itself the person of the Lord.”<sup>85</sup>

Margaret utters one last prayer (Prayer 7) while in prison that mirrors this motif of calling upon the name of the Lord and that vanquishes the second demon – just as he feared. In the *passio*, the demon remarks of his brother’s and his own fates, “Tu uero interfecisti eum signaculo Christi, et nunc per canticum interficere cupis me” (135 l.16-18) [You have slain him with the sign of Christ, and now through a song you wish to slay me”]. In a brief prayer that offers in some versions a litany of epithets for the devil, and in all versions a list of titles describing Margaret’s allegiance to God, Margaret triumphs over evil. In Mack’s version of the *passio* we find: “Cessa de mea uirginitate, quia ego habeo adiutorem Deum. Cessa, *maligne*, gemisce *horribilis homicida*, protector mihi Christus est. Cessa *fetor male, fera iniqua, auctor gehenna*. Ego enim *agna Christi et domestica eius*. Ego *ancilla Dei et sponsa Christi* sum, cuius nomen permanet benedictum in secula seculorum” (135 ll. 22-27) (my emphasis for the litany of epithets) [“Stop (working) against my virginity, because I have God as my helper. Stop, evil one, go away horrible man, Christ is my protector. Stop stinking evil one, cruel unjust one, author of hell. I am the lamb of Christ and his servant, I myself am the handmaid of the Lord and the bride of Christ, whose name is blessed for ever and ever”].<sup>86</sup> In baptism rituals the *sphragis* is the sign that one belongs to Christ, but specific words renouncing the devil are also central to the rite: “Abrenuntio” (I do renounce”) the candidate replies three times when asked if he or she renounces Satan, his works, and his pomps. Three times (in this version) Margaret abjures the

devil: “Cessa.” And, as in the baptismal rites, the renunciations are followed by statements of belief and allegiance to Christ.

The version of Prayer 7 found in *SM* offers a glimpse, once again, of the two very different audiences served by this text over its lifetime. The powerful moment of renunciation, characterized by solemnity in the *passio*, seems utterly lost in the ME translation, or transformed into comic mode. In a scene that might play well on a pageant stage and must certainly have delighted the women who may have gathered to hear this poem read aloud, Saint Margaret who has thrown the second demon down to the ground (which also happens in the *passio* but is not emphasized as it is here), stomps hard on his neck three times as she repeats, “Stute nu.” One might say that this speech is not properly a prayer in that part of it is addressed to the devil rather than God, but it does become a statement of belief and it does end in both the Latin and ME with a doxology. Finally, her words are also immediately responded to from on high.

For at this point a sign of triumph is given to Margaret: a light from heaven descends into the prison and a cross of Christ appears (or seems to appear, in ME) with a dove sitting upon it who says, “Meiden eadi an, Margarete, art tu, for paraise geten aren garewe iopenet te nu” (30 ll.1-3) [“Margaret, you are a blessed maiden, for now the gates of Paradise are opened ready for you”]. Clearly this dove is the spiritual helper for whom, like the spiritual testing, she had prayed in Prayers 3 and 4. The dove, of course, is a well-known representation for the Holy Spirit and the presence of the dove here recalls that a dove descended and words of approbation were spoken from heaven when Jesus was baptized in the Jordan.<sup>87</sup> The dove is not reported, as we might imagine, to be bearing the oil that “descended” to her and for which Margaret had already offered thanks, and of course Margaret is not actually being baptized at this moment. The dove will appear two more times in the *passio* and *SM* after the baptismal bath, the third time in fact

referencing the holy oil, which may seem more liturgically appropriate. What to make of these moments when the symbols are all present, but their deployment seems not properly sequenced?

As noted above, it is not necessary to find exact correspondences to any particular order of the baptismal rite to say that baptismal imagery is strongly present in this text. In fact at this point in the *passio* text, a wealth of baptismal associations seems to overpower the linearity of the narrative. Before Margaret utters the words of baptism, she will have been stripped and bathed in blood, battled a demonic dragon, visited by a dove from heaven, interrogated and banished a demonic fallen angel, stripped again and burned in a fire. Repetition of the symbolic elements throughout the story -- two demonic testings, two strippings, three tortures, multiple signings with the cross, three appearances of the dove -- may be examples of *amplificatio*, the deliberate recapitulation of narrative episodes used to emphasize their significance; each repetition of symbol or action deepens the thematic resonance of the recurring element. While the encounters with the demons at first suggest simply the rite of exorcism, the two-fold temptation calls attention to the differences between the demons, who, it seems, are nevertheless related to each other in a complex web of early Christian baptismal imagery. Liturgies themselves often make powerful use of repetition, as we have seen, for instance, in the three-fold questions of enrollment, three scrutinies, and the three-fold renunciation of the exorcism. While the first four prayers of the *passio* seemed to draw more heavily on the scriptures (and thus reward knowledge of the scriptures for those who practice *lectio divina*), the prayers, repeated symbols and recapitulated events from Prayer 5 to 7 have increasingly called upon the ability to recognize the liturgical shaping of the narrative and to read a wider variety of texts in order to appreciate their full significance.

We have seen that in their devotional effusiveness, these prayers suggest liturgical prayers, hymns and popular devotions; in the ME versions especially, the prayers have also seemed to encourage a reading of the natural world itself as the work of the Creator God. Finally, typological interpretations of the scriptures such as one finds in patristic sources and an understanding of the liturgical shaping of these dramatic episodes are especially called into play as the passion narrative progresses. In the monastic realm of books where the *passio* took shape, familiarity with these last two intertexts seems likely. A question that will bear consideration is the degree to which the typological and liturgical literacy seems expected of the readers of the ME *SM*.

As noted above, Margaret's encounter with the two demons has been a focal point of interest in the legend throughout its history. While some early versions of the legend may have abbreviated these episodes and others elaborated upon them, the Mombritius version may be said to treat fully the appearances and vanquishing of the dragon and the Ethiopian/black demon, and the subsequent interrogation of the latter.<sup>88</sup> In turn, the ME author expands from his source both the description of the dragon and the black demon's "sermon" in his version. As Mack, Clayton and Magennis, and Price have noted, the demonology of the legend is sophisticated. While to a modern reader these episodes may seem digressive and disproportionate (and to an extent suspiciously sensational even to some medieval authors, including Jacobus de Voragine), the theologically serious issues explored in Margaret's defeat of the dragon and inquisition of the black demon must be understood as a crucial element in this legend that is otherwise very carefully structured. So although we have already read these episodes by looking at the texts of the prayers within them, they bear further examination at a typological and structural level.

## 2. Prayers 5-7: Baptismal Exorcism and Typology

Why does Margaret battle two demons? The *amplificatio* here encourages a closer examination of each demonic incarnation. Mack and Price give extensive history of the demon-lore that informs these representations of the devil, but neither notes two ancient demonic associations with possible relevance for the baptismal typology at work: the dragon is associated with baptismal waters and the interrogation and binding of fallen angels with the harrowing of hell – which is also a type for baptism.

First, the Behemoth of Job is interpreted by Cyril of Jerusalem in his *Mystagogic Catecheses* as a type of the devil who tests the Christian in baptism. He writes:

The dragon Behemoth, according to Job, was in the waters, and was taking the Jordan into his gullet. But as the heads of the dragon had to be crushed, Jesus, having descended into the waters, chained fast the strong one, so that we might gain the power to tread on serpents and scorpions. Life came so that henceforth a curb might be put on death, and so that all who have received salvation may say: O Death, where is your victory? For it is by Baptism that the sting of death is drawn. You go down into the waters, bearing your sins; but the invocation of grace, having marked your soul with its seal, will prevent your being devoured by the terrible dragon.<sup>89</sup>

Didymus the Blind offers the same exegesis of Job 40:18-20 and Daniélou reports a Greek prayer for the blessing of baptismal water: “Thou, thou hast sanctified the waters of the Jordon by sending from on high Thy Holy Spirit, and Thou hast crushed the heads of the dragons hiding therein.”<sup>90</sup>

The subsequent appearance of the dove who speaks words of approval over Margaret places this episode already in a relationship with the story of Christ's Baptism in the Jordan. Although Margaret is not yet in the water, she *is* in prison, and the prison where she is visited by the demons may suggest the depths of the earth—the abyss. Indeed in the *passio* as she was cast into prison Margaret prayed to “Deus inuisibilis, quem *abissi* et thesauri eius contremiscunt” (134 ll.3-4) [“Invisible God, for whom the *abysses* and your treasurehouses tremble”] (my emphasis). John Bernard details how the depths or the abyss is clearly considered in the New Testament to be the dwelling place of demons and evil spirits; it is also in the Judeo/Christian cosmology to be connected to the primordial, abysmal waters.<sup>91</sup>

That the prison may be associated with the abyss also suggests another baptismal motif first promulgated by St. Paul: he compares the descent of Christ into Hades with the Christian's descent into the baptismal waters.<sup>92</sup> This association was subsequently explored in the writings of Chrysostom and is often taken as the explanation for the three-fold immersion (Christ was in the tomb for three days) and the timing of Holy Saturday for the Baptism of catechumens (Christ harrowed hell on that day).<sup>93</sup> In fact Margaret has already explicitly invoked the harrowing of hell in Prayer 5 when she refers to God as one who “*infernum devastasti; diabolium ligasti; qui extinxisti potestatem draconis magni*” (134 ll.6-7) [“laid waste hell, bound the devil, who extinguished the power of the great dragon”] or as it was rendered in ME “*ƿu herhedest helle ant ouercome ase kempe þe acursede gast þe fundeð to for-do me*” (22 ll.30-31) [“You harrowed hell and overcame as champion the accursed spirit who is trying to destroy me”].

Another early link between baptism and the harrowing of hell is found in 1 Peter 3:18-22 – also a famous crux for Scriptural interpretation. The passage reads:

Because Christ also died once for our sins, the just for the unjust: that he might offer us to God, being put to death indeed in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit, In which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison: Which had been some time incredulous, when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noe, when the ark was a building: wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. Whereunto baptism, being of the like form, now saveth you also: not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but, the examination of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>94</sup>

While our first association with the harrowing of hell is most often to recall Christ's salvation of the innocent souls there, ancient traditions of the *Descensus ad inferos* also concern themselves with Christ's encounter there with demonic forces. In centuries of debate about the identity of the "spirits in prison" in this Petrine passage, a strong tradition (which is validated in most contemporary scholarship) holds that these were indeed the Fallen Angels and that Christ "announced" to them their condemnation. This difficult passage shares themes and imagery with early Israelite tradition concerning the Flood (as captured in 1 Enoch) and with another (approximately) contemporary text that likewise represents the *Descensus ad inferos*: the apocryphal Odes of Solomon.<sup>95</sup> Most critics agree that many of the Odes suggest baptismal imagery. In Ode 24 we find this imagery specifically linked to the harrowing of hell, which, interestingly, is also linked with the pain of childbirth:

The dove fluttered over the Christ,  
Because he was her head.  
And she sang over Him  
And her voice was heard....

And the abysses opened themselves and were hidden;  
And they were asking for the Lord like women in travail.  
And he was not given to them for food,

Because he did not belong to them.  
 And they sealed up the abysses with the seal of the Lord...  
 For they who in their hearts were lifted up  
 Were deficient in wisdom,  
 And so they were rejected,  
 Because the truth was not with them....<sup>96</sup>

If the dragon recalls the beasts of the waters of the abyss, the black demon when interrogated by Margaret specifically identifies himself as a fallen angel – precisely those who were condemned in that harrowing – and one marked by the lack of true wisdom about which this Ode speaks. Whereas in *SM* the discourse of the demon is more expansively interested in the sexual temptation of vowed virgins – the preoccupation, perhaps of its thirteenth-century community of readers -- in the *passio* we see in the extended dialogue with the black demon a primary concern with issues of knowledge, perhaps even gnosis.

The black demon speaks to Margaret in the *passio* as one who reads and knows scripture and even more arcane sources, for instance, “In libris [Iamne et Mambre] inuenies genus nostrum: scrutare et uide” (137 ll.20-21) [“Search and see our descent in the books of Jamnes and Mambres” or more literally, “you will find our ancestry in the books of Jamnes and Mambres: search and see”], he advises her. He also references the apocryphal Testament of Solomon.<sup>97</sup> With the authority of one who has just received a heavenly visitation, she orders him, “Unde est natura tua, o diabole? Enarra mihi” (136 ll.1-2) [“Where does your nature come from, o devil? Tell me”]. In the Paris, BN, lat. 5574 he will respond: “Vis scire quod est misterium nostrum?” (206) [“Do you wish to know our secret knowledge?”] and in others, as in Harley 2801, simply, “omnia opera mea indicabo tibi” (136 ll.4-5) [“all my works I will tell you”]. Of his “works” he reveals to her that he and his fellow demons are especially jealous of the “just,” returning to the theme we have already found explored in the *passio* and in *SM*: why are the

innocent or the just tormented? She interrogates him again, asking “Narra mihi genus tuum iniquum” (137 ll.11-12) [“Tell me the origin of your sinfulness”] but before he answers he tries to obtain Margaret’s own “secret:” “Unde uita tibi, aut membra que mouentur in te, aut fides; uel quomodo te ingressus est Christus?” (137 ll.13-15) [“Whence comes your life, and whence either your limbs, which move in you, or your faith; in what manner has Christ entered you?”]. Her response has a gnomic quality: “Non licet mihi hec dicere tibi, quia dignus non es audire uocem meam. Gratia Dei sum id quod sum” (137 ll.16-18) [“It is not permitted for me to inform you of these things, because you are not worthy to hear my voice. Thanks to God, I am what I am”].<sup>98</sup> Later the demon will again offer her knowledge, “Ecce omnia nunciabo tibi” (137 ll.25-26) [“I will tell you everything”] and urge her to action that will be wiser even than Solomon’s. But she has exposed him, rejected his own appeal, and finally silences him, “Ex hoc iam non audiam ex ore tuo” (137 l.35) [“Now I will not hear a word from your mouth”]. Once again Margaret makes the sign of the cross, and the black demon is swallowed by the earth.

Two types of knowledge are clearly opposed here. Mack noted the degree to which this episode relies on the Testament of Solomon and other ancient Jewish and Babylonian sources for the descriptions of the demons and their works. But the author of the *passio*, in openly referencing these non-scriptural works and placing those references in the mouth of the black demon (or Ethiopian in some manuscripts), is aligning the knowledge of magic and demon lore with the fallen angel himself. The knowledge that he is forced to share is contrasted with the sacred knowledge that Margaret refuses to reveal. Margaret’s insistence on hiding her sacred knowledge may call to mind that the secret knowledge (later known as the *arcana*) of the baptismal rituals – i.e., how it is that “Christ enters into” one – was specifically that knowledge

that in the early years of Christian persecutions was tightly guarded -- often even from the catechumens until shortly before they were baptized.<sup>99</sup>

What the black demon offers about his own lineage is his name (Beelzebub in most manuscripts), his allegiance to Satan, and the information that Margaret's mother and father were adherents of his ("socii mei fuerunt;" 137 l.4). Mack discusses the identification of Beelzebub in the Testament of Solomon as the demon who tests especially the servants of God, which is certainly fitting here. In addition, however, Beelzebub is often considered a figure for pagan belief itself.<sup>100</sup> In this sense his pointed questioning about the baptismal rituals ("Quomodo te ingressus est Christus?") and his claiming of Margaret's pagan parents as associates is logical. Beelzebub in the guise of a black man or Ethiopian is the "other," the pagan against whom Christians during the persecutions generally struggled. That struggle historically accounts to some extent for the fascination with demonology and also with the *Descensus ad inferos* in the early centuries of Christianity. As Daniélou notes in his discussion of 1 Peter 3:17-22: "as Christ fearlessly faced the fallen angels whom he had conquered, so Christians also should face without fear the world of paganism and its demons. Such seems to be the general meaning of the passage."<sup>101</sup>

To recap, the defeat of the dragon and black demon which occupy a disproportionately large portion of the *passio* text are episodes marked by longer, less "simply scriptural" prayers, perhaps drawn from devotional and patristic sources, which seem to denote an intensifying of the liturgical moment in the *passio*. On the level of liturgical allusion, the defeat of these demons suggests the rejection of Satan and all his pomps and works that is a central element of the baptismal liturgy. At the same time, a complex web of typological associations with the Baptism of Christ and the Descent into hell is evoked in the specific appearance of the demons as dragon

and black man/Beelzebub/a fallen angel, the location of the testing in the abyss of a prison, and the strangely-timed appearance here of the heavenly dove.

Does this level of rich typological association and liturgical resonance survive in the ME version known to the anchoresses? In *SM*, as we saw in the analysis of the prayer texts themselves, elaborations to Prayers 5 and 6 are evocative of thirteenth-century devotional lyrics, perhaps because the translator also recognized that hymns are being referenced at this point in the *passio*. The expansion of the black demon's discourse in *SM* and the degree to which that speech concerns the temptations specific to enclosed women bespeaks the text's re-shaping for its particular audience of anchoresses. In the more focused encounter of the *passio*, where Margaret triumphs over the black demon who represents paganism and false knowledge itself, that victory seems appropriate to the story of an early Christian martyr for her faith. It may have had resonance as well in the monastery for which the *passio* was composed, where the library of available texts and hours devoted to study might also lead to the "testing" of doctrinal error or intellectual pride. In *SM*, however, the triumphs the demon recounts at length are over holy men and women who cannot control their libidos, but perhaps more importantly, are not careful stewards of their time.<sup>102</sup>

The long days of an anchoress must be filled, and so a text like the *Ancrene Wisse* recommends elaborate multiplications of prayers and prayer rituals to guard against the temptations of the gossipy visitor or annoyingly slothful servant.<sup>103</sup> The anchoress has neither a community with which to sing the hours nor an extensive library (or Latinity) within which to work. As *SM* suggests, the visitor who comes to speak of spiritual matters would indeed be a significant temptation, the remedy for which, as the demon reveals, is the filling of time with eating and drinking by rules, self-mortification, prayers, pious thoughts, meditation upon sin and

upon heaven and upon hell, frequent reception of the sacraments, making the sign of the cross, and further isolation, if necessary.<sup>104</sup> Although the *Ancrene Wisse* does allow that “To rede is gode bone,” [“To read is a good prayer”] that devotional practice is not suggested here by the demon in *SM*. Robertson’s observation about the turning away from the world of books in this body of anchoritic literature is well illustrated in the comparison of the temptation episodes in the *passio* and *SM*.

And yet what might be said to link the episodes in both versions, is that in both cases the devil *is* ultimately defeated by the power of ritual. The *passio*’s effluence of baptismal imagery at this point threatens to overwhelm the text, but Margaret in her prayers and gestures maintains a rhetorical control throughout to conclude forcefully by making the sign of the cross and commanding: “Vade de me, Satanas” (138 ll1-2) [“Go from me, Satan”]. *SM* retains all of the elements of the baptismal rituals, but ultimately emphasizes instead the everyday ritual of a vowed life. Margaret’s comic renunciations and the digressive discourse of the black demon suggest that if the ME author is aware of that baptismal imagery, it is not of primary concern for him here. Margaret does not make the sign of the cross and more ramblingly concludes, “Stille beo þu, stille...earmest alre þinge! Ne schalt tu, alde schucke, motin wið me mare; ah flih, sorhful feont, ut of min ehsihðe, ant def þider as þu mon ne derue na mare” (40 ll.20-23) [“Be quiet! Quiet, you pestilent wretch! I will not allow you to argue with me anymore, ancient demon; but flee, miserable fiend, out of my sight, and fall headlong to the place where you can do no more harm to anyone”]. This “alde schucke” or “sohrful feont” is a more familiar, homely creature – though still very dangerous -- to be battled day by day in the self-made rituals of an individual’s holy life, not the devil who tested Christ himself and whom the candidate renounces

once, powerfully, in receiving the sacrament of baptism. But in both versions he *is* turned away, and Margaret emerges from prison, once more sealing herself with the sign of the cross.

#### *IV. Prayers 8-10: Presider Prayer: Praying Torture into Baptism by Fire and Water*

At this point in the *passio* “de ciuitatibus cuncti” (138 l.5) [“the population of the city”] come out to witness the rest of Margaret’s ordeal; in *SM* people come “of eauereuch strete, for to seo þet sorhe” (40 ll.28-29) [“from every street to see the suffering”]. Margaret deflects Olibrius’s demand that she convert to his faith, by challenging him rather to become a follower of Christ. Again she is stripped, hung high and this time burned with brands. The short Prayer 8 she utters here is entirely scriptural. In *SM* it is introduced as “Davidēs bone” (“David’s prayer”) and is an unusually restrained, close translation of the Latin: “Ure, Domine, renes meos et cor meum, ut non sit iniquitas in me” (138 ll.16-17) [“Burn up my loins, Lord, and my heart, so that there may not be wickedness in me”]. This brief prayer in the *passio* references Psalm 25:2 most directly, but echoes Psalm 16: 3 as well. Once again, knowledge of both psalms enriches the understanding of this prayer. Both psalms are called “psalms of innocence.”<sup>105</sup> The psalms themselves do not suggest that testing or fire will purify the speaker of evil, but rather, prove his innocence. And in both psalms, which are attributed to David, the charge against which the speaker defends himself is that of idolatry. Yet in the *passio* and even more so in the ME version, the prayer rather suggests the fire that will burn away sin, and perhaps even sin of a sexual nature, depending on the understanding of Latin *renes* or ME *ledden*.<sup>106</sup> A similar prayer can be found in various medieval sacramentaries, where it is sometimes offered as another prayer of thanksgiving after mass, and sometimes under a rubric that indicates its use as a prayer “contra

temptationes carnis”: “Ure ignis sancti spiritus renes nostros et cor nostrum, domine, ut tibi caste et corde serviamus et corpore placeamus.”<sup>107</sup> In *SM* the purifying fire for which Margaret prays is similarly linked to the action of the Holy Spirit: “þe halewende fur of þe hali gast” (42 l.19) [“with the healing (or sanctifying) fire of the Holy Ghost”]. For of course fire, too, is a common motif in baptismal liturgies and literature.

Baptism by fire is first discussed by Origen and is a theme specifically related to the action of the Holy Spirit based on a verse from Matthew 3:11 where John the Baptist promises that the one who is to come will baptize “in the Holy Ghost and fire.” Unlike baptism by blood (*baptismus sanguinis*), the baptism obtained by martyrs, there is no canonical baptism by the substance of fire. However, metaphorically, the baptism by desire (*baptismus flaminis*) takes its name from the action of the Holy Spirit (one of whose names is Flamen) whose intercession in this mode of baptism leads one to the necessary perfect contrition of heart.<sup>108</sup> Edsman’s book-length examination of the theme of baptism by fire discusses the legend of Marina (the Greek Margaret) and specifically links Marina’s torture in the fire with a baptismal re-clothing in light when he writes, “Marina est revêtue du vêtement de lumière du Christ, et, par là, du Christ lui-même. Et ce vêtement prend l’aspect d’une colonne de lumière ou de feu.”<sup>109</sup> The prayer in *SM* explicitly links the Holy Spirit to the purification Margaret seeks, but the *passio* offers a more direct statement of the perfect contrition she desires.<sup>110</sup> Should she die while being tortured for her faith, Margaret would be baptized by blood; should she die while the fire of the Holy Spirit perfected her contrition, she would be baptized by desire, for every act of perfect charity contains the desire for baptism. However, even those actual, historical martyrs who might be justified by blood or desire must seek *baptismus aquae* should the means to do so appear; for Margaret the third instrument of torture affords this opportunity. The logic of this clearly figural narrative

likewise demands the completion achieved when the third type of baptism occurs: baptism by water.

In both the *passio* and *SM*, Olibrius orders a large vessel of water to be prepared; Margaret is bound hand and foot so that she will drown in the water. The binding, of course, also recalls the binding with sin from which baptism frees the Christian.<sup>111</sup> The first words of Margaret's Prayer 9 are to call upon "Domine, qui regnas in eternum" (138 l. 28) ["Lord, who reigns in eternity"] or "Alre kingene king" (44 l.1) ["King of all kings"] to break those bonds. The words of the prayer in the *passio* that Mack prints and those in *SM* are very close, perhaps because this is the moment of baptism itself, only altered in very minor ways by the ME author. In the Latin we have:

Domine, qui regnas in aeternum, disrumpe uincula mea: tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis. Fiat mihi haec aqua suauitatis et illuminatio salutis. Fiat haec mihi fons baptismi indeficiens, et indue me galeam salutis. Veniat super me sancta columba tua, Sancto Spiritu plena, et benedicat aquam in nomine tuo, et mihi abluat peccata mea, et confirma animam meam, et clarifica sensum meum, et proice a me tenebras peccatorum, et baptiza me in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti; quia ipse est benedictus in secula seculorum. Amen. (138 l.28-139 l.4)

[Lord, who reigns in eternity, break apart my fetters. I will offer up to you a sacrifice of praise. Let this water become for me a sanctification and the illumination of salvation. Let it become for me the everlasting font of baptism. May the Lord put the helmet of salvation on me. May the holy dove, filled with the Holy Spirit, come upon me and bless this water in your name, and wash all my sins away; and strengthen (confirm) my soul and sharpen my mind, and throw from me the shadow of sins and baptize me in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, because he is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.]

The fact that Margaret uses the actual baptismal formula here is significant, theologically, in that all instructions on baptism, such as, for instance, those in the Sarum Missal, caution against re-baptizing anyone who has already been baptized with the proper words.<sup>112</sup> It seems clear, then,

that at this moment Margaret does baptize herself; she had not been previously baptized and she would not need to be subsequently.

In this prayer Margaret asks God to bless the water, as the priest does at a baptism, employs the baptismal formula invoking the Trinity, asks to be washed from her sins, and also bids the Holy Spirit, “confirma animam meam,” invoking the martial imagery of the helmet of salvation, from Ephesians 6:17, often associated with the sacrament of confirmation. As discussed in Chapter Three, baptism and confirmation were given together in the early Church. Here, some element of the sacrament of confirmation seems to be indicated by this language; later we will also hear the dove bless Margaret “quae sanctum oleum quesisti” (140 ll.21-22) [“(you) who have sought the holy oil”]. Confirmation has long been understood as the perfecting of the powers given in baptism. Margaret’s subsequent prayers on behalf of those around her certainly suggest that she has indeed not only been reborn through baptism, but armed for spiritual struggle and mastered spiritual powers through confirmation.<sup>113</sup>

The *SM* prayer is adorned with some alliterative pairing, but it is in no sense “overwrought” with devotional effusions such as we saw, for instance in Prayer 4. The tone remains solemn. A few minor changes in the *SM* (unless, of course, another version of the *passio* contains these) are worth noting. In *SM* the request is not only for the literal freedom from the bonds, but that that miraculous act will be one that “ich ant alle þet soð hit” (44 ll.1-2) [“I and all that see it”] can praise. In small expansions such as this, *SM* again and again emphasizes the interpretation of the events by the crowd gathered around Margaret. Also, in *SM*, Margaret entreats the Lord, “Festne wið fullhut mi sawle to þe seoluen...ant bring me to þi brihte bur, brudgume of wunne” (44 ll. 6-9) [“Secure my soul with baptism to yourself...so that your bright bridal chamber may welcome me in”]. This additional reference to baptism as an entry into the

bridal chamber of the Lord is certainly in keeping with the other moments in *SM* that emphasize the theme of the virgin as the *Sponsa Christi*, a motif with clear relevance for the anchoresses.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, as Daniélou points out, nuptial imagery is common in early writings about baptism and baptismal types are suggested in exegeses of the Song of Songs including those of Tertullian, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Ambrose. This is not to suggest that the ME author has introduced the emphasis on virginity and the attendant marital imagery into the text to reference this patristic spiritual tradition. Rather, it is simply worth noting that the very nature of the story itself – that of a virgin martyr who is “baptized” into death and life with Christ – contains within its very framework an ancient baptismal motif that the thirteenth-century spiritual vocabulary will, perhaps unknowingly, recapitulate. The ME author understands at some level that the baptismal climax merges with the consummation of the spiritual marriage of the virgin soul and the bridegroom, Christ. This deeply intuited insight is also implied in the *passio* and is perhaps generally figured in the whole struggle between Margaret and Olibrius, who wants her body for himself by marriage or concubinage, whereas she is determined to keep it pure for Christ.

Signs and wonders mark Margaret’s emergence from the vessel of water: the earth trembles; the dove descends again, bearing a golden crown (perhaps the helmet she asked for) that he places on her head; her bonds are broken. In the ME she is also described as shining as brightly as the sun; in both versions she sings a song of praise, Prayer 10. This very brief prayer, drawn from Psalm 92 or perhaps 103 feels (as did Prayer 8) like an antiphon used in certain liturgical settings where it serves as an intertextual commentary on another scriptural reading or liturgical action. Here the theme is praise of the Lord who has “clothed himself with beauty.” As *SM* elaborates, “Feierlec ant strengð beoð hise schrudes, ant igurd he is ham on, þet a cumeliche fearen ant semliche sitten” (44 ll. 20-22) [“Beauty and strength are garments for him, and he is

girded with them so that they may seem comely and sit well on him”]. Here again the *Sponsa Christi* motif may be suggested in that the Lord is perhaps figured as the comely bridegroom. But the general theme of new clothing is also appropriate to the post-baptismal moment when the newly baptized “put on Christ” in the symbolic act of putting on a white garment. The ME description of Margaret as “shining” (which although not represented in the version printed by Mack may have precedent in *SM*’s source), suggests a brightness or whiteness that is well-attested in patristic sources on the symbolism of the white garment and appropriate too for a “pearl” as it emerges from the water.<sup>115</sup>

As Edsman notes in *Baptême de feu*, the symbolism of the pearl includes ancient beliefs about its apparently miraculous formation; he summarizes these creation myths about the the union within the mussel shell of the “clear lunar dew” (water) and “lightening”(fire) thus: “la création de la perle nous est expliquée de deux façons, soit comme un résultat de l’union de la claire rosée lunaire avec la moule, soit comme le fruit de l’éclair s’introduisant dans celle-ci, car la perle est créée par l’eau et le feu.”<sup>116</sup> From her ordeals of fire and water, her baptisms, Margaret has emerged both physically brilliant – her shining whiteness – and spiritually polished, indeed like a pearl formed by fire and water. But as Edsman goes on to note, the pearl formed of fire and water, elements so closely related to baptism, is itself an ancient symbol for that sacrament. In a Syriac hymn for Epiphany attributed to Ephrem, Edsman finds a clear example of the direct connection made between the pearl and baptism in Eastern thinking. He translates: “Le plongeur, lui aussi, de la mer/ il tire la perle./ Plongez (faites-vous baptiser), tirez de l’eau/ la pureté, qui s’y trouve cachée,/ la perle dont est sertie/ la couronne de la divinité.”<sup>117</sup> Edsman notes here the Syriac play on words in that the same verb signifies both to dive and to baptize. He writes, “Les mystères du baptême et de la perle sont donc visiblement identiques!”<sup>118</sup>

Edsman also discusses other aspects of pearl symbolism of possible significance for our understanding of the deepest levels of meaning in the Margaret legend; I will return to these in my conclusion.<sup>119</sup>

Once again, the dove descends, inviting Margaret into the “requiem Christi” [“the repose of Christ”] and offering her “*coronam uitae*” (139 l. 13 & 14) [“the crown of life”]. These words suggest both the spiritual benefits that have just been conferred upon Margaret and those which are soon to come. In this moment of peril, as she faces execution, she comes spiritually into Christ’s peace through her baptism. From Psalm 22, the waters of repose and refreshment and peace beside which the shepherd leads the sheep were understood as referring to the baptismal waters. But the fields of repose may also represent the heavenly home she will soon enter. The crown likewise has some direct associations with baptism, confirmation, and the related *Sponsa Christi* motif; however, its most obvious and important meaning here, in both the Latin and ME, is as a manifestation of the heavenly reward promised to martyrs.<sup>120</sup> But even if the *coronam uitae* symbolizes the eternal life that Margaret as a martyr will merit, that life has been opened to her, as it is to all Christians, through baptism.

This eternal promise is a fortunate reminder for the five thousand men (not counting women and children) who are converted and immediately beheaded for their conversion just after they witness Margaret’s baptism and crowning. Neither the *passio* nor *SM* specifies that these converts have been “baptized by blood,” and yet the implication in the *passio* is that those who come to believe through Margaret’s witness will also be with her in heaven, as she promises the executioner, and so *must* be baptized in this fashion in order to reap this reward. *SM* unambiguously reports “ant stihen alle martyrs wið murhde to heouene” (44 l. 33) [“and all ascended as martyrs joyfully to heaven”].

*V. Prayers 11-12: Prayers of Memorialization; Communion and the Creation of Cult*

In her final moments, Margaret's last two prayers exhibit the new spiritual authority that has come to her as one baptized and confirmed in the faith. Although she asks the executioner for an opportunity to pray for her own soul -- in *SM*: "biteache him mi gast ant mi bodi baðe to ro ant to reste" (46 ll12-13) ["commend my soul to him and my body too to rest and repose"] and in the *passio*: "commendem Christo corpus meum in loco refrigerii" (139 ll.27-28) ["commend my body to Christ in the place of (restoration/refreshment)"] -- in reality in Prayers 11 and 12, Margaret prays in thanksgiving to God and for the spiritual benefits that her own cult may obtain for others. Just as before the liturgically "different" moment bracketed by Prayers 5 and 6, here Margaret falls to her knees and raises her hands before beginning the similarly intense liturgical moment marked by these last two prayers. Prayer 11 in the Latin is reminiscent of Prayer 5, because in both praise of God as creator is followed by a series of petitions, but the new spiritual power with which Margaret prays here highlights the great distance she has traveled in her spiritual journey.

Prayer 11 begins, "Deus qui palmo caelum mensus es et terram / pugillo mensurasti, mari quoque limitem posuisti"(139 l.30-40 l.1)["God who have marked out heaven in your palm and measured earth in your fist, and who established a limit for the sea"]. The prayer in *SM* adds a little detail from Margaret's current situation: "Drihtin, leodes lauerd, duhtie, [þ]ah ha dearne beon ant derue, þine domes. Me is nu deað idemet her, ant wið þe lif ilenet: þi milde milce ich þonki hit" (46 ll. 17-19) ["God, Lord of men, mysterious though they may be, your judgments are just. Now a sentence of death has been passed on me here, and life with you granted; for this I give thanks to your gentle mercy"], before also addressing him as creator.

Prayer addressed to God the Creator seems appropriate here where Margaret herself sketches the architecture of something new: the cult of Saint Margaret. Margaret prays in the *passio* for the following: those who will read this book or hear this passion read; those who bring a lamp to her basilica; those who remember her name at the final judgment; those who read the passion or carry it or hear it read; those who build a basilica in her name or write a manuscript of her passion or by their labor cause one to be written. She prays that all of these categories of devotees, grammatically gendered as male acolytes, will have their sins forgiven, and begs, as a coda attached to her last petition, the final blessing that also no child will be born lame, blind, dumb or tested by the devil in the home of one who performs devotions on Margaret's behalf. The ME orders the petitions a little differently and also attaches that final benefit -- of healthy children born to the household of a petitioner -- much more directly to women who call upon Saint Margaret when they are in labor.

The degree to which the cult of Saint Margaret becomes related to childbirth should not distract us from noting that for most of these categories of pious behaviors the benefit Margaret requests is the forgiveness of sins. At the moment when she might be praying for her own forgiveness and salvation, she is rather praying for the souls of others who will achieve salvation only if their sins are forgiven. The dove from heaven, who will momentarily rehearse all of these requests and promise their fulfillment, first notes that Margaret is blessed precisely because she has "remembered all in her prayers." In baptismal liturgies the "Prayer of the Faithful," also known as the general intercessions, would follow immediately upon the ritual of baptism and confirmation: now the new Christian prays with the assembly for the needs of all.<sup>121</sup>

Confirmation also confers the strength of spiritual perfection in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and

the authority and confidence with which Margaret petitions the Lord here are markedly higher than in the similarly structured Prayer 5 when she faced the dragon.

Indeed the final three “speeches” of the *passio* (Margaret’s Prayer 11, the Dove’s spoken response, and Margaret’s final prayer, Prayer 12) reach an altitude of spiritual intensity that might be called ecstatic. In the interplay of Margaret’s voice and the dove’s, it is as if the holy dialogue of *oratio* and *lectio divina* is being enacted and the bystanders who hear it are being drawn into that spiritual communion as they are named in Margaret’s prayers. Again with reverberating noise, thunder, the dove comes from heaven with the holy cross and proclaims that Margaret has sought the holy oil and defeated the world. This is the third time the dove has been described as coming down from heaven, both in the *passio* and in *SM*: first in the prison in a dazzling brightness, perched upon a cross; second after the baptismal bath, bearing a crown; third, after the prayers of intercession, again with a radiant cross. The three-fold visitations and blessings of the dove may relate to liturgical or sacramental moments – perhaps of signing with the sphragis, anointing with chrism, imposition of hands, etc.— or this *amplificatio* may serve to re-inforce the Trinitarian theme of baptism itself which is, of course, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Two of the prayers in *SM* (Prayer 6 and here in Prayer 12) conclude with elaborated Trinitarian doxologies not found in the *passio* that would serve to further highlight this theme.

We have already noted that the various cult practices recommended in Prayer 11 are nevertheless unified in the reward they all promise: the forgiveness of sins. We might also say that these diverse devotional activities are also unified by their very nature as memorial actions. Whether it is reading a book or building a church, the activities Margaret recommends to her followers in this prayer might all be summarized in the words of Jesus at the Last Supper that are

spoken as part of the canon of the Mass: “Do this for a commemoration of me.”<sup>122</sup> Several times during the course of the *passio* the threat that Olibrius or the devil will destroy the memory of Margaret from the earth has been raised: the townspeople warn her, “Iste prefectus iracundus est, et te perdere festinat, et delere de terra memoriam tuam” (131 ll.23-25) [“The prefect is angry and hastens to ruin you and to blot out memory of you”], and the black demon complains, “Ego quidem misi fratrem meum Rufonem in effigie draconis, ut obsorberet te et de terra tolleret memoriam tuam...” (135 ll. 13-16) [“Indeed I sent my brother Rufo to you in the likeness of a dragon to swallow you up and to remove your memory from the earth”]. But as her two final prayers attest, Margaret will be remembered, and specifically through memorial practices that she herself promotes and the dove endorses. The thematic resonance suggested here with the essential Christian memorial enacted in the Eucharist seems audacious unless it is pulled once more into the baptismal schema of Margaret’s passion.

For the Sacraments of Initiation -- Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist -- are celebrated in that order in the early church. The *passio* builds in its final prayers and actions to a eucharistic crescendo that completes the liturgical action. As noted above, the petitions in Prayer 11 may be linked to the Prayer of the Faithful. It is also possible, however, to see similarities between this prayer and the prayer known in Western liturgies as the “Preface.” The preface begins the Eucharistic prayer or Anaphora and developed in the West as a separate prayer marked off from the words of Institution by the *Sanctus*. In the Eastern liturgies the separation is less stark, but in all cases the Preface begins, as does Prayer 11, with praise and thanksgiving offered to God the Creator. After the thanksgiving and intercessions of Prayer 11, and the promises of the dove, Prayer 12 returns to the theme of memorial action and petition but concludes with thanksgiving to God.

In Prayer 12, Margaret prays, “Patres et matres, fratres et sorores, omnes uos coniuro per nomen magni Dei, memoriam meam facite, nomen meum nominate, et commendate me” (141 ll. 2-4) [“Fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, I adjure you through the name of great God, make recollection of me, call my name and venerate me”]. Likewise in the ME: “gleadieð all wið me þe me god unnen....Ant as ge luuieð ow seolf, leofliche ich ow leare, þet ge habben mi nome muchel ine munde; for ich chulle bidden for þeo bliðeliche in heouene, þe ofte munneð mi nome”(50 ll/3-8) [“And all who wish me well rejoice with me....And as you love yourselves, I exhort you lovingly to have my name much in your thoughts, for I will pray gladly in heaven for those who often recall my name”]. The sense is strong in her final prayers in both versions that Margaret is gathering together a community of believers. In the moments before and after her execution, five thousand have already been converted (and martyred); the executioner will be joining her in heaven; the crowds are pulled rhetorically within the sphere of her prayers; the sick, blind, lame, deaf, weak and feeble will come to touch her body; angels will sing and and demons howl their torment. The thanksgiving which concludes Prayer 12 is described by Margaret herself in the *passio* as a hymn: “Gratias enim ago Deo, regi omnium seculorum, qui dignam me facit in sortem introire beatorum. Hymnum dico, Deum laudo, et glorifico, quia Deus benedictus est in secula seculorum” (141 ll.8-11) [“For I give thanks to the Lord, the King of all ages, who has made me worthy to enter into (ranks of the blessed). I utter a hymn to the Lord. I praise and glorify God, because you, God, are blessed for ever and ever”]. The ME author responds to the solemnity of this final prayer by enriching both the affective intensity and the theology of the conclusion:

þe ich þonki þrof: þe ich heie ant herie, heouenliche healent. For þi deorewurðe nome ich habbe idrohe nowcin, ant neome deað nuðe: and tu nim me to þe, godd, of al þet god ordfrume ant ende. Beo þu aa iblestet ant ti blisfule sune, Iesu Crist bi his nome, wið þe hali gast, þet glit of inc baðe: ge, þreo ant tah an, in hades to-

tweamet, in hehschipe untodealet, iteit ant itunet an godd-imagin. Wurdscchipe ant wurðmunt wurde to þe ane from worlde in-to worlde aa on ecnesse(50 ll. 11-20).

[It is you I thank for this, you that I praise and honour, heavenly Saviour. For your precious name I have suffered affliction, and now must endure death; and may you, God, take me to yourself, the Origin and End of all that is good. May you be always blessed, and your glorious Son, whose name is Jesus Christ, with the Holy Ghost, who proceeds from you both; yes, three and yet one, separate in persons, undivided in glory, bound and enclosed together, one God without beginning. May there be honour and glory to you alone, world without end, always to eternity.]

We may see in this last prayer one final example of the incorporation into the ME prayer text of a detail not found in the *passio*, but with relevance for the daily life of the anchoresses. Here, and also in the Trinitarian doxology that concluded Prayer 6, the three persons are “itunet” [44 l.12]—enclosed in one God. While theologically sound, this may also be an especially resonant image for a reader who is herself enclosed.

After echoing Christ’s own words of eschatological promise to the “good thief,” Margaret is at last beheaded and the conditions of her final prayers immediately begin to be fulfilled. The executioner falls dead at her right side, presumably, like the good thief on Christ’s right side, to be reunited with her in heaven. In the *passio* the demons, who as we have seen are closely linked with the pagans, now recognize that there is only one powerful God – the God of Margaret. *SM* similarly reports that “swiðe monie” (52 l.10) [“very many”] were converted by her witness. In both versions all manner of afflicted people touch her body and are healed. And her own salvation, as promised by the dove, is visibly attested to when angels come to carry her soul towards heaven.<sup>123</sup> As they rise up, the angels sing the *Sanctus*; the full text of the Latin prayer is provided in the Latin *passio*, the Latin incipit followed by a full ME translation in *SM*.<sup>124</sup> As we saw in *Elene*, the *Sanctus* recalls in the most solemn moments of the Eucharistic liturgy the doctrine of the communion of saints – the angels are present at the mass and the

congregation sings with them this hymn of praise before the words of institution (“This is my body ... this is ... my blood”) are spoken over the bread and the wine. We have heard in Prayer 11 echoes of the Preface, and here a newly-constituted communion of believers hears the angels sing the angelic hymn. The Eucharistic moment seems to stop short then, in Margaret’s story, when no prayer that more specifically references the words of institution follows the *Sanctus*. Yet we might say that at her own invitation, Margaret’s body was broken when she submitted to the beheading. And as has been discussed in studies of the poem “Pearl,” the pearl there and elsewhere can also be a figure for the Eucharist.<sup>125</sup> In the elevation of Margaret by the angels at this point, we may see a suggestion of the elevation of the Eucharistic host that occurs during the consecration. Finally, Margaret is dispersed, like the “bread broken for all,” in that her body is relicized and her prayers written down to be likewise distributed for memorial use, just as she had advocated in her final prayers.

#### *VI. Concluding Elements*

In the *passio* a concluding testimony from Theotimus reports, “scripsi omnes orationes eius in libris cartaneis cum astutia multa, et transmisi omnibus Christianis haec omnia, in ueritate conscripta” (142 ll.7-8) [“I have written all her prayers in the pages of books with great diligence and passed these things all on in truth to all Christians everywhere”] and in *SM* Theotimus adds as well that her words are “soðliche iwrten wide gont te worlde”(52 l.30)[“faithfully committed to writing, sent ... out widely throughout the world”]. These final words from the narrator of the story seem to guarantee its authenticity and also serve to both enable and model the cultic

practices that Margaret had prescribed when she prayed blessings upon “hwa-se-eauer boc writ of mi lif-lade” (46 ll.27-28) [“whoever writes a book of my life”].

The narrative in *SM* approaches its conclusion by urging the readers to remember Margaret in their prayers so that she may pray for them “wið þe ilke bone þet ha bed on eorðan” (55 l.1) [“with the same prayer she prayed on earth”]. While the *passio* similarly encourages prayer to Margaret as a heavenly intercessor, it does not presume to imagine the very prayer she will use there. By the time the ME author concludes in this fashion, the prayer to which he refers here, Prayer 11, has become the artifactual element that remains the most stable of all of the prayers and which will survive to some extent even in the later versions discussed by Winstead that excise the other prayers and the baptismal episode. Perhaps the growing fondness for Margaret’s cult and this, its best known prayer, is indicated here by this self-referential note. Such a fond feeling may also underly the final words of *SM* that concludes with an authorial prayer, not found in the *passio*, of eight lines in rhyming couplets, and that may also reflect the narrative’s probable use as a piece for public recitation – the rhyming lines providing an audibly resounding resolution to the long narrative. The prayer describes Margaret as “schenre þen þe sunne” (55 l.3) [“more shining than the sun”] and suggests that a place among the angels, such as she now occupies, is not attainable to those fouled by lust; *SM* emphasizes one last time here its consistent preoccupation with virginity and carnal temptations. But the prayer’s very last words are a Trinitarian doxology, much like the doxologies the ME author has also added to Prayers 6 and 12 in *SM*, and which serves to reinforce another key element of the legend both as it came to him from his source, and as he has preserved and expanded upon it: the liturgical resonance of Saint Margaret’s prayer-filled passion.

### *Conclusions*

In the *passio* the theme of baptism is inescapable – it is clearly a structuring device, an aspect of this saint’s life as *Imitatio Christi*, which accounts for the highly liturgical framework of prayer, gesture, and event upon which the story of a young virgin martyr is draped. As we have seen, Margaret, the pearl born of fire and water, may be said to figure baptism itself; but as Edsman also suggests in his study of baptism by fire, the pearl is a figure as well for Christ and the individual soul who are both reborn through baptism. This symbolism is most powerfully present in Gnostic thought and Manichean writings, as well as in Syriac liturgies. Edsman writes:

Le Christ, symbolisé par la perle ne naît pas simplement de la vierge Marie, mais aussi du baptême dans le Jourdain, où, selon la doctrine gnostique, le sauveur céleste est réuni avec le Jésus terrestre, doctrine qui se laisse apercevoir chez Éphrem dans sa constante comparaison entre la naissance et le baptême du Christ. La perle divine, le Christ, naît du baptême de feu dans le fleuve flamboyant, et c’est là, de même, que chaque chrétien naît dans l’eau et le feu, qui forment le noyau céleste ou la perle dans l’homme.<sup>126</sup>

Edsman examines many ancient texts where the pearl, as a symbol of both Christ and the soul, is tied not only to baptism, but also to the related preoccupation of the Margaret legend: virginity. Texts of Syriac hymns and sermons, some attributed to Ephrem, reveal a constellation of other linked images: the pearl as a symbol of purity, the pearl that one dives for nude in baptism, the pearl as a gem placed in a royal diadem, Ethiopians who are rendered “resplendissants de blancheur” and become pearls through catechetical instruction.<sup>127</sup> So much of this imagery and symbolic detail resonates with the Margaret legend as it is represented in the Western tradition

by the Mombritius *passio*, but which of course derives from a “highly developed older Greek tradition.”<sup>128</sup> Perhaps this ancient, Eastern symbol of the pearl-as-soul/Christ/baptism is the source from which the liturgically resonant Margaret legend first springs. Further research might even bear out the possibility that this particular saint, now acknowledged to be a-historical, was neither in her beginnings thought to be a real person, but created as an allegorical figure for the rites of initiation, perhaps for use in catechesis.<sup>129</sup>

Certainly we can say that the Mombritius *passio*, does seem to require of its audience monastic reading habits where a rich knowledge of both the scriptures and patristic writing reveals this level of meaning. Within the text, just as we saw of Judas in *Elene*, Margaret is figured as using the scriptural prayers she utters and the liturgical gestures she makes to properly read her situation. Most specifically, Margaret uses her prayers to rhetorically recreate the elemental instruments of her torture as sacramental substances.<sup>130</sup> In neither case does she pray in metaphoric terms – i.e. that the fire be “like” the Holy Spirit’s fire or the water “like” a baptismal font -- but rather she prays in a generative mode whereby the substance over which she speaks will by the action of her words be transformed into an instrument of her salvation. She is paradoxically completely powerless (bound, beaten, burned, bathed and beheaded!) but through her prayers and the actions which accompany them she remains in complete control of the narrative of her martyrdom. By prayerfully reading into her tortures her own baptism, she is able to claim the transformation from death to everlasting life that the sacrament promises.

The ME *SM* retains all of the structure and the prayers, so necessarily retains the baptismal motif, but is it conscious of this layer of meaning? In his additions and changes to the source the ME author has shifted the emphasis of the text subtly in two directions:

- 1) Scriptural and patristic knowledge – i.e. Robertson’s “world of books”-- while still important seems less deeply called upon. Margaret’s prayers lose some of their scriptural associativeness and refer rather to the lived experiences of vowed women, including their experiences of carnal temptation, and observations of the natural world; the prayers display a keen interest in psychological motivation and concern with the question of evil. These changes would seem to suggest that the spiritual reading habits encouraged in this thirteenth-century text for this particular readership include indeed Robertson’s “incarnational reading.”
- 2) The ME text emphasizes repeatedly Margaret’s awareness that her story is being “read” or interpreted by the crowd around her. She is making meaning of her own life, “reading” meaning into it as we saw in the *passio*, but there is a greater sense here that her interpretation will be the basis for others – that she models a reading that others will take up as she also becomes herself a text for “incarnational reading.”

And yet, while we see here a turn towards “incarnational reading,” this reading is still figured as being accomplished through prayer texts and in the very act of praying. This then at least can be said: *SM*, unlike some later versions of the life which will remove the prayers and even the baptism episode, retains them. As the resources of the individual readers (and perhaps even the author) are less monastic in nature, the abilities to hear in the story the scriptural, theological and typological echoes from the earliest centuries of Christian writings may have diminished.<sup>131</sup> Or may not, since these insights are also woven into the communal “reading” that the liturgy itself represents.

For those who did not perhaps read Tertullian or Cyril of Jerusalem, the annual Easter Vigil liturgy offered nevertheless the fruits of their scriptural interpretations in the interplay of readings, the imagery of the prayers, the language of gestures, and the symbolic use of water, oil, incense, bells. Perhaps for anchoresses, literally attached to churches and watching the liturgical year unfold season after season, another important aspect of “incarnational reading,” beyond the material world of her cell, her work and her body, would indeed be the very “liturgical reading” that could enrich her interpretation of *SM*.<sup>132</sup>

And as Margaret points to herself as a sign throughout *SM*, it is difficult to miss her in the role of “presider” over this liturgically-informed narrative. For women whose days were structured around the individual enactment of the spiritual devotions and daily rituals of their enclosed lives (rather than, as in a monastic setting, the participation in communal roles), Margaret may have been both a sympathetic and empowering figure. On the other hand, for women whose own formal liturgical experiences were characterized by passivity (watching, receiving), Margaret’s pronouncement of presbyterial words may have been shocking or inspiring or simply strange.

Finally, the ability to recognize the transformative power Saint Margaret wields over her own story must certainly have been widespread and must account for some of this story’s tremendous popularity beyond any individual version or readerly setting. Perhaps the story became linked in popular piety with childbirth during the stages when the text did clearly include the baptismal formula – when brought to the woman in labor, afraid for the health, life, and ultimate salvation of her child, it would offer even the illiterate the comfort of the presence and promise of those words. The ME *SM* is indeed a text which preserves those very powerful words. But even in later versions when with removal of the prayer texts, the sacramental words have

also been extirpated, Saint Margaret herself clearly promises in her intercessory prayer the very benefits that baptism confers: forgiveness of all sins and salvation from death at the last judgment. Looking beyond the particular necessities of cult development -- reading of passions, church building, copying of texts -- we see that the pious busy-ness Margaret encourages all results in the same reward: forgiveness of sins. The protection specifically offered to new-borns is that they not be born deformed, lame, hunchbacked, dumb, deaf, nor afflicted by the Devil -- real, worldly afflictions, but also well into the middle ages, also states symbolically resonant of sin.<sup>133</sup> The legend of Saint Margaret does not (and could not overtly) promise eternal salvation for infants who die before they are baptized, but it offers that hope.<sup>134</sup>

As we have seen, the story meditates to some extent on innocence brought to suffer, questioning why a virgin martyr, or an anchoress, or we might imagine, an innocent child, should be tormented by the devil and marked by sin for death. But the story also answers: in bloody suffering and fiery contrition and cleansing sacrament death can be conquered and the victimized innocent (or newly forgiven) achieve salvation. It is a message whose appeal clearly resonated with women in travail; in their prayerful devotion to Saint Margaret, women across cultures and centuries “read rightly” the true promise of her passion.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> McFadden 473.

<sup>2</sup> For my text of the Mombritius version (also known as BHL 5303), I have relied on the edition of London, British Library MS Harley 2801 found in Mack (127-142), although I have occasionally consulted as well several other editions of manuscripts of the Mombritius version. There are numerous variant versions listed by the Bollandists for BHL 5303 but all seem to derive from a single translation of the Greek original. At this time a critical edition is still lacking, and as Gerould warned in publishing “A New Text” of the *passio* in 1924, “students of mediaeval works must beware of thinking they know the content when they have read only one or two of the manuscripts. Study of the sources of productions in the vernacular literatures cannot be other than imperfect unless it is preceded by inquiry as to the real content of the Latin progenitors....It is not safe, in other words, to regard a text like the *Passio S. Margaritae* printed by Mombritius as a fixed entity with which works in the vulgar tongues may be mechanically compared. In this case the text of Mombritius is a very good one, but it has certain omissions and

certain peculiarities that make its sole use as a standard dangerous in attempting to gain a critical knowledge of the work” (526). I am well aware that my comparisons may yet be imperfect, but I have so far examined the printed texts of Mombritius edited by Gerould (the Mather MS), Mack (MS Harley 2801), and Clayton and Magennis (Paris, BN, lat. 5574) – and will note differences of any significance as needed. For the English translations of the *passio*, I rely on Clayton and Magennis to the extent that the text they translate agrees with Mack. Where differences occur, I have supplied the necessary changes to their translation.

<sup>3</sup> The *passio* was most likely composed originally by someone deeply steeped in biblical literature, for reading aloud during the saint’s festival Office or at meals. It is widely represented in early and later medieval monastic manuscript legendaries. On its biblical and liturgical style, see Clayton and Magennis 24-26.

<sup>4</sup> There are excellent introductory chapters and bibliographies in both Savage and Watson’s *Anchoritic Spirituality: Ancrene Wisse and Associated Works* (7-32; 431-4) and in Millet and Wogan-Browne’s *Medieval English Prose for Women* (ix-xi) which provide invaluable background on the history of the thirteenth-century English anchoritic tradition and this group of related texts. Dobson’s influential, *Origins of ‘Ancrene Wisse’* proposed a particular author for this text and speculated masterfully about the conditions under which all of the texts were planned, copied, and collected. Although more recent scholarship has challenged Dobson’s conclusions about the authorship of the *Ancrene Wisse*, a general consensus has emerged that the *SM* of this group, like one of its companion legends, that of Saint Juliana, was probably composed a little earlier than the *Ancrene Wisse*, perhaps around 1200 by a cleric in the West Midlands (the third saint’s life of the group, *Seinte Katherine*, is thought to be a slightly later composition). For the text of *SM* I rely on Mack’s 1943 edition of MS Bodley 34. For the Modern English translation I will use that provided by Millet and Wogan-Browne in their edition, except in the few instances where theirs and Mack’s ME texts do not agree. In those cases I have supplied my own translation of Mack’s *SM*. For simplicity, I will refer to the three main characters in the *passio* and *SM* as Margaret, Olibrius and Theotimus, mindful that variant spellings of these names appear in the Bodley and Royal manuscripts of *SM* and in the various manuscripts of the *passio*.

<sup>5</sup> Savage and Watson 9. They describe this translation of a Latin *passio* as characterized by “a vigorous and dramatic English prose” marked by “heavy alliteration and thumping rhythms” (11). Mack’s discussion of the ornamentation of the language reminds us that the heavy use of alliteration in the text “was certainly regarded as an indispensable element in the vernacular rhetoric of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century” and that this version of the legend has roots in the native homiletic tradition represented, e.g., by Aelfric (Mack xx), although the late OE prose lives of Margaret are less elaborate in style.

<sup>6</sup> On the use of *SM* for public recitation, see Millet and Wogan-Browne xiii.

<sup>7</sup> In fact, in *Middle English Prose for Women*, Millet and Wogan Browne print only the life of Margaret to represent the genre because “[t]hough there is some thematic variation between the Lives, [their] shared design and purpose make it possible for a single Life to give a good idea of all three” (xxi).

<sup>8</sup> Katherine more often disputes than prays; Juliana prays a few times at great length, but in a diffuse and rambling manner – the elevated style of the Margaret prayers is notably lacking.

<sup>9</sup> We have seen in Chapter Three how Judas's acclamation of belief in the middle of his long prayer likewise becomes the "artifactual" element of his prayer that survives in almost all of the later re-tellings of the legend of the Invention.

<sup>10</sup> On the cult of Margaret in medieval England see Mack x-xii; on the cult in Anglo-Saxon England more specifically see Clayton and Magennis 72-83; on her popularity as an intercessor for women see, for instance, Larson. On visual representations of Margaret as an intercessor at childbirth, see the evidence adduced by Drewer 18 n.2.

<sup>11</sup> Wolpers (170-7; 182-4), Mack (xxiv-vi), Millet and Wogan-Browne (xxii-v).

<sup>12</sup> Mack xxvi.

<sup>13</sup> Clayton and Magennis 31.

<sup>14</sup> Clayton and Magennis 61.

<sup>15</sup> We find as well: "[a]spiciens autem illa in caelum, ait" (131 ll.6-7) ["looking up to heaven, she said"], or "Et iterum orauit, dicens" (131 l.11) ["And again she prayed, saying], or "et orare cepit et dicere" (133 l. 2) ["and she began to pray and to say"], or "fixit genua in terra, expandens manum in celum" (134 ll.1-2) ["She fell to her knees on the ground, extending her hand to heaven"]. Such verbal rubrics mark every one of these twelve prayers.

<sup>16</sup> I will refer to the narrator of the legend as Theotimus, the name as it appears in the *passio*. The ME gives the name as Theochimus.

<sup>17</sup> Winstead 39-40. I will be substituting "g" for yoghs in the ME text throughout.

<sup>18</sup> Winstead 15. Similarly, Vitz, "From the Oral," posits a move from hagiography to hagiology-- involving removal of devotions in the Golden Legend. See Vitz 106-114.

<sup>19</sup> See Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption* 181-238 for one example of her carefully nuanced examinations of the corporeality of female religious experience.

<sup>20</sup> Robertson, "This Living Hand," 29.

<sup>21</sup> Robertson, "This Living Hand," 14.

<sup>22</sup> Robertson, "This Living Hand," 33.

<sup>23</sup> Robertson, "Corporeality," 285.

<sup>24</sup> Katherine Lewis offers a useful overview of recent feminist and gendered readings of virgin-martyr legends, suggesting that the "processes of voyeurism and self harm that are frequently taken to characterize the act of reading a virgin-martyr's life" may stand in need of critical re-evaluation (82). Lewis takes issue with readings that focus exclusively on the passivity of the female martyrs and advocates opening other avenues of approach to these texts, including her own attempt to reconstruct the possible interpretations of four ME Saint Margaret legends by their contemporary female readers. While, as she suggests, some readers may have found these legends titillating and some oppressive, other readers, male and female, may have read them as empowering. See also the Introduction (1-18) to Wogan-Browne, *Saints Lives*, which urges a deeper appreciation for the wide variety of readings and uses the virgin martyr legends allowed in the diverse literary culture of the women and men who commissioned, wrote, read and heard them.

<sup>25</sup> Earl, "Saint Margaret." On Margaret's *Imitatio Christi* and her nature as a sign for others, see Katherine Lewis and Price.

<sup>26</sup> Katherine Lewis 69. See also Hill, "Imago Dei," 43-47 on figural and typological patterning in hagiography.

<sup>27</sup> Earl, "Typology and Iconographic Style," 27.

<sup>28</sup> See Clayton and Magennis 3-6 for the early history of the legend.

<sup>29</sup> Delehayé as referenced in Earl, “Typology and Iconographic Style,” 24.

<sup>30</sup> For the typological interpretation of the waters of the Red Sea, see Tertullian, “On Baptism,” chapter 9 as well as the discussion of the theme by Lundberg 116-145.

<sup>31</sup> Daniélou 5.

<sup>32</sup> Price, “Demonology,” 352.

<sup>33</sup> The quasi-priestly role implied in Margaret’s prayers and ritual actions is drastically reduced in later versions of her passion by the removal of her prayers and of the episode in which she speaks the baptismal formula over herself, coinciding with the insertion of information earlier in the story that she was baptized as a child; see, e.g., the late-thirteenth century *Legenda Aurea* version and in the Anglo-French Margaret, Version G, printed by Cazelles (218-28).

<sup>34</sup> In Kavanaugh’s useful overview of the differences between the developments in the West and the East (Syrian/Armenian), he notes, the Eastern rites developed as essentially “consecratory” in nature – emphasizing the baptismal bath as a “birth bath” into new life, whereas the Western rites became formalized into an “initiatory” process that emphasized a longer period of instruction – often over many years—followed by ascetical formation, exorcism and finally the ceremonies of baptism itself imaged rather as a “death-bath” marking the end of an old life. The theology of baptism and its ritual practices were debated and discussed extensively by Justin, Hippolytus, and Tertullian. See Kavanaugh 38-78.

<sup>35</sup> In his study of baptism in the early Middle Ages Cramer notes that the Prayer of Saint Brendan has a “baptismal background,” which links Brendan’s legendary pilgrimage with the *transitus* or *pascha*, i.e. the passing over, that is Passover/Easter, especially the deliverance from evil that the baptismal exorcism promises (174-5). Clearly, many saints’ lives employ such typological vocabulary, suggesting the need for both *lectio* and liturgical reading.

<sup>36</sup> The baptismal liturgy in the Sarum Missal, for instance, includes detailed instructions regarding the occasional necessity for and validity of lay baptism. For these lengthy instructions see the translation provided by Fisher 175-9. For the history of debate over lay administration of baptism see Elwin, especially 153-61 where he notes that ecclesial canons in medieval England reflected a local church that was perhaps more open to the practice than elsewhere. The movement towards infant baptism which began as early as the 3<sup>rd</sup> century and became the norm during the medieval period necessitated such lay intervention and created a need to offer explicit instruction in the ritual for those who would attend births. On the shortening over time of the interval between birth and baptism, see Fisher 109-19.

<sup>37</sup> As Millet and Wogan-Browne observe, “While childbirth is an experience foreign to all virgin saints apart from the mother of God, a popularly accepted logic founded Margaret’s special powers in the ease with which she is expelled from the dragon’s jaws or stomach” (xxii). Later versions of the legend will also note the healing powers of the pearl with respect to excessive bleeding, a connection with obvious relevance for women giving birth. The *Legenda Aurea* version makes explicit a connection between pearls, which were known to stop bleeding, and Saint Margaret’s name in his etymological introduction to her life. See Jacobus de Voragine 368.

<sup>38</sup> On the iconography of Saint Margaret see Celletti and Réau (vol. 3, 877-82).

<sup>39</sup> E.g., “ha bigon to clepien ant callen to *Criste*, þus” (6 l.18) [“she began to call upon Christ as follows”]; “Þet eadie meiden a-hef hire heorte heh up towart hoeuene, ant clepede to *Criste*” (12 ll.19-21) [“That blessed maiden summoned up her courage, looking towards heaven and called upon Christ”]; “ha bigon to bidden þeos bone to ure laure[d]” (18 ll.23-34) [“she

began to say this prayer to our Lord”]; “heo feng ... to þonkyn þus ant herien hire healant” (24 ll.25-26) [“she began ... to thank and praise her Saviour in tis way”]; “heo bigon on hire cneon for to cneolin adun, ant bliðe wið þeos bone ber on heh iheuen up honden towart heouene” (46 ll.14-16) [“And first of all she fell to her knees, then joyfully lifted her hands up to heaven as she said this prayer”].

<sup>40</sup> This is true for Harley 2801(Mack) although the reference is not found in Paris, BN lat.5574 (Clayton and Magennis). The allusion to Thecla and Sussanah is also preserved in the Latin ‘Casinensis’ version of the legend, which was another significant witness for the transmission of the story in the West, as discussed by Clayton and Magennis 13-16.

<sup>41</sup> The story of Susannah is in Daniel 13. Thecla’s story is part of the Apocryphal Acts of Paul and Thecla, where she throws herself into a pit of water in order to be baptized (see J. K. Elliott 370).

<sup>42</sup> In the Gelasian: “Deus Abraham, Deus Isaac, Deus Iacob, Deus qui tribus Israel monuisti et Susannam de falso crimine liberasti, te supplex deprecor, Domine, ut liberet et has famulas tuas, et perducere eas digneris ad gratiam baptismi tui” (Wilson 49) [“God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob, who didst admonish the tribes of Israel and didst free Susannah from false accusation, I humbly beseech thee, Lord, to free also these thy servants, and to lead them to the grace of baptism”] (translation by Whitaker 161-2). The prayer remains essentially the same in the Sarum rite, adding only a more direct reference to Moses and the desert. See Legg 126.

<sup>43</sup> In Edsman, in a brief discussion of S. Marina and “Le vêtement de lumière” motif he notes, “Nous trouvons dans les Acta sanctae Marinae du IVème siècle un parallèle frappant du récit du baptême de Thècle” (165) to which he adds in a note “Suhling montre...l’analogie avec le récit du baptême de Thècle et il émet l’hypothèse que les deux récits viennent des mêmes milieux. Il nie au contraire, contre Usener, qu’ils soient gnostiques” (165 n.3).

<sup>44</sup> In the early church the stages of the conversion process as recorded by the Fathers include the *audientes*, catechumens, and *photizomenoi* – those who are coming into the light (interestingly, Margaret becomes blazing with light after her bath) – and the journey of initiation could last for several months, or for a lifetime. See Finn 2-22 for another concise overview of early baptismal practices in both the East and the West including these terms.

<sup>45</sup> The bracketed emendation to the ME text is added in the margin of Bodley 34 . by a corrector and found in the text of the Royal manuscript.

<sup>46</sup> Quoted in Whitaker 3-4.

<sup>47</sup> The ME text is clearer on this point than the *passio*.

<sup>48</sup> Winstead reproduces and discusses a pastoral image of Margaret from *Queen Mary’s Psalter* on 97. See also pastoral images of Margaret noted in Réau (882): a fourteenth-century bas-relief and illumination in the fifteenth-century *Les Heures d’Etienne Chevalier* by Jean Fouquet (currently online at <http://expositions.bnf.fr/fouquet/enimages/chevalier/f122.htm>).

<sup>49</sup> See Daniélou 177 ff. Among his sources is the following passage from Gregory of Nyssa, *Sermon against those who put off baptism* (PG XLVI 692 A): “In the Psalm, David invites you to be sheep whose shepherd is Christ, and who lacks nothing good, you for whom the Good Shepherd becomes at once pasturage, water of rest, food, dwelling, way and guide, distributing His grace according to your needs. By this He teaches the Church that you should first become a sheep of the Good Shepherd, Who will lead you by the catechesis of salvation to the meadows and to the springs of sacred teachings” (Daniélou 186-87).

<sup>50</sup> Mack xxvi.

<sup>51</sup> My scriptural references will all be taken from the Dhouay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate, and follow the Vulgate's numbering of the psalms.

<sup>52</sup> The bracketed reference to the pearl cast into the mud is missing from Mack's edition, but she notes that it is found in all but one of the other manuscripts she collates. The reference is of course to Matthew 7:6: "Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you."

<sup>53</sup> Earl suggests an increasing association of pearl imagery with virginity by the time *Pearl* is written. Earl, "Saint Margaret," 4-5.

<sup>54</sup> See Millet and Wogan-Browne xxii-xxv; Savage and Watson 22-28; Cazelles 47-53; Winstead 8-18; Robertson, "Corporeality," 269-74.

<sup>55</sup> Price 352.

<sup>56</sup> The text I call Prayer 2 is actually separated into two even shorter prayers in the Latin, the first ending with a closing formula: "in secula seculorum" and then beginning anew, after "Et iterum orauit, dicens," with direct address to God: "Respice in me et miserere mei, Domine..." (131 l.12) ["Look upon me Lord and have pity on me"].

<sup>57</sup> Clayton and Magennis misidentify the first line of the prayer as a reference to Psalm 22 – which would certainly be richly suggestive for the baptism motif, but doesn't seem correct; the allusion is rather to Psalm 30.

<sup>58</sup> The development of Margaret's attention to her audience may also suggest a growing interest in literature of the 13<sup>th</sup> century with emotional or affective content.

<sup>59</sup> Margaret will once more call Olibrius "heateliche hund" (18 l.5) ["vicious dog"]. In fact, even when the prayers from which such insults are drawn are dropped from Margaret's *passio* – as in the later Golden Legend and its textual progeny – some variant on the epithet "helle-hund" will repeatedly be attached to Olibrius. Likewise in the legends of Juliana and Katherine "helle-hund" is an epithet attached to their villains. Many Bible verses referring to dogs are interpreted to be about "non-believers" – cf. Jesus and the Canaanite woman who insists, "even the dogs eat the scraps..." (Matthew 15:21-28) and again in Matthew 7:6 the verse which links holy things given to dogs and pearls cast before swine.

<sup>60</sup> The Nicene Creed affirms that Christ is "Deum de Deo, Lumen de Lumine" (God from God, Light from Light).

<sup>61</sup> cf. *Lay Folks Mass Book*, ed. Simmons 222.

<sup>62</sup> The Sarum Missal notes that at the door of the church, the priest would ask the midwife 1) whether the infant is male or female, 2) if the infant has been baptized at home, and 3) by what name he is to be called. Translated in Fisher 138.

<sup>63</sup> On enrollment as described in the Apostolic Constitutions and afterwards, see Kavanaugh 54-6.

<sup>64</sup> In the Gelasian we find the following in a "Prayer over the Elect": "Almighty everlasting God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, look upon thy servants whom thou has called to the elements of faith. Drive from them all blindness of heart: loose the bonds of Satan with which they were bound: open to them, O Lord, the door of thy religion: that bearing the sign of thy wisdom, they may turn from the squalor of fleshly lusts and delight in the sweet savour of thy commandments and joyfully serve thee in thy church..." (as translated in Fisher 159); for the Latin, see Wilson 46. For the same prayer in the Sarum Missal, see Legg 124.

<sup>65</sup> Page 10 in line 12 as it is emended by the corrector and found in Royal.

<sup>66</sup> Or in Royal: "þe haueð iseilet to him me seolf" (11 l.15).

<sup>67</sup> However the position of the rite has varied; it can be found between the renunciation of Satan and baptism or also after the rite of baptism and performed with the chrism or holy oil. See Daniélou 54. The image of the “seal” is also found in the Song of Solomon, which would suggest the *Sponsa Chrsiti* motif, again also linked with baptism. See for instance Song of Sol 8:6: “Put me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thy arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy as hard as hell, the lamps thereof are fire and flames.”

<sup>68</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis*, PG XXXIII, 373A, as translated and discussed in Daniélou 58.

<sup>69</sup> On nakedness in baptism, see Daniélou 38.

<sup>70</sup> See *SM* 16 ll.23-29; Likewise, *passio* 132 ll. 23-25.

<sup>71</sup> In addition to the direct comparisons with water, in the *passio* Margaret’s blood is also “multa sanguinis effusione” (131 ll.19-20) [“a great outpouring of blood”] and “sanguinis effusionem” (132 l. 24) [“the outpouring of blood”]; in *SM* Margaret’s skin is “liðerede o blode” (12 l.19) [“lathered/streaming with blood”] and the beating results in “þet stronge rune of þe blod stream” (16 l.24) [“the torrents of blood that streamed from her”].

<sup>72</sup> The insistence on “living water” is found as early as the *Didache*, as discussed by Cramer 10.

<sup>73</sup> See Luke 12:50 and 1 John 5:6.

<sup>74</sup> Later, more fully developed rituals will include seven scrutinies, and then as infant baptism becomes the norm, the rites return to more abbreviated, and formulaic, forms of scrutiny occurring on three Sundays in Lent. See Kavanaugh 58-61.

<sup>75</sup> The Temptation of Christ is found in all of the synoptic gospels (Mt 4:1-11; Mk 1:12-13; Lk 4:1-13) and was traditionally used as the reading for the First Sunday of Lent which marked the beginning of the formal catechumenate. See Kellner 103.

<sup>76</sup> Prayer 5 takes about ten lines in Mack’s edition of Harley 2801, whereas the ME takes 30; Prayer 6 is 18 lines in the Latin, 37 in ME. These two prayers are very different in Harley 2801(Mack) from their versions in Paris, BN lat 5574 (Clayton and Magennis). In the case of Prayer 5, the Harley 2801 version is much closer to the ‘Casinensis’ version than it is to Paris, BN, lat.5574; and the number of footnotes that Mack attaches to Prayer 6 attest to the variety of versions of this particular prayer.

<sup>77</sup> Price 337.

<sup>78</sup> Price 352.

<sup>79</sup> Wilson 46. It is interesting to note that while most of the prayers of the public liturgies recorded in Sacramentaries like the Gelasian or Gregorian would be spoken in the first person plural, the very ancient rites of baptism are spoken, as private prayer would be, in the first person singular: “[T]e invoco, Domine” (“I invoke you, Lord”) and “Exorcizo te” (“I exorcise you”) for example.

<sup>80</sup> Price 346 likewise notes the addition in the devil’s sermon of concern with his motivation.

<sup>81</sup> Of course it is necessary for Margaret to request the grace she will receive in baptism. Throughout her passion, it is her freely chosen actions and words which place her in a position to receive the graces God bestows.

<sup>82</sup> For instance, Harly 2801 (Mack) says only “facto sancte crucis signo” (“the sign of the cross having been made”) whereas Paris, BN lat 5574 (Clayton and Magennis) says, “Sed crux,

Christi, quam fecerat sibi beata Margareta, ipsa creuit in ore” (“But the cross of Christ which the blessed Margaret had made for herself, grew in the mouth of the dragon”).

<sup>83</sup>The placement of this prayer differs slightly in different manuscripts of the *passio*. For instance, Paris, BN, lat 5574 (Clayton and Magennis) places a very abbreviated version of the prayer just after Margaret emerges from the dragon, but before the appearance of the second demon; Harley 2801 (Mack) places the prayer after the second demon appears. The author of *SM* has it both ways. It is reported that Margaret prays as she emerges from the dragon’s belly: she is “heriende on heh hire healent in heouene” (24 ll.18-19) [“praising on high her Saviour in heaven”], but a similar phrase introduces the prayer she utters after she sees the black demon a few lines later: “heo, þa ha seh þis, feng to þonkin, þus, ant herien hire healent” (24 ll. 25-26) [“she, when she saw this, began to thank, thus, and praise her Saviour”].

<sup>84</sup> Mack xxvi. In the Latin, the demon complains, “nunc per canticum interficere cupis me”—perhaps also identifying this prayer as a type of hymn (135 ll. 17-18) [“now through a song you wish to kill me”].

<sup>85</sup> Clayton and Magennis 30. Indeed, Margaret’s “incantatory” or song-like prayer of victory over the devil in Prayer 6 may call to mind the admittedly much briefer Song of Miriam (Ex 15:20-21) that celebrates the drowning of Pharaoh in the Red Sea. It might be said that both women’s songs celebrate the crushing of evil/the devil that is a central theme of Baptism expressed in all of the narratives that serve as its types: Crossing the Red Sea, defeat of the dragon in the Jordan at Christ’s own baptism, the Harrowing of Hell. I will be discussing the last two typological associations below.

<sup>86</sup> A better reading for “gemisce horribilis homicida” as noted by Mack from Harley 5327: “genus horribile. Cessa homicida.”

<sup>87</sup> See the Baptism of Jesus as found in the synoptic gospels: Mt 3:13-16; Mk 1:9-11; Lk 3:21-22.

<sup>88</sup> The *Casinensis* and *Redorf* versions of the *passio* downplay these episodes; the *Turin* expands them. See Clayton and Magennis 7-23.

<sup>89</sup> Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogic Catechesis*, PG XXXIII, 441A as translated by Daniélou 41-42.

<sup>90</sup> Didymus, *De Trinitate*, PG XXXIX, 684B and a Greek prayer, both as reported by Daniélou (42, quoting A. Baumstark), who also references Lundberg on this aspect of baptismal typology.

<sup>91</sup> Bernard, “Descent into Hades,” 242. Christ conquers the demons of the waters in his own baptism as noted in Cyril of Jerusalem, above, note 88; also Bernard 245, note.

<sup>92</sup> Romans 6: 3-5 and Colossians 2:12ff.

<sup>93</sup> Chrysostom wrote, “The immersion and emersion are the image of the Descent into Hell and the Return thence. That is why Paul calls Baptism a burial” (*Hom. I Cor.*, 40; PG LXI 348; as translated by Daniélou 77 n.16). On the liturgical uses of the Harrowing of Hell at Easter, see Tamburr 1-13.

<sup>94</sup> A useful introduction to the textual and critical history of this passage is provided by John H. Elliott in his edition of 1 Peter 637.

<sup>95</sup> On the Enoch passage see John H. Elliott, *1 Peter* 649; also Reicke, 97-103.

<sup>96</sup> *Odes of Solomon*, 24 ll. 1, 3b-4, 9. Ed. Bernard 102.

<sup>97</sup> 137 ll.30-33: “Salemon ergo inclusit nos in uase; et uenientes Babylonii, putantes aurum inuenire, fregerunt illud, et relaxati, impluimus omnem orbem terrarium” [“For Solomon

enclosed us in a glass vessel, but we sent fire into one part of this vessel, and the men of Babylon came and thought they had discovered gold in it and broke it, and then we were freed and filled the world”]. Mack discusses the demonology of the black demon’s sermon, including his references to the apocryphal Testament of Solomon and the book of Jamnes and Mambres (xxvi-xxix). Price likewise discusses these apocryphal works (344-46) as do Clayton and Magennis (178). See also Biggs and Hall (69-89) for a more complete treatment of Jamnes and Mambres.

<sup>98</sup> The allusion here is to 1 Cor. 15:10a: But by the grace of God, I am what I am.

<sup>99</sup> The term “arcana” does not appear to have existed in the first three centuries of Christianity, but the practice this term describes -- of hiding knowledge of the most sacred mysteries of the faith from the heathens and only slowly revealing the same even to catechumens -- is suggested in scripture and attested in patristic sources especially from the fourth century on. The arcana is also sometimes called the “discipline of the secret.” See Stroumsa 27-45.

<sup>100</sup> Beezezebub or Beelzeboul is associated with pagan belief because a god of Ekron by the same name appears in 2 Kings 1:2-6. See Russell 189 n.14.

<sup>101</sup> Daniélou 76.

<sup>102</sup> For discussions of the demon’s sermon in *SM*, see Price; also Mack xxvii-xxix.

<sup>103</sup> See Raw, “Prayers and Devotions,” 260-271, and Ackerman 734-744.

<sup>104</sup> Relevant passages: On the temptations of spiritual discourse with a visitor, see *SM* 32 ll. 4-25; on the weapons best used to fight the devil, see *SM* 32 l.32-34 l.31.

<sup>105</sup> See Dahood 93 and 161.

<sup>106</sup> Ziegler notes that medieval exegesis influenced medieval encyclopedists who generally report a relationship between the kidneys and lust; in Hebrew lore, on the other hand, the kidneys are rather the organs which give the heart advice and counsel – an association that makes greater sense within the context of the “innocence psalms.”

<sup>107</sup> The sacramentaries in which it appears as a prayer of thanksgiving after mass are all from Great Britain: Arbut, Hereford, and Sarum; the three other sources, indicating its use in battling carnal temptation are all from Italy: Bergamo, Biasca, and Milan; see Moeller and Clement, CCSL 160H, Item 6025.

<sup>108</sup> This theme of the baptism by fire would seem to be relevant to an episode in the Passion of Saint Katherine as well. When the knights are being burned to death because they have come to believe in God through Katherine’s teaching, they ask her to wash them with holy waters, but she reassures them: “Do not be afraid at all, chosen knights, for you will be baptized, and repair all the damage you have done by the running of your blood; and this terrible fire will light in you the health-giving law of the Holy Spirit, who set the apostles aflame with tongues of fire” (Savage and Watson 274). It is interesting that, unlike Margaret, Katherine does not take on the baptizing role, but leaves the sacerdotal work to the efficacy of the blood itself and to the Holy Spirit.

<sup>109</sup> Edsman 166. And the “colonne de feu” likewise has typological associations with the pillars of smoke and fire that accompanied the Israelites in their Exodus, another type for Baptism, which featured as well in *Elene*.

<sup>110</sup> It may be relevant to remember that virginity was also a figure for orthodox fidelity to the true God, just as “whoring” was an image of heretical infidelity. For Ælfric, for example, the Church is a mother and a virgin, “æfre unwemmed” (forever undefiled), as long as she remains free of heresy and idolatry; see Upchurch 22 and notes 137-38. But *SM* seems to channel the

episode in the direction of physical chastity, supporting the *Sponsa Christi* motif, which the fire helps Margaret preserve.

<sup>111</sup> And we have already seen, within Margaret's passion, the binding of the black demon by the litanic invocation of the name of God.

<sup>112</sup> The Sarum Missal advises that if the priest "finds the layman has baptized discreetly and in the required manner and used completely the form of the words of baptism above in his own language, let him approve what has been done and not rebaptize him" (as translated in Fisher 176).

<sup>113</sup> See Romans 3:14 and Galatians 3:27.

<sup>114</sup> After Prayer 11, the dove will likewise promise: "Cum nu, for ich kepe þe, brud, to þi brudgume" (48 ll.28-29) [Come now, for I am waiting for you, bride to your bridegroom"].

<sup>115</sup> Daniélou 49ff. offers references to Ambrose, Cyril, Gregory of Nyssa, and Theodore of Mopsuestia on the shining brightness associated with the baptismal garment.

<sup>116</sup> Edsman 190.

<sup>117</sup> Edsman 197.

<sup>118</sup> Edsman 198.

<sup>119</sup> Usener takes the Margaret/Pearl connection in another direction, hypothesizing (p. 11, 20) that Marina, Pelagia and Margareta, since their names connect them to the sea, are all Christian duplicates of and antidotes to, the pagan sea-born goddess of love, Aphrodite, but this was sharply criticized by Delehayé, 197-207.

<sup>120</sup> In some Eastern baptismal liturgies, for instance in a Coptic rite, crowns are given to the newly baptized after a prayer for the paraclete. One example of an association between confirmation and a crown, may be seen in Hugh of Saint Victor's comments on this sacrament: "after the holy anointing his head is covered with a holy veil, that he may understand that he possesses the diadem of the kingdom and sacerdotal dignity" (quoted in Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals*, 141). The use of the crown in the *Sponsa Christi* motif is supported by lines from the Canticle of Canticles 4:8 where we find, "Come from Libanus, my spouse, come from Libanus, come: thou shalt be crowned from the top of Amana." And in this vein, the ME poem *Pearl*, where pearl symbolism is certainly linked to the *Sponsa Christi* motif, also includes an episode in which all of the Lamb's brides are crowned in Section XIX, 1, ll. 9-10: "And coronde wern alle of the same fasoun,/ Depaynt in perles and wedes white" (Dunn and Byrnes 372). In Marie Borroff's translation of the ME: "As she was crowned, so crowned were they; /Adorned with pearls in garments white" (28). However, the main meaning of the crown as the reward of martyrs derives from several very clear scriptural statements on the subject. "Esto fidelis usque ad mortem, et dabo tibi coronam vitae" (Rev. 2: 10) [Be thou faithful unto death: and I will give thee the crown of life]; also James 1:12, "Beatus vir, qui suffert tentationem, quia, cum probatus fuerit, accipiet coronam vitae, quam repromisit Deus diligentibus se" [Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for, when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life which God hath promised to them that love him]. Another famous martyrdom passage is 2 Tim. 4:8, where Paul anticipates the reward for his sacrifice, "in reliquo reposita est mihi iustitiae corona quam reddet mihi Dominus in illa die iustus iudex" [As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day].

<sup>121</sup> Finn writes of the post-baptismal practices common after the late fourth century: "As the newly baptized came up out of the baptismal pool, they prayed the Lord's Prayer, sent prayers of intercession heavenward, vested in white garments, received lighted candles, and

sometimes were crowned with garlands. They processed to the Eucharist, often chanting Psalm 22(23)...” (16).

<sup>122</sup> These words from the canon that prescribe the memorial action are from Lk 22:19b. I am not suggesting that the full theological weight of the *anamnesis* enacted by the Eucharist is evoked here; actions done in memory of Margaret will not serve to “render present” her sacrifice each time they are performed. But these memorial actions will certainly ensure the continued memory and power of her witness.

<sup>123</sup> Textual traditions vary as to whether it was Margaret’s head or body or soul that was so elevated by the angels. See Clayton and Magennis 14.

<sup>124</sup> On this ascension of the soul as a baptismal motif related to the baptism of fire, see Edsman 171, where he translates another hymn by Ephrem: “ O frères, ouvrez vos sens et contemplez/ la colonne, cachée dans l’air,/ dont la base repose sur les eaux/ (et qui atteint) la porte des hauteurs,/ comme l’échelle que Jacob vit./ Sur elle la lumière est descendue au baptême/ et l’âme est montée au ciel,/ afin que nous soyons réunis dans un amour.”

<sup>125</sup> That the pearl is a widely variable symbol has been discussed by Schofield, who lists several pages worth of pearl associations (634-8), to support his assertion that the pearl is “protean in symbolism”(638). Likewise, Earl writes, “When working with a set tradition as large and amorphous as medieval pearl symbolism, we must carefully maintain perspective” . Earl would have readers focus attention on “only those associations which the poet (of *Pearl*) openly and unambiguously establishes with the pearl” (“Saint Margaret” 2). I suggest that in the versions of Margaret’s legend studied here, baptismal associations (and the related constellations of Eucharistic and bridal motifs) with the pearl, “Margaret,” while not perhaps “openly” established by the authors, are too pervasively present to be ignored. On the use of the pearl as a Eucharistic symbol in the ME poem *Pearl*, see the recent studies of Garrison and Phillips.

<sup>126</sup> Edsman 191.

<sup>127</sup> Edsman 198-99. The Ethiopians are referenced in relation to the eunuch of Acts 8. Recall that the black demon is referred to as an Ethiopian in some versions of the Margaret legend.

<sup>128</sup> Clayton and Magennis (6) do not speculate about when the original Greek passio might have been composed, but imply it was considerably earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century *Passio a Theotimo*, the earliest extant Greek text known so far (BHG 1165).

<sup>129</sup> As Maud McInerny suggests, “the name Margaret, which means pearl in Greek, may have been attached to the saint because it filled some demand of the hagiographical narrative” (22). Likewise, Earl, “Typology,” discusses the extent to which saints’ lives and legends were at times invented wholesale for the essentially liturgical and monastic use they served (37). Margaret, “the pearl,” or even Marina, “of the sea,” could be a figure created to embody the secret rites of Christian initiation that an individual would pass through as an adult at the time in which her narrative is set. In that distant time, when professing Christ could mean death, catechumens were secretly instructed and the most sacred tenets of the faith (later known as the *arcana*/ discipline of the secret, cf. note 98 above) given only to those who had progressed for months (or even years) through their catechumenate. Tertullian discusses the care with which the final rites of baptism should be guarded -- not offered rashly to those not fully prepared -- in *De Baptismo* chapter 19 using the injunction from Matthew 7:6 that warns against casting *pearls* before swine to make his point. Perhaps of significance as well, the immediately preceding chapter 18 concludes with a discussion of who is the proper minister for baptism, recognizing the

possibility that a lay person might have to perform the rite in certain circumstances, but warning against letting a woman do so: “But the impudence of that woman who assumed the right to teach is evidently not going to arrogate to her the right to baptize as well—unless perhaps some new serpent appears, like that original one, so that as that woman abolished baptism, some other of her own authority confer it.” Tertullian goes on to warn specifically against the example of Thecla from what he calls the falsely named Acts of Paul. Could the whole story of Margaret have been invented as a meditation on and answer to such patristic musings on the subjects of the arcana and the rites of baptism?

<sup>130</sup> In the *passio* the Holy Spirit is not mentioned in association with the fire, but the ME author makes the identification that he clearly feels the Latin text suggests.

<sup>131</sup> I use “monastic” here to question the likelihood that serious patristic scholarship is being undertaken in the hours of *lectio* in this particular anchoritic circle. On the “monastic” aspect of anchoritic life in terms of its devotional practice, see Ackerman who writes, “In fact, the anchoress’s whole commitment to strictly religious exercises could scarcely have occupied much less than five hours and perhaps more on days when she went to confession or held council with her advisors. When spelled out in detail, the program of worship is likely to seem more exacting, more time-consuming, and even more in accord with monastic custom...”(743).

<sup>132</sup> Annie Sutherland explores the influence of the daily liturgy on anchoress Julian of Norwich’s mystical life, noting that the powerful liturgies of Holy Week are often echoed in her writing (91).

<sup>133</sup> Throughout the legend in both the *passio* and *SM*, the pagan idols are described as “deaf and dumb.”

<sup>134</sup> Cramer’s study of baptism includes a beautiful epitaph for an unbaptized child from fifth-century Gaul which witnesses to the deep anguish his parents felt that although they had “intended to bury him in the holy baptismal font,” death had snatched him before he could die with Christ in baptism (131). Cramer argues forcefully that concern for the souls of children and a strongly intuited sense of their native innocence is a theme in the writings of Gregory the Great and in the contemporary prayers of the Masses of the Innocents (132-3), which could explain popular expressions of the hope, such as the epitaph captures, that the mercy of God might operate over and against ecclesiastical authority with its insistence upon the unredeemed fate of unbaptized children. The popularity of the Margaret legend as an aid in childbirth might be another such expression of hope.

<sup>135</sup> I have so far located two examples of later medieval prayers related to Saint Margaret which specifically reference baptism. In her article on the degree to which popular attachment to the dragon episode was in conflict with authoritative efforts to suppress this sensational element, Wendy Larson offers a medieval French prayer to illustrate “the way in which a mother might turn to the saint for assistance”(97); but this prayer does not in fact mention the dragon at all. Rather it implores Saint Margaret, “make my child come out/ safe and sound, so I can see him/ baptized joyously” (qtd. in Larson 98). Likewise in the 14<sup>th</sup> century Northern Italian manuscript Egerton 877, folio 12 preserves a unique Latin prayer appended to this version of Margaret’s legend – the manuscript a *libellus* that was apparently brought to women in childbirth and which bears evidence of having been repeatedly kissed on this very page. Above an image of a woman who has just given birth, flanked by two other women, the prayer reads: ‘Come forth infant, Christ summons you in the name of the Son. Come forth infant, Christ guides you in the name of the Holy Spirit. Come forth infant, Christ guides you and invites you to baptism, [he] who

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suffered for you and from his side produced the water of baptism, and made baptism red by his blood. Elizabeth bore John, Anna bore Mary, the Virgin Mary bore Christ the saviour of the world, who will free you [name] from birth and your pains, Amen. If you are male or female, living or dead, come forth, for Christ summons you, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. The Father is alpha and omega, the Son is life, the Holy Spirit is medicine. Thanks be to God.’ (As translated by John Lowden for his lecture “Treasures known and unknown at the British Library,” at the British Library website.) As Lowden muses about this page, “And if the worst happened and their child was stillborn, how many women prayed in anguish, with the help of this little book, that their labour might still end safely?”

## Conclusion

All three of the works studied here have their origins in monastic settings and presumably saw use behind monastery walls or in the close confines of the anchor house: *The Book of Nunnaminster* perhaps compiled by a Benedictine nun for *lectio* within her own community, *Elene* composed by Cynewulf purportedly as both product of and material for *lectio*, the *Passio S. Margaretae*, the source text for *Seinte Margarete*, probably crafted for inclusion in a legendary, and its ME descendent, while ostensibly accessible to mixed audiences, certainly later passed from one anchoress to another within the unique religious milieu for which it and its manuscript companions were collected. The solitary reader who sat at one time with each of these texts was attuned, we may imagine, to the power of the prayers that are so central to each, and lingered over these very prayers which have in modern readings received too little attention. Having now attempted in some measure to redress this oversight, what have we been able to recover of that devotional and literary worldview; and what have we seen beyond it? In *The Book of Nunnaminster*, prayers are more than central to the meaning – they are constitutive of it. This dialogic text, composed of “God’s word” in the Passion lections, responded to by the pray-er’s thematically arranged devotions, memorializes the monastic reading habit of *lectio divina*, making its inner processes “visible” to us. By paying careful attention to the scriptural sources of the prayers and to the *compilatio* of the collection we are able to see the apian motion of the mind that ranges over the scriptural fields to cull and collect and order responsive meditations. These prayers are deeply felt reflections that link the pray-er’s own bodily life to the physical experiences of the incarnate God and to the sacramental life of her ecclesial community, both immediate and eternal: the Body of Christ. The prayer

collection's thematic arrangement, its deployment of particular prayer forms (litany, collect, and lorica), and its structural borrowings from the liturgies associated with healing, also aspire, through "liturgical reading," to bring the solitary reader at her *lectio* into communion with that Body of Christ. What social exigencies, perhaps specific to a women's religious community, might have necessitated or fostered such a collection?

In *Elene* we have seen both framing authorial prayer and characters at prayer within the narrative action of the poem. At both narratological levels, in a work widely acknowledged to be about interpretation and conversion, prayer is clearly conceived of as a necessary element of right reading. Cynewulf's epilogue explicitly recounts the poet's own prayerful reading process that enabled him to write the poem. Judas's long prayer at the heart of the narrative proper represents the process of *lectio* – a reading method that seeks Christ -- which will enable him to find the cross, itself a figure for the scriptures, and find Christ, as a convert. At the same time the prayer, through its scriptural allusions, form and purported language – Hebrew -- constructs Judas as a still-recognizably Jewish figure, thereby supporting the story's basic insistence on the necessity of Jewish modes of interpretation – here conceived of as the literalism so widely associated with Jews in the medieval imagination and so essential to proper *lectio*. But if Jewish modes of reading will always be important for the Church, how will that "spectral" and potentially disruptive Jewish presence be contained or controlled? As the prayers spoken by these "converting" Jews become increasingly liturgical, the poem suggests a solution to this problem: liturgy, or Church authorized reading, is the safe vessel for the literal and spiritual readings of scripture.

In *Seinte Margarete* we have a text that is in a sense both a collection of prayers and a narrative. Unlike *Elene*, which is dominated by one long central prayer, this *passio* is structured

around the twelve prayers that are essential to its meaning as a figural narrative. While later versions of the Margaret legend will remove some or all of these prayers, the ME *Seinte Margarete* retains them and therefore also retains the typological layer of meaning present in its source text, where Margaret's *passio* is conceived of as a meditation on the sacraments of initiation, especially baptism. Margaret's prayers are richly scriptural and she is represented as using them to interpret or read her own situation in terms of *Imitatio Christi*: she suffers as Christ did, praying the same psalms that were on his lips. She re-configures, through her scriptural prayers, her instruments of torture into baptisms of blood, fire, and water, ultimately even pronouncing the liturgical formula of baptism over herself, thereby insuring that her death is in fact a birth into eternal life with Christ. For anchoritic readers who had been instructed that "to rede is gode bone," *Seinte Margarete*'s protagonist demonstrates the fruits of *lectio* in her scripturally allusive prayers and in her dialogic exchange with the Holy Dove. At the same time she offers a powerful model of "liturgical reading"; when Margaret reads the structures and promise of the baptismal liturgies into her story, she pulls the drama of an individual life into the broader pageant of salvation history. This woman's liturgical power and the promise of re-birth through baptism that her story rehearses may account for some of Margaret's popularity as an intercessor at childbirth, a role which takes her far beyond the cloister in which her story first took shape.

The tension and interplay between *lectio* and liturgical reading is evident in all three works and ever present in a devotional, literary and theological context where prayer and reading are so inextricably bound. In Chapter One I suggested that prayer itself, from the believer's point of view, is necessarily dialogic. Similarly, prayerful reading is in some sense never completely solitary, and, beyond the dialogic, is also a communal endeavor. If your prayer, both individual

and corporate, depends to a large extent on formal or even formulaic re-combinations of texts from a shared corpus of sacred literature, the solitary pray-er and reader in a cell or anchor house at *lectio* is always, in some sense, also engaged in “liturgical reading,” seeking to place him or herself into the on-going narrative described by those scriptures and pursuing union with those others, both living and dead, who pray them as well.

What of prayers in texts that are not monastic in origin nor intended for private prayerful use, but speak rather to wider audiences who might very well engage them in groups? When I began this work, as my Introduction suggested, I had intended to cover more ground, pursuing evidence of *lectio* in the N-Town mystery plays, exploring the “liturgical reading” revealed in a set of Marian Miracles in the South English Legendary, and pondering what Chaucer is “doing” with the unique register of prayer in the openings and closings of so many of the *Canterbury Tales* and in his own authorial prayers of the “Retractions” and the colophon to *Troilus and Criseyde*. I look forward to engaging these works where I believe that the study of their embedded and framing prayers will offer fresh perspectives on the works themselves and on literary and devotional cultures in which they were produced.

The mystery plays are replete with prayer; focusing on one of the cycles, N-Town, we can see there liturgical set pieces such as the *Sanctus*, *Gloria*, and the *Nunc dimittis*. It will be significant for my purposes to ask not only which liturgical and devotional sources are exploited by the dramatists, but which, just as tellingly, are ignored; N-Town includes a dramatization of the Last Supper, for instance, but does not include the words of institution from the Anaphora. The N-Town cycle incorporates as well prayers from popular devotions including “Elevation Prayers” and “The Seven Last Words,” as well as dialogue composed of hymns, like the “Planctus Mariae,” and carols. Other moments in the N-Town cycle that do not immediately

“read” as known prayer texts become more recognizably related to prayer when their relationships to *lectio* are explored. Within the patriarch plays (involving for instance Noah, Abraham, Moses), long prayer speeches that rehearse scriptural history may be viewed as instances of reading the community’s past through prayer. The mystery plays were popularly understood, much like images in Gregory the Great’s terms, as “books for the unlearned.”<sup>1</sup> Just as in other types of reading, we might expect, then, to find that prayer is central to unlocking the meanings of these texts.

The group of Marian miracles inserted into some manuscripts of the South English Legendary include a number of narratives in which the memorization of a few simple words of liturgical prayer by an otherwise illiterate monk or knight is found to be a supremely efficacious alternative to learning the whole Office or to scholarly study.<sup>2</sup> As Vitz’s notion of “liturgicity” suggests, elements of liturgy might be appropriated with the intention of “borrowing” their effects for extra-liturgical use. If the liturgy itself is a text to be read, the verbal and non-verbal signs and symbols that constitute it -- prayers, hymns, hand gestures and holy water -- can be employed beyond the walls of the church to express some of the same meanings they carry within its confines. The concept of “liturgical reading” might be said to include a pervasive confidence that the performance of certain prescribed devotional forms effects at least some of the results obtained by monks at their *lectio* or the literate presiders at “official” liturgies. What appears at first to be a magical use of prayer may be understood quite differently when these practices are viewed within the framing nexus of prayerful reading strategies. Like the prayer posture of Saint Dominic, described in Chapter One, that invites a pray-er to mimic reading by holding his hands before him as if they are a book, certain liturgical prayer artifacts in popular use may be narratologically figured as substitutes employed by the unlettered for the monastic

and clerical habits of prayerful reading through which selves are constructed, texts interpreted and the world illumined.

Finally, while the subject of prayer in Chaucer's oeuvre has indeed already attracted scholarly attention, as my Introduction suggested, the use of this rich register of speech when employed by masters such as Dante and Chaucer merits further study.<sup>3</sup> While many of the tales, for instance, the Rime Royal tales, would undoubtedly yield further insights to an inquiry focused on their embedded prayer texts, I am particularly interested in the many framing prayers that begin and end twenty-five of the *Canterbury Tales* and in Chaucer's own authorial prayers: the colophon to *Troilus and Criseyde* and the "Retractions" which conclude *The Canterbury Tales*. These closing prayers could be examined in relation to the opening and closing prayers of Chaucer's many narrators, to the broader context of such authorial prayers, and to the traditions of prayerful reading I have studied here. By Chaucer's time *lectio divina* and "liturgical reading" are not the only prayerful reading practices available to late medieval readers. These habits, once narrowly limited to monastic circles, have given way to more broadly defined *lectio spiritualis* and to the *lectio scholastica* of the Schoolmen. And of course there are many other reading strategies, not exclusively spiritual, at play in the increasingly literate society. By the time Chaucer concludes *The Canterbury Tales* with the plea for prayer of his "Retractions," he represents a spiritual approach to the text as one among many strategies of reading, one which he may indeed parody at times or represent as degenerate, but which clearly still holds powerful attractions beyond the walls of the monastery for newly literate and even illiterate classes of people.

Chaucer's concluding prayer to *Troilus and Criseyde*, is a translation of a Trinitarian prayer from the *Paradiso*, praising God who is "Uncircumscrip, and al maist circumscribe."<sup>4</sup> As

in Dante's *Padre Nostro*, the unbounded God invoked by these great poets is beyond the limits, etymologically, of writing itself: "non circoscritto" and "uncircumscribed." And yet, the anonymous author of the Parisian *La Nativité* composes prayer for his drama to say something about the nature of that un-writable God. Cep prays his own version of the Lord's Prayer, and in the scheme of the whole play, this prayer to his heavenly Father suggests a meditation on the quality of fatherhood that can be attached to so omnipotent a Being.<sup>5</sup> Clearly medieval authors, both known and anonymous, attempted to traverse the immense distance between God and man through the prayers collected into, embedded within and framing their texts; such profound ambition invites serious study.

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<sup>1</sup> Meg Twycross reviews this Gregorian concept as it applies to the drama

<sup>2</sup> Even the "Hail Mary" is, of course, a scriptural prayer whose popularity first derived from its use in the Little Office of the Virgin Mary. See Thurston 110-12.

<sup>3</sup> The literature on Chaucer's use of prayer is quite extensive, but the subject is far from exhausted. For some of the most recent work in this area see the collection, *Chaucer and Religion*, edited by Helen Phillips, in which Helen Cooper (xi-xv) offers a useful brief overview of the religious climate during Chaucer's lifetime; Sherry Reames (81-96) addresses prayers within some of the Canterbury Tales and includes extensive bibliography on this topic.

<sup>4</sup> *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book V, l.1865.

<sup>5</sup> See Gallagher 188-89.

## Appendix

Reference numbers for the prayers from *The Book of Nunnaminster* as itemized in Birch's edition, with manuscript and print edition page numbers. With the exception of titles given in brackets, titles of prayers are the rubrics in the manuscript :

Reference Number	Prayer Title	Begins on manuscript folio...	Begins on Birch's edition page...
1	Incipit oratio Sancti Gregorii Papae urbis Romae	16b	58
2	Incipit oratio Sancti Augustini in sanctis sollempnitatibus	18b	61
3	De Angelorum conditione	19a	61
4	Laus Dei omnipotentis	19b	62
5	Oratio de natale domini	20a	62
6	De natale domini	20b	63
7	In natale domini	21a	63
8	De cibo	21a	64
9	De Circumcisione	21b	64
10	De Epiphania	21b	64
11	De Baptismo	22a	65
12	De Quadragesimo	22a	65
13	De ambitione domini	22b	65
14	De aqua in uinum conuersa	22b	66
15	De congregatione apostolorum	23a	67
16	De v. panibus	23b	67
17	Oratio de lacrimis domini	23b	67
18	Oratio in caena domini	24a	67
19	Item oratio in caena Domini	24a	68
20	De flectu genium	24b	68
21	De osculo Judae	25a	69
22	De auriculo absciso	25a	69
23	De iudicio presidis	25b	70
24	De diuersis passionibus domini	25b	70
25	De spinea corona domini	26a	70
26	De inrisione domini	26a	71
27	De cruce domini	26b	71
28	De ueste eiusdem	26b	71
29	Oratio de collo	27a	72
30	De brachis [sic] et manibus	27a	72
31	De vii donis Spiritus Sancti	27b	73
32	Item de passione crucis	27b	73
33	De tenebris	28a	74
34	De latrine	28b	74
35	De aceto et felle	28b	75
36	Tradidit spiritum	29a	75
37	De luminibus clausis	29b	76

38	De naribus	29b	76
39	De auribus	30a	76
40	De latere domini	30a	77
41	De sepulchro	30b	77
42	Ad inferos	30b	78
43	De rusurrectione domini	31a	78
44	Item de rusurrectione	31a	79
45	De paenitentiae Petri	31b	79
46	De ascensione domini	32a	79
47	De Pentecosten	32a	80
48	De iudicio futuro	32b	80
49	[Sacramental Hymn]	33a	81
50	Oratio [metrica]	33b	83
51	Sancta oratio	33b	84
52	[Prayer of Confession]	34a	84
53	Item oratio	34b	85
54	Oratio	35a	86
55	Oratio ad Sanctum Michaellem	35b	87
56	Oratio ad Sanctam Mariam	36a	88
57	Oratio ad Sanctum Johannem Baptistam	36a	88
58	Sequitur oratio	36b	88
59	[Oratio]	36b	89
60	[Oratio]	37a	89
61	[Oratio]	37a	89
62	Contra uenenum	37a	90
63	Hanc luricam Lodgen...	37b	91
64	Pro dolore oculorum	40b	96
65	[Incantatio quaedam] (Caput Christi...)	40b	96
66	[Boundaries of the Property which Queen Ealswið...]	40b	96
67	[Formula of confession]	41	97
68	[Formula of absolution]	41	97
69	[Oratio]	41	97

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