FILIUS GRATIAE:

THE VENERABLE BEDE'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE

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FILIUS DEI: THE VENERABLE BEDE'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE

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PREFACE

Although it bears my name, this dissertation would not have been possible without encouragement, prayers, and even sacrifice of countless others. First and foremost is my wife, Heather, who oftentimes had to encourage me to press on throughout my doctoral studies and especially during the dissertation process, and whose labors afforded me the time and opportunity to write. Also, many thanks must be given to my parents who both supported me financially throughout my studies and instilled in me a love for learning and the importance of hard work. Furthermore, I am thankful for those in my church family at Immanuel Baptist in Danville, Kentucky—the Ashcrafts, the Botillers, the Hursts, the Ingrams, the Mikels, Henry H. F, the Wilsons, and many others—whose support made this thesis possible. Also, I am thankful for the Smiths and their friendship over the years.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In his work *Medieval Wisdom for Modern Christians*, historian Chris Armstrong remarks on the common Protestant suspicion of any spirituality stemming from the Middle Ages:

> Many modern Protestants still believe they can be faithful to their Reformation heritage only by rejecting the medieval heritage They perceive medieval faith as not just catholic, but Roman Catholic (or in its Eastern forms, Eastern Orthodox) and thus hyper-sacramental, semi-Pelagian, institutional, nominal. For these folks . . . to "get medieval" is to do violence. It is to do violence both to the Reformation doctrinal heritage of salvation by faith and to the revivalist spiritual heritage of direct, unmediated access to God in Christ.[1]

The Middle Ages are often associated with the cementation of tradition as an equal authority to scripture, the growth of monasticism, the influence of mysticism, and, in the words of Martin Luther, "consecrated salt, water, vigils, masses, and whatever other tomfoolery like this you can name."[2] As a result, the medieval world can seem foreign to evangelical Protestants. Although the church fathers have received considerable attention from evangelical scholars in the last two decades, the Middle Ages seem neglected in comparison. Can Evangelicals find any common ground with those writing in the time between the early church and the Reformation, or between Augustine and Luther?[3] Despite the doctrines and practices that emerged during this time that may cause evangelicals to recoil, a closer look does reveal that the Spirit of God *was* at work in his

[1] Chris R. Armstrong, *Medieval Wisdom for Modern Christians: Finding Authentic Faith in a Modern Age* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 5.

[2] Martin Luther, *Concerning the Letter and the Spirit*, in *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull and William Russell, 3rd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 65.

[3] Or, as Armstrong sardonically states the dilemma, the time between Constantine and Luther, John Wesley, and Billy Graham (*Medieval Wisdom for Modern Christians*, 5).

people during this often-misunderstood period. By exploring the thought of one early medieval scholar, theologian, and exegete, the Venerable Bede (c. 672–735), this dissertation demonstrates that studying this era can yield "medieval wisdom."

In his lifetime, Bede produced an extraordinary literary output that the monastic vocation afforded him. Writing from what was geographically regarded as the end of the known world, this scholar-monk's impressive corpus ranged from biblical commentaries of both the Old and New Testaments, scientific works on grammar, methods of dating, poetic meter, the nature of the cosmos, and finally to his historical and hagiographical works for which he is best known. This dissertation explores one facet of his theology that, considering Britain was the birthplace of the infamous Pelagius (c. 350–425), was personal for Bede: his theology of grace. Grace itself is a broad category that touches upon several other aspects of theology, and this dissertation investigates how Bede's view on grace relates to those additional interconnected themes found in his writings. For example, how does Bede's views on grace relate to his anthropology and harmartiology? In other words, to what extent did Adam's sin in Genesis 3 affect subsequent humanity? What is the nature of humanity's corruption brought about by the fall? Do humans have free will, or was it lost as a result of sin? Similarly, how does Bede's understanding of grace correspond to his soteriology and pneumatology? Given humanity's sinful condition, what role does grace play in restoring humanity into a right relationship with God? Does God elect or predestine those whom he will ultimately save? Can sinners merit favor with God? What is the relationship between grace and human effort? Relatedly, what role does the Holy Spirit play in salvation?

Undoubtedly, no other figure in the history of the Western church looms larger over discussions of the doctrines of grace than the "doctor of grace" himself, Augustine. Although Pelagius once held admiration for Augustine, around 405 his sentiments quickly changed upon encountering the famous line from the *Confessions*: *Da quod iubes*

et iube quod uis.[4] For Augustine, keeping God's commandments required God's unmerited grace, and he predicated this view upon his understanding of human nature after the fall as *non posse non peccare*. On this point, Augustine's understanding of grace and the human condition "struck at the whole basis of moral theology as Pelagius understood it" since he seemed to destroy any incentive for good works.[5] The ensuing debates not only consumed an inordinate amount of Augustine's time up to the end of his life, they also have continued to influence theological discussions in the West from the fifth century to the present.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated Bede's own indebtedness to Augustine. Owing to the efforts of Benedict Biscop (c. 628–689), Bede's predecessor and the founder of his monastery, Bede inherited the largest library in Anglo-Saxon England.[6] Over at least six journeys to Rome, Biscop secured a wide array of volumes for the library at Wearthmouth-Jarrow, a collection that his successor Ceolfrith (c. 642–716) managed to double.[7] Consequently, Bede not only had access to complete copies of the Bible but an impressive array of church fathers at his disposal. Given Augustine's influence, it is no surprise that Bede had first-hand knowledge of a sizable amount of Augustine's works, perhaps as many as fifty.[8] Throughout his own writings, Bede either

[4] Cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, 10.29.40. For more on Pelagius' reaction see B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, vol. 2 (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1998), 3.

[5] Gerald Bonner, "Pelagianism and Augustine," in *Church and Faith in the Patristic Tradition: Augustine, Pelagianism, and Early Christian Northumbria* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1996), 35.

[6] Michael Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 37. For a study on Biscop, see Eric Fletcher's 1981 Jarrow Lecture, "Benedict Biscop," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol. 1 (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994), 539–554, and Patrick Wormald, "Bede and Benedict Biscop," in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*. ed. Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976) 141–169.

[7] Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 35. For a more recent discussion, see also Rosalind Love, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," in *The History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 1, ed. R Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[8] See the discussion in Love, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 624–625. Also, below, 25–31.

made explicit references to the bishop of Hippo, or gave clues to his unmistakable influence. According to Alan Thacker, Bede in a sense saw himself as "another Augustine," and in particular he argues for Augustine's influence on Bede's exegesis.[9] Although he inherited the standard fourfold division of the senses of scripture (literal, anagogical, allegorical, and tropological), Bede followed Augustine more than Gregory the Great (540–604) in his emphasis on the literal meaning of a text.[10] Bede constantly referenced Augustine's greatness, but, as with the other church fathers, could also criticize his mentor in times of disagreement.[11]

Given the pervasive influence of Augustine's theology of grace on the Western church and its impact on Bede in particular, his views will serve as a standard by which to compare Bede's own views on the subject. Bede himself lamented the presence of Pelagianism on his island, and save for Arianism it was the heresy he mentioned more than any other. Although Bede clearly condemned Pelagius, how close did he come to Augustine's understanding on the issues surrounding the doctrines of grace? For example, John Cassian of Marseilles (c. 360–435), a contemporary of Augustine, condemned Pelagius but did not follow Augustine completely in his understanding of grace and free will. Consequently, Cassian's critiques of Augustine's "excesses" earned for himself the oft-used title, "Semi-Pelagian."[12] Now, Bede cited both Augustine and Cassian as authorities. Bede frequently made his aversion to Pelagianism known, but less studied are the details of his own thinking on grace, the freedom of the will, and its

[9] Alan Thacker, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo: History and Figure in Sacred Text* (Jarrow, UK: St. Paul's Church, 2005), 32.

[10] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo*, 32–33.

[11] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo*, 13.

[12] See James Wetzel, "Snares of Truth: Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), 124. For a discussion on the history and usefulness of the term "Semi-Pelagian," see Donato Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship Between Grace and Free Will in the Discussions of Augustine with the So-Called Semipelagians* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 5–9.

related subjects. Would Bede have agreed with Gerald Bonner's assessment that Augustine's doctrine of grace and predestination "remains a terrible one and more likely to arouse our awe than enlist our sympathy"?[13] If not, how close did Bede come to an Augustinian position on these matters? This dissertation examines these areas of Bede's thought and concludes that Bede's views on grace can be rightly understood as Augustinian: humanity is hopelessly corrupted by the fall, and only through God's gracious election and the bestowal of good gifts to his elect could one hope to escape judgment and receive eternal life.

History of Research

Bedan researcher Gerald Bonner suggests that "Bede's reputation has never stood higher than at present, not simply as a scholar, or even as a canonised saint, but as a human being, at once modest and of heroic nature, who took advantage of the uniquely favourable circumstances in which he found himself."[14] The growing amount of secondary literature on Bede in the last fifty years—not to mention that of previously untranslated material—confirms Bonner's assessment.

Given the popularity of his *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, it comes as little surprise that the majority of Bedan scholarship focuses on this seminal work and Bede's role as a historian. This reality, however, misrepresents Bede's own view of the writing of history. For Bede, history was not intended as an end in and of itself. On the contrary, history served to "advance through teaching and exegesis the work of the Church on earth."[15]

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[13] Gerald Bonner, *Saint Augustine of Hippo: His Life and Controversies* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 392.

[14] Gerald Bonner, "Bede and His Legacy," in *Church and Faith in the Patristic Tradition: Augustine, Pelagianism, and Early Christian Northumbria* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1996), 221–222.

[15] Alan Thacker, "Bede and History," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 188.

Although Bede is primarily remembered for his *Ecclesiastical History*, the number of his writings devoted to theology and the exegesis of scripture far exceeded his historical works. Bede himself remarked that his life was spent "applying myself entirely to the study of the Scriptures."[16] Regrettably, as Bedan biographer Peter Hunter Blair notes, Bede's biblical commentaries "are not nowadays read save by those concerned with his theology or with tracing the different sources which he used and the particular methods he employed."[17] By his own reckoning, Bede did not see himself as an original thinker. Rather, explains Bonner:

> Bede saw his task as the transmission of the teachings of the great theologians of an earlier age . . . It is, of course, true that he put the stamp of his own personality on his works, but this was by accident, not by design. Bede's desire was to follow in the steps of the Fathers of the Church, whose teaching he sought to transmit to those unable—or too lazy—to read the works on which he drew first hand.[18]

That Bede understood his task as, in the words of Bonner, "a kind of theological middle-man" and a "populariser" rather than a pioneering theologian in his own right might explain the lack of scholarly attention given to him.[19] With recent translations of several of his theological and exegetical works, however, Bede's contribution to theology and exegesis is becoming an important, growing aspect of Bedan scholarship. Nevertheless, as Blair points out:

> Whatever importance different ages have attached to the different facets of Bede's intellectual achievement . . . [Bede] himself leaves no doubt that he would have supposed all his labours to have been in vain, if they had not born fruit in the daily lives of ordinary men and women.[20]

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[16] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 293. Subsequent references to this work will include the book and chapter number followed by the page number of the modern edition.

[17] Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 298.

[18] Bonner, "Bede and His Legacy," 5.

[19] Bonner, "Bede and His Legacy," 5.

[20] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 299.

Hopefully, this dissertation demonstrates the usefulness of studying Bede and the value of his thought for daily living.

T. A. Carroll's 1946 work *The Venerable Bede: His Spiritual Teachings* provides one of the earliest interactions with Bede's theology of grace and argued that Bede moved in a more Gregorian position.[21] The most substantial and recent treatment of Bede's theology of grace, however, is found in Aaron Kleist's dissertation and later monograph, *Striving with Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England*.[22] After outlining the views of both Augustine and Gregory the Great on grace and free will, Kleist surveys a host of Anglo-Saxon authors beginning with Bede and moving chronologically to Alfred the Great, Lantfred of Winchester, Wulfstan the Homilist, and Ælfric of Enysham. As in this dissertation, Kleist uses Augustine as a benchmark by which to judge later Anglo-Saxon writers:

> On the subject of free will, if any body of thought may be seen as the benchmark against which the doctrine of these men may be measured, it must be that which for the Second Council of Orange and thus (officially, at least) for the Catholic Church as a whole set the standard for orthodoxy in the Middle Ages: the theology of Augustine of Hippo.[23]

Kleist himself notes that "it is remarkable that so little scholarly attention has been paid to Bede's theology."[24] Like Carrol, Kleist argues that Bede's own thinking on grace shifted towards a more Gregorian direction that, while emphasizing the primacy of God's divine grace, leaves room for human effort. Although Bede underscored the absolute necessity of God's grace to overcome the effects of sin, according to Kleist, he also

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[21] T. A. Carroll, *The Venerable Bede: His Spiritual Teachings* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1946).

[22] Aaron Kleist, *Striving with Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008.

[23] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 3.

[24] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 60.

stressed that human beings must still cooperate with grace. Likewise, one may reject God's grace. Kleist also observes in Bede the recurring theme of merit:

> Throughout Bede's works . . . there runs a tension between grace and merit. Bound and blind through corruption of their desires, human beings must merit God's gratuitous enlightenment . . . Individuals must strive to deserve God's help in accomplishing good deeds, even though love, the source of righteous works, is the prevenient gift of God. Like Gregory, moreover, Bede teaches that God's initiative enables people to 'cooperate' with God. Like living stones, people should accept the grace they are given, and pray for further grace.[25]

Thus, Kleist notices a tension between the divine grace and human effort found in Bede. Kleist does attempt to survey Bede's corpus, at least works in which he finds significant discussion on the issue of grace, but given his broader goal of examining a host of Anglo-Saxon writers, his presentation of Bede's views is limited to just one chapter. This dissertation provides a more comprehensive look at this particular area of Bede's thought while pushing back on Kleist's assertion that Bede significantly deviated from Augustine's position.

The Life and Times of Bede: An Overview

Although not officially declared a Doctor of the Church until 1899, Bede had earned the title "Venerable" as early as the ninth century.[26] Even before his death in 735, Bede garnered a reputation as a gifted scholar and teacher. Following his death, Bede's popularity continued to grow beyond the shores of England to the Continent where he gained a wide reading. Notes Benedicta Ward,

> It was outside England that the fame of Bede flourished, returning to England with the foreign influence on the monastic revival, which also aroused a renewed instinct for the Anglo-Saxon past. Respect for Bede's writings had grown up abroad during his lifetime and all his works were copied and distributed abroad.[27]

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[25] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 82.

[26] J. Robert Wright, *A Companion to Bede: A Reader's Commentary on the Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 2008), 3.

[27] Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* ((Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 136.

Brought to Europe by missionaries such as Boniface (c. 675–754), Bede's works eventually gained an influential admirer in Alcuin of York (c. 735–804), a leading figure in the Carolingian Renaissance and prominent scholar in Charlemagne's court.[28] Apparently, Continental demand for Bede's works kept his successors busy with the task of copying in the scriptorium at Wearmouth-Jarrow. As George Hardin Brown remarks, Bede was "scarcely in his grave" when requests for his works overwhelmed the copyists at his monastery.[29] Additionally, the fact that the oldest surviving manuscripts of Bede's works are of Continental origin rather than English further speaks to Bede's popularity there.[30] Bede was, notes Bonner, "from first to last, a Christian writing for Christians," [31] and Bede would have been pleased to know Christians after him were using his works to understand the scriptures.

Apart from his incredible literary endeavors and high reputation, Bede lived—and this by the monk's own admission—an unremarkable life consisting primarily in the daily activities in and around the Northumbrian double-monastery of Wearmouth and Jarrow. Several valuable monographs and articles have attempted to piece together a life of the monk, but the scarcity of contemporary records poses challenges to producing a biography, as Ward acknowledges:

> He left no personal account of himself and no contemporary celebrated him with either a hagiography or a biography; he appears in no chronicles of the times, nor did he take any part in the government of the abbey or the church of which he was a member all his life; in no instance can his mark be detected in official documents of any kind.[32]

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[28] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 138.

[29] George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2009), 117.

[30] See Bonner, "Bede and His Legacy," 3.

[31] Bonner, "Bede and His Legacy," 5.

[32] Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 1–2.

Consequently, all major biographies of Bede agree that few particulars about Bede's life are known.[33]

A passage from his *Ecclesiastical History* offers the most substantial account of Bede's life:

> I was born in the territory of this monastery. When I was seven years of age I was, by the care of my kinsmen, put into the charge of the reverend Abbot Benedict and then of Ceolfrith, to be educated. From then on I have spent all my life in this monastery, applying myself entirely to the study of the Scriptures; and, amid the observance of the discipline of the Rule and the daily task of singing in the church, it has always been my delight to learn or to teach or to write. At the age of nineteen I was ordained deacon and at the age of thirty, priest, both times through the ministration of the reverend Bishop John on the direction of Abbot Ceolfrith. From the time I became a priest until the fifty-ninth year of my life I have made it my business, for my own benefit and that of my brothers, to make brief extracts from the works of the venerable fathers on the holy Scriptures, or to add notes of my own to clarify their sense and interpretation.[34]

Born near the monastery where he would spend his entire life, apart from documented journeys to Lindisfarne and York, it is doubtful Bede ever travelled far beyond those walls. Bede did not reveal any details about his family, although it is safe to assume that they were both English and Christian.[35] Biographers differ, however, on the social status of Bede's kinsmen. Considering their association with Benedict Biscop, Blair proposes that Bede's family was "probably from the ranks of the well-born."[36] Ward, on the contrary, suggests that Bede's lack of references to his family might imply his birth was

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[33] Earlier biographies include G. F. Browne's *The Venerable Bede: His Life and Writings* (Macmillan, 1919) and A. H. Thompson's *Bede, His Life, Times, and Writings* (Clarendon Press, 1935). Peter Hunter Blair's *The World of Bede* (Cambridge University Press, 1970) supplanted these prior works in his treatment on Bede's life and historical context, and although shorter in length than Blair's work, Benedicta Ward's *The Venerable Bede* (Morehouse Publishing, 1990) also evaluates Bede's life and contributions. More recently, George Hardin Brown's *A Companion to Bede* (Boydell Press, 2009) includes a short introductory chapter on Bede's life and historical context, and Scott DeGregorio's *The Cambridge Companion to Bede* (Cambridge University Press, 2010) features several articles from numerous scholars that reflects recent Bedean scholarship. Divided into three parts, the work covers Bede's life and context, his writings, and his influence.

[34] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24 (293).

[35] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 3.

[36] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 4.

not noble.[37] For Bede, however, his true family consisted of his fellow monks and abbots with whom he spent his days with in prayer and song, and for whom his writings reveal much affection.[38]

By the time Bede's kinsmen handed him over to Biscop's care at age seven, the monastery had only been in existence for about five years. With land donated to him by King Ecgfrith of Northumbria, Biscop erected the monastery at Wearmouth likely in 673, with the foundation of nearby Jarrow following shortly thereafter in 681.[39] The two monasteries were ruled by a single abbot—Biscop initially, then Ceolfrith beginning in 688—and like many oblates the monastic life provided the young Bede with the rare opportunity to receive an education. In addition to Latin and Greek, it is likely that Bede's own instruction would have included "Roman law, methods of combining chant and verse and other poetic arts, mathematical calculation, and the zodiac."[40] The efforts of Biscop and Ceolfrith's in building the library at Wearmouth-Jarrow provided Bede with not only the writings of the church fathers, but secular works as well.[41] Bede excelled at the monastic life, and his ordination as a deacon, which, says Blair, "was several years below the canonical age of 25 for ordination to the diaconate," may attest to the monk's giftedness.[42] Finally, and in the last major event recorded of his own life, at age thirty Bede received ordination into the priesthood by the ministration of the Bede's teacher and bishop, John of Hexam,

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[37] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 3.

[38] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 3.

[39] For an in-depth account of the founding of Wearmouth-Jarrow, see Blair, *The World of Bede*, 165–183.

[40] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 8.

[41] See Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 9.

[42] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 5.

Bede's Political and Ecclesiastical Context

Never holding any bishopric or administrative position in the monastery,[43] Bede's career, notes Gerald Bonner, "was what in modern terms would be called an academic one."[44] Likewise, Alan Thacker likens Bede's career to that of "a research professor" with a few students and "many well-connected helpers."[45] Beyond the normal routine that accompanied the monastic vocation, Bede's days would have been spent learning, teaching, and writing.[46] In addition to Bede's inherent intellectual gifts, several factors made his academic career possible. Bede lived during the "Golden Age of Northumbria," a narrow window of peace and stability between the re-establishment of Christianity that began during the Augustinian mission in 597 and the Viking attacks that terrorized England only a handful of decades after Bede's death. Blair comments on Bede's propitious situation:

> For the remaining 50 years of his life the records do not tell of any major battle fought anywhere in Britain, nor do they tell of any attack against Britain's coastline. Had he been born half a century earlier Bede might well have found himself involved directly in some of the many wars arising from the attempts of ambitious rulers to extend their boundaries or to win supremacy over neighbours, and had he died a little more than half a century later he would have witnessed the first Viking attack on his own monastery.[47]

Historian Peter Brown notes that "behind Bede's achievement lay two generations characterized by the massive transfer of goods from Gaul and Rome to northern Britain."[48] Thus, the prosperity of Northumbria during this time—and by extension, his

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[43] See Benedicta Ward, "Preface," in Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*, Book One: Advent to Lent, trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, Cistercian Studies Series vols. 110–111 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), v.

[44] Bonner, "Bede and His Legacy," 8.

[45] Alan Thacker, "Bede and the Ordering of Understanding," in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia Press, 2006), 42.

[46] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24, 293.

[47] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 7.

[48] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A. D. 200–1000*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 356.

monastery's patron, King Ecgfrith—provided Bede with a locale conducive to his scholarly pursuits.

By the time of Bede's birth, Christianity had flourished among the English for over a generation. Christianity had been in Britain even longer, and as early as the third century Tertullian boasted that Christianity had subjugated the "haunts of the Britons" [49] Although likely an overestimation, by around 240 Origen spoke of Christianity as a "unifying force among the Britons."[50] Despite its initial success, however, civil unrest and the arrival of pagan armies almost obliterated Christianity in Britain.

Although the Roman army had provided protection and stability to Britain for centuries, as Blair writes, "it was Britain's misfortune to lie at the edge of the world."[51] For Rome, the increasing barbarian threat at home was more pressing than protecting its outposts at the ends of the map. Consequently, the removal of the Roman soldiers from Britain by 410 left the Britons themselves exposed to barbarian attacks.[52] According to Bede, the fleeing Romans instructed the Britons to "take up arms themselves and make an effort to oppose their foes," but one doubts that their advice provided any consolation to Britain's now-defenseless inhabitants.[53] Now without the security provided by the legions and hoping to combat raiding by the Irish and Picts, the Britons sought the help of the Germanic Angles and Saxons. Gildas (c. 500–570), whose account Bede later relied

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[49] Tertullian, *Answer to the Jews* 7, trans. S Thelwall, Ante-Nicene Fathers, American ed., vol. 3 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature, 1885; reprint, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 154. On Christianity's origins in Britain, See W. H. C. Frend, "The Christianization of Roman Britain," in *Christianity in Britain: 300–700*, ed. M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1968). For a study of the British church prior to the Anglo-Saxons, see Michael Mates, "The British Church From Patrick to Gildas," (PhD diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1982).

[50] Frend, "The Christianization of Roman Britain," 38.

[51] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 9.

[52] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 9, 23.

[53] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.12, 24.

upon for his *Ecclesiastical History*, described the unwise decision by Vortigern, the Britons' king, to hire the pagan Angles and Saxons as protectors:

> Then all the councillors, together with that proud tyrant Gurthrigern [Vortigern], the British king, were so blinded, that, as a protection to their country, they sealed its doom by inviting in among them (like wolves into the sheep-fold), the fierce and impious Saxons, a race hateful both to God and men, to repel the invasions of the northern nations. Nothing was ever so pernicious to our country, nothing was ever so unlucky. What palpable darkness must have enveloped their minds—darkness desperate and cruel! Those very people whom, when absent, they dreaded more than death itself, were invited to reside, as one may say, under the selfsame roof.[54]

By the 440s, the would-be protectors turned into the Britons' enemies when they revolted against their former employers. Despite a successful resistance and control of Britain by the Britons from around 460–570, in the wake of a second revolt the Anglo-Saxons held most of the territory and pushed the Britons either to the margins or off the island by 600.[55]

Blair describes the effect on Christianity in Britain following the Anglo-Saxon takeover: "In those parts of Britain which had been settled by the English before 597 Christianity was totally obliterated and was replaced by Germanic paganism. Christianity survived only in those parts of the country which lay beyond the range of Anglo-Saxon settlement."[56] Like Gildas, Bede understood the eventual defeat of the Britons by the pagan Anglo-Saxons as divine punishment for not preaching to them: "To other unspeakable crimes, which Gildas their own historian describes in doleful words, was added this crime, that they never preached the faith to the Saxons or Angles who inhabited Britain with them."[57] The situation in the now-pagan Britain seemed dire, but, wrote Bede of the Anglo-Saxons, "Nevertheless God in His goodness did not reject the

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[54] Gildas, *The Ruin of Britain* 23, trans. J.A. Giles [online]; accessed 21 August 2020; available from https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/source/gildas.asp.

[55] See J. R. Morris, "The Literary Evidence," in *Christianity in Britain: 300–700*, ed. M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1968), 58–59.

[56] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 42.

[57] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.22, 36.

people whom he foreknew, but He had appointed much worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith."[58]

In his *Ecclesiastical History,* Bede recounted the seemingly legendary story of Gregory the Great, not yet a pope, and his encounter with boys from Britain, with their "fair complexions, handsome faces, and lovely hair," being sold as slaves in Rome:

> [Gregory] asked for the name of the race. He was told that they were called *Angli*. 'Good', he said, 'they have the face of angels, and such men should be fellow-heirs of the angels in heaven. 'What is the name', he asked, 'of the kingdom from which they have been brought?' He was told that the men of the kingdom were called *Deiri*. '*Deiri*', he replied, '*De ira! good!* snatched from the wrath of Christ and called to his mercy. And what is the name of the king of the land?' He was told that it was Ælle; and playing on the name, he said, 'Alleluia! the praise of God the creator must be sung in those parts.'[59]

Moved by his encounter at the market, Gregory offered to preach to the heathen in Britain. Although obligations in Rome kept Gregory himself from ever preaching among the English, his commissioning of Augustine (d. 604), prior of Gregory's monastery in Rome and later bishop of Canterbury, to take the gospel to England ultimately led to the establishment of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons.

In 596, Gregory sent Augustine and his company of "God-fearing monks" to "preach the word of God among the English race."[60] Bede described the party of about forty persons initially arriving in Kent, the home of King Æthelberht. Æthelberht's wife Bertha, noted Bede, was herself a Christian from a Frankish royal family, and although the king suspected that Augustine might practice magic arts against him, the company of monks received a hospitable reception and the king's blessing to preach in his lands.[61] Despite Æthelberht's initial unwillingness to "forsake those beliefs which . . . the whole

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[58] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.22, 36.

[59] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 2.1, 70–71. For a discussion on the origin and historicity of the account, see Michael Richter, "Bede's *Angli*: Angles or English," in *Peritia* 3 (1984), 99–114.

[60] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.22, 37.

[61] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.25, 39–40.

English race have held so long," through Augustine's preaching and miracle workings he eventually believed and was baptized.[62] Writing to Eulogius, the Bishop of Alexandria, Gregory rejoiced about the success of the English mission. Gregory boasted that before the first Christmas of Augustine's arrival, "more than ten thousand Angli are reported to have been baptized."[63]

Although the Augustinian mission established several churches in Kent, its success beyond that kingdom, writes Blair, is uncertain: "There is no evidence that the missioners penetrated beyond the confines of Kent, save momentarily into London and Essex."[64] The conversion of the Northumbrians began later as a result of two primary forces. First was the ministry of Paulinus (d. 644), a missionary and future bishop of York, who was sent by Gregory shortly after Augustine's arrival. His efforts were successful in converting their king, Edwin (c. 586–632), along "with all the nobles of his race and a vast number of the common people" in 627.[65] The defeat and death of Edwin in 632 resulted in Paulinus fleeing Northumbria, but this in turn paved the way for Irish missionaries of the Celtic church to spread Christianity in the north. When King Oswald (c. 604–642), Edwin's eventual successor, desired that his subjects "should be filled with the Christian faith," he requested the help of the Irish who were based on Iona. The Irish elders consequently sent Aidan (d. 651), whose labors to convert the English Bede later described:

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[62] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.25, 40–41.

[63] Gregory, *Epistles*, Book VIII:XXX, in *Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers*, second series, vol. 12, 240. See also, Blair, *The World of Bede*, 53.

[64] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 88.

[65] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.14 (97). See also Blair, *The World of Bede*, 92. Patrick Wormwald likewise traces the conversion of the English people in his 1984 Jarrow Lecture, "Bede and the Conversion of the English: The Charter Evidence," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol. 2 (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994), 611–644, and in his *The Times of Bede: Studies in Early English Christian Society and its Historian*, ed. Stephen Baxter (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006).

> He used to travel everywhere, in town and country, not on horseback but on foot, unless compelled by urgent necessity to do otherwise, in order that, as he walked along, whenever he saw people whether rich or poor, he might at once approach them and, if they were unbelievers, invite them to accept the mystery of the faith; or, if they were believers, that he might strengthen them in the faith, urging them by word and deed to practise almsgiving and good works.[66]

The influence of the Irish missionaries, despite their success in helping to plant Christianity in the north, paved the way for the most dramatic ecclesiastical disputes in England prior to Bede: the Synod of Whitby.

Centuries of relative isolation fostered several unique observances in the Celtic church. Although secondary issues included the type of tonsure worn by their monks—Irish monks, in contrast to the Roman style of a crown with a shaven top, shaved their heads while leaving their hair growing in the back—the chief matter concerned the dating of Easter. These differences ultimately led to a clash between the Celtic churches, represented by the native Britons, and the Roman church, embodied by Augustine. Tensions relating to these matters between the Celtic church, which still had remnants in England even after the Anglo-Saxon takeover, and Rome were evident early on in Augustine's mission. Bede recalled a conference between Augustine and the British clergy that met in order to reconcile their differences. The Britons became enraged when Augustine remained seated as they entered the meeting, attributing the act to Augustine's pride. Bede, however, interpreted British church's refusal to adopt Roman practices and to submit to Augustine's—that is, Rome's—authority at the conference to their own stubbornness: "[The Britons] were unwilling, in spite of the prayers, exhortations and rebukes of Augustine and his companions to give their assent, preferring their own traditions to those in which all the churches throughout the world agree in Christ."

Although the controversy lay dormant for several decades following Augustine, the work of Irish missionaries in England once again brought the two traditions into collision with one another. Since, according to King Oswiu (c. 612–670),

[66] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.5, 116–117.

"it was fitting that those who served one God should observe one rule of life and not differ in the celebration of the heavenly sacraments, seeing that they all hoped for one kingdom in heaven," he called a synod at Whitby in 664 in order to settle the dispute between the two parties.[67] According to Bede, Oswiu's own house was divided on the issue; he had been educated by Irish monks and thus held to the Celtic tradition, while his wife Eanflæd held to the Roman observance of Easter.[68] Bede's retelling of the synod pitted Colman, bishop of Lindisfarne and the Celtic representative, against Wilfrid, an Anglo-Saxon priest and the Roman advocate. For Oswiu, the question of authority ultimately decided the matter in favor of Wilfrid. Although Colman could claim that his mentor Columba, himself respected by the English, held to the Celtic tradition, Wilfrid claimed the authority of the universal church and hence, Peter. Thus, concluded Oswiu: "Since [Peter] is the doorkeeper I will not contradict; but I intend to obey his commands in everything to the best of my knowledge and ability."[69] Roman Christianity thus prevailed, and along with it came the ecclesiastical unity Bede enjoyed during his career.

"In Honour of Saint Peter": The Monastery at Wearmouth-Jarrow

Another important factor for Bede's successful career was the affluence of his monastery at Wearmout-Jarrow. Biscop "was determined that from the first the church should be after the fashion of buildings such as he had seen on his travels in Gaul and

[67] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25 (154). For a summary of the issues, context, and outcomes of the Synod of Whitby, see Henry Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 103–113. More recently, T. M. Charles-Edwards, *Early Christian Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 391–415. For a discussion of the council and the impact on English spirituality, see Arthur Holder. "Whitby and All That: The Search for Anglican Origins," *Anglican Theological Review* 85, no. 2 (2003): 231–252. On the political aspect of Whitby, see N. J. Higham, *The Convert Kings: Power and Religious Affiliation in Early Anglo-Saxon England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), 250-267.

[68] See Bede, Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25 (153).

[69] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.25 (159).

Italy."[70] Bede described its grand construction under the close supervision of Biscop who, given the lack of skilled laborers in England, recruited workers from the Continent:

> Only a year after work had begun on the monastery, Benedict crossed the sea to France to look for masons to build him a stone church in the Roman style he had always loved so much. He found them, took them on and brought them back home with him. So strong was his devotion to St. Peter, in whose honour the scheme was begun, and so fervent his zeal in carrying it out, that within a year of laying the foundations, he had the gable-ends of the church in place and you could already visualize Mass being celebrated in it.[71]

When he could not find skilled glass workers in Britain, Biscop once again contracted glaziers from France so that his grand monastery dedicated to Saint Peter would become a reality.

For Bede, the items contained within the walls of Wearmouth-Jarrow that Biscop procured from his journeys to the Continent were more important than the architecture itself. Again, what Biscop could not find at home he brought back from abroad. Bede described the "spiritual treasures" obtained by his abbot on his fourth journey to Rome:

> In the first place he returned with a great mass of books of every sort. Secondly, he brought back an abundant supply of relics of the blessed apostles and christian [sic] martyrs which were to prove such a boon for many churches in the land. Thirdly, he introduced in his monastery the order of chanting and singing the psalms and conducting the liturgy according to the practice in force at Rome.[72]

Despite its location on the fringes of the Western world, Biscop desired for "England to be enriched, ecclesiastically and culturally, by Western Europe and especially Rome."[73] The stability of the time and Biscop's efforts ensured that "fragments of a Mediterranean

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[70] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 166.

[71] Bede, *Lives of the Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, trans. D. H. Farmer, in *The Age of Bede* (New York: Penguin Group, 1983), 189.

[72] Bede, *Lives of the Abbots*, 190.

[73] D. H. Farmer, in *The Age of Bede*, 29.

world . . . now came to rest at the far end of Europe."[74] Bede, in return, benefited from these factors.

In addition to the books, liturgy and sacred relics, Bede also identified another kind of treasure acquired by Biscop during his travels:

> He brought back many holy pictures of the saints to adorn the church of St Peter he had built: a painting of the Mother of God, the Blessed Mary Ever-Virgin, and one each of each of the twelve apostles which he fixed round the central arch on a wooden entablature reaching from wall to wall; pictures of incidents in the gospels with which he decorated the south wall, and scenes from St John's vison of the apocalypse for the north wall. Thus all who entered the church, even those who could not read, were able, whichever way he looked, to contemplate the dear face of Christ and His saints, even if only in a picture, to put themselves more firmly in mind of the Lord's Incarnation and, as the saw the decisive of the Last Judgment before their very eyes be brought to examine their conscience with all due severity.[75]

Bede's description both highlights an important aspect of his monastery and sheds light on his own duties. Bede was not speaking of illiterate villagers who might benefit from the pictures placed in the church; rather, Bede had in mind his fellow monks. While Bede was involved in teaching Latin grammar to incoming novices—Bede's earliest work, *De Orthographia*, did just that—one should not equate "monk" with "scholar."[76] Peter Brown describes the situation in monasteries like Wearmouth-Jarrow:

> The monastery was very often a local "nobleman's club" for retired warriors quite as much as it was an island of Latinate book-learning. Even in a monastic settlement as unusual as Wearmouth and Jarrow, studious Latin scholars, such as Bede, were a very small minority among their fellow-monks . . . Converted warriors came to monasteries to do something more urgent than master the Latin language. As in northern Gaul, they came to save their souls, through prolonged penance under a strict rule.[77]

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[74] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 357.

[75] Bede, *Lives of the Abbots*, 190–191.

[76] On Bede's role as a teacher, see Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 19–39. For further comments on Bede's role as a *doctor* or "research professor," as well as a discussion of his educative program, see Alan Thacker, "Bede and the Ordering of Understanding."

[77] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 374.

Many entering the monastery viewed it as a "powerhouse of atonement" more so than a place of scholarly endeavors, and unlike Bede, notes Brown, "most monks and members of the clergy had a tenuous grasp of Latin."[78] Bede's monastic duties, therefore, was an exception rather than the rule.

Bede's praise of Eosterwine, Biscop's cousin and, for a brief time, a co-abbot at Wearmouth, reveals the daily work of most monks in the monastery. Seeking solidarity with his fellow monks, Eosterwine did not shirk from the "ordinary work" as described by Bede in his *Lives of the Abbots*: "He took his share of the winnowing and the threshing, the milking of the ewes and the cows; he labored in the bakehouse, garden, and kitchen, taking part cheerfully and obediently in every monastery chore."[79] Furthermore, added Bede, "Often, as he went about on monastery business, he would come across the brethren at work and would quickly go and help them out in whatever they were doing, putting his hand to the plough along the furrow, hammering iron into shape or wielding the winnowing-fan."[80] While Bede commended King Ecgfrith's former thane for his display of humility in taking on the mundane tasks of the monastery, we must remember, notes Brown, that Bede himself "did not labor in the fields."[81] Bede would have labored in the scriptorium, not the stables, and his tool was the pen, not the plough. The affluence of the monastery from its generous endowments made possible the expensive task of producing manuscripts. For example, the *Codex Amiatinus*, the "oldest surviving complete Latin Bible in one volume from anywhere in the world," would have taken enormous resources of time, materials, and labor to produce.[82] Scribes at Wearmouth-

[78] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 374.

[79] Bede, *Lives of the Abbots*, 193.

[80] Bede, *Lives of the Abbots*, 193.

[81] Brown, *Rise of Western Christendom*, 357.

[82] Farmer, *The Age of Bede*, 35.

Jarrow produced the pandect sometime between 688 and 716, and Bede himself could have been among their ranks.[83]

Although his career was mostly free of controversy, even an exegete as esteemed as Bede had detractors in his day. In his *Letter to Plegwin*, Bede had to defend his views against a certain David who, when Bede challenged the prevailing consensus on the duration of the "Six Ages" of the world," accused Bede of heresy in front of their bishop.[84] Whereas the popular position held that around 5,000 years elapsed between Adam and Christ—the first five ages of the world—Bede held to a shorter timeframe. In his *Greater Chronicle*, Bede begins the sixth age at 3,952 years, a difference in reckoning that apparently warranted charges of heresy. Bede in turn demanded an apology and offered a sharp rebuke to his accuser: "For truly it is said that if a serpent will bite in silence, there is no wealth for the enchanter."[85]

"Beyond the moving story of his death, written by one of his fellow monks," writes Blair, "there is little more to be told of either lesser incident or greater episode in the near sixty years of [Bede's] life."[86] Bede's seemingly-mundane life, however, free from the distractions of political and ecclesiastical turmoil in a wealthy monastery under the care of an abbot who himself prized learning, produced the greatest scholar of its age. Bede had already established his reputation by the time he completed his magnum opus, the *Ecclesiastical History*, in 731.[87] The scholar-monk died only a few short years later in

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[83] Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, 357.

[84] For a discussion of Bede's understanding of the ages of the world, see the works by Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), and Máirín MacCarron, *Bede and Time: Computus, Theology and History in the Early Medieval World* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

[85] Bede, *Letter to Plegwin*, trans. Faith Wallis, in *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 415.

[86] Blair, *The World of Bede*, 3.

[87] See remarks in D. P. Kirby, "Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*: Its Contemporary Setting," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol. 2 (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994), 908.

735. Bede left behind no possessions save for his incredible legacy and the fruits of his scholarly labors.[88]

[88] In addition to Bonner's essay, "Bede and His Legacy," see also Dorothy Whitelock's 1960 Jarrow Lecture, "After Bede," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol. 1 (Aldershot,UK: Variorum, 1994), 35–50, for a discussion of Bede's reputation and the dissemination of his works following his death.

CHAPTER 2

AUGUSTINE'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE

In his *Revisions*, written in 427 and in the midst of the bitter Pelagian controversy, Augustine revisited many of his earlier writings and offered remarks and clarifications that the wisdom and maturity his long career—now approaching its conclusion—afforded him. As biographer Peter Brown notes, "These invaluable remarks of the old man are partly in self-criticism, but more often they are attempts to explain himself."[1] Referencing the warning given in James 1:19 concerning the severity of the judgment for teachers, Augustine himself acknowledged the gravity of a lifetime of writing and teaching:

> Not even now do I claim . . . perfection for myself, although I am already an old man. How much less when as a young man I began to write and speak to the people! To such a degree was it my responsibility to have to speak to the people wherever I was, that I was rarely allowed to be quiet and to listen to others and to be "quick to listen but slow to speak." What remains for me, then, is to judge myself under the one Teacher, whose judgment of my offenses I yearn to escape.[2]

Augustine intended to offer corrections on all of his earlier works in chronological order so that "those who are going to read these works should not imitate me in my errors but in my progress towards the better. For whoever reads my works in the order in which they were written will perhaps discover how I have made progress over the course of my writing."[3]

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[1] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 433.

[2] Augustine, *Revisions*, trans. Boniface Ramsey (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2010), 22. When applicable, subsequent classical references will be indicated first by the book, chapter, and section divisions followed by the pagination of the modern translations.

[3] Augustine, *Revisions*, Prologue, 23.

Although noting the "invaluable remarks" contained within the *Revisions*, Brown also calls its writing a "dry business" in reference to the largely-insignificant nature of many of Augustine's reevaluations of his works.[4] There are exceptions, however. Given the timing of the *Retractions*, Pelagianism "[loomed] the largest in Augustine's thought."[5] Pelagius himself initially admired Augustine for his *On Free Choice of the Will*, and even quoted from the treatise in one of his own works, *On Nature*.[6] Consequently, in several places in the *Retractions* Augustine sought to clarify his position and head off Pelagian opponents misusing his earlier works and, in a sense, pitting Augustine against himself.

If Pelagius and his followers had misinterpreted Augustine's earlier writings, what was Augustine's position on matters related to grace and the will? With particular emphasis on the works known to Bede, this chapter will explicate the substance of Augustine's doctrines of grace and its corollary subjects from his earliest writings to the anti-Pelagian controversy that marked the end of his career. This presentation of Augustine's theology of grace will then provide a reference point by which subsequent chapters of this dissertation will orient and assess Bede's own thinking.

Bede's Access to Augustine

Assessing Bede's reception of Augustine's theology of grace must begin with a preliminary investigation into the works of Augustine to which Bede had access. Thus, this section will summarize recent scholarship concerning the volumes available in Bede's library at Wearmouth-Jarrow. This discussion will be pertinent for two reasons. First, it will demonstrate whether or not Bede had sufficient material available to him that

[4] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 433–434.

[5] Boniface Ramsey, introduction, in *Revisions*, 14.

[6] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 141.

would have provided a well-rounded understanding of Augustine's theology of grace. If not, it would hardly be fair to judge Bede's reception of Augustine's theology too harshly if he simply lacked the necessary writings needed to form an adequate picture of the bishop's views on grace. If, on the other hand, Bede did have access to a sufficient amount of Augustine's works, we can more accurately assess Augustine's influence on Bede, both where Bede followed his mentor and where his own thought diverged. Second, given Augustine's vast corpus as it relates to his theology of grace, discerning what works Bede most likely had at his disposal will narrow the focus of this chapter's summary of Augustine's theology. In other words, we can limit an otherwise enormous survey to the works of Augustine with which Bede was familiar.[7] In turn, this brief discussion will demonstrate that Bede had ample access to Augustine's teachings on grace.

In his influential work, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, Michael Lapdige identifies quotations from almost fifty works of Augustine throughout Bede's writings.[8] Nevertheless, Rosalind Love points out in a recent essay the numerous issues complicating the task of discerning exactly what complete works to which Bede had access. Not only is there no surviving library catalogue from Wearmouth-Jarrow, there are only a handful of titles still in existence that can be traced with any certainty to its scriptorium.[9] Additionally, Bede did not always specify the authors he cited, instead often working citations seamlessly into his own material.[10] This fact makes identifying his

[7] For example, Aaron Kleist limits his survey of Augustine's theology as known to Bede to just six works: *Confessiones*, *Enarrationes in psalmos*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, *De civitate Dei*, *Enchiridion*, and *De haereibus*. These works, says Kleist, "clearly demonstrate that the main tenets of Augustine's position on free will would have been known in some form to Bede, despite the apparent absence in England of Augustine's mature works on the subject." (*Striving with Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* [Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008], 26).

[8] Michael Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 196–204.

[9] Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 37.

[10] See Rosalind Love, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," in *The History of the Book in Britain*, vol. 1, ed. R Gameson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 618.

source material tricky, and has led to contentions among scholars about purported citations.[11] Moreover, Bede's use of *florilegia*, or medieval compilations consisting of various excerpts from different authors, makes identifying the works of Augustine Bede had direct access to even more difficult.

Despite these challenges, several important articles have attempted to recreate the library at Wearmouth-Jarrow. M. L. W. Laistner provided one of the earliest attempts to reproduce Bede's library, a project that by his own admission was not final and in the end only a tentative list of Augustine's works available to Bede could be drawn up.[12] Laistner's list contained nearly 150 titles in all held at Wearmouth-Jarrow, among which are eighteen works by Augustine.[13] Several of Augustine's works would have provided Bede with the fundamentals of his theology of grace. Such works notably included Augustine's *Confessiones*, *De civitate Dei*, and the *Enchiridion*. Laistner noted the surprising omission of many of Augustine's polemical writings, arguing that it was unlikely his anti-Donatist writings were known in England at that time and that Bede's knowledge of his anti-Arian treatises was "not the kind to make it probable that he had made a real study of the earlier literature on the subject."[14] Pelagianism was a different matter, given its influence in Gaul and Britain, and despite not identifying any extracts

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[11] Love, "Library of the Venerable Bede," 619. See also Lapdige's comments in *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 36.

[12] M. L. W. Laistner, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," in *Bede, His Life, Times, and Writings: Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of His Death*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1935), 249.

[13] Laistner, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 263. The works of Augustine given by Laistner are as follows: *Confessiones, Contra adversarium legis et prophetarum, Contra Faustam, De civitate Dei, De consensus evangelistarum, De doctrina Christiana, De Genesi ad litteram, De Genesi contra Manichaeos, De mendacio, De sancta virginitate, Enarrationes in psalmos, Enchiridion, Epistolae* cxlvii, clxvii, and ccv, *Quaestiones in evangelia, Queastiones in Heptateuchum, Sermones aliqui, Tractatus in Ioann. epist.* I, and *Tractatus in Ionn. evang*.

[14] Laistner, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 260.

from Augustine's anti-Pelagian works himself, Laistner concedes it is "by no means improbable that [Bede] had read some of them."[15]

Laistner lamented the lack of critical editions of Bede's works needed to complete the project of recreating the monk's library, an advantage that the last several decades have since afforded modern scholars seeking to build off his work.[16] Alan Thacker's 2005 Jarrow Lecture, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo: History and Figure in Text* expands upon Laistner's article. Thacker highlights the reverence for Augustine as the "practical teacher concerned with right doctrine, expounding and defending the creed, exposing and reproving heresy," and the "supreme exponent of the teaching of the Pauline epistles" in writers preceding Bede such as Eugippius of Naples (c. 465–535) and Cassiodorus of Vivarium (c. 485–580). [17] Bede inherited their high regard for the Bishop of Hippo as a "vigorous and pugnacious defender of the faith."[18] Furthermore, Bede benefitted from their anthologies of Augustine's writings. In particular, Bede made extensive use of Eugippius' fifth-century *Excerpta ex operibus S. Augustini*, a collection of over 300 extracts pulled from dozens of Augustine's works. Bede's use of Eugippius, notes Thacker, also makes it difficult to ascertain whether Bede had access to the complete work of Augustine or not.[19] While Augustine had thus been made "accessible in digests" by Bede's day, Bede did have the advantage of the monastery's library for "deeper investigation of Augustine's thought."[20] Along with "most competent judges," Thacker estimates that, in addition to his numerous letters and sermons, Bede had access

[15] Laistner, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 261.

[16] Laistner, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 238.

[17] Alan Thacker, *Bede and Augustine of Hippo: History and Figure in Sacred Text* (Jarrow, UK: Saint Paul's Church, 2005), 3.

[18] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, 6.

[19] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, 5.

[20] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, 4–5.

to over forty of Augustine's works, including the *Confessiones, De doctrina christiana,* and the whole of the *De civitate Dei*.[21] Unlike Laistner, who argued Bede's knowledge of the *Rectractiones* came from hearsay, Thacker includes the work in his assessment.[22] Although Bede utilized Eugippius in part for his own collection of excerpts of Augustine on the letters of Paul, the *Collectio in Apostolum*, Thacker notes Bede's "considerable independence" in arranging his anthology as a kind of introduction to Augustine's thought: "Bede . . . was both more systematic and wedded to a radically different arrangement. Moreover, he clearly consulted the works of Augustine directly, and included many passages not in Eugippius."[23]

Lapdige's *The Anglo-Saxon Library* provides a "rough guess" of some 250 titles in Bede's library, making it the largest library ever assembled in Anglo-Saxon England.[24] Nevertheless, while Lapdige mentions Bede's "extensive, exhaustive even" knowledge of Augustine's writings, some caution must be taken.[25] Like Thacker, Lapdige acknowledges that there is a real possibility that Bede used intermediary sources for some of his quotations of Augustine, notably, that of Eugippius. Bede's use of Eugippius' *Excerpta* could drastically reduce the number of available works of Augustine from nearly fifty to the eighteen given earlier by Laistner.[26] Ultimately, notes Lapdige, "How large the collection at Wearmout-Jarrow was must remain uncertain, for we cannot assume that all the books consulted by Bede were in that place."[27] Lapdige points to the

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[21] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, 5.

[22] Laistner, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 251.

[23] Thacker, *Bede and Augustine*, 8–9.

[24] Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 37.

[25] Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 36.

[26] Lapdige, *The Anglo Saxon Library*, 36.

[27] Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 36.

likelihood that Bede would have borrowed books from other libraries, and while this may affect the total number available on-hand at Wearmouth-Jarrow, it does open up the possibility that Bede could have accessed books not found in his own library.

More recently, Rosalind Love's 2011 essay has further explored Bede's reliance upon Eugippius for his knowledge of Augustine. In the summary of his writings contained in the *Ecclesistical History*, Bede mentioned that "on the Apostle (Paul), I have transcribed in order whatever I found in the works of St Augustine."[28] One might assume, notes Love, that Bede's own anthology of excerpts of Augustine on the letters of Paul might "add quite significantly to the number of Augustinian texts which we can envisage in Bede's library."[29] On closer analysis, however, the opposite is true. Bede's debt to Eugippius, says Love, "seems beyond doubt because there are cases in which Bede's excerpts do not extend beyond those offered by Eugippius or share some peculiarity with his *Excerpta*, such as a textual error or misattribution."[30] Thus, says Love, "acknowledgement of this debt to Eugippius detracts somewhat from our sense of Bede's *Collectio* as a treasure-trove of evidence about his library, and also highlights the very obvious dangers of a dependence on identifiable citations alone as an index of first-hand reading."[31]

Although scholars have made advances since Laistner's pioneering essay, and, says Lapdige, that with the introduction of electronic databases of classical and patristic Latin authors "will inevitably continue to provide refinements and additions" to the works assumed to be in Bede's Library, the general consensus remains that some uncertainty will always be present when attempting to fully recreate Wearmouth-Jarrow's

[28] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.24 ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 294.

[29] Love, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 624.

[30] Love, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 625.

[31] Love, "The Library of the Venerable Bede," 625.

catalogue.[32] For our purposes, however, we can agree with Kleist's assessment that Bede would have had enough of Augustine's material to be cognizant of the African father's theology of grace.[33] It is also worth investigating those works of Augustine available to Bede not explored by Kleist. For instance, Lapdige reveals that Bede quoted from over seventy of Augustine's sermons, many of which are not contained in Eugippius' *Excerpta*.[34] More specifically, Bede would have had access to over ten of Augustine's sermons that, according to Anthony Dupont's important study on Augustine's anti-Pelagian sermons, were produced during the anti-Pelagian controversy and highlight key themes of Augustine's theology of grace.[35] Thus, it is possible to demonstrate from Augustine's sermons alone that Bede would have been exposed to Augustine's main teachings on grace. Furthermore, while several articles have discussed the relationship between Eugippius' *Excertpa* and Bede's later *Collectio,* the theology of the *Collectio* remains a relatively-unexplored avenue of study.[36] Even if Bede did not possess complete copies of Augustine's works, his *Collectio,* which did include numerous selections from Augustine's anti-Pelagian treatises in varying lengths, could in turn demonstrate Bede's knowledge of Augustine's theology of grace.

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[32] Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*

[33] See above, note 7.

[34] Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 203.

[35] See Anthony Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine's* Sermones *during the Pelagian Controversy: Do Different Contexts Furnish Different Insights?* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013). Of the nearly thirty sermons Dupont identifies as specifically anti-Pelagian, Bede showed knowledge of *Sermones* ii, cxxv, cli, cliii, cliv, clv, clvi, clxx, clxxvi, ccxciii, ccxcix, and cccxxxv.

[36] On Bede's dependence on Eugippius, see P. Fransen, "D'eugippius À Bède Le Vénérable À Propos De Leurs Florilèges Augustiniens." *Revue Bénédictine* 97 (1987): 187–94. For a recent analysis of Bede's *Collectio,* along with some remarks on Bede's reception of Augustine's doctrine of predestination, see Jérémy Delmulle, "Le florilège augustinien de Bède le Vénérable et les discussions tardoantiques sur la grâce, le libre arbitre et la prédestination*," Revue d'Etudes Augustiniennes et Patristiques* 62 (2016): 265–292.

Augustine's Early Years: *On Free Choice of the Will* and *Response to Simplician*

The general consensus among Augustinian scholars is that Augustine's theology of grace developed during the course of his career.[37] Certain statements made by Augustine in one of his earliest works, *On Free Choice of the Will*, have led to the charge that "Augustine was, on paper, more Pelagian than Pelagius."[38] For instance, it appears Augustine asserted to Evodius, his dialogue partner in the treatise, that obtaining upright lives and wisdom was within the power of the human will apart from grace:

> So if by our good will we love and embrace that will, and prefer it to everything that we cannot retain simply by willing to retain it, then . . . we will possess those very virtues that constitute an upright and honorable life. From this it follows that all who will to live upright and honorable lives, if they will this more than they will transitory goods, attain such a great good so easily that they have it by the very act of willing to have it.[39]

Elsewhere in the same work, Augustine allowed that the will had the power to avoid sinning: "Who sins by doing what he cannot guard against? But there is sin, so it is possible to guard against it."[40]

The Pelagians later seized upon such statements in the hope of demonstrating that, at one time, Augustine held to their own position. In his *Revisions*, however,

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[37] For example, J. Patout Burns claims progression in Augustine's thinking is "indisputable" (Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace* [Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1980], 8). Likewise, Peter Brown suggests a change in Augustine from his earlier works like *On Free Choice of the Will*, typified by his optimistic view of human ability, and the more mature position seen in the *Confessions*: "Augustine, indeed, had decided that he would never reach the fulfillment that he first thought was promised to him by a Christian Platonism: he would never impose a victory of mind over body in himself, he would never achieve the wrapt contemplation of the ideal philosopher. It is the most drastic change that a man may have to accept: it involved nothing less than the surrender of the bright future he had gained at Cassiciacum" (*Augustine of Hippo*, 140). More recent studies, on the contrary, argue for more continuity in Augustine's theology of grace between his earlier and later works. For this position, see Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[38] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 141

[39] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* 1.13, trans. Thomas Williams (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1993), 22–23.

[40] Augustine, *On Free Choice of the Will* 3.18, 105.

Augustine offered more clarification than correction on his earlier views. Augustine asked his readers to consider the original context of *On Free Choice of the Will*, a polemic originally directed towards the Manicheans and their "dualistic solution to the problem of evil" that proposed two independent principles in the universe, one good and one evil:[41] As Augustine wrote,

> This discussion was initiated on account of those who deny that the origin of evil proceeds from the free choice of the will and who contend, if that is the case, that God, the creator of all natures, is to be blamed. In the same way, in keeping with the error of their impiousness (for they are Manicheans), they want to introduce a kind of immutable evil that is coeternal with God.[42]

If Augustine could demonstrate that evil originated in the act of the will, then he would thereby answer the Manichean charge that it originated in God.[43]

Augustine later criticized the Pelagians for ignoring the context and intent of *On Free Choice of the Will*:

> The recent heretics, the Pelagians, who insist upon the free choice of the will to such a degree that they leave no place for God's grace, since they insist that it is bestowed according to our merits, should not boast as though I had taken up their cause, because I said many things in these books on behalf of free choice, which the purpose of that discussion required.[44]

Furthermore, wrote Augustine, "Because God's grace, which was not an issue at the time, was not mentioned in these and similar words of mine, the Pelagians think, or could think, that we held their opinion. But in vain do they think this."[45] Although Augustine acknowledged his repeated emphasis on free choice, the Pelagians ignored the context of those statements which were, summarizes Carol Harrison, "theoretical references to

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[41] Simon Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will: The Theological and Philosophical Significance of De Libero Arbitrio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) 14.

[42] Augustine, *Revisions* 1.9, 44.

[43] Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 210.

[44] Augustine, *Revisions* 1.9, 45.

[45] Augustine, *Revisions* 1.9, 47.

humanity before the Fall . . . primarily directed against Manichean dualism and determinism."[46]

Although Harrison finds evidence of Augustine's more mature theology of grace even in his earlier works, historians generally agree that 396 marked a turning point in Augustine's theology of grace.[47] Augustine's shift to the idea that salvation is wholly of God's grace prior to any merit was, according to Gerald Bonner, "an intellectual illumination comparable though not identical with that experienced in Milan in 386."[48] For Peter Brown, this period signified Augustine's "lost future": his youthful optimism now vanished in light of his realization that "he was would never reach the fulfillment that he first though was promised to him by a Christian Platonism: he would never impose a victory of mind over body in himself, he would never achieve the wrapt contemplation of the ideal philosopher."[49]

Following his ascension to the rank of bishop in 395, Augustine received a series of questions from his friend and mentor, Simplicianus who was, even more so than

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[46] Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 223.

[47] See, for example, Lenka Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), which describes the treatise to Simplicianus as "a kind of manifesto of his new conception of God's grace and the free will of man" (71). Also, in Burns, *Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*: "[Augustine] discovered divine control over the human will through a series of attempts to interpret Romans 9 which culminated in *Ad Simplicianum* in 396" (8). Likewise, Donato Ogliari in *Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship Between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-called Semipelagians* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003): "[*Ad Simplicianum*] contains the necessary adjustment and formulation by which [Augustine] rejected as wrong his previous belief that both faith and the will to believe was the result of human agency" (157). Finally, James Wetzel in "Snares of Truth: Augustine on Free Will and Predestination," in *Augustine and His Critics: Essays in Honour of Gerald Bonner*, ed. Robert Dodaro and George Lawless (New York: Routledge, 2000), which describes *Ad Simplicianum* as Augustine's "watershed" moment, an "exegetical turn of mind," and the end of "Augustine's attempt of about two years earlier to read into Rom 9 some basis in human worth for God's favouring of one mother's son over another" (128). For a summary of scholarly views on the significance of *Ad Simplicianum* in the development Augustine's thought, see Lenka Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 82–85.

[48] Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine's Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom* (Washington D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 42.

[49] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 140.

Ambrose, the "architect of Augustine's conversion." Now, ten years later, Simplicianus wrote to Augustine seeking clarification on perplexing passages in Paul's letter to the Romans.[50] Augustine's reply in turn demonstrated some of the clearest expositions of his theology of grace prior to the Pelagian controversy.

Simplicianus' first question concerned the relationship between the law and sin in Romans 7, and Augustine's answer highlighted his emphasis on humanity's bondage to sin following the fall. The law of God itself is not sin, wrote Augustine, but through the law sin is made known: "The law was given not that sin might be instilled nor that it might be extirpated but only that it might be made manifest."[51] As a result, wrote Augustine, the law highlights both the sinner's guilt before God and his need for grace:

> [The law] would make the human soul, seemingly secure in its innocence, guilty by the very manifestation of sin so that, inasmuch as sin could not be conquered apart from the grace of God, [the soul] would be turned by its uneasy awareness of guilt to a receptivity of grace.[52]

The law brings our guilt before God into clear focus, and, said Augustine, it revealed his own just punishment: "I was unafraid of death from sin because it had not appeared when there was no law . . . I knew that I was dead for the reason that the guilt of transgression threatens me with the certain punishment of death."[53]

Augustine argued that life may be found for those obedient to the law, but in the post-fall world this is an impossibility. On the contrary, for fallen natures the law makes sin "grow more desirable because of its prohibition."[54] Augustine distinguished

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[50] Serge Lancel, *St Augustine*, trans. Antonia Nevill (London: SCM Press, 2002), 83.

[51] Augustine, *Miscellany of Questions in Response to Simplician*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, in *The Works of Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2008), 1.2, 175; cf. Rom 7:7.

[52] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.2, 175–176.

[53] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.4, 176.

[54] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.5, 177; cf. Rom 7:11.

between those living in grace and those still under the law. For those "reborn through grace" are those "who have already been redeemed by the blood of the Lord and renewed by faith."[55] For the one under the law, however, "is fleshly in that he has not been yet been reborn from sin but is sold under sin."[56] Augustine depicted those in the flesh as slaves so bound to their masters—in this case, their desires—that they willingly delight in their sins despite the sure consequence of death:

> [The one under the law] willingly accepts the sweet price of deathly pleasure by which he is being deceived and also delights in contravening the law, since the less it is allowed the more attractive it is. The sweetness he cannot enjoy as the price of his condition unless he serves his appetites like a bought slave.[57]

The mastery of sin over those under the law, noted Augustine, results from two factors: nature and habit. The former, said Augustine, "derives from the punishment for the original sin"—a term Augustine used here for the first time[58]—and the latter "constant repetition of sensual pleasure."[59] The one we are born into, the other we amass over the course of our lives. Together, nature and habit "create a very strong and unconquerable covetousness" and sovereignty over our lives.[60]

At this point, and in conjunction with his exposition of Romans 7:18–21, Augustine distinguished between the idea of the human capacity to will the good and the ability to actually do it. Willing to do good is within the power of those under the law, but it is not within their power to carry it out in this "second nature" that humankind received

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[55] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.7, 178.

[56] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.7, 178.

[57] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.7, 178.

[58] On the term, see discussion in Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 72–73. On the concept in Augustine's thinking prior to *Ad Simplicianum*, see Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 185–188.

[59] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.10, 179.

[60] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.10, 179.

as a result of original sin.[61] One can will "without difficulty," but, said Augustine, "he does not do with such ease what he easily wills."[62] Thus, within the sinner there are, in effect, two wills; one knows what the law demands, sees the law's goodness, and in some sense yearns to obey it, but, as a result of his enslaved nature, he succumbs to his sinful desires:[63]

> A person who is living under [the law] and who has not been freed by grace bears witness to that the law is good. It certainly bears witness to him, inasmuch as he restrains himself contravening the law and finds that it is a good thing for him even when he will to do what it enjoins and is unable to do so because covetousness has overwhelmed him.[64]

Augustine compared the sad state to a person pushed off a cliff: "[He] easily continues to fall, even though he does not want to and hates what is happening."[65] For the one under the law, desire [*concupiscentia*] becomes an "irresistible force."[66] For Augustine, the dominant will—for the one under the law, giving into his lusts—will always win out.[67]

Those under the law are not without hope, argued Augustine. The law reveals us not as victorious, but as transgressors.[68] Consequently, those under the law, whose just condemnation the law has revealed, are brought to humility before God and shown their complete dependence on his grace: "[Humankind] must humbly cry out, 'Wretched man

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[61] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.11, 180.

[62] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.12, 180.

[63] Augustine favorite terms for "desire," which several scholars understand as essentially synonymous, were *concupiscentia*, *cupiditas* and *libido*. For a general discussion of these terms and comments on recent scholarly discussion as they were used by Augustine, see Timo Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 15–18.

[64] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.12, 180.

[65] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.12, 180.

[66] Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, 278.

[67] Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*, 34.

[68] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.14, 181.

that I am, who will liberate me from the body of this death? The grace of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'"[69] What is left of human free will following the fall cannot keep the laws demands, but, when brought to this point of despair, it can cry out for God's grace: "What in fact is left to free choice in this mortal life is not that a person may fulfill righteousness when he wants to but that by suppliant piety he may turn to him by whose gift he may be enabled to fulfill it."[70] Whereas those formerly under the law were held captive by it, grace frees them so that they may do what it enjoins.[71] Likewise, whereas the law formerly condemned, "those who are renewed through the Spirit . . . are freed from its condemnation so that they are no longer bound to the punishment of the letter but are united to its understanding of through righteousness."[72]

Having discussed Romans 7 and the nature of the law, Augustine then turned his attention to another pressing and more controversial query: the meaning of Romans 9. Augustine's previous answer seemed to imply some remnant of free will that could initiate seeking God's help. Using the example of Jacob and Esau, however, Augustine clarified his position on the will's ability to turn towards God in light of divine predestination and election: grace, which precedes any human merit, is necessary for the will to turn to the Creator, and it is God himself who chooses whom will receive this grace.

One of Augustine's stated purposes was to safeguard God's grace against any human boasting in human merit or work, an idea that he also understood to be Paul's main thought in the passage. Augustine saw a cautionary example of this in the Israelites who "dared to boast of [their works] on the grounds that they had observed the law that

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[69] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.14, 181.

[70] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.14, 181; cf. Rom 7:24–25.

[71] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.15, 182.

[72] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 1.17, 184; cf. 2 Cor 3:6.

had been given to them and so had received the grace of the gospel as though it were due them for their merits, because they observed the law."[73] The Israelites then had the audacity to view the Gentiles as unworthy recipients of grace since they, unlike the Israelites themselves, did not follow the "Jewish sacraments."[74] This was an error, noted Augustine, "For they did not understand that the grace of the gospel is not dependent on works; otherwise grace is no longer grace."[75] Works do not precede grace, contended Augustine; rather, no one can do good works "unless he has obtained grace through faith."[76] Like a fire that heats because it burns, so too do good works follow not in order to receive grace, but because one has already received it.[77] If the order is reversed, argued Augustine, one can demand eternal life as a kind of debt owed by God on account of his good works.

In order to demonstrate that grace precedes human merit, Augustine referenced the example of Jacob and Esau. Why was the older brother, Esau, to serve the younger, Jacob?[78] "No one could say," wrote Augustine, "that Jacob, who was not yet born, had been meritorious before God on account of his works."[79] If not works, what then was the basis for God's choosing Jacob over Esau? Augustine proceeded to narrow down the possible basis for the special grace given to Jacob, beginning with a discussion of the two brothers' natures. Did they have different natures? Augustine ruled out this option: "They had the same father and the same mother, came from a single act of intercourse, and had

[73] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.2, 185.

[74] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.2, 185; cf. Acts 15.

[75] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.2, 185.

[76] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.2, 185.

[77] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.3, 187.

[78] Cf. Gen 25:23; Rom 9:12.

[79] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.3, 186.

the same creator."[80] Augustine then considered God's foreknowledge: did God choose on account he saw "future faith in Jacob, who was not yet born?"[81] In earlier treatises, this idea provided a solution for Augustine.[82] Now, however, this solution failed for Augustine: "How then does the Apostle show that these words, 'The older shall serve the younger,' were not said on account of works? Because if they were not yet born, it applied not only to works but also to faith, since those who were not yet born lacked both."[83] Hence, Augustine saw no difference between God's foreknowledge of faith and works: "If a choice is made through foreknowledge, then, and God foreknew Jacob's faith, how do you prove that he did not also choose him because of works?"[84] Donato Ogliari points to this discussion in *Ad Simplicianum* as Augustine's "definitive step forward":

> Abandoning the idea of Jacob being loved by God because the latter had foreseen his future faith, [Augustine] begins to speak explicitly of the *gratia fidei* in an inclusive way, asserting that nothing good happens outside the grace of God. Faith itself depends upon the *gratia* [*fidei*] which, in turn, depends upon the divine *uocotio*.[85]

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[80] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.4, 188–189.

[81] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.5, 189.

[82] On Augustine's shift on this particular point, see the discussion in Phillip Cary, *Inner Grace: Augustine in the Tradition of Plato and Paul* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 45–48. Says Cary, "Augustine invents the maneuver used by future theologians in the Augustinian tradition of the West who want to uphold justification by faith but do not want a doctrine of unconditional election or absolute predestination: there is such a thing as predestination and election (Scripture says so) but God predestines and elects those whom he foresees will have faith" (47). Cary adds, "This maneuver does not convince Augustine for very long" (47).

[83] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.5, 189.

[84] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.5, 189. For a similar synopsis, see also Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*, 39, and Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 76.

[85] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 301. Also Cary, who describes this discussion as "the epochal turning point of the treatise *To Simplicianus*, where for the first time he treats grace as fully prevenient, coming before every worthy effort of ours, including our decision to believe" (*Inner Grace*, 27).

Here, Augustine ultimately grounded God's election in his purpose to make the wicked "righteous by faith."[86] Augustine entertained the idea that our faith itself merits God's mercy, but insisted it too is a *result* of God's mercy: "No one believes who is not called. But it is a merciful God who calls, bestowing this [gift] when there are no merits of faith, because the merits of faith follow the call rather than precede it."[87] Returning to Jacob, Augustine confidently wrote that Jacob's favor was the result of God's gracious calling, not his own works.

Having established that Jacob's calling was due to God's grace, Augustine now had to explain what James Wetzel calls the "dark side" of his reading of Romans 9, the situation of Esau.[88] On what basis was it written, "I hated Esau"? Augustine reasoned that if God did not choose Jacob on account of any work, neither must it be true of Esau on the basis of evil works:

> On account of what evil deeds of his did he merit to serve his younger [brother] and to have it written [of him]: "I hated Esau?" . . . If God predestined [Esau] to serve his younger [brother] because he foreknew his future evil works and predestined Jacob as well, so that his older brother would serve him, because he foreknew his future good works, what [Paul] says is now false: "Not because of their works."[89]

The solution, noted Augustine, is found in God's efficacious calling: God calls some to life, others he passes over. Over the next several sections, Augustine would expand upon this notion of "calling."

Earlier in the work, Augustine hinted at what prompts belief: people are moved to faith by God, he noted, "by either an internal or external urging."[90] Augustine reaffirmed that, given our fallen will, only those who are called can believe: "It is evident

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[86] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.6, 190.

[87] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.7, 191.

[88] James Wetzel, "Snares of Truth," 129.

[89] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.8, 191.

[90] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.2, 185.

that we will to no avail unless God is merciful . . . For since it is not a good will that precedes a call but a call that precedes a good will, it is rightly ascribed to God who calls that we will what is good."[91] Drawing from Matthew 20:16, Augustine distinguished between those who are called and those who are chosen. In other words, not all who are called receive the same divine mercy as others. The elect are called in "an appropriate way" [*congruenter vocati*] such that they may follow the call.[92] Others, however, "those who are called and not chosen," are unwilling to submit to God's more general call: "The call has indeed reached others, but because it was such that they could not be moved by it and not suited to grasp it."[93] As proof, Augustine pointed to different instances in Scripture where certain events lead some people to faith—Jesus' miracles and crucifixion, for instance—whereas others remained unmoved.[94] Writes Karfíková, "the choice of the will thus loses its constitutive role in faith … Everything, including the human consent to the will to believe, must therefore be God's gift."[95] That some do not acquiesce to God's call is no fault of God himself, Augustine emphasized, "For who would say that the manner in which [the sinner] might be persuaded to have faith was lacking to the Almighty?"[96] Augustine provided the example of Saul, who did nothing but "attack, seize, enchain and kill Christians" with his "rabid, raging, blind will."[97] Yet, wrote Augustine,

> At a single voice from heaven [Saul] fell prostrate and, having had such an experience that his mind and will, now broken by savagery, were turned about and

[91] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.12, 194; cf. Phil 2:13.

[92] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.13, 195.

[93] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.13, 195.

[94] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.14, 196.

[95] Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 79.

[96] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.12, 196.

[97] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.22, 206.

> directed toward faith, he was at once transformed from a famous persecutor of the gospel to its still more famous preacher.[98]

Likewise, God could have called Esau in such a way as to bring him to eternal life, yet God did not. Hence the difficult truth Augustine discovered of God's calling: some persons God willingly abandons, leaving them to their destruction.

At this juncture, notes Ogliari, the core of Augustine's doctrine of predestination "appears in its full light."[99] Augustine, like Paul, sensed the looming objection of God's unfairness: "But it is unjust that [God] would have hated Esau when there was no unrighteousness to merit it."[100] Paul's answer, which Augustine here repeated, was that God has mercy and compassion on whom he sees fit.[101] But Paul's rejoinder, admitted Augustine, only complicates the issue:

> For this is the very thing that is so disturbing: if he will have mercy on whom he will have mercy and show compassion to whom he will be compassionate, why was this compassion lacking in regard to Esau, so that by it he might have been good, just as by it Jacob became good?[102]

Augustine understood the situation in terms of a debt owed to the creditor. Because of Adam, "from whom the origin of the offense against God spread throughout the whole human race," all of humanity is now "a kind of single mass of sin [*massa pecati*] owing a debt of punishment to the divine and loftiest justice."[103] God, as the creditor, has the right to show mercy on some sinners while withholding his mercy from others:

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[98] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.22, 206–207.

[99] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 316. Continues Ogliari: "From now on much of [Augustine's] efforts will be spent in trying to justify how the *diuina poena* that falls on the non-elect can be considered as not unjust."

[100] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.8, 192; cf. Rom 9:14.

[101] Cf. Rom 9:15.

[102] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.9, 192.

[103] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.16, 198.

> Because whom [God] wills he sustains and whom he wills he abandons, since both the one whom he sustains and the one whom he abandons comes from the same mass of sinners and, although both owe a debt of punishment, yet it is exacted from one and forgiven another.[104]

In Adam all are guilty, thus no sinner can cry foul if some receive his mercy and others are hardened, the term Augustine equated with God's choice to refuse mercy.[105] Augustine again pointed to Paul's retort should anyone still claim injustice on God's part: "O man, who are you to answer back to God?"[106]

Augustine explained that God passes over some in order to provide a warning and a demonstration of God's power and mercy to his elect:

> That he is willing to display his wrath and has borne with the vessels of wrath . . . contributes to a beneficial fear to which others must be exposed and to the making known of the riches of his glory to the vessels of mercy, which he has prepared for glory. And indeed that hardening of the wicked demonstrates two things—both what should be feared, so that through goodness a person may be converted to God, and what great thanks are owed to the mercy of God, who shows in the punishment of the ones what he forgives in the others.[107]

Nevertheless, Augustine could find no discernible basis by which God would elect some individuals to life and others to perdition. God's choice to save some, wrote Augustine, "is so very hidden that it can by no means be discerned by us in the same lump." Again, Oligari points to this shift in Augustine's thought as "of paramount importance":

> It is the hidden equity on God's part which is now brought into the limelight and which replaces the earlier appeal to the "most hidden merits of the souls (*animarum occultissima merita*)". In other words, the difference is no longer about those who believe (Jacob) and those who do not (Esau), but about the way God relates to human beings, calling them *congruenter* or not, choosing them as his elect, or not. The difference lies now entirely in God himself.[108]

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[104] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.17, 198.

[105] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.15, 197. See also Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 81.

[106] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.17, 198; cf. Rom 9:20.

[107] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.18, 201; cf. Rom 9:23.

[108] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 316–317.

Augustine recognized his own ignorance: "If it is discernable to some, I for my part acknowledge my incompetence in the matter. For, if in my thoughts I am allowed some insight into this choice, I cannot see how persons are chosen for the grace of salvation apart from either greater endowments or lesser sins or both."[109] Referencing how God often uses the most unqualified persons, whether fishermen, prostitutes or murderers like Paul in order to confound the strong and the wise, Augustine acknowledged the mysterious nature of God's gracious election. In *Ad Simplicianum,* the foundations of Augustine's theology of grace were thereby laid.[110] As he later reflected in his *Retractions,* Augustine struggled during this time to find some remaining capacity or merit within the fallen human will that could provide a basis for God's mercy, but, he wrote, "God's grace conquered."[111]

Confessions

Pinpointing the exact nature of Augustine's *Confessions* may be open to discussion—is it an autobiography, a poem, or something else entirely?—but the work's status as a masterpiece in Western literature is hardly debatable.[112] Brown places the work in the category of "spiritual autobiography," a tradition that began with the pagan philosophers and reached its climax with the *Confessions,* which Augustine wrote around

[109] Augustine, *Response to Simplician* 2.22, 206.

[110] Says Ogliari, "God . . . intervenes "directly" to help those He has decided to elect, whereas He abandons those He does not want to save. With regard to the latter, that means that He does not intervene with his mercy to prevent them from sinning and falling away from him. The path towards the concept of the *massa peccatorum*, as the justifying background against which God's election and rejection stand out, is thus laid" (*Gratia et Certamen*, 317).

[111] Augustine, *Revisions* 2.1, 110.

[112] For a recent discussion on the genre of the *Confessions*, see Annamaré Kotzé, *Augustine's Confessions: Communicative Purpose and Audience* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2004), 45–84, in which it is argued that the *Confessions* is an example of protreptic literature, that is, a work with the aim of converting its readers.

397.[113] The opening lines reveal the method of Augustine's communication, a prayer to God:

> Can any praise be worthy of the Lord's majesty? How significant his strength! How inscrutable his wisdom! Man is one of your creatures, Lord, and his instinct is to praise you . . . The thought of you stirs him so deeply that he cannot be content unless he praises you, because you made us for yourself and our hearts find no peace until they rest in you.[114]

Augustine continued with a request: "Grant me, Lord, to know and understand whether a man is first to pray to you for help or to praise you, and whether he must know you before he can call you to his aid."[115] By tracing the path to his own conversion, Augustine highlighted many of the themes found in his *Response to Simplician* in a very personal way: formerly bound by sin, only by divine grace could Augustine's will be turned from carnal lusts to true satisfaction found in the creator.

"Where or when," asked Augustine, "was I, your servant, ever innocent?"[116] Although referenced earlier in his *Response to Simplician*, in the *Confessions* Augustine further elaborated upon the doctrine of original sin. Put simply, original sin was that grave offense "by which we all have died with Adam."[117] Likewise, wrote Augustine, "we were all happy in Adam, the first sinner, in whom we all died and from whom we are all descended in a heritage of misery."[118] Not only does our solidarity with Adam result in death, it also produced in humanity a corrupted will that is the foundation for personal

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[113] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 152.

[114] Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin (London: Penguin, 1961), 1.1, 21.

[115] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1, 21.

[116] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.8, 28.

[117] Augustine, *Confessions* 5.9, 102. See also the discussion in Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 92.

[118] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.20, 226.

sin.[119] Augustine likened the human race that stems from Adam to a "bitter sea . . . forever chafing for knowledge in the profound depths of its ignorance, buffeted by the storms of its pride and never at rest from its surge and swell."[120] Reflecting on the inner turmoil prior to his conversion, Augustine wrote:

> I was at odds with myself. I was throwing myself into confusion. All this happened to me although I did not want it, but it did not prove there was some second mind in me besides my own. It only meant that my mind was being punished. My action did not come from me, but from the sinful principle that dwells in me. It was part of the punishment of a sin freely committed by Adam, my first father.[121]

Commenting on this passage, Paul Rigby writes: "Augustine believes that he is bound over to the devil, and this spiritual bondage leads in its turn to carnal bondage, from inherited spiritual concupiscence to corporeal concupiscence"[122]

The corporeal concupiscence that manifested itself in Augustine's own life provided him with experiential proof of the reality of original sin. Evidence of man's sinful nature does not take long to reveal itself, and Augustine recounted how, even as an infant trying to satisfy his desires, original sin displayed its effects:

> I would toss my arms and legs about and make noises, hoping that such few signs as I could make would show my meaning . . . And if my wishes were not carried out, either because they had not been understood or because what I wanted would have harmed me, I would get cross with my elders, who were not at my beck and call, and with people who were not my servants, simply because they did not attend to my wishes; and I would take my revenge by bursting into tears.[123]

Augustine continued,

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[119] Burns, *The Development of Augustine's Doctrine of Operative Grace*, 48–49. Burns denies Augustine held to inherited guilt at this stage in his thinking, only "mortality as a consequence of Adamic sin and the penalty for personal sin" (48).

[120] Augustine, *Confessions* 13.20, 329.

[121] Augustine, *Confessions* 8.10, 173; cf. Rom 7:17.

[122] Paul Rigby, *The Theology of Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 105.

[123] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.6, 26.

> It can hardly be right for a child, even at that age, to cry for everything, including things which would harm him; to work himself into a tantrum against people older than himself and not required to obey him; and to try his best to strike and hurt others who know better than he does, including his own parents, when they do not give in to him and refuse to pander to whims which would only do harm.[124]

According to Augustine, this observation confirmed that infants were by no means innocent, and failure to do harm he attributed to a lack of strength, not will.[125] Augustine related his own sins as an infant as illustrative of all of Adam's descendants; when he confessed his sins, he confessed the sins of every infant.[126] No one is free from sin, "not even a child who has lived only one day on earth."[127] The sins of infants, comments Rigby, "point to the primordial concupiscence and sin inherited from Adam, which is at the root of every personal sin."[128] Envy, jealousy and rebellion were not traits babies had to learn; rather, they are inherited.

As Augustine aged into boyhood, his sinful nature manifested itself in new ways. As a young pupil, remembered Augustine:

> Many and many a time I lied to my tutor, my masters, and my parents, and deceived them because I wanted to play games or watch some futile show or was impatient to imitate what I saw on the stage. I even stole from my parents' larder and from their table, either from greed or to get something to give to other boys in exchange for their favourite toys, which they were willing to barter with me. And in the games I played with them I often cheated in order to come off the better, simply because a vain desire to win had got the better of me. And yet there was nothing I could less easily endure, nothing that made me quarrel so bitterly, than to find others cheating me as I cheated them. All the same, if they found me out and blamed me for it, I would lose my temper rather than give in.[129]

Augustine concluded with a penetrating insight into the nature of original sin:

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[124] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.7, 28.

[125] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.7, 28.

[126] Paul Rigby, *Original Sin in Augustine's Confessions* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1987), 37.

[127] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.7, 27.

[128] Rigby, *The Theology of Augustine's Confessions*, 116.

[129] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.19, 39–40.

> Can this be the innocence of childhood? Far from it, O Lord! But I beg you to forgive it. For commanders and kings may take the place of tutors and schoolmasters, nuts and balls and pet birds may give way to money and estates and servants, but these same passions remain with us while one stage of life follows upon another.[130]

One does not grow out of a sinful nature. For Augustine, his passage into adolescence further demonstrated the validity of his assessment.

In Book II, Augustine narrated his turbulent adolescence, beginning with a year of idleness following his return to Thagaste from studies abroad in Madaura while his father saved up the necessary funds to further his education in Carthage.[131] Augustine did not withhold the scandalous details of this period, and he used several shocking descriptors of sins which had now morphed from childhood rebellion to lusts of the flesh. "Love and lust together seethed within me," Augustine wrote, and "In my tender youth they swept me away over the precipice of my body's appetites and plunged me in the whirlpool of sin."[132] He further floundered in the "broiling sea of fornication" and "ferment of wickedness," and he gloried in the applause he received from his own depravity.[133]

For Augustine, however, no sin demonstrated the nature of his depravity more clearly than his theft of pears from a neighbor's tree. Augustine described the exploits of he and his fellow troublemakers:

> There was a pear-tree near our vineyard, loaded with fruit that was neither to look at nor to taste. Late one night, a band of ruffians, myself included, went off to shake down the fruit and carry it away . . . We took away an enormous quantity of pears, not to eat them ourselves, but to simply throw them to the pigs. Perhaps we ate some of them, but our real pleasure consisted in doing something that was forbidden.[134]

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[130] Augustine, *Confessions* 1.19, 40.

[131] Augustine in *Confessions* 2.3, 45.

[132] Augustine, *Confessions* 2.2, 43.

[133] Augustine, *Confessions* 2.2,3, 43–44, 46.

[134] Augustine, *Confessions* 2.4, 47.

What might be perceived as a harmless mischief provided Augustine a glimpse into the depths of humanity's corrupt nature and paradigmatic of the nature of sin itself.[135] People rob and murder for some motive, wrote Augustine, whether for personal gain, revenge, necessity, and so on. Augustine's theft was unique, and in a sense viler than his other vices during this time:

> It was not the pears that my unhappy soul desired. I had plenty of my own, better than those, and I only picked so that I might steal. For no sooner had I picked them than I threw them away, and tasted nothing in them but my own sin, which I relished and enjoyed.[136]

Augustine stole not out of necessity, "but only for disgrace itself."[137] This, for Augustine, highlighted the human condition. Our love is not directed towards God; rather, we love sin for sin's sake: "The evil in me was foul, but I loved it. I loved my own perdition and my own faults, not the things for which I committed wrong, but the wrong itself."[138] Rather than loving God, fallen humanity foolishly and pridefully thinks it can find satisfaction in pale imitations of the Creator.[139] In turn, this misdirected love "further corrupts itself as each respective action perpetuates the sinful condition of the soul, leading to an entire life marked by concupiscence."[140] Rigby echoes this assessment: "Adolescent Augustine hates that for want of which he dislikes himself. He is trapped, for

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[135] Gerald Bonner, "Augustine's Doctrine of Man," in *God's Decree and Man's Destiny: Studies in the Thought of Augustine of Hippo* (London: Variorum, 1987), 496.

[136] Augustine, *Confessions* 2.6, 49.

[137] Augustine, *Confessions* 2.4, 48.

[138] Augustine, *Confessions* 2.4, 47.

[139] Augustine, *Confessions* 2.7, 50. For a discussion of pride in *Confessions* 2, see Mateusz Stróżyński, "The Fall of the Soul in Book Two of Augustine's *Confessions*," *Vigiliae Christianae* 70 (2016): 92–98.

[140] Jeffrey Mann, "Original Sin in Augustine: An Analysis of Ricoeur's Essential Three Traits," *Budhi* 2 (1998): 153.

he hates God and himself, and the more he hates God the less he has what he wants and consequently the more he dislikes himself."[141]

Augustine's subsequent time in Carthage further exhibited this vicious cycle. Now finding himself "in the midst of a hissing cauldron of lust," Augustine's desire to love led him into "rank depravity."[142] Although reading Cicero's *Hortensius* initiated Augustine's pursuit of truth that ultimately lead him to Christianity, his will remained in bondage.[143] By Book VII, and coming out of his association with the Manicheans, Augustine became convinced of the truth of Christianity, or what has been termed his "intellectual conversion":[144] "I believed too that it was in Christ your Son, our Lord, and in the Holy Scriptures, that you had laid the path of man's salvation, so that he might come to that other life which is to follow this our life in death."[145] Nevertheless, Augustine recounted the intense struggles leading up to the famous garden scene and his conversion. Augustine's well-known quote, "Give me chastity and continence, but not yet," aptly summed up his inner turmoil at this time.[146] Augustine described himself as caught between "two wills," one convinced of the truth of Christianity and the other reluctant to give up its life of sin:

> I longed to [devote myself to God], but I was held fast, not in fetters clamped upon me by another, but by my own will, which had the strength of iron chains. The enemy held my will in his power and from it he had made a chain and shackled me. For my will was perverse and lust had grown from it, and when I gave in to lust habit was born, and when I did not resist habit became a necessity. These were the links which together formed what I have called my chain, and it held me fast in the duress of servitude. But the new will which had come to life in me and made me wish to serve you freely and enjoy you, my God, who are our only certain joy, was

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[141] Rigby, *The Theology of Augustine's Confessions*, 113.

[142] Augustine, *Confessions* 3.1, 55.

[143] Augustine, *Confessions* 3.4, 58–59.

[144] See Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, 284–285.

[145] Augustine, *Confessions* 7.7, 143.

[146] Augustine, *Confessions* 8.7, 169.

> not yet strong enough to overcome the old, hardened as it was by the passage of time. So these two wills within me, one old, one new, one the servant of flesh, the other of the spirit, were in conflict and between them they tore my soul apart.[147]

Elsewhere, Augustine likened his inner self at this time as a "house divided against itself."[148] Like the man under the law in his *Response to Simplician*, Augustine himself was torn between the two poles of loving God and loving his lust; he "wanted to follow the first course and was convinced that it was right," but "was still a slave to the pleasures of the second."[149]

Book VIII closes with the familiar scene of Augustine languishing under the fig tree in the Milanese garden, where he heard the now-famous words "*tolle lege*, *tolle lege*." It was there that Augustine experienced what Carol Harrison describes as the "final battle throes" in his long struggle against his sin.[150] Augustine described his experience in the garden after picking up a book and reading Paul's words in Romans 13:13:

> It was though the light of confidence flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled . . . You converted me to yourself, so that I no longer desired a wife or placed any hope in this world but stood firmly upon the rule of faith."[151]

Reflecting back on the time leading up to that moment, Augustine asked: "During all those years, where was my free will?"[152] What, he asked, rid his desires from "fruitless joys" and the "gnawing anxieties of ambition and gain, from wallowing in filth and scratching the itching sore of lust"?[153]

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[147] Augustine, *Confessions* 8.5, 164.

[148] Augustine, *Confessions* 8.8, 170.

[149] Augustine, *Confessions* 8.5, 165; Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 94.

[150] Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 239.

[151] Augustine, *Confessions* 8.12, 178.

[152] Augustine, *Confessions* 9.1, 181.

[153] Augustine, *Confessions* 9.1, 181.

Ultimately, Augustine attributed his conversion to an act of God's grace, not the power of his will: "You drove [those worldly pleasures] from me . . . You drove them from me and took their place."[154] As Phillip Cary notes, the episode usefully illustrates Augustine's teaching on grace: "God can give faith not just to the unworthy, but even to the unwilling.[155] Instead of loving his own sin, now Augustine directed his affections towards the Creator who is "sweeter than all pleasure."[156] Harrison rightly notes the "omnipresent" nature of grace in Augustine's experience:

> It is not the language of response, cooperation, or synergy, but of command, discipline, and coercion. Augustine describes God's grace as assaulting human beings, laying hold upon them and attacking them, causing pain and suffering, disregarding or overriding their wills, purging and cleansing them like a consuming fire, overcoming and conquering their sin, battering them into submission, as it were, so that they might ultimately attain freedom.[157]

Harrsion's descriptive language describing Augustine's understanding of grace echoes the bishop himself:

> You called me; you cried aloud to me; you broke my barrier of deafness. You shone upon me; your radiance enveloped me; you put my blindness to flight. You shed your fragrance about me; I drew breath and now I gasp for your sweet odour. I tasted you, and now I hunger and thirst for you. You touched me, and I am inflamed with love of your peace.[158]

The one who was weak had been made strong, and the heart of the one formerly in love with sin now was roused by the love of God's mercy and the joy of his grace.[159]

Man's entire life on earth, noted Augustine, is a "long, unbroken period of trial."[160] Although no longer under the law, Augustine held that the allure of sin and

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[154] Augustine, *Confessions* 9.1, 181.

[155] Cary, *Inner Grace*, 104.

[156] Augustine, *Confessions* 9.1, 181.

[157] Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology*, 249.

[158] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.27, 232.

[159] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.3, 208.

[160] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.28, 232.

worldly pleasures still remained in believers. This too, emphasized Augustine, required grace to keep at bay. Augustine pointed to lingering evils which he combated daily, including those that could gratify his senses.[161] Although he did not miss the "sweet scents" when they were absent, neither did he refuse them when he found them.[162] The pleasures of sound could stir Augustine to a "greater religious fervor," but could at the same paralyze his mind and lead it astray.[163] Likewise, pleasures of the eye were ever before Augustine, and allowed him no respite.[164] Sleep did not provide Augustine with relief; his dreams often conjured up images of "unclean acts inspired by sensual images" that he had to combat while asleep. Even pride was a temptation that Augustine admitted "has not passed from me," and he questioned whether he would ever fully overcome it.[165]

"Day after day without ceasing," noted Augustine, "these temptations put us to the test."[166] For Augustine, these ever-present trials pointed to the reality of the continuing necessity of grace in our lives. God commands holiness, but only with God's help could Augustine hope to meet these demands. Hence Augustine's now-infamous line that he repeats more than once in Book X: "Give me the grace to do what you command, and command me to do what you will."[167] Comments Karfíková on this statement:

> Into this sentence . . . Augustine seems to have put his notion of Christian experience: even after their conversion, men are still dependent on God's grace if they are to fulfill the principles of a virtuous life. They are not capable of it on their own, but they may succeed with the help of grace. They may even succeed on fulfilling any task, no matter how difficult, if God gives them the power.[168]

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[161] See also the discussion in Nisula. *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, 287–290.

[162] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.32, 237.

[163] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.33, 238.

[164] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.34, 239.

[165] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.36, 244.

[166] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.37, 245.

[167] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.29; 10.37, 233, 245.

[168] Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 97–98.

In a life full of trials, our hope is not found in the power of our wills but in God's "boundless mercy."[169] However, it was Augustine's emphasis on man's inability to keep God's commands apart from grace that sparked the controversy that lasted until the end of his life.

Inimici gratiae dei: The Pelagian Controversy

Augustine was no stranger to controversy throughout his career, but none were as long-lasting and bitter as his battles against the Pelagians which began in 411.[170] Although Pelagius initially admired Augustine for his *On Free Choice of the Will*, and even quoted Augustine in one of his own works, *On Nature*.[171] Pelagius' admiration turned to disgust around 405 upon hearing the famous line from Augustine's *Confessions*: "Give me the grace to do what you command, and command me to do what you will."[172] For Pelagius, both Augustine's insistence that keeping God's commandments required God's unmerited grace, along with his understanding of human nature after the fall as *non posse non peccare*, "struck at the whole basis of moral theology as Pelagius understood it."[173]

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[169] Augustine, *Confessions* 10.35, 243.

[170] There is modern scholarly debate about the validity of designating Pelagius himself as the movement's primary founder, and questioning whether one can rightly talk of Pelagianism as a unified movement. Donato Ogliari points to recent research that has become sensitive to this "over-simplification." See his discussion in *Gratia et Certamen*, 230–232. See also Gerald Bonner: "We can no longer think of the Pelagians as a party with a rigidly-defined doctrinal system but rather as a mixed group, united by certain theological principles which nevertheless left the individual free to develop his own opinions upon particular topics" ("Rufinius of Syria and African Pelagianism," in *God's Decree and Man's Destiny* [London: Variorum Reprints, 1987], 31). This section will highlight Pelagianism's main theological principles.

[171] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 141.

[172] For more on Pelagius' reaction, see B. R. Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 2 vols (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 1998), 2:3.

[173] Gerald Bonner, "Pelagianism and Augustine," in *Church and Faith in the Patristic Tradition: Augustine, Pelagianism, and Early Christian Northumbria* (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1996), 35.

Peter Brown candidly states, "we know very little about Pelagius."[174] Biographer B. R. Rees agrees: "In sum, all we are able to say with any conviction about his origins and early life is that he was a Briton, was born sometime in the early part of the second half of the fourth century, emigrated to Rome in the early eighties and was neither a monk nor a priest."[175] Nearly all contemporary authors described Pelagius as a Briton, with only Jerome referring to him—perhaps pejoratively—as *Scottus*, or "Irish."[176] Likely from a "good family" and possessing a "sound education," by the 390s Pelagius had made his way to Rome.[177] The climate of the times allowed for laymen like Pelagius to gain popularity, as Brown notes: "Laymen and women had become prominent as apostles of the new ascetic movement . . . their theological views were respected; their patronage sought, their mansions put at the disposal of holy men and pilgrims from all over the world.[178] With his popular expositions on Paul, Pelagius apparently found favor in high circles there.[179]

Despite enjoying the patronage of prominent Roman aristocratic families, controversy marked Pelagius' career from the beginning. It is in Rome that one finds the first mention of Pelagius in the form of a scathing letter written by Jerome. Around 393–394[180]—over a decade before his quarrel with Augustine—Pelagius made an enemy of Jerome when the latter learned secondhand of Pelagius' criticisms leveled against his

[174] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 341.

[175] Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 1:xiv.

[176] Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 1:xiii.

[177] Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 1:xiii.

[178] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 341–342.

[179] See Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 287–288.

[180] Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 2:2.

Against Jovinian. Consequently, Jerome penned a harsh critique against Pelagius in a letter addressed to Domnio:

> He is a young man—a monk, and in his own eyes an eloquent one (do not pearls fall from his lips, and are not his elegant phrases sprinkled with comic salt and humor?)—I am surprised, therefore, that he can without a blush frequent noblemen's houses, pay constant visits to married ladies, make our religion a subject of contention, distort the faith of Christ by misapplying words, and—in addition to all this—detract from one who is his brother in the Lord.[181]

Jerome—perhaps uncharitably—drew further attention to Pelagius' suspect visits to the "cells of widows and virgins," and that the young "monk" should remember his position "not by talking and arguing, but by holding his peace and sitting still."[182]

Pelagius made his contrary views explicit in his *Letter to Demetrias*, a work penned in 413 and directed towards the young Demetrius who had called off her engagement and taken a vow of virginity. Here, Pelagius stressed a life of holiness to the young maiden which he saw as evident in the repeated exhortations throughout the scriptures. For Pelagius, Augustine's view seemed to contradict the Scriptures' demands for perfection. Crucial for Pelagius was that God made men good, rational, and free:

> It was because God wished to bestow on the rational creature the gift of doing good of his own free will and the capacity to exercise free choice, by implanting in man the possibility of choosing either alternative, that he made it his peculiar right to be what he wanted to be, so that with his capacity for good and evil he could do either quite naturally and then bend his will in the other direction too.[183]

Contra Augustine, the fall did not alter human nature such that at any given time one was not free to do good instead of evil. This in itself—the ability to choose good *and* to choose evil—speaks to God's goodness in creating man: "This very capacity to do evil is also good—good, I say, because it makes the good part better by making it voluntary and independent, not bound by necessity but free to decide for itself."[184] Furthermore, to take

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[181] Jerome, Letter 50, in *Nicene and Post-Nice Fathers*, vol. 6, ed. Phillip Schaff and Henry Wace. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004), 81.

[182] Jerome, Letter 50, 81.

[183] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 3.2, in Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 2:38.

[184] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 3.2, 38.

away this man's ability to choose evil would eliminate any notion of virtue in man. Wrote Pelagius:

> It is on this choice between two ways, on this freedom to choose either alternative, that the glory of the rational mind is based, it is in this that the whole honour of our nature consists, it is from this that its dignity is derived and all good men win other's praise and their own reward. Nor would there be any virtue at all in the good done by the man who perseveres, if he could not at any time cross over to the path of evil.[185]

Furthermore, Pelagius maintained that denying that a person has the capacity to do good seemed to contradict ordinary human experience:

> Why is it, I ask you, that we either blush or fear at every sin we commit, displaying our guilt for what we have done at one moment by the blush on our countenance, at another by its pallor, anxiously trying to avoid any witness even of our smallest offences and suffering pangs of conscience all the while? And why, on the other hand, are we happy, resolute, bold after every good deed we have done and, if this fact is hidden from sight, desire and wish it to be seen in broad daylight? Why else unless it is because nature is its own witness and discloses its own good by the very fact of its disapproval of evil and, by putting its trust only in a good deed, shows what alone benefits it?[186]

Thus, for Pelagius, the conscience bears witness to our innate ability to recognize both good and bad deeds, and either to feel guilt or resolute after committing them.

One anonymous follower of Pelagius levelled a similar critique against Augustine which included both rational and moral elements: More than simply giving excuse to sloth and licentiousness, for God to command what man could not possibly achieve not only lacks common sense, but more seriously it would make God himself unrighteous. In his *On the Possibility of Not Sinning*, the Pelagian author makes this point clear:

> Surely it would be fitting for God to have given a command which it is impossible to fulfill, is such a thing is fitting for even a man to do; but if even human nature thinks it unfair to order anyone to do something impossible, how perverse it is to believe God to be capable of something which not even the nature of morals would respect! Is there anyone so thoughtless, so unrighteous, so totally ignorant of equity,

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[185] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 3.1, 38.

[186] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 4.1, 39.

> as to dare to order a servant or any of his subjects to do what he knows to be beyond his capability?[187]

Thus, Augustine's understanding runs contrary to all conceptions of human justice and common sense, and the anonymous Pelagian likened it to asking a man to swim across the sea or traverse an impassable mountain.[188]

While Pelagius opposed the idea that sin held man powerless to obey the dictates of the law for it stood in contrast to Christ's repeated commands to be holy, he nevertheless conceded that man could commit evil acts:

> Yet we do not defend the good of nature to such an extent that we claim that it cannot do evil, since we undoubtedly declare also that it is capable of good and evil; we merely try to protect it from an unjust charge, so that we may not seem to be forced to do evil through a fault in our nature, when, in fact, we do neither good nor evil without the exercise of our will and always have the freedom to do one of the two, being always able to do either.[189]

Once again, Pelagius invoked the freedom of the will to explain why people sin when their natures are not naturally inclined towards evil. Although the sins of some appear to be innate and some sinners often seem powerless to keep from sinning, Pelagius understood this phenomenon in terms of developing bad habits. One may form habits that do tighten their grip on the individual, and these habits even appear "to have acquired the force of nature."[190] Said Pelagius,

> Nor is there any reason why it is made difficult for us to do good other than that long habit of doing wrong which has infected us from childhood and corrupted us little by little over many years and ever after holds us in bondage and slavery to itself . . . That old habit now attacks our new-found freedom of will, and, as we languish in ignorance through our sloth and idleness, unaccustomed to doing good after having for so long learned to do only evil, we wonder why sanctity is also conferred on us as if from an outside source.[191]

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[187] *On the Possibility of Not Sinning* 2–3, trans. B. R. Rees, in *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 2:167. For a discussion of the authorship of this work, see pp. 15–18.

[188] *On the Possibility of Not Sinning* 2–3, 167.

[189] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 8.1, 43.

[190] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 8.3, 44.

[191] Pelagius, *Letter to Demetrias* 8.3, 44.

Habit, not nature, therefore, explains sin. Brown provides an apt summation of Pelagius' teachings:

> In Pelagius's opinion, there was no element in the human person and no force within the universe itself that made it impossible for a serious Christian to carry out what his or her conscience demanded. The moral universe, as created by God, was made up of free wills alone. Human beings might use this freedom to do terrible evil. But they acted as totally free agents. There was no heart of darkness in human nature, just as there was no heart of darkness in the universe . . . Holiness came from the human will alone.[192]

By 415, the teachings of Pelagius and his supporters had come to a head with Augustine. A subsequent series of councils sought to condemn Pelagius with mixed results. Now in Jerusalem, Pelagius was summoned at the Synod of Diospolis, an assembly of fourteen bishops, to account for his views. Pelagius appeased the assembly by reassuring the bishops of his orthodoxy and distancing himself from his disciple, Caelestius.[193] Disappointed with the result and unconvinced of Pelagius' innocence, Augustine and his friend Orosius continued their campaign to have him condemned. Augustine's extensive writing moved the cause forward, but so did his appeal for the support for his fellow African bishops. In 416, councils at Milevis and Carthage condemned both Pelagius and Caelestius, but an excommunication handed down by Pope Innocent in 417 was delayed by his successor, Zosimus.[194] Mounting pressure from the African bishops, however, pushed Zosimus to condemn Pelagius in 418.[195] Pelagius' influence did not stop following his excommunication and subsequent disappearance from history; rather, it continued to spread through the writings of his successor, Julian, the bishop of Eclanum. Julian would become Augustine's last, great opponent, and Augustine would die leaving a tract against Julian unfinished.

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[192] Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, 305.

[193] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 358. Rees helpfully reprints the interrogation in *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, I:135–139.

[194] Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 2:4.

[195] Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters*, 2:141.

The City of God

Although not specifically addressing the Pelagian controversy—Augustine intended the work to offer an apology to the pagans in response to the catastrophic sacking of Rome by the Visigoths in 410—*De civitate Dei* (*The City of God*) nevertheless "is a treatise in which Augustine presented a substantial part of his theology and in which he addressed the issue of grace to a large extent as well."[196] Fleeing in the wake of Alaric's attack, many of Rome's pagan intelligentsia found refuge in Augustine's North Africa. Men like Volusianus brought with them the charge that Christianity was to blame for the empire's present crisis, a charge Augustine was ready to counter.[197] Moreover, Augustine sought to provide answers to an entirely different group: his fellow Christians "whose own faith had been shaken."[198] Consequently, Augustine's reply traced framed all of cosmic history as the providential outworking of two cities, that of the City of God and the earthly city. Augustine exploration into the origins of the earthly city provided a clear presentation of his doctrine of God, man, and sin. Bede quoted from at least sixty passages in the *City of God* in his own writings, and therefore he would have been familiar with its insights.[199]

After his extended apologetic against the pagans in books I–X, Augustine began to explore the origins of the two cities in book XI. The city of man finds its origins not in God as with the heavenly city, but with the regrettable decision of humanity's first parents in the Garden. Created good and endowed with freedom, God required obedience from Adam and Eve under pain of death:

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[196] Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 267. On the dating of the twenty-two individual books—a span of over ten years—see the tables in Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 280, 380. For Brown's helpful summary of its aims and composition in the same work, see pages 297–311. Also, Lancel, *St Augustine*, 391–412.

[197] See Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 301.

[198] Lancel, *St Augustine*, 394.

[199] Compare with Lapdige, *The Anglo-Saxon Library*, 197–198.

> God created [man] in such a way that, if he remained subject to his Creator as true Lord, and if he kept His commandments with pious obedience, He should pass over into the company of the angels and obtain, without suffering death, a blessed immortality without end. But if he offended the Lord his God by using his free will proudly and disobediently, he should live, as the beasts do, subject to death: the slave of his own lust, destined to suffer eternal punishment after death.[200]

Timo Nisula comments on the role of obedience in the Garden:

> In Paradise, obedience was the only virtue that rational creatures, subordinated under God's dominion, were able to show to Him. Indeed, obedience was, and still is, the mother of all virtues. By giving the commandment, God told Adam and Eve that He is the Lord.[201]

Nevertheless, Adam "began to be pleased with himself, as if he were his own light."[202] Thus, even before eating the forbidden fruit, argued Augustine, Adam's already-present pride made Satan's offer of godhood so alluring.[203] Thus the act was preceded by an evil will, the "primal disobedience," or "man's desire to be free on his own."[204]

Although man "did not fall away from his nature so completely as to lose all being," the effects of the fall were disastrous for both Adam and his progeny.[205] The effects were immediately made manifest in God's divine punishment; not only did

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[200] Augustine, *The City of God Against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2014), 12.22, 533. See also 13.1, 541: "If [Adam and Eve] discharged the duty of obedience, the reward of an angelic immortality and a blessed eternity was to follow without the intervention of death; but if they disobeyed, they were to be most justly punished with the sentence of death."

[201] Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, 102. On this concept see also Ogliari: "Highly indicative of [Augustine's] growing pessimism about human powers is also the fact that 'his nomination of obedience as the mother of virtues in the *City of God* . . . reflects the deep misgivings of the later Augustine about man's ability to function as a moral agent *sui iurus*'" (*Gratia et Certamen*, 259).

[202] Augustine, *The City of God* 14.13, 610. For a discussion of the goodness of creation as discussed in the *City of God*, see Harrison, *Augustine's Way into the Will*, 137–150.

[203] Augustine, *City of God* 14.13, 610.

[204] Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, 102.

[205] Augustine, *City of God* 14.13, 609. See also 22.24, 1160: "There is still in [man] a certain spark of that reason in respect of which he was made in the image of God; and this has not been wholly quenched." Commenting on this passage, says Bonner, "The fact that the capacity to enjoy God was never utterly destroyed by the Fall remained part of Augustine's theology throughout the Pelagian controversy . . . Such, according to Augustine, is the greatness and misery of fallen humanity, rightly condemned yet still retaining traces of its heavenly origin" (*Freedom and Necessity*, 48).

mankind lose the freedom it once had—the passions now ruled its will—but the first offence also brought upon death:

> For the soul, now taking delight in its own freedom to do wickedness, and disdaining to serve God, was itself deprived of the erstwhile subject of the body to it. Because it had of its own free will forsaken its superior Lord, it no longer held its own inferior servant in obedience to its will . . . Then began the flesh to lust against the Spirit, from which the conflict we are born. From the first offence of mankind comes the origin of death in us, and we bear in our members, and in our vitiated nature, the striving of flesh, or, indeed, its victory.[206]

Augustine further highlighted the solidarity of all mankind in Adam:

> For God, Who is the author of nature, and certainly not of vices, created man righteous. Man, however, depraved by his own free will, and justly condemned, produced depraved and condemned children. For we were all in that one man, since we all that one man who fell into sin through the woman who was made from him before they sinned.[207]

Whereas God intended to create the human race from one man so that "they should be united in fellowship by a natural likeness" and "bound together by kinship in the unity of concord, linked by the bond of peace," now mankind inherited a corrupt nature, bondage to sin, and death.[208]

Although Adam could have attained blessedness, humanity was now divided into "two orders," those who "live according to the flesh, and the other of those who live according to the spirit."[209] Augustine drew out the stark contrast between the two orders or cities. Those who live according to the flesh constitute the city of man, whose founder Augustine identified as the murderous Cain.[210] Those who live according to the spirit,

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[206] Augustine, *City of God* 13.13 (555). See also the discussion in Nisula, *Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, 103–109.

[207] Augustine, *City of God* 13.14 (555–556). Comments Bonner on this passage: "Augustine here develops the Pauline image of humanity being either in Adam or in Christ, though for him we were all in Adam, while only the elect are in Christ. Augustine seems to have taken an image literally, and so contrived to visit Adam's personal sin on his descendants" (*Freedom and Necessity*, 74).

[208] Augustine, *City of God* 14.1, 581.

[209] Augustine, *City of God* 14.1, 581.

[210] Augustine, *City of God* 15.1, 635.

however, constitute the heavenly city whose builder is God himself. [211] Those in the earthly city "prefer their own gods to the founder of this holy city,"[212] Whereas the heavenly city "is a perfectly ordered and perfectly harmonious fellowship in the enjoyment of God, and of one another in God," the wretched, wrote Augustine, "lack that tranquility of order in which there is no disturbance . . . they are miserable deservedly and justly."[213] In what Serge Lancel refers to as the "true living heart of the whole work,"[214] Augustine demarcated the citizens of each city by their loves:

> Two cities, then, have been created by two loves: that is, the earthly by love of self extending even to contempt of God, and the heavenly by love of God extending to contempt of self. The one, therefore, glories in itself, the other in the Lord; the one seeks glory from men, the other finds its highest glory in God.[215]

Augustine closed this section by drawing the connection between the city of man and Paul's description of fallen humanity in Romans 1. Whereas members of the heavenly city seek to serve one another in charity, those in the earthly city "have pursued the goods of the body or of their own mind, or both."[216]

Importantly, all are born from Adam and Eve are necessarily born first as citizens of the earthly city: "So it is that each man, because he derives his origin from a condemned stock, is at first necessarily evil and fleshly, because he comes from Adam."[217] Humanity inherits a will that has become "vitiated and depraved" and has lost the freedom it once had.[218] Consequently, the only hope restoring humanity's fallen

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[211] Augustine, *City of God* 11.1, 449; cf. Ps 48:8.

[212] Augustine, *City of God* 11.1, 449.

[213] Augustine, *City of God* 19.13, 938.

[214] Lancel, *St Augustine*, 401.

[215] Augustine, *City of God* 14.28, 632.

[216] Augustine, *City of God* 14.28, 632.

[217] Augustine, *City of God* 15.1, 635.

[218] Augustine, *City of God* 14.11, 605.

nature and for those under wrath becoming citizens of the heavenly lies with the gratuitous grace of God by which he predestined to save some out of the *massa damnata*:[219]

> It is, however, certain that Almighty God, the supreme and supremely good Creator of all natures, who assists and rewards good wills, forsakes and condemns the bad, and orders both alike, did not lack a plan whereby he might complete the fixed number of citizens predestined in His Wisdom for His City, even out of the condemned as it were in its vitiated root.[220]

God's will to save some stemmed from his eternal decrees, thus it did not rest with foreseen merit.[221] Consistent with his reply to Simplician years before, Augustine wrote:

> He chooses them by Grace, and He shows His bounty to those who have been redeemed not only in His dealings with them but also in His dealings with those whom He has not redeemed. For each man who is excused from sharing the fate of those in whose just punishment he had shared can recognize that he has been rescued from such evils by a goodness which is not owed to him, but freely given.[222]

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[219] On the term *massa damnata*, see Ogliari,: "For Augustine, the term *massa* becomes a forceful tool to describe the powerless, sinful situation in which humanity finds itself (*massa peccati*), together with the damnation that goes with it (*massa damnata*), and from which only those whom God's decree has predestined will be delivered" (*Gratia et Certamen*, 343).

[220] Augustine, *City of God* 14.26, 630.

[221] See for example Augustine's discussion on the will of God in *City of God*, 22.2, 1110: "According to [God's] own will, however, together with His foreknowledge, is eternal, God has certainly already made all things in heaven and on earth which He has willed: not only things past and present, but also things future. But before that time arrives at which He has willed that something is to come to be which He has foreknown and disposed before all time, we say, 'It will come to pass when God wills it.' This does not mean that God will then have a new will which He did not have before; but that something will then come to pass which has been prepared in His immutable will from all eternity." See also the discussion in Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*: "God's decision to make something happen coincides with the very moment in which He foreknows what he will do. According to Augustine's doctrine, therefore, the priority of God's prescience must not be considered as a priority *in tempore*, but as a priority which can only be understood in the light of the *nunc stans*, where God's timeless and eternal decrees find their proper setting. It follows that predestination to salvation of individual men relies exclusively on God's will, which is at one with his prescience" (332–333).

[222] Augustine, *City of God* 14.26, 630. Ogliari notes the "substantial shift" that distinguished Augustine from earlier theologians on his view of predestination. Whereas pre-Augustinian theologians regarded prescience and predestination as synonyms, writes Ogliari, "According to Augustine, God's prescience should instead be understood in the light of *God's gracious acts or gifts*. The substantial shift by which Augustine makes God the sole, absolute subject of predestination, independently of any possible future behavior of man (*ante praeuisa merita*), is in itself sufficient to rule out any convergence between Augustine's understanding of the relationship between prescience and predestination and that of the ancient Greek and Latin Christian theologians. According to Augustine, whereas prescience is God's foreknowledge of man's acting and destiny, predestination is the direct exercise of God's intentions, will and agency upon the elect. Only in this way are God's chosen ones enabled to receive the grace of election prepared for them from all eternity" (*Gratia et Certamen*, 331–332).

Augustine gave the example of Cain and Abel to further illustrate his point. The first man was to be born a citizen of the world. Abel, however:

> Was a pilgrim in this world, belonging to the City of God. The latter was predestined by grace and chosen by grace; by grace he was a pilgrim below, and by grace he was a citizen above. So far as he himself is concerned, he arises from the same lump which was wholly condemned originally; but God, like a potter . . . made 'out of the same lump, one vessel unto honour, and the other unto dishonor.[223]

Since all come from the same corrupted lump, no one can charge God with unfairness. In the same way, those who experience salvation can only credit God's grace.

In this age, the two cities are intermixed with those in the City of God dwelling "by faith as a pilgrim among the ungodly."[224] As with the ungodly, the current life is not without hardships for the people of God; although they enjoy spiritual blessings now and look forward to a time of eternal peace, in this life they must battle against the flesh daily:

> The peace which is our peculiar possession, however, is ours even now, with God by faith, and we shall enjoy it eternally with Him by sight. But the peace we have here, whether shared with other men or peculiar to ourselves, is only a solace for our wretchedness rather than the joy of blessedness. Our righteousness also, through true righteousness insofar as it is directed toward a good end, is in this life such that it consists only in the remission of sin rather than the perfection of virtue. This is borne out by the prayer of the whole City of God during its pilgrimage on earth; for it cries out to God with the voice of all its members: 'Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.'[225]

While the people of God can govern the vices, "the vices do not allow themselves to be governed without resistance." Evil may still creep into the elect, and if not in deed, then in the mind or the lips.[226] Nevertheless, Augustine asserted that God's elect are

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[223] Augustine, *City of God* 15.1, 635.

[224] Augustine, *City of God* 1.1, 3.

[225] Augustine, *City of God* 19.27, 962. Comments Nisula on this passage: "Only when people adjust their loves and lives according to God's will they become able to pursue a right and just order in their souls, in their families and in their public lives. Augustine denies this to be possible for anyone but Christians, albeit non-Christians may form communities based on their shared convictions on what to love and pursue . . . Augustine sums it all up in *ciu* 19,27 by asserting that only Christians are effectively able to resist vices, and even they do it with difficulty" (*Augustine and the Functions of Concupiscence*, 247).

[226] Augustine, *City of God* 19.27, 963.

characterized by their desire to please God: "Christians . . . are citizens of the Holy City of God, living according to God during the pilgrimage of this present life."[227] Believers have confidence that, despite their current struggles against the flesh, "the help of Christ will never fail to sustain the believer."[228]

For Augustine, the ultimate end for those in both cities is certain: Those "predestined to death"[229] and belonging to the city of man "will undergo eternal punishment with the devil," but those belonging to the City of God are "predestined to reign in eternity with God."[230] Those now in the City of God look with eager anticipation of the coming age in which, as Augustine described it, "that great felicity . . . where there will be no evil where no good thing will be lacking, and where we shall be free to give ourselves up to the praise of God."[231] The freedom humanity lost in the Garden will finally and evermore be restored:

> They will then no longer be able to take delight in sin. This does not mean, however, that they will have no free will. On the contrary, it will be all the more free, because set free from delight in sinning to take a constant delight in not sinning. For when man was created righteous, the first freedom of will that he was given consisted in an ability not to sin, but also in an ability to sin. But this last freedom of will will be greater, in that it will consist in not being able to sin.[232]

Augustine thus anticipated and answered the possible rejoinder: does the ability not to sin imply a loss of freedom? Not so, argued Augustine, for in this new freedom "The Lover is not so much concerned with freedom as with cleaving to the Beloved."[233] While the

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[227] Augustine, *City of God* 14.9, 597.

[228] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 381.

[229] Augustine, *City of God* 22.24, 1165. For a discussion of this term, see Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 366–367.

[230] Augustine, *City of God* 15.1, 634.

[231] Augustine, *City of God* 22.30, 1178.

[232] Augustine, *City of God* 22.30, 1179.

[233] Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity*, 65.

freedom not to sin will supersede that freedom originally possessed by Adam and Eve, it is not itself a natural possibility, but, stated Augustine, "a gift of God."[234] The greatest gift to those predestined for life, however, will be God himself "Who gives virtue, and Who has promised Himself to us, than Whom nothing is better or greater."[235]

Augustine's Sermons

As Peter Brown notes in reference to a letter Augustine once wrote to Jerome, the Bishop of Hippo, despite his renown as a thinker, exegete, and theologian, could never be a "disinterested biblical scholar."[236] Perhaps above all, Augustine saw his primary task as communicating the message of the Bible, God's word, to his flock.[237] Of Augustine's nearly eight hundred preserved sermons, a significant number—especially those produced during the Pelagian controversy—cover important aspects of the bishop's doctrines of grace.[238] Instead of investigating each of these, the present section will focus on those sermons known by Bede and that highlight the fundamental elements of Augustine's theology of grace.[239] Bede's access to these sermons, as with Augustine's

[234] Augustine, *City of God* 22.30, 1180.

[235] Augustine, *City of God* 22.30, 1179.

[236] Brown, *Augustine of Hippo*, 249.

[237] For a recent treatment of Augustine as a preacher, including an insightful discussion of his North African context, see Peter Sanlon, *Augustine's Theology of Preaching* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014).

[238] Anthony Dupont, *Preacher of Grace: A Critical Reappraisal of Augustine's Doctrine of Grace in his Sermones ad Populum on Liturgical Feasts and During the Donatist Controversy* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2014), 1.

[239] Anthony Dupont s has produced two important works exploring Augustine's theology of grace as found in his sermons. In addition to his aforementioned *Preacher of Grace*, which argues for continuity in Augustine's doctrines of grace in his sermons produced during the Donatist controversy, see his *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones.* For a *status quaestinonis* on current research on Augustine's sermons, see Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine's Sermons*, 3–34. Likewise, J. Patout Burns, "Situating and Studying Augustine's Sermons," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 26, no. 2 (2018): 307–322. The present section is indebted to these studies. See also the more succinct discussion of Augustine's sermons in Karfíková, *Grace and the Will according to Augustine*, 232–239.

other works, further demonstrates that Bede would have had ample exposure to the African Father's theology of grace.

Several sermons emphasized the ruin brought about by Adam and Eve's sin. Despite God forbidding the first parents from eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, "They ate in spite of the prohibition, and their eyes were opened."[240] The opening of their eyes, Augustine went on to explain, did not refer to a physical sense of formerly being blind; rather, "Their eyes were opened to something they had never perceived, something they had never been shocked by in the movement of their bodies."[241] Thus, argued Augustine, "There you have what original sin is derived from, there you have the reason why nobody is born without sin."[242] Now, although no law was given, man was a sinner, and as a result brought guilt and death upon their descendants. Appealing to Romans 5:12, Augustine wrote, "So then observe, brothers and sisters, observe how the human race has flowed from the death of the first man. Thus, said Augustine, "Sin entered" from the first man "into this world, and through sin death, and thus it passed through into all men."[243] Augustine then elaborated on the ramifications of Adam's sin upon future generations:

> "Passed through;" take note of these words you heard; reflect, and see what is meant by "passed through." It passed through; as a result, even the baby is guilty; it hasn't yet committed sin, but it has contracted it. You see, that sin didn't remain in its source, but "passed through," not into this person or that, but "into all men." The first sinner, the first transgressor, begot sinners liable to death.[244]

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[240] Augustine, *Sermon* 151, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 3, vol. 5, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 43. All future references to Augustine's sermons will come from Hill's translations indicated by the specific volume number and pagination.

[241] Augustine, *Sermon* 151, 5:43. See also Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine's Sermons*, 471–472.

[242] Augustine, *Sermon* 151, 5:44.

[243] Augustine, *Sermon* 153, 5:65.

[244] Augustine, *Sermon* 153, 5:65.

Thus, all of Adam and Eve's progeny inherit guilt and death, and this is prior to "any free choice."[245] Created without blemish, now humanity is corrupt and estranged from God, and with a hint of sarcasm Augustine noted that "you've definitely found someone born apart from sin, when you've found someone born apart from Adam."[246] Those born from Adam are, in Augustine's words, a *massa irae*, a "lump of wrath."[247]

Throughout his sermons, Augustine described the extent of corruption brought about by original sin. In particular, the bishop emphasized the pervasiveness of sin upon humanity and the dire situation it left it in. Speaking in the context of Christ coming to save sinners, Augustine wrote:

> Where did he find you? Sold under sin, lying in death of the first man, deriving sin from the first man, having guilt before you could have any free choice. That's where he found you, when he found you as a baby. But you have got beyond your infant years; why look, you've grown up, to the first sin you have added many more, you have received the law, you have turned out a transgressor.[248]

To Adam's inherited sin, therefore, his progeny adds more and more transgressions. Likewise, in several places Augustine likened the effects of sin to a disease that had infected the body and required a doctor: "There is no human being in this whole mass of mortals that comes down from Adam, not a single one hasn't been sick."[249] As far as Augustine was concerned, left to their own power, sinning is all those born from Adam *can* do.

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[245] Augustine, *Sermon* 153, 5:65.

[246] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:157.

[247] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:155. See also Dupont's discussion on the theology of this sermon in *Gratia in Augustine's Sermons*, 213–220. Also, on the term *massa irae*, see Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 343–344.

[248] Augustine, *Sermon* 153, 5:65.

[249] Augustine, *Sermon* 176, 5:273. See also *Sermon* 125, where repeatedly used the imagery of sickness and infirmity.

Throughout the sermons, Augustine proposed two possible "cures" for the sinner, the power of the will and works of the law. Both, according to Augustine, ultimately fail to give humanity any hope for salvation. First, Augustine combatted the notion that our wills have the power to please God. In a sermon on Romans 8:12–17, Augustine described the effect of sin upon the mind:

> The irreligious mind, of course, hates even the truth when rightly understood and sometimes people's minds are so twisted, they are afraid of understanding, in case they should be obliged to carry out what they have understood. It is of such people that the psalm says, "They refused to understand, so as to act well."[250]

Thus, argued Augustine, obstinate sinners willingly remain in ignorance of God's law, or, even when God's will is known to them, refuse to abide by it. In the same sermon, Augustine further elaborated on the damage done to the sinner's will, again using the imagery of sickness:

> Human nature was capable by free will of wounding itself; but once wounded and sickly, it is not capable by free will of healing itself. After all, if you want to live so intemperately that you get ill, you don't require a doctor to help you; you yourself are all you need for falling down. But when by your intemperate behavior have begun to get ill, you cannot deliver yourself from sickness in the same way as you were able by your excesses to ruin your health.[251]

Adam was free to injure the will, but conversely his progeny are unable to heal it. Further on in the sermon, Augustine used even more powerful imagery of slavery to describe the fallen will: "That's what your will, which is called free, is fit for, and by acting badly it becomes a slave deserving to be condemned."[252] To support his argument, Augustine invoked 2 Peter 2:19: "For whatever anyone is defeated by, to that person he is a slave."

Secondly, as in his treatise to Simplician, Augustine insisted that the law was incapable of rectifying the problem of sin. The transgressor looking for healing in the law, would be disappointed since, as Augustine pointed out, "the letter makes people

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[250] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:96; cf. Ps 36:3.

[251] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:97.

[252] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:103–104.

guilty."[253] *Sermon* 156 contains an extended discussion of the law's true purpose.[254] Augustine did affirm the goodness of the law despite its inability to take care of the root of sin in the sinner's heart, and the law, being a reflection of God's moral character, does serve an important purpose: it makes the transgressor aware of his sin. Appealing to 1 Timothy 1:8, Augustine wrote:

> "The law is good, if one uses it lawfully." So what does it mean, lawfully to use the law? To recognize through the law one's disease, and to desire divine assistance in getting better. Because, as I have said, and it can't be said too often, "If the law could bring to life, justice would really come from the law," and a savior wouldn't be required, nor would Christ come, nor would he seek the lost sheep with his blood.[255]

Augustine, drawing from Galatians 3:22–24, then compared the law to a teacher who brings the student—the sinner—to the headmaster, Christ:

> What was the use of the law, then, and how does it help? Because "scripture locked all things up under sin, so that Jesus Christ's promise out of faith might be given to those who believe. And so the law," [Paul] says, "was our pedagogue" in comparison. See if you can get the point I'm making in from this comparison. The pedagogue doesn't take the boy to himself, but to the schoolmaster; but once the boy has been well educated and grown older, he won't continue to be under the pedagogue.[256]

The law, therefore, awakens sinners to the reality that their hope lies in assistance from outside themselves: God's divine grace. Whereas the law is insufficient to make sinners righteous, argued Augustine, God's grace can make those under wrath into children of God. Consequently, to trust in the law for righteousness is to place one's hope in their own merits rather than the grace of God.

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[253] Augustine, *Sermon* 270, 7:291.

[254] For a detailed treatment of this sermon, see also Dupont's discussion in *Gratia in Augustine's Sermons*, 496–503.

[255] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:98.

[256] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:98.

Augustine continued his argument by providing the example of the Jews. In contrast to the law's intended purpose, said Augustine, they supposed that the power of their wills and works of the law could make them righteous apart from grace:

> In particular, it's because of the Jews that the apostle is so persistent in saying all this and urging it on us; they were always boasting about the law, and claiming that the law was enough to direct their freedom of choice. And thus, because they claimed the law was enough to direct their freedom of choice, "being ignorant of the justice of God," that is, of the justice that is given by God as a result of faith, "and wishing to establish their own," as though it were achieved by their own powers, not obtained by the cries of faith for help, "they are not subject," as he says, "to the justice of God. For the end of the law is Christ, to be justice"[257]

Once again returning to the imagery of sickness to describe the human condition, the bishop brought into focus the inherent pride in supposing that it was within one's own powers to provide his own cure apart from God's grace:

> "What use is the law?" [Paul] answers, "It was laid down for the sake of transgression." This is the same as what he says elsewhere: "The law was introduced so that the offense might abound." And what did he add there? "But where the offense has abounded, grace has abounded all the more." Because with a milder kind of sickness the help of medicine was ignored, the disease grew worse, and the doctor was asked for. So why the law? It was laid down for the sake of transgression; as a means to humble the stiff necks of the proud who attribute too much to themselves, and claim credit for their wills alone, imagining that their freedom of choice is all they need for being just.[258]

Thus, the law thwarts any attempt by the sinner to claim a righteousness of their own; instead, the law reveals sinful humanity's inability to make itself just. To finish his line of reasoning, Augustine pointed to the power of the will in the Garden: "When this freedom was unimpaired, that is, in paradise, it demonstrated what its powers were, it showed how much they could do—collapse into ruin, not rise up again."[259] Consequently, Augustine concluded, the need for the grace of a mediator becomes apparent.

As the previous discussion demonstrated, grace is the medicine needed by sinners. For Augustine, apart from grace the situation would be hopeless for sinners:

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[257] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:98–99; cf. Rom 10:3–4.

[258] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:99; cf. Gal 3:19, Rom 5:20.

[259] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:99.

> The whole mass or lump of the human race, which through Adam was estranged from God, is reconciled to him again. "For through Adam sin entered the world, and through sin death; and thus it passed over into all men, in that all have sinned." Who could ever be rescued from this? Who could ever be set apart for mercy from this lump of wrath?[260]

How does one consequently attain God's mercy? How then, if what Augustine has said about the powerlessness of the will is true, does the sinner earn God's grace? Augustine's based his reply on Paul's instruction in 1 Corinthians 4:7: "'For who sets you apart? And what do you have that you have not received?' So it's not merits that set us apart, but grace."[261] Thus, according to Augustine, God freely bestows his grace without cause to any preceding merit on behalf of the recipient. Merit, he said, implies that something is owed to us by God, and if it is owed, it is not free. In the same way, Augustine sharply retorted, "if it isn't gratis, it isn't grace."[262]

Throughout his sermons, Augustine repeatedly emphasized two important channels through which God bestows his grace: baptism and the gift of the Spirit. Augustine's *Sermon* 193, which he preached in the midst of the Pelagian controversy, demonstrates the close relationship between the bishop's understanding of original sin and baptism. Using the example of mothers who bring their children to the baptismal font, Augustine argued why, given his understanding of the guilt passed down from Adam, even infants must receive baptism:

> Now I'm questioning you about a baby; it's brought to church to be made a Christian, to be baptized, for the purpose, I rather think, of belonging to the People of Jesus. Which Jesus? The one who saves people from their sins. If [the infant] has nothing in it that needs to be saved from, take them away. "It is not the healthy that need a doctor, but those who are ill." In this critical issue of the baby, someone will be brazen enough to say to me, "He's Jesus for me, he isn't Jesus for this one."[263]

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[260] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:155; cf. Rom 5:12.

[261] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:155.

[262] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:155.

[263] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:156; cf. Mark 2:17.

Augustine clearly had his Pelagian opponents in mind since they denied the inherited guilt present in infants. Augustine further highlighted their need of salvation:

> Nobody would deny these babies grace, not even if he had to give them what was his own. Let mercy be shown to these unfortunates. What's the point of praising their innocence beyond measure? Let them find the savior, don't let them already have experience of the flatterer. Clearly, when infants are at such grave risk, we ought not even be arguing about it, in case we appear even by arguing to put off their well-being and salvation. Bring it along, let it be washed, be liberated, be given life.[264]

Augustine then contrasted Adam, the father in whom all die, with Christ, the one who makes all alive: "The only was [the infant] found of entering into life of this world was through Adam; the only way it will find of avoiding the penalties of the next is through Christ. Why shut the door in its face?"[265] In another sermon, Augustine made a similar argument, noting the absurdity of those, he clearly had in mind the Pelagians, who would want their babies baptized, but denied even their infants required salvation:

> What need did an infant have of Christ if it wasn't sick? If it's healthy, why through those who love it does it seek out the doctor? If infants are said to be entirely without any inherited sin, when they are brought along and come to Christ, why aren't those who bring them along told in the Church, 'Take away these innocents; it is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick.'[266]

Augustine summed up the inconsistency on behalf of the Pelagians by presenting a dichotomy: "Parents can choose one of two things: either admit that sin is being cured in their babies, or stop presenting them to the doctor."[267]

The foregoing discussion raises several important questions on Augustine's understanding of baptism's efficacy. As he made clear in his sermons and elsewhere, baptism takes away the guilt inherited through the first transgression. Augustine often used the language of rebirth describing baptism, as in *Sermon* 153 where he gave the example of a drunkard: "He has been baptized, all his sins of drunkenness have been

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[264] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:156.

[265] Augustine, *Sermon* 293, 8:157.

[266] Augustine, *Sermon* 176, 5:273.

[267] Augustine, *Sermon* 176, 5:273.

forgiven; there remains as his adversary the habit. So he has something to fight with once he has been born again."[268] Furthermore, in other writings Augustine linked together his understanding of election and predestination to baptism; those infants who perish before receiving baptism, even those of Christian parents, are not part of the elect and thereby condemned.[269] Did Augustine mean that the sacrament baptism itself saves? Other studies are helpful in demonstrating that, for Augustine, baptism was ultimately a "sacred sign of an invisible grace."[270]

Although later medieval theologians combined the sacrament with that which it signified, Augustine kept the two, in Phillip Cary's assessment, on "separate tracks."[271] The visible sign, baptism, pointed to the God's invisible work of grace on the inner person and their unity with his church. But if baptism is merely a sign of grace and does not confer it, why was Augustine adamant that those, especially infants, who die without it are damned? Cary helpfully explains that, for Augustine, baptism signified the "inner peace and unity of the church, outside of which is not salvation."[272] Thus baptism itself is

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[268] Augustine, *Sermon* 151, 5:42.

[269] For example, writes Ogliari: "One of the first problems Augustine was confronted with during the [Pelagian] controversy was the destiny of unbaptized children. Set against the backdrop of the doctrine of original sin, the objection of his adversaries was: why does it happen that of two children one is baptized and saved whereas the other is left unbaptized and perishes? For the bishop of Hippo it would make no sense to speak of God's foreknowledge of their future faith and merits, particularly if one thinks that from among the baptized children there grow impious men. Augustine's answer is based (as the only feasible solution) on God's mysterious election, which cannot be grasped by the human mind" (*Gratia et Certamen*, 318).

[270] Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 191. The following paragraph is indebted to Cary's study.

[271] Cary, *Outward Signs*, 163. See also Cary's summary of later-medieval theologians tendency to combine the sign with the thing signified: "Despite great diversity in their formulations, all medieval theologians from the twelfth century onward make two decisive additions to this Augustinian starting point: first, that the sacred thing signified by the sacraments is grace, and second, that the sacraments of the church confer the grace they signify. This makes the sacraments causes of grace, not in the sense of being the ultimate origin of grace (which of course is God alone) but in the sense of being, as Aquinas clarifies, an instrumental cause that God uses to bestow grace" (*Outward Signs*, 161).

[272] Cary, *Outward Signs*, 194.

not efficacious, but, he says, "it is necessary as an outward mark of this inner unity, which is why even infants are damned if they die without it."[273] Cary provides the analogy of a door in order to illustrate his point:

> Augustine will not attribute regenerating power to the water of baptism, but he does join the church in seeing it as a necessary condition of spiritual regeneration. It is like the door that leads within the walls of the church. The door has no power to open itself and let anyone in: the man outside knocks, and the people within open up an take him in among themselves, and there he is safe. Everything depends on passing through this door, but the door itself has no power to save.[274]

Augustine's statement in the lengthy quote above would seem to confirm Cary's assessment that the sign points to the grace found in the thing signified. That is, the "doctor" in Augustine's imagery was not baptism itself, but Christ.

If Augustine held that baptism was only a sign, it follows that the sacrament by itself is not efficacious to save.[275] To use Cary's words, "for Augustine, baptism saves us only in hope, not in reality."[276] The bishop noted the reality that even those whose "sins had been forgiven in the holy bath" will still struggle with sin. Pointing to Paul's example in Romans 7:15–25, Augustine warned that "the life of the just in this body is still a warfare, not a triumphal celebration."[277] The believer is not without hope, however, for Augustine's second major emphasis in his sermons is the grace of the Spirit in aiding believers in their battle against sin. The grace of the Spirit, argued Augustine, delivers sinners "from the law of sin and death."[278]

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[273] Cary, *Outward Signs*, 194.

[274] Cary, *Outward Signs*, 194.

[275] As Cary explains, this fact becomes an important argument against the Donatists. See *Outward Signs*, 194–197. See also J. Patout Burns, "The Atmosphere of Election: Augustinianism as Common Sense," *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, vol. 2, no. 3 (1994): 325–339.

[276] Cary, *Outward Signs*, 193.

[277] Augustine, *Sermon* 151, 5:40.

[278] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 5:86.

Where the freedom of choice failed, the grace of the Spirit triumphs. Augustine cautioned his hearers against putting faith in their own powers in keeping the law:

> But you must be very determined to keep wide awake, in case perhaps your spirit starts saying, "If God's cooperation and God's help is withdrawn, my spirit can still do this; even though with trouble, even though it can only do it with considerable difficulty, still it can fulfill the task. It's as if somebody said, "We can of course get there by rowing, though with considerable trouble; of, if only we had some wind, we would get there so much more easily![279]

Such a view distorts both man's nature subsequent to the fall and the nature of God's grace. On the contrary, argued Augustine:

> That's not what God's help is like, that's not what Christ's help is like, that's not what the help of the Holy Spirit is like. If it's completely lacking, you won't be able to do anything good whatsoever. You can indeed act by your free will without him helping; but only badly.[280]

Augustine drove home to his hearers their utter dependence on the Spirit to persevere in the faith. Should the Spirit withdraw his grace, said Augustine, "the human spirit rolls back under its own weight into the flesh, returns to the deeds of the flesh, returns to worldly lusts."[281] By the power of the Spirit sinners are able fight the flesh: "What does walking according to the flesh mean? Consenting to the lusts of the flesh. What does walking in the Spirit mean? Being helped by the Spirit in the mind, and not obeying the lusts of the flesh."[282] Whereas the law could only lead sinners by "commanding, threatening, and promising," the Spirit, noted Augustine, leads by "urging, enlightening, [and] helping."[283]

Lest anyone suppose that they earn the Spirit, Augustine clarified: "So 'if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you; he that raised Christ from the

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[279] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:103.

[280] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:103.

[281] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 5:92.

[282] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 5:90.

[283] Augustine, *Sermon* 156, 5:103.

dead will bring to life your mortal bodies also, because of his indwelling Spirit that dwells in you;' not because of your merits, but because of his gifts."[284] Not even baptism guarantees the Spirit; Augustine referenced those—in this context, the Donatists—who received an empty sacrament apart from the Spirit: "You ask them about the sacrament, you find it; you look for baptism, you find it; you look for the creed, you find it. That's the shape or form; unless you are quickened inwardly by the Spirit, any boasting you do about the outward form is meaningless."[285] Only those in whom the Spirit dwells belong to Christ, and like his other gracious gifts, God gives the Spirit to whom he wills. Through this gift of the Spirit, hearts of stone are changed into hearts of flesh that delight in God's law.[286] In *Sermon* 155, Augustine expressed that, through God's act of transformation, the redeemed sinner "finds praise not in themselves, but in God."[287] In the same passage, Augustine quoted from Psalm 44:8 in order to indicate the hope of those saved by God's grace: "In God," you see, "shall we find praise all day long."[288]

Augustine's Theology in Bede's *Collectio*

Despite the uncertainty surrounding Bede's access to many of Augustine's later anti-Pelagian works, his own anthology of Augustine's writings on Paul's epistles, the *Collectio in Apostolum*, contains four hundred fifty-seven selections from over forty

[284] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 5:94.

[285] Augustine, *Sermon* 268, 7:279. On the relationship between the Spirit and baptism, see Dupont, *Preacher of Grace*, 175.

[286] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 5:86.

[287] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 5:86.

[288] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 5:86.

of Augustine's major works and sermons.[289] These works include several of Augustine's treatises on grace such as *Contra Julianum*, *De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio*, and *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum*/*De Dono Perseverantiae*. While Bede relied heavily upon Eugippius' own collection of Augustine's writings, the *Excerpta ex operibus S. Augustini*, at times he added material not found in Eugippius' excerpts.[290] Furthermore, as Jérémy Delmulle has also instructively pointed out, there were times Bede intentionally omitted material from Augustine—and in several instances dealing with passages on grace, free will, and predestination.[291] Although caution must be taken when assessing Bede's own views from the extracts he included in his anthology, this section will demonstrate that, often despite their brevity, from these excerpts alone Bede would have been familiar with Augustine's theology of grace.[292]

Bede organized his *Collectio* chronologically through Paul's letters, beginning with his epistle to Romans and ending with extracts of Augustine's comments on Hebrews. As a result, Bede provided no systematic treatment of any particular doctrine.

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[289] David Hurst, "Translator's Introduction," in *Excerpts from the Works of Saint Augustine on the Letters of the Blessed Apostle Paul* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1999), 9. Surprisingly, to date no critical edition of Bede's *Collectio* has been produced. Hurst's translation, as the author notes, "was made from a preliminary critical text consisting of a collation of five early manuscripts of Bede's work" (10). Subsequent references to this work will include the specific excerpt number, followed by the cited source of Augustine and the pagination of Hurst's modern translation appearing in brackets. For a detailed record of Bede's use of Augustine in his *Collectio*, see P. Fransen, "Description De La Collection De Béde Le Vénérable Sur L' Apôtre," *Revue Bénédictine* 71 (1961): 22–70

[290] P. Fransen, "D'eugippius À Bède Le Vénérable À Propos De Leurs Florilèges Augustiniens." *Revue Bénédictine* 97 (1987): 187–94.

[291] See discussion in Jérémy Delmulle, "Le florilège augustinien de Bède le Vénérable." 275–281.

[292] For example, see Delmulle, "Le florilège augustinien de Bède le Vénérable," in which he counters an interpretation that Bede's purposeful omissions from Augustine's extracts indicates Bede was trying to soften or remove views he did not like. To give one example, Delmulle points to extract 223 in Bede's *Collectio* and the intentional deletion by Bede of Augustine's discussion of the *initium fidei* (cf. Augustine, *De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* 20.40), seemingly in order to deny Augustine's teaching on the divine initiative in producing faith in the unbeliever. In this particular instance, argues Delmulle, Bede was not seeking to minimize Augustine's teachings on God as the *initium fidei*—a theme, he says, Bede explicitly affirmed elsewhere in his own writings—but was highlighting a particular theme in the extract (in this case, a discussion of 2 Cor. 2:12–13 and the apostles as the "aroma of Christ").

Nevertheless, one can construct Augustine's theology of grace from the varied selections included in the *Collectio*. First, several selections contain clear teachings on the fall and sinfulness of humanity. In reference to 1 Corinthians 15:44–48, Augustine argued that Adam, although good, was created as a "natural body." Through obedience, however, Adam "could have lived perpetually in paradise," and, as a reward for his obedience, "become spiritual," or immortal.[293] Instead, Adam's sin brought about the "necessity of dying;" death now reigns in his offspring.[294] Because of his misuse of the free will God had granted him, Adam's sin "has passed over to remain in his descendants."[295] Consequently, all are now sinners, "either because of the guilt [coming from their origin] or by the addition [of that coming from] their free will."[296] Original sin is "passed on to all people," and thus all share in Adam's condemnation.[297]

In a brief extract from his unfinished treatise against Julian, Augustine emphasized that, because of the fall, Adam and Eve's descendants are now sinners by nature, not by mere imitation:

> Do not sinners imitate Eve? Does the sin of the human race not take its beginning from her? 'From a woman sin had its beginning, and because of her,' Scripture says, 'we all die.' Why do you choose not to notice that the Apostle chose to say that sin entered into the world through one man because he wanted us to understand not imitation but generation?[298]

Several of Bede's extracts reveal how the sin of the first parents profoundly altered human nature. Humanity now takes delight in its sin. Commenting on Paul's language of "those who are in the flesh" in Romans 8:8–9, Augustine wrote they are those who

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[293] Bede, *Excerpts* 220 [*City of God* 13.23; 170].

[294] Bede, *Excerpts* 220 [*City of God* 13.23; 171]

[295] Bede, *Excerpts* 9 [*Ep.* 194; 26]; cf. Rom 2:1–2.

[296] Bede, *Excerpts* 9 [*Ep.*194; 27].

[297] Bede, *Excerpts* 38 [*Contra Secundam Juliani Responsionem* 148, 103; 47]; cf. Rom 5:16.

[298] Bede, *Excerpts* 36 [*Contra Secundam Juliani Responsionem* 56; 44]; cf. Rom 5:12.

"pursue their lusts, who live in them, who are entertained by the pleasures they offer, who consider that a happy and blissful life comes from enjoying them."[299] Absolutely all those who partake of human nature, argued Augustine, "are liars, and of themselves they have nothing except to be liars."[300] Those born of Adam are all transgressors of God's law.[301] They do not reflect on God's inscrutable ways, and they are hostile towards God.[302] Furthermore, in Adam all are by nature "children of hell," implanted with vice, and "born mentally blind."[303]

The excerpts reveal a picture of fallen humanity as powerless to overcome their sinful nature by its own power. Although holy, just, and good, the law only arouses sinful passions and produces transgressors.[304] Just as the law is "unable to take away sin," neither could Moses, representing the law, "take away the reign of death" which comes through sin.[305] Thus pointing to Paul's example of Abraham, Augustine argued that it was faith, not works, that justifies:

> When commending the righteousness that comes from faith against those who boast of the righteousness that comes from works, [Paul] says, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our father according to the flesh, found? For if Abraham was justified by works he has something to boast about, but not before God."[306]

Augustine continued by contrasting those who boast in their good works with Abraham:

> Many people who boast about their works and you find many pagans who for this reason are unwilling to become Christians. They are quite satisfied with their good lives. They say, 'I lead a good life—why do I need to have Christ teach me? I do not

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[299] Bede, *Excerpts* 66 [*Serm.* 155.10–14; 68].

[300] Bede, *Excerpts* 11 [*Enarritones in Pslamos* 115.11; 28]; cf. Rom 3:4.

[301] Bede, *Excerpts* 17 [*Enarritones in Pslamos* 118.25.5; 32]; cf. Rom 3:20–21.

[302] Bede, *Excerpts* 66 [*Serm.* 155.10–14; 68].

[303] Bede, *Excerpts* 311 [*Trac. In Ioh.* 44.1; 234]; cf. Eph 2:3.

[304] Bede, *Excerpt* 53 [*Serm.* 153.6, 8–7, 9; 57]; cf. Rom 7:5.

[305] Bede, *Excerpts* 37 [*Contra Secundam Juliani Responsionem* 64–84; 45]; cf. Rom 5:13.

[306] Bede, *Excerpts* 21 [*Enarrationes in Pslamos* 31.2–4; 35]; cf. Rom 4:1–3.

> commit murder, theft or violence. I do not covet other people's possessions. I am not defiled by adultery. If you find anything in my life to blame, let the one who blames me make [me] a Christian.' This person has something to boast about—but not to God. Our father Abraham was not like this. What does Scripture say justified Abraham? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him for righteousness."[307]

While Augustine maintained that works are a necessary part of the Christian life, they are performed "so that we may not establish our own righteousness but that God's righteousness may be in us—that is, [the righteousness] that God bestows on us."[308] Good works follow grace, and do not precede it.[309]

The primacy of God's gratuitous grace is a theme that runs throughout the *Collectio*. Apart from the Lord's "working that we may will, or working together with us when we will," said Augustine, "we are incapable of any good works of religion."[310] Unless grace is freely given, argued Augustine, "it is not a gift."[311] Grace is necessary for humanity to overcome its corrupt nature, since it is grace that "brings it about that those who [formerly] did evil are now doing good."[312] Free will cannot overcome humanity's' slavery to sin except by grace of Christ: "A person cannot choose to do anything good unless aided by him who is unable to choose evil."[313]

Given humanity's powerlessness over its sin and its condemned nature and since God finds us "without merits," Augustine excluded any good in a person as the basis for salvation or the giving of grace.[314] On the contrary, God bestows his grace on

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[307] Bede, *Excerpts* 21 [*Enarrationes in Pslamos* 31.2–4; 35].

[308] Bede, *Excerpts* 102 [*Contra Secundam Juliani Responsionem* 1.141; 91]; cf. Rom 11:5–6.

[309] Bede, *Excerpts* 102 [*Contra Secundam Juliani Responsionem* 1.141; 91].

[310] Bede, *Excerpts* 75 [*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* 17.33; 77]; cf. Rom 8:28.

[311] Bede, *Excerpts* 50 [*Enchiridion* 28.107; 55]; cf. Rom 6:23.

[312] Bede, *Excerpts* 14 [*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* 22.44; 30].

[313] Bede, *Excerpts* 48 [*Contra Duas Ep. Pelagianorum* 1.2.5, 3.7; 54]; cf. Rom 6:20–22.

[314] Bede, *Excerpts* 310 [*Enarrationes in Pslamos* 30.2.13; 233] cf. Eph 1:11.

the basis of his act of predestination. The *Collectio* reveals that Bede had access some of Augustine's clearest treatments of predestination:

> God's predestination in a good person is the preparation for grace, and grace is the consequence of that predestination. When God promised Abraham that the faith of the nations would exist in all his descendants, saying 'I have made you the father of many nations'—whence the Apostle says, "For this reason it depends on faith, so that the promise may be established for all his descendants"—[God] made this promise depend not on the power of our wills but upon his predestination. He promised what he was going to bring about, not what humans would do. Although humans perform the good deeds that are an essential part of their worship of God, he himself brings about their doing what he has commanded.[315]

More than being synonymous with God's foreknowledge of man's future merits or demerits—a view held by pre-Augustinian theologians—predestination is, according to Ogliari, "the foreknowledge and the preparation, by divine decree, of those beneficial acts of God thanks to which those who have been predestined to be saved, will be infallibly saved."[316] Thus, while predestination is the preparation for grace, grace is the effect of that predestination including, said Augustine, God's bestowal of faith itself that will ultimately see his elect to eternal life.[317] This understanding, says Ogliari, "makes God the sole, absolute subject of predestination, independently of any possible future behavior of man."[318]

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[315] Bede, *Excerpts* 25 [*De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* 10.19–11:21; 37]; cf. Rom 4:16.

[316] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 323. For a similar assessment, see also Cary, *Inner Grace*: "No one knows whether I will continue to pray for and receive the gift of grace except God. This knowledge in fact is precisely what Augustine means by the term "predestination," which he defines as God's foreknowledge of his own good gifts. The elect are therefore "chosen before the foundation of the world by that predestination in which God foreknew his future doings." This doctrine of predestination follows from Augustine's conviction that God's choices are not improvised in response to unfolding events but are informed by his knowledge of all that will happen from the beginning of time to the end, including all that he will do and in particular how he will distribute his gifts of grace" (117).

[317] Bede, *Excerpts* 25 [*De Praedestinatione Sanctorum* 10.19–11:21; 37]; Karfíková, *Grace and the Will According to Augustine*, 288. Says Karfíková, "The grace of God, prepared in predestination, is therefore manifested as a gift of an efficacious will in the sense of faith and an efficacious will to good deeds" (288).

[318] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 331.

God did not predestine all to receive his grace; to the elect God gives grace, to others he withholds it. Likewsie, some persons God hardens by "withdrawing and not giving his help."[319] Augustine could discern no basis by which God would predestine some over others other than "God's secret will."[320] Commenting on Romans 1:24, Augustine wrote:

> God works in the hearts of human beings to move their wills in whatever way he chooses, whether toward good, in accord with his mercy, or toward evil, in accord with their deserts. [He does this] by his judgment that is sometimes clear, sometimes hidden, yet always just.[321]

God bestows grace on whom he wills, electing to transform some from the condemned lump and make them vessels of his mercy:

> [God] shows mercy in accord with grace, which is given freely and not in return for merits, whereas he hardens in accord with a judgment which is in return for merits. To make from a condemned lump a vessel for honorable us is a manifestation of grace, while to make from it a vessel for ignoble use is a just judgment.[322]

Ultimately, no one will be able to fault God with unfairness in assisting some and abandoning others: "When the entire lump has been rightly condemned, justice pays its deserved shame, and grace gives its undeserved honor."[323]

While those whom God withholds his mercy earn their just punishment, God's elect have no room for boasting:

> Those to whom the promise was made were not yet in existence lest any of them glory in their own merits. Even those who were to receive the promise [i.e., the elect] were themselves promised. Thus the whole body of Christ may say, 'By the grace of God I am what I am!'[324]

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[319] Bede, *Excerpts* 106 [*Tract. In. Ioh.* 53.5–6; 93]; cf. Rom 11:7–8.

[320] Bede, *Excerpts* 310 [*Enarrationes in Pslamos* 30.2.13; 233]; cf. Eph 1:11.

[321] Bede, *Excerpts* 7 [*De Gratia et Libero Arbitrio* 21.42–43; 25].

[322] Bede, *Excerpts* 92 [*Contra Secundam Juliani Responsionem* 1.41; 86]; cf. Rom 9:13.

[323] Bede, *Excerpts* 94 [*Ep.* 194.2.5; 87]; cf. Rom 9:20–21.

[324] Bede, *Excerpts* 26 [*Enarrationes in Pslamos* 118.31.1; 38]; cf. Rom 4:17.

From their faith to their good works, God's grace takes precedence. In God's grace he gives to the elect the Spirit, by whom sinners are able to call upon Christ and transforms them into his image, aids them in their fight against the flesh, and by whom believers will ultimately persevere and enter the kingdom of heaven.[325] By grace God adopts former lovers of vanity out of sinful humanity to be children of God.[326] Whereas the first parents brought condemnation to humanity, the grace of Christ "brings life to life those whom he chooses from among those who universally die in Adam."[327] Thus, even in their brevity, Augustine's theology of grace permeates the excerpts in Bede's *Collectio*. This leaves no doubt that, in conjunction with other works at his disposal, Bede would have had ample access to Augustine's teachings on the fall, the will, and predestination and election. Subsequent chapters, however, will determine where Bede himself followed his North African mentor and where he departed from him.

[325] Bede, *Excerpts* 201 [*Ep.* 147.22.51; 154]; *Excerpts* 70 [*Serm.* 156.5,5–15,17; 70], cf. Rom 8:13; *Excerpts* 191 [*De Serm. Dom. In Monte.* 2.25.82–83; 148];

[326] Bede, *Excerpts* 71 [*De Diversis Quaestionibus LXXXIII* 67.2–5; 75]; cf. Rom 8:24.

[327] Bede, *Excerpts* 40 [*Contra Secundam Juliani Responsionem* 104, 135–136; 48]; cf. Rom 5:18.

CHAPTER 3

BEDE'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE IN HIS BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

As a prolific scholar, Bede wrote on a wide range of subjects. Nevertheless, as Benedicta Ward points out, "The basic teaching of grammar and arithmetic, all the work of the classroom, everything involved in establishing firm structures through which to apprehend reality, were a means to an end for Bede and that end was the study of the Sacred Page."[1] Gerald Bonner makes a similar claim: Bede's textbooks and grammars "are not humanist writings, in the Renaissance sense of the word, intended to encourage classical studies; rather, they enable the student to read the Bible and the Fathers, and to understand the language of public worship."[2] Bede's impressive catalogue of biblical commentaries testify to the suggestion that, above all, he was an exegete of the scriptures. Over the course of his career, the monk produced nearly twenty works dedicated to biblical exposition. From full-length, verse-by verse commentaries to shorter, more general expositions, Bede's exegetical works spanned the Old and New Testaments, including the Apocrypha, and comprised the bulk of his writings.

It is a shame that, despite the weight Bede himself placed upon his exegetical works, "the commentaries have often been dismissed as unoriginal and derivative, or simply ignored in favor of the historical works."[3] This chapter will hopefully add to the rediscovery of Bede's role as a exegete and theologian by examining the theology of

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[1] Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 41.

[2] Gerald Bonner, "Bede: Scholar and Spiritual Teacher," in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hakwes and Susan Mills (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 367.

[3] Arthur Holder, "Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis," *Anglican Theological Review* 72, no. 4 (1990): 403–404.

grace found within his exegetical works. This enterprise is complicated by the fact that, perhaps unlike some of his precursors, as Arthur Holder notes, "Bede's penchant was for practical, not systematic, theology."[4] Holder designates Bede as a "pastoral theologian," wherein his primary aim "was to edify his readers than to investigate unknown theological territory."[5] Writes Holder,

> We might best describe it as pastoral theology—not in the narrow sense of the theology of pastoral care (although that is certainly included), but in the wider sense of a theology that describes and informs the ministry of those charged with the cure of souls.[6]

Thus, one should not expect to find a neatly articulated theology of grace as one might find in one of Augustine's anti-Pelagian treatises, for example. Reconstructing Bede's theology of grace often requires piecing together scattered remarks throughout the commentaries, a task made possible, thankfully, given the consistency in Bede's comments as it relates to grace. Given the large quantity of Bede's commentaries, this chapter will focus primarily on those works selected from both the Old and New Testaments that contain the most significant discussions pertaining to his theology of grace. These works will thereby provide a representative sample of his teachings on the subject.

Bede's Exegetical Method

As an exegete, Bede did not see his role as an innovator. Although for commentaries such as his *In Cantica Canticorum* Bede had little by way of patristic precursors—there, he was in effect paving new ground—Bede's primary duty was that of a custodian of Christian doctrine and culture: "What was essential," writes Gerald Bonner, "was transmission, and that was what Bede understood himself to be

[4] Arthur Holder, "Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis," 406.

[5] Arthur Holder, "Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis," 407.

[6] Arthur Holder, "Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis," 410.

providing."[7] Even with his pioneering efforts in several of his biblical commentaries, however, Bede still utilized exegetical methods he received from the church fathers, especially that of Origen, Augustine, and Gregory.[8] In his *De schematibus et tropis,* Bede held to and even elaborated upon the four senses of scripture—the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogic—but he usually limited his exegesis to the literal and allegorical senses, the latter of which was often termed synonymously as the "hidden," "mystical," or "spiritual" sense.[9] Bede's approach may seem alien to our own, but, cautions Paul Meyavert, "if our quest to for the past is to be a genuine one, we must make some effort to enter sympathetically into the thought-forms of another age."[10]

With allegory, any seemingly insignificant detail in the biblical text could provide deeper spiritual insights, thus "etymologies, number symbolism, analogies from the natural qualities of plants and animals, the linking of one biblical verse to another by a chain of concordance" all factored into Bede's allegorical method.[11] Oftentimes, Bede could allegorize the same passage in multiple, seemingly contradictory ways. In his *In Genesim*, for example, Bede understood the flood as prefiguring God's salvation in the

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[7] Gerald Bonner, "Bede: Scholar and Spiritual Teacher," 365.

[8] On Bede's debt to the church fathers, see Arthur Holder, "Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis."

[9] For an in-depth treatment of Bede's exegetical methodology, see Mary Barrows, "Bede's Allegorical Exposition of the Canticle of Canticles: A Study in Early Medieval Allegorical Exegesis" (PhD diss., University of California at Berkeley, 1962), 60–79. See also the comments by Scott DeGregorio, "Bede and the Old Testament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133: "Nowhere in his own interpretive practice did Bede rigidly or consistently apply this fourfold scheme. He could speak just as contentedly of three or two senses, and indeed it is the basic twofold distinction between a literal/historical meaning on the one hand and some kind of spiritual meaning on the other–variously termed 'allegorical', 'figurative', 'mystical' or 'hidden'–that informs the hermeneutical procedure most often followed in his Old Testament commentaries."

[10] Paul Meyavert, "Bede the Scholar," in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976), 45.

[11] Holder, introduction, in Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 3, trans. Arthur Holder (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011), 11.

sacrament of baptism, but also as anticipating God's final judgment.[12] In his *On the Song of Songs*, Bede likened the text of scripture to a honeycomb dripping with sweetness that must be extracted:

> Comparable to honeycomb are those who know how to search out the sweetness of the spiritual senses within the sacred writings and to clarify it for the salvation of their hearers by preaching. Similar to honey are those who long to delight in tasting the delicacies of the word, which are set before them, and to feed on them insatiably.[13]

While perhaps far-fetched to modern readers, Bede's use of allegory aimed to "uncover the hidden mysteries which underlay the literal sense of scripture," a form of scholarship he and other likeminded exegetes took seriously.[14] Although not totally uninterested in the literal sense,[15] for Bede the use of allegory was meant to direct readers of the Old Testament to Christ, the Church, and the sacraments.[16] Thus, notes Meyavert, often the particular text of Scripture being commented on becomes of little concern to the reader; commenters like Gregory and Bede were "constantly on the watch for scriptural verses on which they can peg this or idea."[17] Moreover, since allegory often draws upon the author's personal experiences, interpretation of any given passage may vary greatly.[18] Thus, while Bede's use of allegory in his commentaries can make for difficult reading, to

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[12] See below, pp. 97–99.

[13] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 3, 141; cf. Song 5:1. Unless otherwise stated, this and subsequent quotations come from Holder's translation. Future references to classical works will indicate book, chapter, and section numbers (when available) followed by the pagination in the modern translations.

[14] Meyavert, "Bede the Scholar," 46.

[15] For example, says DeGregorio: "Bede's interests in the Bible were exceedingly wide-ranging; they encompassed every imaginable facet of the text and there is no doubting that they included an abiding fascination with its literal reading" ("Bede and the Old Testament," 134).

[16] Meyavert, "Bede the Scholar," 47. Also Holder, "Introduction," 11.

[17] Meyavert, "Bede the Scholar," 46.

[18] For instance, Meyavert provides an example of how Gregory and Bede's unique environments—one being a typically sunny environment whereas the other was frequently cloudy and rainy—affected their use of the imagery of shade ("Bede the Scholar," 46).

use Meyavert's words, it is nevertheless a necessary undertaking in order to capture Bede's theology of grace.

Old Testament Commentaries

As Benedicta Ward notes, it was in Bede's Old Testament commentaries that "his theology expanded and flourished."[19] Throughout the course of his career, Bede produced ten Old Testament works that fell into two primary categories.[20] On the one hand are Bede's verse-by-verse exegetical works, which included his *In principium Genesis* (*On Genesis*), *In primam partem Samuhelis* (*On First Samuel*), *In Cantica Canticorum* (*On the Song of Songs*), *In proverbia Salomonis* (*On the Proverbs of Solomon*), *In Tobiam* (*On Tobias*), and *In Ezram et Neemiam* (*On Ezra and Nehemiah*). Furthermore, as DeGregorio explains, other Old Testament works by Bede offer "discussions of just select verses or chapters."[21] In this group are Bede's *De Tabernaculo* (*On the Tabernacle*), *De Templo* (*On the Temple*), *In Regum librum xxx Queastiones* (*Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings*), and *In Canticum Habacuc Prophetae* (*On the Canticle of Habakkuk*). While most of these works provide insight into Bede's theology of grace, the primary discussion here will be limited to his *On Genesis*, a work heavily influenced by Augustine, and his deeply anti-Pelagian commentary, *On the Song of Songs*. Of Bede's Old Testament commentaries, these two writings most clearly communicate key features of his theology of grace.

[19] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 66.

[20] The following summary is based upon DeGregorio's analysis in "Bede and the Old Testament," 129.

[21] DeGregorio, "Bede and the Old Testament," 129.

On Genesis

On Genesis, like his other biblical commentaries, relied heavily upon the use of allegory inherited from Augustine.[22] Bede did not completely neglect the plain sense of Scripture; he himself warned of overusing allegory to the detriment of a literal reading: "It must be carefully observed, as each one devotes his attention to the allegorical senses, how far he may have forsaken the manifest truth of history by allegorical interpretation."[23] Still, Bede sought to peel back the layers of Scripture in order to lay bare the "mystical sense." If not giving convincing exegesis of the biblical text (at least according to post-Enlightenment readers), Bede's allegorical method nevertheless provides surprising insights into the monk's own theology in unanticipated places. Any verse may become the basis for an unexpected foray into a number of subjects, and this is especially true of his theology of grace.

Furthermore, and perhaps above all of his other commentaries, Bede's *On Genesis*, which he likely began writing around 717–18 and completed by 725, demonstrates the monk's indebtedness to Augustine.[24] Although the commentary borrows from other patristic authors, notably Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose, Jerome, and Gregory, over and again Bede deferred to Augustine's authority for his own understanding of the biblical text. Often, this meant that while expositing numerous passages, Bede simply quoted Augustine with little or no explanatory comments of his own. For example, when discussing the difficult question of why God allowed the serpent to tempt Adam and Eve in the garden if he knew they would sin (Gen 3), or what it means that God repented of

[22] See Calvin Kendall, introduction to *Bede: On Genesis* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008), 8–9. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from this work, as well as Bede's use of patristic sources, will come from Kendall's translation.

[23] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 69. See also comments by Kendall, introduction, 9, and Holder, "Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis," 407.

[24] On the composition and dating of *On Genesis*, see George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2009), 43. For a more detailed discussion, see Kendall, introduction, 45–53. On Bede's use of patristic sources in *On Genesis*, see Ward, "The Venerable Bede," 68–69.

making man after seeing their wickedness (Gen 6:5–6), Bede consulted Augustine.[25] In several places, Bede's theology of grace may be ascertained in his lengthy quotations of Augustine which, by implication, the monk himself endorsed. Bede's reliance upon Augustine, coupled with the fact that the book of Genesis itself covers the topics of creation, fall, and redemption, consequently guarantees that *On Genesis* was one of Bede's most important works dealing with grace.[26]

In the first book of *On Genesis*, Bede covered the opening lines of Genesis to man's fall. Like Augustine and despite appearances to the contrary to those living in a corrupt, fallen world, Bede affirmed the goodness of God's original creation:

> Holy Scripture necessarily repeats that God saw that what he had made was good a number of times, so that the piety of the faithful may be informed from this not to judge of the visible and invisible creation according to human understanding, which is offended even by good things of which it does not know the causes and order, but to believe in and submit to the God who approves it.[27]

The goodness of creation extended to the pinnacle of his creatures, man. God made man "in the image and likeness of his Creator," which Bede understood as mirroring important attributes of God: "Adam, the new man, was created from earth after God, so that he was just, holy, and true, subject to and humbly dependent upon the grace of his Creator, who is eternally and perfectly just, holy, and true."[28] Moreover, wrote Bede, as God's image bearer God created man to reign over all the other creatures and have a relationship with the creator himself:

> Because there is no doubt that man was made in the image of God chiefly in the respect in which he surpasses the irrational creatures—that is to say, he was created capable of reason, by which means he could both properly govern each and every

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[25] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 125; *On Genesis* 2, 171.

[26] Thus, pushing back against Hardin's comment that, "Bede, while Augustinian, is not so concerned with sin and grace in this commentary as with '*natura externa*, God's gracious creation'" (*A Companion to Bede*, 43).

[27] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 84; cf. Augustine, *Contra Adversarium* 1.7.10.

[28] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 90; cf. Gen 1:26.

> created thing in the world and enjoy the knowledge of the One who created all things.[29]

Furthermore, God appointed both Adam and Eve to live in and tend to God's perfect paradise, a task that they took delight in keeping:

> Whatever pleasure faring has, it was certainly far greater then when no calamity had happened either on earth or in heaven. For there was no distress of labour, but delight of the will, when those things which God had created turned out more pleasantly and fruitfully with the support of human effort.[30]

Importantly, God created Adam with immortality, albeit a conditional one. God commanded Adam not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17), and had Adam remained obedient, wrote Bede, he would have received "the sacrament of eternal life which would be merited by that very obedience."[31]

Of course, Adam and Eve did not persist in their obedience, but, as Bede noted, they rejected God's governance by eating the forbidden fruit: "When that act was committed, with respect to which the sole order of the Governor that it not be committed ought to have been heeded, nothing else was desired by the sinner except not to be under the governance of God.[32] Bede, once again quoting from Augustine, pointed to pride as the source for Adam and Eve's rebellion: "Man, scorning the command of God . . . learned what the difference between good and evil was, namely, the good of obedience and the evil of disobedience, that is, of pride, stubbornness, perverse imitation of God, and injurious license."[33] By sinning, Adam "had died the death of his soul" and

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[29] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 91.

[30] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 117, quoting from Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.8.

[31] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 112. Compare with Bede's similar statement: "The flesh of the first human beings was created immortal and incorruptible so that they might preserve the same immortality and incorruptibility of theirs by keeping the commands of God. And among these commands was this, that they should eat from the lawful trees of paradise, but that they should refrain from eating the forbidden tree. By eating of the former, they would preserve the gift of immortality bestowed upon them; in contact with the latter, they would find the bane of death" (*On Genesis* 1 (95)). Elsewhere, Bede argued that Adam, had he remained obedient, would be "changed into a better and spiritual condition without death" (Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 128).

[32] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 118, quoting from Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.13–14.

immediately sought to hide from his creator.[34] Bede also understood this scene in the garden as illustrating the broken fellowship that now existed between God and man: "The Lord walked indeed to signify that he had withdrawn from man, in whose heart he had remained quiet."[35] Furthermore, said Bede, "the light of divine knowledge and the fervor of divine love" was now diminished in him; by going against the command of his creator and desiring to be like God, Adam was "cast down to the mortal nature of wild beasts."[36] As a result, argued Bede, "the Creator himself punished [Adam and Eve] with a sentence of a just judgment when he deprived them of the condition of eternal life by the penalty of mortality both in the soul and in the flesh."[37]

Due to their sin, God expelled the first parents from the garden. The penalty of sin, however, extended to their progeny who inherit the "stain of original sin."[38] Bede described at length the effects of the fall upon humanity.[39] Just as Adam had corrupted the divine image in himself, so too did he bring corruption to the whole human race.[40] Bede allegorically understood the God's cursing the ground in Genesis 3:17–18 as picturing humanity's own spiritual condition following the fall. Like the ground that now produces thorns and thistles, so also does the curse "now puts forth thorns and thistles in us, because, having been propagated by carnal desire, we suffer the prickings and

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[33] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 118; cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 8.13–14.

[34] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 130; cf. Gen 3:8–9.

[35] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 101.

[36] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 101, 136; cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 2.21.32.

[37] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 136.

[38] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 146.

[39] For a similar discussion of the fall in *On Genesis*, see Aaron Kleist, *Striving with Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 68–69.

[40] See Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 90. Although the image of God was corrupted by Adam's sin, Bede did not argue that it was completely lost. For example, Bede wrote that, even after the fall, "insofar as every man uses reason, he has the image of God in him" (*On Genesis* 1, 93).

enticements of the vices from the flesh itself."[41] Whereas God created man to enjoy and love him, now, wrote Bede in a discussion of the etymology of "Naamah" in Genesis 4:22, "the human race withdrew from Eden, that is, from the delights of inward goods," and who "subject themselves to the pleasures of the flesh, to the neglect of things of the spirit, [and] hasten deservedly to ruin."[42] Appealing to Sirach 40:1, Bede compared the first transgression to a heavy yoke "on account of which we are all conceived in iniquities and brought forth into the world in sins," upon which humanity willfully heaps more sin.[43]

For Bede, the only remedy for humanity's sinful inheritance is "[deliverance] by the grace of God through Jesus Christ."[44] Bede, like Augustine, stressed the importance of baptism in God's act of redemption, and several incidents in the book of Genesis provided Bede with an opportunity to explore that subject. First, Bede saw parallels between baptism and the biblical flood. Commenting on God's warning that he would bring a flood in Genesis 6:17–18, Bede wrote,

> When the waters of the great flood were brought upon the earth, they destroyed all flesh that was found outside the ark, but Noah and all the creatures that were in the ark were saved. Washing the world, the water of baptism saves whomever it finds remaining faithfully in the unity of the holy Church.[45]

Similarly, said Bede,

> Noah's departure from the ark into the earth cleansed by the flood, with the men and animals that he had brought with him, prefigures the time when all of the faithful, washed clean by the fountain of baptism, also proceed openly to the exercise of good works under the leadership of Christ.[46]

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[41] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 135.

[42] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 158.

[43] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 203.

[44] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 203.

[45] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 181.

[46] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 198; cf. Gen 8:15–18.

Furthermore, just as God promised that he would never again destroy the earth with a flood, Bede understood baptism as a one-time event: "Mystically . . . the fact that the water of the flood will not return to the earth signifies that once the water of baptism has been received it cannot be renewed. For "he that is washed, needs not to wash."[47]

In addition to the account of the biblical flood, Bede saw parallels to baptism in God's covenant with Abraham. Circumcision, which God required of Abraham's descendants as a sign of his covenant, prefigured the need for baptism in the New Covenant in removing the stain of Adam's transgression. Alluding to God's warning against those who refused to undergo circumcision in Genesis 17:14, Bede wrote,

> With this statement a greater mystery of that circumcision is put forward, that it is not only the sign of the renewal to come in Christ, but also the abolition of the transgression made in Adam. For what baptism in the faith of Christ now does, was at that time done by circumcision on the eighth day, which signified the resurrection of Christ.[48]

Bede continued with a lengthy quote from Augustine's commentary on the same passage that emphasized humanity's shared guilt in Adam and the need for rebirth that comes through baptism:

> Even infants, not on account of the particular manner of their own life but on account of the common origin of the human race, have all broken God's covenant in that one man 'in whom all have sinned.' . . . Therefore, since circumcision was a sign of regeneration and procreation deservedly brings perdition on the infant because of the original sin by which God's covenant was first broken, unless a liberation sets him free, these divine words must be interpreted as if they said something like, 'Whoever has not been regenerated, that soul shall be destroyed from among his people,' because he broke God's covenant when, he too sinned in Adam, together with all mankind.[49]

Elsewhere, Bede mirrored Augustine in a comparable but more succinct statement: "For we all are born into the world as sons of the devil on account of the sin of the first

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[47] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 207; cf. John 13:10.

[48] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 284.

[49] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 284; cf. Augustine, *City of God* 16.27.

transgression; but by the grace of rebirth all of us who belong to the seed of Abraham are made sons of God."[50]

Although Bede considered baptism itself as a grace from God, he warned against "false Catholics" who fell back into sin after receiving the sacrament. Drawing an analogy from the clean and unclean beasts brought aboard the ark in Genesis 7:2–3, Bede explained that,

> Not all those who undergo the washing of baptism in the Church also observe the cleanliness of good work. And the clean beasts are well represented by the number seven, because the grace of the Spirit is sevenfold, by which the hearts of the faithful are cleansed and sanctified. The unclean beasts are represented by the number two, because false Catholics receive the sacraments of the faith with a two-faced heart, desiring both to take pleasure here with the world and to reign in the future with Christ. Of such as these James says, "Therefore let not man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. A double minded man is inconstant in all his ways."[51]

Baptism, while removing the transgression of original sin, by itself is insufficient for salvation. Bede held that through God's gracious bestowal of his gifts some would pursue a life of virtue and ultimately inherit God's kingdom. These gifts ensure that they will persevere in the faith. In particular, God accomplishes his salvation through the grace of the Spirit who, argued Bede, "sanctifies those whom [he] wishes."[52] The Spirit diffuses the love of God into the hearts of the faithful, and not by "merit of our deeds."[53] Similarly, wrote Bede of sinners coming to the Father, "[the Spirit] excites our hearts to cry out when he has filled them."[54]

Like Augustine, Bede limited the scope of God's gracious gifts to only certain individuals: the elect. The elect, or those understood by Bede as "all the people who have

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[50] Bede, *On Genesis* 3, 247.

[51] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 184; cf. Jas 1:7–8.

[52] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 116; cf. John 3:8.

[53] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 176.

[54] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 145.

been predestined for eternal life," are those who not only receive baptism, but also God's "divine protection, so that none of those whom he predestined for eternal life should perish for any reason."[55] Allegorizing the account of God's rescue of Lot in Sodom (Gen 19), Bede provided one of the clearest examples of his indebtedness to Augustine in his understanding of man's inability to come to God apart from divine election. Despite his attempts to warn Sodom of its impending judgment, said Bede,

> [Lot] was able to recall to salvation none of the faithless citizens, not even his own relatives and friends, although he tried hard, signifies that no man's effort can add to the number of those predestined for salvation, who were chosen by the Lord before the creation of the world, not even one soul, "for the Lord knows who are his."[56]

Bede did not fault Lot for seeking out the salvation of his kindred since, stated Bede, "it is unknown in the frailty of our human nature who belongs to the category of the elect."[57] Despite not knowing who God does or does not elect, Bede cautioned his readers that "we must not cease from an active care for our own salvation, and our tongue must not be restrained from teaching our neighbors, but following the example of the office of piety to the correction of those who wander from the true path."[58] Bede continued with a striking statement that would seem to indicate that he, borrowing language from the bishop of Hippo, held to a *praedestinatio gemina*: "For it is the case that although we cannot save those who are predestined to damnation, nevertheless we do not lose the reward for our kindness, which we devote to our salvation."[59] Bede's meaning here is

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[55] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 173, 188. In these particular passages, Bede likened the ark described in Gen. 6 to the church wherein the predestined are saved from the flood (i.e. judgment).

[56] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 301; cf. Augustine, *City of God* 20.7; 2 Tim 2:19.

[57] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 301. Elsewhere, Bede made a similar statement in which he distinguished between "the elect and the wicked among the people of Israel," further noting that "only the elect could be saved from eternal destruction" (*On Genesis* 3, 264). Thus, Bede suggested that, even among the people of Israel, only some were elect. In the same way, Bede noted that even in the church there are those who "persist until the time of their death in wicked deeds among good Catholics" (*On Genesis* 4, 322).

[58] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 301.

[59] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 301.

uncertain, and while he may have taken Augustine's views on predestination and reprobation to their logical conclusion, one need not necessarily understand the monk as affirming double predestination.[60] In fact, given the previous context, it is possible that Bede may have only been referring to the fate of the non-elect as being predestined by God, namely, eternal judgment. Such a view of reprobation, that is, God's non-election of those from the *massa damnata* would align with Augustine's. Bede's argument may therefore be summarized as such: despite the fact that, as with Lot, evangelism and calls for repentance will fall upon deaf ears, namely, those who are not elect and hence are predestined to damnation, we who do not know the true members of the elect must therefore preach the gospel indiscriminately.

Although only God knows the true number and members of the elect, Bede could affirm that "they are rightly compared to the number of the stars, not only because they cannot be counted by men, but also because 'they are exalted with heavenly bliss.'"[61] It is in the book of life, said Bede, "in which are concealed all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, and in which are written the names of all the elect."[62] Their

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[60] For a discussion of Augustine's views on double predestination and reprobation, see Donato Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship Between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-called Semipelagians* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 366–376. According to Ogliari, reprobation for Augustine was equivalent to "non-election." Ogliari points out that since predestination was, by definition, God's preparation beforehand of the gifts (especially perseverance) that leads to salvation, "Augustine made it clear that it would be utterly outrageous to even think that a negative, driving force could proceed from the Godhead to man and be eventually the cause of his reprobation" (339). Nevertheless, despite his apparent denial of double predestination, Ogliari notes Augustine's inconsistency on the subject by his repeated use of terms like *praedestinatio ad poenam* and *praedestinatio ad aeternum mortem* throughout his writings. Ogliari resolves this discrepancy by noting that, despite Augustine's insistence to the contrary, his doctrine of election and predestination inevitably results God predestining some to damnation. Says Ogliari: "The confusing use of the term *praedestinatio*, applied to election and reprobation alike, may give rise to the conviction that Augustine thought of and taught about a *praedestinatio gemnia*m but it may also be taken, more simply (in our opinion), as an implicit proof of the *cul de sac* he found himself in because of his theory of predestination . . . His occupation with continually stressing the antithesis between the two destinies, has eventually induced him to ignore their (implicit) interplay" (368).

[61] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 273; cf. Augustine, *City of God* 16.23.

[62] Bede, *On Genesis* 3, 225.

ranks come from "all the kindreds of earth who are saved in Christ," a point Bede made elsewhere by allegorizing the multiple levels of the ark as described in Genesis 6:16:

> And not without reason did Scripture say that middle storeys and third storeys were made in the ark, or that it was made of two storeys and of three storeys . . . But it said in brief that it was made of two storeys to signify that circumcision and foreskin, the Jews and Greeks, were to be saved in the church.[63]

Finally, and in reference to the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17:7—called by Bede "the covenant of his grace"—the line of the elect has persisted from Abraham and will continue until the end of the age: "This covenant will certainly not only be preserved for the whole time of this life in the generations of the elect following each other in order without any interruption, but it will also be celebrated in the age to come eternally."[64]

While their destiny is certain, Bede insisted that even the elect would struggle in the present life: "the elect, who are still held fast by the bonds of the flesh and located in the path of progress of the virtues, are certainly hard pressed to come to the house of the celestial habitation even with the whole effort of their minds."[65] Similarly, no one bound in the flesh, "however lofty it may seem to be, can be free from the contamination of a tempting fault."[66] Drawing from the experience of Abram who was tested by the famine described in Genesis 12, Bede maintained that, "under the arrangement of divine providence," even the just "would endure in this life the universal evils of the world, such as famine, plagues, and captivity."[67] Since, as Bede stated, "the commandments of the Law must be carried out not by strength of human free will, but by the gift of Christian grace," God therefore gives the gifts that guarantee the perseverance of his elect.[68] Bede

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[63] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 181; cf. Augustine, *City of God* 15.26.

[64] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 282.

[65] Bede, *On Genesis* 3, 254.

[66] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 308.

[67] Bede, *On Genesis* 3, 251.

[68] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 193–194.

used the imagery of the ark to illustrate his point. Just as Noah smeared pitch on the ark as a layer of protection, so also, wrote Bede, "both the thoughts and deeds of the elect, in order not to be conquered or beguiled by the assault of vices, are fortified by the strength of faith in all things."[69] The elect were not free from sin, but unlike their salvation which Bede attributed to "God's illuminating grace," their sins are owed "to [their] own blindness and frailty."[70] When the elect do succumb to sin, however, they are called to repentance through the church and the Spirit.[71] In the same way, held Bede, despite the tribulations of the world the saints can expect true rest, "which is granted to the elect by the same Spirit."[72]

Bede attributed all good to the grace of God: "whether we are humbled in the sight of the Lord or whether we do lofty deeds of virtue, either is a gift of divine favour."[73] Although they will not be perfected while in exile on the earth, "the elect nevertheless exert themselves, not to relax in the basest pleasures of carnal things, but rather to rule themselves up to a desire for heavenly things."[74] Ultimately, God "grants life which [the just] have not deserved."[75] Bede used the imagery of the cherubim guarding the entrance to Eden as mystically signifying the path of salvation that God opens to the elect:

> But that God is said to have placed Cherubim and a flaming sword before the paradise of pleasure, "this we must believe was indeed done by heavenly powers in the visible paradise, so that by angelic assistance there would be a kind of fiery sentinel at that place; but it is certain that it was not done without reason, since it

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[69] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 176.

[70] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 309.

[71] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 195.

[72] Bede, *On Genesis* 2, 214.

[73] Bede, *On Genesis* 3, 249.

[74] Bede, *On Genesis* 3, 235.

[75] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 303.

> signifies something also of the spiritual paradise. Also, this sentinel is appropriately asserted to be 'turning every way,' so that it could also be removed, because and when the time came." . . . [It] is removed likewise for each of the elect singly when they are washed in the font of baptism; it is removed more perfectly when, freed from the chains of the flesh, they ascend, each in his own time, to the glory of the heavenly paradise.[76]

While Bede recognized that the elect would progress in virtue, he denied that God saves anyone on the basis of their own merit. On the contrary, said Bede, salvation comes "by the election of grace, not by the effort of their own labour, but by the Lord visiting their heart and fulfilling the gift of grace which he promised."[77] Like God's promise of land to Abram, so also is the "country of the heavenly fatherland, which the Promised Land prefigured, is taken possession by all of the elect, namely, the seed of Abraham, so that they remain in it forever."[78]

Commentary on the Song of Songs

Bede's *In Cantica Canticorum* (*On the Song of Songs*) was a work that, given the lack of patristic commentaries on the Song of Songs at his disposal, represented a project in which Bede "effectively had to manufacture a tradition of his own."[79] Written sometime around 716, the work was most likely Bede's earliest Old Testament

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[76] Bede, *On Genesis* 1, 138; cf. Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 11.40.

[77] Bede, *On Genesis* 4, 315.

[78] Bede, *On Genesis* 3, 257; cf. Gen 13:14–15.

[79] Hannah Matis, *The Song of Songs in the Early Middle Ages* (Boston: Brill, 2019), 27. Here, Matis includes a survey of late antique commentaries on the Song of Songs and argues that, despite earlier attempts at commentaries and a series of homilies by Gregory the Great, medieval writers like Bede would have had scarce access to material on the Song of Songs. For a similar assessment, see Mary Barrows, "Bede's Allegorical Exposition of the Canticle of Canticles: A Study in Early Medieval Allegorical Exegesis," 80–103. Comments Barrows on the importance of Bede's commentary in the Middle Ages: "For the entire early Middle Ages Bede's work was the standard one, whether in the abridgments made by Alcuin or Haimo. There was no complete commentary written by any of the four Latin Fathers; the work of Origen was suspect on account of his having been condemned as heretical; that of Julian became lost for the same reason; and that of Aponius was not only difficult to read but also too much concerned with the problems of his own day to maintain its popularity through later centuries . . . To understand later medieval attitudes towards the Canticle of Canticles, therefore, Bede's work is the fullest and most definitive source" (103).

commentary,[80] Hannah Matis argues that the work "represents an announcement of Bede's maturity as an exegete and a scholar, boldly presenting himself as a bastion of orthodox teaching and the preeminent scholar-in-residence at Wearmouth-Jarrow."[81] Bede's *On the Song of Songs* also displays some of Bede's richest uses of allegorical interpretation, and even more, as Arthur Holder points out, he maintained that the biblical book should be understood in an entirely spiritual sense.[82] Commenting on Song of Songs 8:1, Bede wrote: "Frequently and everywhere, and especially in this passage, this song testifies that it resounds with nothing carnal or according to the letter, but wished that the whole of it be understood spiritually and typologically."[83] For Bede, the book signified the relationship between Christ, symbolized by the beloved, and his bride, the church. Nevertheless, Bede's allegorical technique allowed him to inject important aspects of his theology of grace in unexpected places, and the originality of the work makes these insights all the more noteworthy.

Bede's prologue to the commentary offers some of the most penetrating insights into his theology of grace throughout the whole work. Bede stated his intention to respond to the writings of Augustine's last, great opponent and, to quote Bede, *latet*

[80] On the dating of the *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, see Arthur Holder, introduction, in *The Venerable Bede: On the Song of Songs and Selected Writings*, 28, in which he places the work prior to 716. See also Holder's discussion in "The Anti-Pelagian Character of Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Claudio Leonardi and Giovanni Orlandi (Florence: SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005), 100–103.

[81] Hannah Matis, *The Song of Songs in the Early Middle Ages*, 28.

[82] Holder, introduction, 10.

[83] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 5, 223.

anguis in herba—that "snake in the grass"—Julian of Eclanum.[84] Julian's *De amore,* a work that survives only in fragments found in Bede, not only offered—at least according to Bede's assessment—a more literal interpretation of the Song of Songs in contrast to Bede's allegorical reading, it also promulgated clear Pelagian sentiments.[85] Seeking to provide a defense to that "bitterest attacker of God's grace after Pelagius,"[86] Bede's prologue highlighted several of Julian's arguments and proceeded to answer the "heretical contentions point-by-point."[87]

The primary focus of Bede's polemical prologue was countering Julian's Pelagian anthropology: man's nature is essentially good, and, by an act of their own wills, humans can do what is pleasing to God. Julian downplayed the need for grace in part because he denied that all born of Adam inherit his sinful nature. Julian is shown to be in error, said Bede, when he claimed that sin comes through our own free choices, habits, and through ignorance, not from an inherited nature.[88] Bede responded by

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[84] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol. To date, no translation of Bede's prologue to the commentary has been produced. There is some debate about Bede's composition of the commentary. Benedicta Ward claims that "Bede had quoted [Julian] extensively without realizing his status as a heretic," and thus the prologue and the first book of the commentary were meant as a correction against his oversight (*The Venerable Bede*, 76). Arthur Holder, on the contrary, argues that Bede himself indicated in the prologue that he was going to write the commentary (*scripturus,* i.e. the future active participle), thus indicating the prologue was written before the body of the work itself. Furthermore, Holder argues that it is highly unlikely that Bede was unaware of Julian's association with Pelagius, especially since Bede identifies him as a heretic in earlier works. Finally, for Holder "the most compelling reason for rejecting the suggestion that the prologue was composed after the commentary" is the anti-Pelagian sentiment that runs throughout the work. See, Holder, "The Anti-Pelagian Character of Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs," 92–96.

[85] For a discussion of Julian's *De amore*, see Karl Shuve, *The Song of Songs and the Fashioning of Identity in Early Latin Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 212–219.

[86] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol., in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera Exegetica*, ed. David Hurst, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina*, vol. 129B (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1983), 167: "gratiae Dei post Pelagium, impugnator acerrimus." Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Bede's prologue are mine.

[87] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 80. For a brief but helpful discussion of Bede's theology of grace in the prologue to his *On the Song of Songs*, refer to Kleist's work, pp. 80–81. Kleist's comments here have been helpful in the formation of the present discussion.

[88] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol., 171–172: "Unde probatur falli Julianus cum dicit reatum nobis solo crimine voluptatis accensum, et sicut post apertius suum sensum aperuit, dicens omnia crimina morum esse non seminum. Seminum sunt namque quae ex Adam originalia traximus, morum vero sive voluntatum, seu fragilitatis et ignorantiae, quae ipsi per nos crimina addimus."

providing two passages from Paul: "'Scio quod non habitat in me, hoc est in carne mea, bonum.' Et quod idem apostolus ait, 'Caro concupiscit adversum spiritum spiritus autem adversus carnem.'"[89]

Julian reckoned that grace only supplemented what man had in his natural capacity the power to achieve: "He teaches us that through the decision of a free will the power to do the good that we choose, however, by the help of the grace of God we may be able to achieve this more easily."[90] Here, as elsewhere throughout the prologue, Bede countered Julian's views with scripture. Christ did not say, argued Bede, "Without me what you are able to do is little, but without me you can do *nothing*."[91] Likewise, Bede referenced another now-lost work by Julian, *De bono constantiae*, noting Julian's desire to defend free will against the Manicheans.[92] In guarding against Manichean determinism, Julian stressed the freedom of the will to the detriment of the need divine assistance in conquering the flesh. On the contrary, argued Bede, Julian ought to have argued on behalf of God's grace:

> For how much more might he have persuaded the Manichaeans had he said, "The grace of God has made excellent the soul of the elect, and inflamed him in the pursuit of virtue, although his weakness is ever in view and without which [grace] he is able to do nothing. . . . And thus, it impels him to sing to God, "My strength and my guardian."[93]

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[89] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol.; cf. Rom 7:18, Gal 5:17.

[90] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol., 167: "Docet nos per arbitrium liberae voluntatis posse bona facere quae volumus quamvis per auxilium gratiae Dei facilius ea perficere queamus."

[91] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol.: "non ait: 'Sine me modicum quid potestis;' sed: 'Sine me,' inquit, 'nihil potestis facere;'" cf. John 15:5.

[92] For some comments on Julian's *De bono constantiae* as presented in Bede's commentary, see Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992),

[93] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol., 172; "Quanto enim melius expugnaret Manicheum, si diceret, quia gratia Dei facit egregium cujusque electi animum, et accendit ad studia virtutum dum illum infirmitatis suae semper ammonet, et quia sine ipsa nihil facere potest dumque omnem ab eo fiduciam suae repellit virtutis ac Deo canere suadet: "Fortitudinem meam ad te custodiam;"" cf. Ps 59:9.

Once again quoting Paul, Bede insisted that our good deeds can only be attributed to the grace of God:

> If our love does not come daily from the grace of God, but [emanates] from the natural strength of the soul in a way that is deep and uninterrupted, the Apostle would not have said concerning his holy works, which certainly held to be from a deep and uninterrupted love: "But I labored more abundantly than all of them, but it was not I, but the grace of God with me." And again, "Not because we are sufficient to consider anything coming from us; rather, our sufficiency is from God."[94]

From the beginning of faith to our good deeds and ultimate victory, said Bede, "Grace begins, grace finishes, grace crowns."[95]

The body of Bede's commentary draws out these themes even further, particularly the gifts that God gives to his elect, or those symbolized by the bride in the Song of Songs.[96] Bede likened the elect to vessels adorned with precious stones and who the Lord is "preparing for glory."[97] Elsewhere, Bede compared the elect to the imagery of honeycombs and honey found in Song of Songs 5:1:

> And in a most apt comparison, the ones likened to honeycomb and honey are those who have found favor with the Lord from the foundation of the world, whom he carried away when he rose from the dead and brought from the lower regions to the heavenly kingdoms, so that what is being compared to honey is the sweetness of the holy souls whom he has raised up to eternal joys in heaven, and what is being compared to honeycomb is the no lesser happiness of those who merit through him to ascend to the courts of the heavenly city, both in their bodies and in their immortal souls.[98]

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[94] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol.: "si noster amor, non de cotidiana Dei gratia, sed de naturalibus viribus animi haberet ut esset sublimis atque continuus, non diceret apostolus de suis sanctis laboribus quibus utique per amorem sublimem atque continuum insistebat: "Sed abundantius illis omnibus laboravi non autem ego sed gratia Dei mecum;" et iterum: "Non quod sufficientes simus cogitare aliquid a nobis quasi ex nobis sed sufficientia nostra ex Deo est;" cf. 1 Cor 15:10, 2 Cor 3:5.

[95] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* prol, 172: "Gratia inchoet, gratia consummet gratia coronet." Also, Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 80.

[96] For example, in *On Song of Songs* 1, 63, where Bede spoke of the bride as the "holy church or every elect soul."

[97] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 4, 165.

[98] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 3, 142.

Similarly, Bede described the elect as those "whose names [God] wrote in heaven" and a "number he foreknew before the world began."[99] Finally, in another passage commenting on the bases of gold in Song of Songs 5:15, Bede comments that the elect are those who were predestined to salvation according to God's eternal decrees.[100]

Even the elect, however, begin in a miserable state of sin. Like the wall that separates the bride from her beloved, so also, wrote Bede, there is a wall created by sin that blinds the world to Christ.[101]Referencing several of the same verses utilized in the prologue against Julian, Bede emphasized the sinner's powerless to make any spiritual progress apart from God's grace. Without Christ, we can do nothing (John 15:5), and on whether Paul could "direct his own way by himself and come to the Lord who draws him," Bede provided 1 Corinthians 15:10: "Not I, but the grace of God that is with me."[102] Thus, like the bride who leaned upon her beloved for aid (Song 8:5), so too do the elect lean on Christ's grace for all good things, including faith itself:

> And [the bride] was leaning upon my beloved, duly leaning upon him without whose aid she was unable not only to come up to the heights but even to rise, for we are not able to make progress in virtues, or even the very beginnings of faith, unless the Lord grants it.[103]

[99] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 4, 187.

[100] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 4, 168. The full passage reads: "Surely these bases of gold are the counsels of Divine Providence by which everything that was to be created was created in the temporal world was determined eternally before the world was made, and in which our Savior's incarnation was predestined along with our salvation in him. The Apostle bears witness to this when he says: "Just as he chose us before the foundation of the world, that we might be holy and blameless in his sight in love" (Eph 1:4); and as the apostle Peter says that we have been redeemed "with the precious blood of Jesus Christ, like that of a lamb unspotted and undefiled, foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world, but manifested in the last times" (1 Pt 1:19-20)."

[101] Bede, On the Song of Songs 1, 75–76; cf. Song 2:9.

[102] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 1, 42.

[103] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 5, 230.

Similarly, Bede commented that God also grants people power to love him, something "they cannot do unless he comes to love them first and by the grace of his Spirit incites them to love him."[104]

Bede placed a heavy emphasis on the Spirit as the agent of divine grace. In Song of Songs 1:3, the bride likened Solomon's name to "oil poured out," a reference Bede understood in his allegorical reading as the Spirit which God graciously bestows to his elect:

> Surely the Holy Spirit is accustomed to be understood by the name "oil" . . . And not without cause can we consider those among his elect, upon whom he has most bountifully lavished the gifts of his Spirit, to have had oil poured out upon them, just as that grace which was previously kept hidden among the Jewish people alone has now flooded the ends of the whole world in broad daylight, thus fulfilling the prophecy that says: "I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh."[105]

Bede enumerated the many gifts of the Spirit, which he compared to the vineyards of Engadi in Song of Songs 1:14, and elsewhere to wine that was placed into new wineskins, the church.[106] It is by the Spirit, noted Bede, that those who by grace have cast off their old, sinful selves and make progress in virtue: "The more they cling to the love of their Creator, the more they know that it is only by his grace that they receive the remission of sins and the gifts of the Spirit by which they make progress in virtue."[107] Bede credited to the Spirit the means "by which the hearts of the faithful are illuminated and made ready for spiritual combat."[108] Finally, suggested Bede, through the Spirit Christ calls, sustains, and preserves his elect. In a multi-layered allegorizing of Song of Songs 5:15, Bede wrote:

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[104] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 1, 69.

[105] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 1, 40–41.

[106] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 1, 58; 67.

[107] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 1, 41.

[108] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 3, 128.

> [Christ] is compared both to Lebanon (which brings forth remarkable trees) and to the cedar (which is one of those trees that Lebanon brings forth), as though he brings forth trees and holds them up, and at one and the same time is brought forth among those trees and is held up by himself. For our Lord Jesus Christ nourishes when through the grace of his divinity he brings forth to life all the elect from the beginning of the world until its end, and he carries himself among humanity because when he chose to make himself human he filled humanity in common with the grace of his Spirit.[109]

Thus, by becoming human "along with his elect," through the Spirit Christ brought forth fruit-bearing trees that in turn brings forth praise to the name of the Lord.

As Kleist rightly notes, "grace indeed is at the heart of this treatise."[110] Through Bede's allegorical lens, therefore, the poem about Solomon and his lover becomes the story of God redeeming his elect people through grace and the power of his Spirit.

Other Old Testament Writings

Although Bede's *On Genesis* and *On the Song of Songs* represent some of his most extensive treatments of grace among his Old Testament commentaries, other works also contain important discussions that help to expand upon the particulars of his theology. One such work, *On First Samuel,* frequently broached the concepts of predestination and election. Borrowing a concept from both Paul and Augustine, Bede argued that some persons receive the "election of grace," and the benefits of this special are manifold.[111] These are ones who, although once sinners, can call upon the Savior: "[I am] no longer a sinner yet still your wretched servant, and rightly call you lord because you have gone before me in the most ancient time of election."[112] Likewise, "the people

[109] Bede, *On the Song of Songs* 4, 169.

[110] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 80.

[111] For example, when Bede commented on a remnant of Jews who would ultimately be saved "according to the election of grace" (*On First Samuel* 1, trans. Scott DeGregorio and Rosalind Love (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 146; cf. Rom 11:5. As the translators note, compare with Augustine's similar exposition in his *City of God* 17.5 in which the Jewish remnant have received the election of grace.

[112] Bede *On First Samuel* 1, 118.

of the elect," wrote Bede, are "consecrated as a spiritual sacrifice to God on the high place of a new way of life" and hence able to perform virtuous works pleasing to their Lord.[113] According to Bede, while all must come to God in faith, it is God himself who opens the minds of sinners to receive the faith. Bede illustrated his point by noting that God often calls out his elect "from the number of persecutors to the grace of faith."[114] Perhaps Bede's allegorical exposition of 1 Samuel 13:7, in which the Israelites crossed the Jordan River upon seeing the mighty Philistine army, represented his position most clearly. Like the Israelites forging the river, the elect cross over from a former manner of vice to a current life of virtue:

> Assuredly the elect, in going beyond the Jordan, that is, the seizing or descent of the sinners, enter the land of Gad and Gilead . . . because they ascend to a mind endowed with the constant exercise of virtues and fruitful with produce of works that are always good, and bring praiseworthy testimony about themselves.[115]

In the same way, "attribute everything of virtue that they have to the spirit of grace and confess that they have received it from him."[116]

Importantly, Bede indicated that the elect would ultimately persevere. On this point, Bede referred to Matthew 20:16, a verse he employed several times throughout his writings.[117] Bede distinguished between "called" (*vocati*) and "chosen" (*electi*), the former understood by Bede as a more general call and the latter a specific calling to God's elect. Augustine himself made the distinction between *vocatio* and *electio*, particularly as it related to Jacob and Esau in his *Response to Simplician*; only those who

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[113] Bede, *On First Samuel* 2, 227.

[114] Bede, *On First Samuel* 4, trans. Scott DeGregorio and Rosalind Love (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2019), 442. In this passage, Bede specifically referred to Jonathan, the son of Saul, but, as the translators note, he could have also had in mind the apostle Paul (n. 39).

[115] Bede, *On First Samuel* 2, 267–268.

[116] Bede, *On First Samuel* 2, 264.

[117] Although found in older translations of the Bible, many modern versions omit "many are called, but few chosen" at the end of Matthew 20:16 (although an identical expression in found in Matt 22:14). For other uses of this verse by Bede, see for example his *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 129, and *Commentary on Revelation* 3, 235.

God specially and efficaciously calls "share in the election of the predestined."[118] Other passages lend support for a similar interpretation of Bede. Elsewhere in his writings, Bede's use of the term "chosen" often implied a more intimate relationship between the subject and God, whether Ancient Israel, the church, certain individuals, or Christ himself.[119] Moreover, Bede warned that even those who display some forms of piety or are members of the church does not entail they are elect.[120] Bede gave the example of Saul as one who, although called, was not chosen:

> He was elected at day and rejected at night; who deserved to reign due to the modesty of humility and to be reproved due to the fault of disobedience, not because divine Justice changed but because human merit did. But even today, since the Lord says that many are called but few are chosen, those who are called are separated from the light of the elect by works of darkness.[121]

The passage, however, is perplexing at first glance. Here, Bede seemed to obfuscate the temporal election of Saul as king with God's election of his saints to salvation. Saul, through disobedience, lost his favor with God. Did Bede mean to suggest that one could lose their elect status in a salvific sense? Caution must be taken against pressing Bede's

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[118] Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 349. Ogliari helpfully summarizes Augustine's position: "How can the election of Jacob be just if, apart from God's direct intervention of grace, there is no moral difference between the two brothers? The dilemma Augustine faced with was as follows: either Esau was not called or, if he was called, he was not called with the same effectiveness as Jacob. Of course Augustine chooses the second alternative as the only plausible answer. It is as this point he adopts a predestinarian view, drawing a clear line of demarcation between *uocatio* and *electio*, to demonstrate that they are not exactly the same. If all the elect are also called, not all those who are called are also elected. The grace of election, he asserts, is not given indiscriminately to all those who are called by God, but only to those among them who are truly "affected" (*adfecti*) by this all and are truly "fitted" (*idonei*) to receive it. In other words, election is only for those who are called "efficaciously" (*congruenter*)" (315–316). Likewise, notes Ogliari, Augustine attributed the special calling to God's act of predestination: "The interpretation of the bishop of Hippo, restricting the Pauline meaning of the term, attaches the effectiveness of the divine call to God's *propositum*, that is, to God's predestination. In this way Augustine's exegesis, in accordance with his own theological presuppositions, posits the effectiveness of man's call (and therefore his salvation) in God alone" (*Gratia et Certamen*, 335–336).

[119] For example, when commenting on 1 Peter 2:4 in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 4, wherein Christ is described as "chosen," and to whom Bede then associated with "the whole company of the elect" (183).

[120] For instance, see n. 246 below.

[121] Bede, *On First Samuel* 2, 311.

analogy here too far, and other passages add clarity to this and similar statements made by Bede. For instance, Bede stated in the same commentary that the number of the elect is immovable. Commenting on Ahimelech's inquiry to David in 1 Samuel 21:1, Bede wrote:

> Why, therefore, he says, are you alone, and no one with you? Why are you alone, i.e. with your faithful members, and can no one beyond the number fixed by the Father be saved from so great a multitude? This is said more in surprise than so that the elect should seem to be making a reasoned argument against heaven's counsel.[122]

Similarly, said Bede, the elect are those who were "already so well-known to [Christ], that we were chosen in him before the foundation of the world."[123] Thus, Bede's discussion of the Saul should not be understood that the elect are liable to lose their chosen status; rather, Bede apparently saw a loose parallel between God removing Saul from power for his disobedience with those who, even though receiving a general call, were never "chosen" and hence will be judged for their wickedness. Bede's consistent teaching here and elsewhere throughout his writings maintained that the elect belonged to Christ,[124] and it is the Lord that "sees to the completion of the work in his elect" so that they ultimately attain that eternal rest.[125]

In three other works that relied heavily upon allegorizing the ancient Israelite places of worship, his *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple* and *On Ezra and Nehemiah*, Bede extracted several key insights into the nature of God's elect.[126] In particular, Bede's

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[122] Bede, *On First Samuel* 3, 405.

[123] Bede, *On First Samuel* 2, 272. In this passage, the translators note Bede's dependence on Augustine (*City of God* 17.2).

[124] See Bede, *On First Samuel* 2, 231.

[125] Bede, *On First Samuel* 3, 336.

[126] For the most comprehensive study of Bede's *On the Tabernacle* and *On the Temple*, see Arthur Holder, "Bede's Commentaries on the Tabernacle and the Temple," (PhD diss., Duke University, 1987). For a more recent analysis of Bede's temple imagery, see Conor O'Brien, *Bede's Temple: An Image and its Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015).

exposition further reveals important aspects of his theology of grace as it relates to the work of the Spirit, the nature of the elect, and the relationship between faith, works, and merit.

As he wrote elsewhere, Bede maintained that grace precedes any effort of the sinner to please God. Commenting on God's command that Israel bring him their firstfruits in Exodus 25, Bede allegorically understood this as a picture of God's grace: "We bring the firstfruits of our possessions to the Lord when, if we do anything good, we truthfully attribute it to divine grace."[127] Recognizing our complete reliance upon grace, continued Bede, results in a humble recognition of humanity's fallenness:

> Acknowledging from the inmost heart that we are unable to even begin a good action or thought without the Lord, we confess that our misdeeds, although instigated by the devil, are always begun and brought to completion by us ourselves, nor can they be undone unless the Lord forgives.[128]

Bede exposed the underlying pride of the Pelagians who wrongly held that fallen humanity could keep God's law apart from grace: "The Pelagians are unwilling to bring the firstfruits of their possessions to the Lord but retain whatever they own for themselves, because with foolish presumption they allege that they have something good from themselves apart from the grace of God."[129] On the contrary, Bede pointed to the mercy seat of the ark of the covenant as a reminder to the church that "every good thing it possesses it has received from the generosity of divine grace."[130]

Throughout the commentary, Bede emphasized the role of the Spirit in granting God's elect with the ability to do good. Like Augustine, who argued that no one

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[127] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, trans. Arthur Holder (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1994), 7.

[128] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 7–8.

[129] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 8.

[130] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 20; cf. Exod 25:22.

can claim "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit,[131] Bede noted that Christ distributes "the grace of his Spirit to each one of those who are elect," and it is they who "have all been made partakers in the Holy Spirit and in heavenly grace."[132] As a result, the Spirit inflames the minds and hearts of the elect so that they might live a life pleasing to God. For example, Bede argued that "the gift of penitence is not granted unless the Holy Spirit imparts it," and furthermore, "the gift of pardon is not bestowed upon penitents unless it is administered by the grace of the same Spirit."[133] Similarly, and alluding to the fire that burned under the bronze altar in Exodus 27:4–5, Bede noted that through the gift of the Spirit the elect "render pious thoughts as votive offerings acceptable to the Lord."[134] Furthermore, explained Bede, the fire and smoke that consumed the sacrifices placed on the altar helpfully picture the work of the Spirit:

> Wood burns on the altar when "the charity of God" is "poured forth "into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us," and this holocaust which is placed upon the fire is consumed when everything that we have managed to do well by the grace of the Holy Spirit is rendered acceptable to God through the power of love.[135]

Bede warned against downplaying the role of grace and the Spirit, and act that he likened to covering the grate on the altar, thus cutting off the flame from the sacrifice. Unsurprisingly, Bede used the Pelagians as an example of those "who presume that they are able to achieve something good apart from the grace of God."[136] The Pelagians, said Bede, "do not set a spotted grate in the form of a net over a holy fire in the altar of their heart, but instead they set a solid wall (as it were) between themselves and the fire of the

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[131] See Augustine's statements in his *Tract. In Ioh.* 62.1 and *Sermon* 71, both quoted by Bede in his *Excerpts* 191–192.

[132] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 84.

[133] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 59.

[134] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 93.

[135] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 93; cf. Rom 5:5.

[136] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 93.

Holy Spirit, so that they are never made warm in love."[137] Bede therefore exhorted his readers to seek the love and mercy that comes from the grace of God.

Additionally, Bede highlighted the work of the Spirit in preserving the elect. Bede understood that even after baptism those whom God has predestined for life will inevitably sin, and his commentary *On Ezra and Nehemiah* paid special attention to the theme of repentance and restoration. Bede commented that "when after baptism we again incur death by sinning, we must come to life again through this same faith by repenting and be returned once more to the fellowship of the faithful through the reconciliation of priests of the Church."[138] Elsewhere, however, Bede identified the Spirit as the agent who brings about repentance in his people. Bede discussed those in the church who, "having been deceived by the devil" fall into sin. Some will fall away, but through grace others are renewed:

> Yet some of [those who sin], regaining their senses through the regard of divine grace, return to the Church when they are pricked in the heart by the illumination of the Holy Spirit and begin again to hear and keep the precepts of the divine law which they had abandoned.[139]

In another place, Bede made a similar statement while commenting on the Jews' return from exile:

> None of those who are predestined to life can be damned eternally, but all who belong to the Lord, even though they may seem for a time to have been taken away to Babylon (i.e. to the confusion of sins), are in one way or another led back by divine foresight through the fellowship of the righteous to the peace of the Church.[140]

Furthermore, said Bede,

> The children of the Church are the children of the heavenly homeland, not only those who have already been imbued with the sacraments of the Church but even those who, though wandering in error for some time (i.e. among the impious),

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[137] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 93.

[138] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 1, trans. Scott DeGregorio (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 60.

[139] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 1, 8.

[140] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 1, 25.

> nevertheless were preordained to life by divine election before the world began, and are to be consecrated by the mysteries of divine grace at their own due time.[141]

For Bede, therefore, the work of the Spirit itself is rooted in God's divine election. The salvation of the elect is further guaranteed by the Spirit since it is he himself who begins and completes every good work in the believer: "it is with the grace of the Holy Spirit leading us that we begin every good thing we do and with it accompanying us that we complete it."[142] The Lord "establishes his faith in the hearts of the elect, which in turn produces good works. Bede urged his readers to remember that "we have both received from [God] the beginnings of salvation-giving intention and cannot complete the good works we have begun without the help of his grace."[143] In a passage exploring the typological connection between Ezra and Christ, Bede also underscored the Trinitarian nature of salvation:

> Just as Zerubbabel and Jeshua, as has often been said, designate the Lord Saviour, who releases the human race from captivity through his grace and himself builds his own house in us by sanctifying and taking possession of us, so in the same way Ezra the priest and swift scribe plainly stands for the same Lord who came "not to destroy the Law but to fulfill it." For he could rightly be called a scribe of God's Law or a scribe swift in the Law of Moses because he himself gave the prophets "every truth" through the grace of his own spirit, and he himself enflamed the minds of all the elect as soon as he touched them with his love to understand and carry out the will of God the Father.[144]

Thus, by the work of the Triune God, the temple—"the sum of all the elect"—will be dedicated when it, "having been brought to completion at the end of time, at last attains the grace of heavenly rewards."[145]

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[141] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 1, 25.

[142] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 1, 94.

[143] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 1, 45.

[144] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 2, 112; cf. Matt 5:17, John 16:13.

[145] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 2, 101.

While the Spirit gives gifts to all of the elect, not all gifts are given equally. [146] Comparing the gifts of the Spirit to the various curtains in the tabernacle, Bede noted that "the elect have gifts that differ according to the grace that is given them."[147] According to Bede, there are ranks among the elect according to their merits. When discussing Exodus 27:16, Bede likened the various embroideries decorating the gate of the court to the varieties of the elect:

> The individual colors . . . can also correspond to individual persons among the elect. For one, who merits to look upon heavenly things at a very great height, is blue; another, who suffers many things for righteousness' sake, is purple; this one, who is inflamed with a very fervent love for God and neighbor, is scarlet twice dyed; that one, who is especially white with the fragrance of virginal flesh, is fine twisted linen. And when the righteous rejoice together on account of their virtues in one and the same evangelical faith and piety, it is as if the entrance of the court of the Lord is adorned with a beautiful hanging that is woven with a diversity of varying colours.[148]

Elsewhere, Bede related the assorted stones on Aaron's vestments to "the whole company of the elect, which clings to Christ in a variegated diversity of persons and merits."[149] For example, argued Bede, "Some of the elect have been permitted to ascend to the grace of divine contemplation once they have perfect the active life."[150] While Bede recognized the positive examples of married persons and continent persons within the church, he held that the merit of those among the elect who are called to a celibate life in service of the church is "more sublime" than the other two.[151]

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[146] See for example Bede's exposition of Exodus 25:37 and the seven lamps contained in the tabernacle, in which he likened them to the "seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, all of which remain in our Lord and Redeemer forever and are distributed in his members (that is, in all the elect)" (*On the Tabernacle* 1, 39).

[147] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 51.

[148] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 102.

[149] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 111; cf. Exod 28:2–3.

[150] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 5.

[151] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 34. For comments on Bede's classification, see Holder, *On the Tabernacle*, 34, n.1. Also, see Holder, "Bede's Commentaries on the Tabernacle and the Temple," 103–104.

Bede further illustrated the diversity of merits and gifts among the elect in his *On the Temple*. In a discussion of the various courts of the temple as described in 2 Chronicles 4:9, Bede pointed to the priests and common people of Ancient Israel in order to make comparison to members within the church:

> But the large hall which was outside the court of the priests and in which the whole multitude of the people was wont to worship or gather to hear the word, suggests figuratively the life and behavior of the carnal in the holy Church to whom the Apostle says, "But I, brethren, could not address you as spiritual people, but as of the flesh, as babes in Christ, I fed you with milk, not solid food.[152]

Bede continued by contrasting the "carnal" and the "perfect" within the ranks of the elect. Although the carnal class "is far greater than that of the perfect," reckoned Bede, they are lower in merit."[153] The monk continued:

> Hence it is fitting that this great hall, even though it holds the majority, does not, for all that, admit them to the inner parts of the gilded temple, or to the service of the altar or even to the priests' court itself, because even though all the carnal and weak who are still in the Church have a share in the lot of the elect through the merit of pure faith and of piety which is dedicated to God, nevertheless, they are far from being fit to put on a par with those who have convincingly proved their fidelity.[154]

Since the carnal ones within the church "are only beginners in the way of righteousness," said Bede, "[they] feel it is enough for them to have faith, hope, and charity, as well as purity of conduct."[155] On the other hand, said Bede,

> The perfect . . . as well as having these, also labour in preaching the word, distribute all their goods to the poor, give themselves to vigils, fasting, hymns and spiritual canticles, as well as to sacred reading, endure persecutions and dangers for righteousness' sake, and with prompt zeal perform the other things which Paul with his companions boasts of having done.[156]

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[152] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.17.5, trans. Seán Connolly and Jennifer O'Reilly (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 68; cf. 1 Cor 3:1–2.

[153] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.17.5, 69.

[154] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.17.5, 69.

[155] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.17.7, 70–71.

[156] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.17.2, 71.

Thus, while all the elect aim at "pleasing God by faith, hope, love and action," the perfect, argued Bede, "by the exalted grace of their merits . . . reach such a peak of virtue that they can say to their hearers, 'Be imitators of us as we also are of Christ,' and boast and say, 'Do you not know that we shall judge the angels? How much more the things of this world?'"[157]

Since, as Bede said, the names "of all the elect . . . are written in heaven," merit ultimately concerns the degree of their heavenly rewards, not entrance into the kingdom itself.[158] To illustrate his point, Bede provided the examples of Moses, Aaron, and the priests as individuals from among the people of Israel who, like present-day leaders in the church, surpassed "the rest of the faithful in merit": [159]

> For all those who are to be advanced to a higher rank in the Holy Church must apply their minds to the law of God with greater industriousness, that is, they should be attached to the observance of the divine commandments with a mind that is more astute than the rest. This implies that those who are going to exercise the priestly office are brought to Moses from among the children of Israel and that the leaders and teachers of the Holy Church transcend the common life of the elect by the exceptional eminence of their minds.[160]

With greater responsibility, continued Bede, comes greater reward: "By habitual contemplation, they distinguish which law was spoken to all the elect in general, and which to the few who are more perfect, so that by the higher excellence of their merits they may be able to attain higher rewards."[161] A comment in his *On the Temple* made a similar point: "All the elect will share a common blessing, but in accordance with the

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[157] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.17.8, 71; cf. 1 Cor 11:1, 1 Cor 6:3.

[158] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 156. In this passage, Bede understood the children of Israel in Exodus 30:12 as spiritually representing the sum of all the elect.

[159] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 109.

[160] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 109–110.

[161] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 110.

different quality of their works there are many mansions for the blessed in one and the same eternal house of the Father in heaven."[162]

Despite the diverse gifts and merits of the elect, Bede primarily emphasized their unity as recipients of God's charity and love. "The elect," wrote Bede, "are doubtless imbued with one true faith, even if their merits differ in rank; for they will come to one light of eternal truth in heaven, even though the ones who endeavor to cleave to Christ higher up in this life will enjoy a closer vision of him in that life."[163] In a similar passage, Bede likened the golden lampstand described in Exodus 25:39 to "the whole body of Christ . . . and all his elect from the highest to the lowest."[164] Bede then stressed their oneness despite their differences:

> Although [the elect] are diverse in their ranks, ages sexes, conditions, abilities, and times, all of these, in their own times and places, cleave by the fixed root of their minds to one and the same Author and Giver of perpetual light, as if to a golden lampstand in which they are able to become partakers of his own light.[165]

In another place, Bede emphasized the elect's unity by their sharing the gift of the Spirit. Bede provided an allegorical interpretation of the chain decorations placed upon the pillars of the temple described in 1 Kings 7:17 in order to highlight the bond of the elect in the Spirit:

> The multiple intertwining of chains and the expansion of the network suggests the many different characters among the elect, who, when they faithfully adhere to the words of the holy preachers by listening and obeying, show forth to all who behold them, like the network and the little chains placed upon the tops of the pillars, the

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[162] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.18.14, 82; cf. John 14:2.

[163] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 35. Throughout the commentary, Bede made several similar statements to this effect. For instance, when analyzing the measurements of the ark of the covenant given in Exodus 25:10, Bede wrote, "The width of the ark was cubit on account of the dispensation of the Lord's own charity, with which he took care to unite his elect in God" (*On the Tabernacle* 1, 12). Elsewhere, when discussing the boards that made up the frame of the tabernacle (Exod 26:24), Bede wrote, "Doubtless [the boards are joined together] because the entire life of the elect stretches out toward heaven with one and the same faith and charity to one and the same Divine Vision, and because every utterance of the holy preachers harmonizes in one and the same voice of right teaching" (*On the Tabernacle* 2, 74–75).

[164] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 43.

[165] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 43.

> miracle of their interconnection. For these chains are woven together with wonderful craftsmanship because it is thanks to the marvelous grace of the Holy Spirit that the lifestyles of believers, quite removed from each other though they may be in space, time, rank, status sex and age, are nevertheless linked together by one and the same faith and love.[166]

Baptism is a visible sign of the elect's unity in the Spirit, since it is principally there that "the whole multitude of the elect," said Bede, "are made sharers in the high priesthood which is in the Lord Jesus Christ."[167] Likewise, "Through the washing of baptism," he continued, "[the elect] are filled with the grace of the Holy Spirit."[168]

All of the elect are further united in their ultimate fate, namely, entrance into the heavenly kingdom. This reality is made certain, noted Bede, by the grace granted by God himself in preserving his own people: "All of the elect are upheld by the Lord's gifts, commandments, and promises, and lifted up to love and to seek heavenly things, lest they should be liable to fall to the depths below."[169] In particular, Bede described the work of the Spirit who "quickens the minds of all the faithful with the various gifts of grace,"[170] and who strengthens the elect "that they might not be liable to fall any more."[171] Writing in another work, *In Regum librum xxx Queastiones* (*Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings*), Bede was even more explicit on God's power in preserving his elect. Referencing 1 Samuel 25:19, Bede wrote,

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[166] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.18.9, 78.

[167] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.20.1, 93. In this particular passage, Bede discussed how the bronze basins in 1 Kgs 7:38 prefigured the mysteries of salvation.

[168] Bede, *On the Temple* 2.20.1, 93.

[169] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 1, 37. Note the similarity here between Bede's understanding of the work and role of the Spirit and that of Augustine as quoted in his *Excerpts*: "We cannot say that those who possess the Holy Spirit will fail to enter the kingdom of heaven if they persevere to the end, nor can we say that those who say 'Lord, Lord,' and yet fail to enter the kingdom of heaven possess the Holy Spirit" (Bede, *Excerpts from the Works of Saint Augustine on the Letters of the Blessed Apostle Paul*, trans. David Hurst [Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1999], 148; cf. Augustine, *Tract. In Ioh.* 62.1.

[170] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 147.

[171] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 2, 100.

> For as it is easy for anyone to hold a bundle of grass or hay in one's hand, so does the strength of our Lord and Saviour effortlessly preserve all the elect throughout the earth from the beginning to the end of the world. And so, none of them perish for any reason at all, in accordance with what he himself said of the elect in the Gospel, using sheep as an allegory, "And they follow me; And I shall give them everlasting life. and they never will perish. and no one will pluck them from my hand."[172]

As in his *On the Tabernacle*, Bede highlighted the unity of the elect, who God binds together "by one and the same faith, hope, and love, and enclosed by one rampart of divine protection."[173] It is the elect, Bede maintained, that the Lord deigns to watch over and whom "he preserves for the eternal vision of his glory as they toil in this passing life."[174]

In one of his most striking associations, Bede commented on the perpetual nature of the tabernacle in Exodus 27:21. That the tabernacle and its functions would be a perpetual observance for the people of Israel, clarified Bede:

> Must be understood and expounded in a spiritual rather than a carnal sense . . . it is obvious that this saying is meant to be fulfilled in the Holy Church, in which there are teachers and also hearers of the truth who succeed one another in turn. For [the Church] will never lack either spiritual children of Israel who offer gifts of piety in the house of the Lord, or sons of Aaron (that is, our true Priest) who administer the light of the word to them, until such time as the order of this world will be finished and the entire tabernacle of God itself (that is, the whole multitude of the elect) will be transported to a heavenly kingdom where people will no longer be taught by other human beings, since "God will be all in all."[175]

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[172] Bede, *Thirty Questions on the Book of Kings*, trans. W. Trent Foley and Arthur Holder, in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), 100–101; cf. John 10:28. Note also a similar sentiment in Bede's *De octo queastionibus* (*On Eight Questions*): "Peter, who walked with unimpeded steps over the waves which were stirred up by the wind but was raised up by Christ's right hand when on account of fear he began to sink, signifies that with invincible faith those same elect overcome and regard as nothing all the efforts of the impious and the persecutions thrown at them at the devil's instigation. So they cannot be submerged by the waves of the world at all, since they are encircled by the ever-present aid of their Maker. If they ever begin to falter—as they are [only] human—they are immediately rescued by the one whom they are accustomed to call upon without ceasing, saying: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil" (translated in *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany*, 153).

[173] Bede, *Thirty Questions of the Book of Kings*, 101.

[174] Bede, *On the Temple* 1.5.3, 20.

[175] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 109; cf. 1 Cor 15:28. For brief comments on Bede's association of the tabernacle as the church/elect, see DeGregorio, "Bede and the Old Testament," 135–137.

Thus, the elect, pictured here as the tabernacle itself, long for that last day when they will strip off the corruptible for the incorruptible, and "rejoice more perfectly in the presence of their creator."[176]

Bede's New Testament Commentaries

In addition to his numerous Old Testament commentaries, Bede produced several works expositing the New Testament. These writings include two gospel commentaries, *In Marci evangelium exposito* (*Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*) and *In Lucae evangelium exposito* (*Commentary on the Gospel of Luke*). Additionally, Bede wrote two works on the book of Acts, the initial commentary, *In actus apostolorum*, as well as his *Rectractio*, a later work that "corrects a small number of errors made in the earlier work, presents [his] defense against his critics on a few points, and adds much new material based on his continued meditation on the Acts text and his reading of other sources."[177] Furthermore, Bede provided his *In epistulas VII catholicas* (*Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*) and a commentary on Revelation, *In apocolypsin sancti Iohannis*. In addition to these writings, Bede compiled several homilies on the four gospels, his *Homeliarum evangelii*, and as we saw in chapter two, he produced a collection of Augustine's remarks on the letters of Paul, the *Collectio in Apostolum*.

While "many of the ideas and much of the language are drawn from the works of the Fathers," as Arthur Holder notes concerning Bede's New Testament commentaries, "Bede has put his own stamp on the material."[178] Thus, although Bede did not wish to be seen as a theological innovator in his writings, he was not afraid, continues Holder, "to

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[176] Bede, *On the Tabernacle* 3, 147.

[177] See Lawrence T. Martin, introduction, in *Bede: Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, trans. Lawrence T. Martin, Cistercian Studies Series vol. 117 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), xxiii.

[178] Arthur Holder, "Bede and the New Testament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 147.

contradict a traditional authority on occasion, or to exercise his own independent judgement by choosing one Father's position over that of another." As this section will argue, however, in matters related to his theology of grace Bede demonstrated his indebtedness to Augustine. Two works in particular that will be the main focus of the present investigation, his *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles* and his *Commentary on Acts*, provide ample proof that, although Bede did not shy away from providing his own insights into the text that sometimes went against the church fathers, his theology of grace drew heavily from the bishop of Hippo.

Commentary on Acts

Bede's *Commentary on Acts*, which can be dated sometime between 709–716, was one of Bede's most influential commentaries.[179] As Lawrence Martin notes, the popularity of the work may stem in part from the lack of predecessors on the Book of Acts available in the Latin West in the Middle Ages.[180] Thus, like several of his Old Testament commentaries discussed above, this particular commentary has "a higher proportion than usual of ideas which he has had to put into his own words, rather than in quotations from the Fathers."[181] While works like *On the Song of Songs* were almost entirely allegorical in their exegesis, in Bede's *Commentary on Acts*, says Martin, "the allegory is freely interspersed with comments which are very down-to earth."[182] As George Hardin Brown observes, Bede's work primarily centers on the themes of "Christ, the Church, and the sacraments."[183] To this might be added, however, Bede's focus on

[179] Martin, introduction, xviii. For a lengthier discussion on dating the work, see John Houghton, "Bede's Exegetical Theology: Ideas of the Church in the Acts Commentaries of St. Bede the Venerable" (PhD diss., University of Notre Dame, 1994), 48–51. Also, Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 63.

[180] Martin, introduction, xviii.

[181] Houghton, "Bede's Exegetical Theology," 47.

[182] Martin, introduction, xviii.

[183] Brown, *A Companion to Bede*, 64.

God's grace in salvation, notably, that through the grace of the Spirit can sinners hope to be brought into and persevere in the faith.

For Bede, the condition of fallen man necessitates the grace of the Spirit. The *Commentary on Acts* presents humanity, both Jew and Gentile, as separated from God by the fall. Referencing Acts 4:11, Bede pointed especially to the Jews in order to illustrate man's sinfulness. Bede drew upon the imagery of the lame man in Acts 3:2 to make an observation on Israel's wickedness: "Because the people of Israel were found rebellious, not only after the Lord's incarnation, but even from the earliest times when the law was given, they were as if lame from the mother's womb."[184] Bede then forayed into a parallel between Jacob in Genesis 32 and the Jews who crucified Christ, apparently from the mere use of "lame" in Acts 3:2: "This was well prefigured by Jacob's being blessed, indeed, but lame when he wrestled with the angel, for this same people, when they prevailed over the Lord in his passion, was in some of [its members] blessed through faith, but in others lame through infidelity."[185] As Martin notes, Bede borrowed from Augustine for his interpretation of Genesis 32.[186] Note the similarities in Augustine's *City of God*: "For the fact that Jacob prevailed over him—and the angel allowed this to happen, of course, for the sake of symbolism—signifies the passion of Christ, in which the Jews seemed to prevail over him."[187] Augustine continued: "Moreover, the angel also touched his apparent conqueror in the hollow of his thigh, and in that way made him lame. . . . For the hollow of his thigh signifies the multitude of his race and indeed, it is to

[184] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 43. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from this work comes from Martin's translation.

[185] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 43.

[186] See his comments in *Commentary on Acts*, 47.

[187] Augustine, *City of God* 16.39, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 756.

the greater part of that stock that the prophetic warning is given: 'They have limped away from their ways.'"[188]

Bede further noted how the Jews had rejected Christ, the cornerstone, "while all the gentiles remained in the wasteland of idols."[189] Bede described how the Jews, although they had sought to follow the law and the prophets, were unwilling to believe in the one who would bring both Jew and Gentile together as one new people of God:

> Because they preferred to remain in one wall, that is, to be saved alone, they rejected the stone which was not one-sided, but two sided. Nevertheless, although they were unwilling, God by himself placed this [stone] at the chief position in the corner, so that from two testaments and two peoples there might rise up a building of one and the same faith.[190]

By pointing to the universal cure for humanity's sinfulness, however, Bede expanded this observation of sin to encompass both Jew and gentile alike:

> For although the sacramental signs differed by reason of the times, nevertheless there was agreement in one and the same faith, because through the prophets they learned as something to come the same dispensation of Christ which we learned through the apostles as something which has been done. For there is no redemption of human captivity [to sinfulness] except in the blood of him who gave himself as a redemption for all.[191]

Despite his apparent harsh critiques of the Israelites, Bede levelled equal accusations against the gentiles. One such instance comes from Acts 8:26, wherein the monk explained aspects of biblical geography: "It is not the road, but Gaza which is referred to as a desert. For the old Gaza, which was formerly the Chanaaites' boundary with Egypt, was destroyed down to its foundations, and in a different place another [Gaza] was built

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[188] Augustine, *City of God* 16.39 (756–757).

[189] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 49.

[190] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 50.

[191] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 50; cf. Acts 4:12. See also Houghton's discussion of Bede's exposition of this verse, where he argues Bede did differ with Augustine on the efficacy of the law for the salvation those under the Old Covenant. See his discussion in "Bede's Exegetical Theology," 88. For his overall discussion of the relationship between the Old and New Covenants in Bede's thinking, see pp. 75–130.

to replace it."[192] Reading through his allegorical lens, however, Bede explained the deeper meaning of the text:

> Allegorically this designates the people of the gentiles, who were once separated from the worship of God, uncultivated by the preaching of the prophets. The road which went down to this same place from Jerusalem and opened the fountain of salvation is the Lord Jesus Christ, who said, "I am the way and the truth and the life." From the Jerusalem above he 'came down' to our infirmities, and with the water of baptism he made white the blackness of our guilty condition.[193]

In the same passage, Bede pointed both to the sickness and the cure. The Gentiles were estranged from God and, in a reference to original sin, in a "guilty condition." Nevertheless, Christ opened the way to salvation.

Bede's *Commentary on Acts* implicated both Jew and Gentile in their sinfulness and estrangement from God. Reconciliation between God and humanity required God's grace. As demonstrated in this commentary, Bede taught that God's grace in converting sinners comes primarily through the work of the Spirit. Luke's description of Pentecost in Acts 2 provided Bede with ample opportunities to teach on the role of the Spirit. Commenting on Acts 2:17, Bede referred to the Spirit as both a gift and example of God's grace, which, in contrast with the Old Covenant, God now grants to all:

> "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh." The word effusion shows the lavishness of the gift, for the grace of the Holy Spirit was not to be granted, as formerly, only to individual prophets and priests, but to everyone in every place, regardless of sex, state of life, or position.[194]

Illumination by the Spirit, continued Bede on Acts 2:19, was the difference between the faithful and those who do not believe in the gospel:

> The fire of the Holy Spirit; the vapor of compunction and tears, because just as smoke is produced from fire, so vapor is produced from the ardor of the Holy Spirit. And as for blood flowing in a vigorous stream from the Lord's dead flesh, because

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[192] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 81.

[193] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 81; cf. John 14:6. Martin also draws attention to wordplay present in the original Latin that is lost in translation. Namely, Bede used *deserta* and *desertam* in reference to the Gaza desert and the gentiles who were separated from God, as well as *cultura* and *excultam* in reference to the worship of God and the gentiles being uncultivated (p. 86, n. 1).

[194] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 32; cf. Joel 3:1.

> this is contrary to the nature of our bodies it remains [for us] to believe that this was done for a sign. A sign of what, to be sure, if not of our salvation and the life which is born from his death?[195]

Bede, as he was prone to do with his allegorical readings, then suggests a variation of his interpretation that drew connections with Sinai:

> It is also possible to understand the fire as the enlightening of the faithful, and the vapor of smoke as the blindness of the Jews who did not believe. Whence also when about to give the law the Lord descended in fire and smoke because through the brilliance of his manifestation he enlightened the humble, and through the murky smoke of error he dimmed the eyes of the proud.[196]

Furthermore, Bede continued to expand upon the imagery of the Spirit and fire:

> "When they heard this they were pierced to the heart," and so forth. Behold the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. Notice that after the fore of the Holy Spirit there followed the vapor of compunction, for smoke tends to cause tears. Those who had laughed in ridicule begin to weep. They beat their breasts. They present their prayer to God as a sacrifice, so that as people who are to be saved they may be able to taste of that blood which before, when they were damned, they had called down upon themselves and their children.[197]

Despite the shifting metaphor, Bede's understanding of the Spirit's role remained consistent: The gift of the Spirit pierces the heart, brings about repentance, and precedes belief in the gospel.

Elsewhere, Bede also observed the Spirit's role in spiritual rebirth in letter given by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15:28:

> "For it has seemed right to the Holy Spirit and to us." That is, it has pleased the Holy Spirit, who, appearing as the arbiter of his own powers, "breathes where he wills," and speak the things which he wishes. As it has pleased us, not in accordance with our own will alone, but by virtue of the prompting of the Spirit.[198]

Bede's subtle reference to John 3, wherein Christ asserted that the new birth comes through the power of the Spirit, helps in interpreting Bede's meaning. More than implying that the Spirit aided those navigating the pressing issues faced by those at the

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[195] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 32.

[196] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 32–33; cf. Exod 19:18.

[197] Bede, *Commentary on Acts* 36–37; cf. Acts 2:37.

[198] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 131; cf. John 3:8.

Jerusalem Council—an implication clearly present in Acts 15— Bede expanded its meaning in order to make a broader point about the Spirit's role in salvation, namely, that the Spirit is the instrument of rebirth.

Bede's commentary on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 also offers insight into the monk's understanding of the role of the Spirit in empowering believers. First, Bede drew his readers' attention to the miraculous signs experienced by the apostles who were gathered together. The "tongues of fire" spoken by the apostles in Acts 2:3 pointed to an even greater work produced by the Holy Spirit:

> "And there appeared to them," it says, "parted tongues as of fire." Now the Holy Spirit appeared in fire and in tongues because all those whom he fills he makes simultaneously to burn and to speak—to burn because of him, and to speak about him. And at the same time he indicated that the holy church, when it had spread to the ends of the earth, was to speak in the languages of all nations.[199]

God expands his church through the power of the Spirit, an act that Bede related to undoing the curse instituted at Babel. Those indwelt by the Spirit could miraculously speak in foreign languages, and this, said Bede, further evidences God's grace: "The church's humility recovers the unity of languages which the pride of Babylon had shattered. Spiritually, however, the variety of languages signifies a variety of graces."[200] As Martin observes, Bede's *Retractatio* made the contrast between the confusion of Babel and the restoration begun at Pentecost even clearer. After noting the pride that existed in humanity that lead to the scattering and confusion at Babel, Bede differentiated between those whom God continues to unite in the faith to serve him with those who serve the devil:

> [Humanity was divided] by the merit of iniquity so that, when all men there were speaking by one language, no one could know the will or words of those nearest themselves. Likewise, later in Jerusalem, by the merit of humility the languages are united, and likewise all speech was of one will and spirit, which without doubt is born all the way today by the whole Earth, until the elect in the various divisions of languages serve the Lord with one heart and intention and with no division. But

[199] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 29.

[200] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 29; cf. Acts 2:4.

> truly the all the reprobate serve the devil, that like a slave born by zeal and struggle with a diverse mind and with very much fighting among himself.[201]

Thus, Bede saw the miraculous speaking in foreign languages in Acts 2 as illustrative of what the Spirit continues to do up the present day. Namely, where there was once confusion, struggle, and strife, God now calls the elect through the Spirit in order that they may serve him and hence reverse the effects of Babel.

The undoing of Babel is also pictured by the reception of the gospel message throughout the world, a task made possible by the gift of the Spirit. Bede referenced Peter's vision in Acts 11 in order to highlight the fact the gospel message was now available to all peoples. Bede scoffed at those who understood Peter's vision of the various animals as abdicating the dietary restrictions of the old covenant; rather, Peter's vision indicated the inclusion of both Jew and gentile under the new covenant:

> I am amazed at how some people interpret [Peter's vision] as having to do with certain foods which were prohibited by the old law but which are now to be consumed, since neither serpents nor reptiles can be eaten. Nor did Peter himself understand it in this way. Rather [he understood it as meaning] all people are equally called to the gospel of Christ, and nothing is naturally defiled. For when he was reproached, he explained the symbolism of this vision, not [as giving the reason] why he ate beasts, but why he associated with gentiles.[202]

Moreover, through the power of the Spirit the apostles were empowered to take the universal message of salvation to the nations. Reflecting on the Spirit's prompting of Peter to take six additional brothers with him to Cornelius' house, Bede noted how "It is beautifully appropriate that when the 'sevenfold gifts of the Holy Spirit' that were poured out, the witnesses were brothers seven in number."[203] Moreover, said Bede,

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[201] Bede, *Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum*, in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera Exegetica*, ed. M. L. W. Laistner, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latine*, vol. 121 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1983), 127 [translation mine]: siquidem in opera superbiae turris lingua et mens humani generis cum esset una, merito iniquitatis discissa est ita ut, cum omnibus ibi linguis loquerentur homines, nemo tamen proximi sui voluntatem aut verba cognosceret. Porro in Hierusalem eadem sunt linguae merito humilitatis unitae unique omnibus lingua eadem erat voluntas et anima, quod nimirum usque hodie toto orbe geritur, dum electi in multifaria divisione loquelarum uno ac non diviso corde et intentione domino famulantur. At vero reprobi ita omnes diabolo deseruviunt, ut eadem servitus diversa mente et pugnaci plerumque inter se studio et certamine geratur.

[202] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 107.

[203] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 107; cf. Acts 11:12.

> "And they glorified God, saying, 'Therefore to the gentiles also God has given repentance unto life.' . . . since the splendor of faith first sprang to life in the cold heart of the gentile world, and in virtue of this same unexpected faith, the Jewish world, trembling with fear, glorified God.

Thus, Bede connected the gift of the Spirit to accomplishing the spread of the gospel, leading the Jews to glorify God.

Additionally, Bede indicated that the Spirit now dwells in both Jews and Gentiles. Reflecting upon Paul's ministry in Ephesus in Acts 19:17, Bede discussed how the Spirit's ministry had spread from Jerusalem, representing the Jews, and to Ephesus, signifying the Gentiles:

> Behold, Asia, which not long before was unworthy to be visited by the apostles, now consecrated by the apostolic number and exalted by a prophetic gift! And it should be noted that the Holy Spirit showed signs of his coming, both here in the twelve disciples, and earlier in the hundred and twenty (which is the number twelve multiplied ten times). I believe that the former [manifestation occurred] in Jerusalem, and this one in Ephesus, which is a Greek city, to show that whether the one who believes is from the Jews or the gentiles, he [the Spirit] fills only those who share in the unity of the catholic and apostolic church.[204]

The Spirit now abides in both Jew and Gentile, but Bede added an important qualifier to this fact: the indwelling of the Spirit is predicated upon baptism into the one church.[205] There, both peoples dwell together in the unity of the gospel of Christ and his Spirit.

Just as Bede explained the Spirit's role in bringing people into the faith, so also does the grace of the Spirit preserve them there. The world inevitably inflicts all manner of strife and temptation upon the faithful, and, like Augustine, Bede held that even the saints can stumble by sinning. Bede made this point especially clear in an allegorical reading of Acts 9:36. Bede's exegesis began by describing the characteristics of Christ's followers the monk derived from the etymology of the name "Dorcas":

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[204] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 154.

[205] Elsewhere, Bede makes the connection between baptism and the Spirit clear, primarily driven by the influence of Augustine. Bede's treatment of Acts 10:38 is an extended of Augustine, in which the bishop connected baptism with receiving the Spirit. Augustine contrasted Christ's anointing by the Spirit at his incarnation in the womb of Mary with that of the church, "in which the baptized principally receive the Spirit" (*Commentary on Acts*, 102; Augustine, *De Trinitate* 15.26.

> "Now at Jaffa there was a woman disciple by the name of Tabitha, which means Dorcas," that is, 'deer,' or 'fallow deer,' signifying souls exalted by the practice of virtues although contemptable in the eyes of men. For the blessed Luke would not have provided the meaning of the name had he not known that there was strong symbolism in it.[206]

Bede went on to explain Luke's deeper symbolism, quoting from Isidore's *Etymologies*:

> The deer and the fallow are animals which are similar in nature, though different in size. "They dwell on high mountains, and they see all who approach, no matter how far away they may be." . . . So it is with the saints. As they dwell on high by the merits of their works, through mental contemplation they simultaneously direct their attention with wisdom toward things above, while always watching out for themselves with prudent discretion.[207]

Nevertheless, despite their watchfulness the saints can still fall prey to sin. Bede likened the death of Dorcas to the state even believers find themselves in when the sin: "'Now it happened in those days that [Dorcas] became ill and died.' When, out of frailty of mortal nature, the saints do some wrong, it is as though in the days of good works they meet with death as the result of their unlooked-for infirmity."[208] Ultimately desiring repentance, said Bede, the saints "soon resort to tears, raise their minds to the hope of the virtue which is to be recovered, invoke the help of the saints, and reflect upon their good acts which they temporarily abandoned."[209]

Bede ultimately attributed the preservation of God's people to the grace of the Spirit. Describing the great sheet that came down from heaven in Peter's vision, Bede

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[206] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 91.

[207] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 91; cf. Isidore, *Etymologies* 12.1.15.

[208] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 91–92.

[209] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 92. For an in-depth dissection of this entire passage see Houghton, "Bede's Exegetical Theology," 188–196. Although beyond the intended scope of the present discussion, Houghton helpfully shows Bede's reliance upon Augustine especially as he borrowed from the bishop's understanding of "first and second death" found later in this complicated exposition. Moreover, Houghton discusses Bede's further statement that the repentant sinner's alms deeds "free one not only from the second death, but also the first" (Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 92). While the statement looks very un-Augustinian by promoting a works-based salvation, Houghton finds parallels between Bede's comments and the bishop's notion of "works of mercy." Bede likely had this concept in mind, thus Houghton believes Bede's "*tour de force* of allegory" ultimately reinforces the idea that "salvation and restoration depend upon grace" ("Bede's Exegetical Theology," 194).

remarked on the Spirit's power in protecting his church, now spread throughout the world:

> The four corners by which the linen sheet hangs down designate the four regions of the world to which the church extends, for she is "the city of our God upon his holy mountain," spreading sounds of joy to every land. [That the sheet] is lowered from heaven indicates that she will be preserved as well as increased only by the grace of the Holy Spirit coming upon her.[210]

Thus, those chosen from sinful humanity and become untied in one body through the power of the Spirit, said Bede, will ultimately enjoy the long-awaited jubilee rest in his presence.[211]

Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles

Of Bede's roughly eight New Testament commentaries (if one includes his gospel homilies and *Retractio* on the book of Acts), no other is as strongly anti-Pelagian as his *In epistulas VII catholicas,* or the *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, likely written sometime between 709–716.[212] Although Bede combats a number of heretical groups in his commentary, he aimed his critiques "especially [at] the Pelagians, who (as Bede saw it) denied the need for divine grace."[213] Bede condemned and refuted the teachings of Pelagius throughout the commentary, often mentioning the notorious heretic by name. As a result, Bede's *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles* provides fertile ground for exploring the monk's theology of grace. Several key themes reinforce Bede's indebtedness to Augustine on matters of grace, particularly his understanding of the fall, predestination, and the continuing role of grace in the lives of the elect.[214]

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[210] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 97; cf. Ps 48:1–2.

[211] Bede, *Commentary on Acts*, 10.

[212] Unless otherwise stated, all English quotations of this work will come from *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, trans. David Hurst (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985). For the suggested date of its composition, see John Houghton, "Bede's Exegetical Theology," 293.

[213] Arthur Holder, "Bede and the New Testament," 146

[214] Perhaps Bede's focus upon Pelagius is unsurprising given Augustine was one of his primary sources, especially when commenting on 1 John. See Holder, "Bede and the New Testament," 145.

Throughout his commentary, Bede emphasized the primacy of God's grace in any move of the sinner toward God. For example, while commenting on James 1:5, Bede wrote:

> All saving wisdom, indeed, must be begged from the Lord, because, as the wise man says, "All wisdom is from the Lord God and was always with him," and no one is able to understand and be wise of his own free will without the help of divine grace, although the Pelagians argue a lot [about this].[215]

Did Bede mean to imply, however, that man first seeks out God for saving wisdom? Other passages add clarity to Bede's understanding of the divine initiative:

> The Lord says also in the Gospel, "You have not chosen me, But I have chosen you, and in the prophet Hosea, I shall love them voluntarily." Consequently [James] expands what he had said, therefore, that "every best gift and every perfect gift" comes down from God by adding that he has changed us from sons of darkness into sons of light through the water of regeneration, not because of our merits but because of the generosity of his will. [216]

Alluding to Matthew 20:16, a verse he often quoted throughout his works, Bede noted that the "calling of all who come to the faith is definite."[217] According to Bede, therefore, grace precedes human action.

The basis of Bede's ordering—grace first, then human response—rested in his Augustinian understanding of both God's work of predestination and the fallenness of humanity. While discussing 1 Peter 1:1–2, Bede noted the connection between the elect (v. 1), and foreknowledge (v. 2):

> These verses belong with what [Peter] had said, "to the elect newcomers." For they had been elected according to the foreknowledge of God the Father. Hence Paul also says, "Those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son;" and elsewhere, "As he elected us in him before the creation of the world."[218]

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[215] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 9.

[216] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 16–17; cf. John 15:16, Hos 14:5, Js 1:17.

[217] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 129; cf. 2 Pet 1:10.

[218] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 70; cf. Rom 8:29, Eph 1:4.

Recall the relationship between foreknowledge and predestination in Augustine's thinking, namely, that "predestination is . . . the foreknowledge and the preparation, by divine decree, of those beneficial acts of God thanks to which those who have been predestined to be saved," and furthermore, "God's preparation of the gifts of grace that will surely deliver the elect from their state of perdition."[219] Bede's subsequent remarks on God's gift of the Spirit and the death of the Son in the salvation of the elect suggest his indebtedness to Augustine at this point:

> They had been elected, however, for this, that they might be sanctified through the giving of the Spirit and, having been cleansed from all sins, they who through the disobedience of the first man, Adam, had perished might begin to obey the Lord Jesus Christ, that sprinkled by his blood they might avoid the power of Satan.[220]

Thus, like Augustine, Bede did not equate predestination with God's foreknowledge of human choices; rather, predestination is God's foreknowledge of the grace he would bestow upon his elect that would ultimately lead to their salvation.[221] Other passages further highlight Bede's reliance upon Augustine. While discussing 2 Peter 3:9, Bede highlighted both Christ's total sovereignty over history and particularly the destiny of his elect:

> He who knows all times, the most recent and the past, does not delay the promise of his retribution but certainly shows it in the time which he predestined before all times to be, and he still postpones it for this reason, that he may first fill up the total number of the elect which he with the Father decreed before time began.[222]

According to Bede, therefore, not only are the elect definite in number, their ranks were determined by God's divine decree.

In this commentary, as in his other writings, Bede asserted the fallenness of Adam's progeny following the fall. In turn, this fallen state prevents any meritorious

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[219] Donato Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen*, 323.

[220] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 70; cf. 1 John 1:7.

[221] Recall the previous discussion of Bede's *Collectio in Apostolum*, wherein Bede reproduced this precise definition of predestination. See chapter 2, pp. 84–85.

[222] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 149–150.

action on the part of the sinner without God's grace. Although "the Pelagians are unwilling to believe that the whole mass of the human race was corrupted and condemned in one man," several comments made by Bede affirmed the disastrous effects of the fall.[223] For example, Bede utilized John's statement in 1 John 1:8—if anyone says he is without sin, he is deceived—as an opportunity to condemn Pelagius: "This statement prevails over the heresy of Pelagius which claimed both that all children are born without sin and that the elect, as they be without sin, are able to advance in this life."[224] On the contrary, wrote Bede, "all human beings are born in the darkness of vices, they all remain in darkness until they are enlightened by Christ in the grace of baptism."[225] By the "first sin," said Bede, "we are carried away this way and that by an unsettled mind and in running hither and thither in our uncertain examination of all things do not know where salvation is, where danger is."[226] Bede likened the state of unbelievers to being weighed down in a prison, "in interior darkness, that is, in the blindness of their mind and in the unrighteousness of their works."[227] Furthermore, Bede contrasted the elect, who are enlightened indwelt by the grace of the Spirit, with carnal persons who, bereft of spiritual grace, are more like animals in their thinking: "Having no spiritual grace, [the carnal man] knows only how to think about or do those things which are naturally implanted in the senses of the flesh and soul.[228]

Given mankind's deplorable state following the fall, Bede adamantly rejected the Pelagian notion that holiness was a matter of the human will apart from grace: "For the teaching of Pelagius which says about human beings, 'They make themselves holy as

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[223] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 113.

[224] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 164.

[225] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 169.

[226] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 40.

[227] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 103.

[228] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 45.

if someone can make himself holy by his own free choice without divine help,' must not be believed to be of assistance."[229] Like Augustine before him, Bede maintained that the law, while itself good and holy, was powerless to take away sin and change the sinner's heart. Thus, said Bede,

> Let not Pelagius glory, let not Julian, his follower, exalt himself when he hears, "Everyone who has hope in the Lord makes himself holy." For no one takes away sin, because not even the law, although holy and righteous and good, was able to remove it, no one except he in whom there is no sin. He takes them away, however, both by forgiving those that have been committed and by helping that they may not be repeated and by bringing us to the life where they are completely unable to be committed.[230]

Any good we do, said Bede, "we have received as a gift from God."[231] In the same way, and while alluding to 1 Corinthians 12:3, Bede suggested that "no one can serve Christ the Lord with perfect profession and action save by the gift of grace of the Holy Spirit."[232] Thus, Bede left no room for doubt that grace preceded any move towards God, and his comments on 1 John 4:19 aptly summarize his position. Drawing from Augustine, Bede surmised:

> Let us love, because he first loved us. 'For what might we love, unless he had first loved us?' For from this he himself says in the Gospel, "You have not chosen me, but I have chosen you." For thus will we be perfect in charity if, just as he first loved us for the sake of nothing else than our salvation, we shall also love him for no other reason than his love for us.[233]

Although all are born into this life "dead in soul, deriving original sin from Adam," Bede encouraged his readers that "by the grace of Christ to the faithful in giving them new life it is brought about that they can be alive in soul."[234]

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[229] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 187.

[230] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 188–189.

[231] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 16.

[232] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 179.

[233] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 212–213; cf. Augustine, *In Ioh, ep.* 9.9.

[234] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 193.

While the elect have been freed from the prison of sin, Bede nonetheless characterized their lives as in constant need of God's grace. Again, Bede chose Pelagius as his sparring partner. While discussing 1 John 1:10 and incorporating a host of verses, Bede cautioned against those who would suppose the Christian life is free from struggle:

> For [God] himself said through a man filled with his spirit, "There is not a righteous person on earth who does good and does not sin," and he himself also taught that we cannot be free from profligacy when he admonished us to pray, "And forgive us our debts as we also forgive our debtors." Let no one, therefore, believe, as Pelagius teaches, that he can live without sins and debts, when he sees the apostles praying earnestly for their own transgressions, as the Lord teaches.[235]

In this life, noted Bede, God "forgives the elect their daily and trivial sins, without which we cannot live in this life."[236] Furthermore, Bede suggested that Christians must continually rely upon grace as a means of perseverance and overcoming adversities. While discussing 1 John 4:4, Bede asked how believers are able to "overcome the antichrist by confessing that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh":

> Is it by the power of free will? Certainly not. Let Pelagius be silent, let John himself say, "Since he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." [John] teaches them therefore to maintain their humility, lest they credit their own victory to their own strength and be overcome by the arrogance of pride.[237]

Whereas Bede maintained in lieu of 1 Peter 1:5 that "no one by dint of his own freedom can manage to be kept in good," he frequently exhorted his readers to seek out the aid of him "from whom we have received the beginning of the good action if we are to bring it

[235] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 165; cf. Eccl 7:20; Matt 6:12.

[236] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 165.

[237] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 201.

to completion.[238] Likewise, Bede called for his readers to strive for holiness, while "in everything requiring the grace of him who says, 'Without me you can do nothing,' and by saying to him, 'Be my helper, do not forsake me.'"[239]

Throughout the commentary, although especially in his comments on James, Bede stressed the relationship between faith and works in the lives of the elect. Bede sensed the tension between James and other scriptures that emphasize the role of faith, notably Paul. In a discussion of James 2, Bede clearly taught both the primacy of faith in salvation and the necessity of good works that follow:

> Since the apostle Paul, preaching that "man is made righteous by faith without works," was not well understood by those who took this saying to mean that when they had once believed in Christ, even though they might commit evils and live wickedly and basely, they could be saved by faith, [James] explains how the passage of the apostle of Paul ought to be understood to have the same meaning as this letter.[240]

For Bede, any confusion or discrepancy between the biblical authors could be explained by their specific focus. In particular, Bede noted how the example of Abraham revealed the different—but complementary—emphases of Paul and James:

> Paul does not teach by Abraham that man is made righteous without works to the extent that anyone who believes it has no responsibility to perform good works, but

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[238] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 73. Statements like these found in Bede seem to confirm Kleist's assessment that the monk departed from Augustine in favor of Gregory, who allowed more room for human volition. Writes Kleist, "While it is God who initially illuminates individuals and helps them persevere until the end God's grace seems to be dependent on people's prayers and efforts to deserve it. . . . Given this context, it may be that Bede understands Christ's statement that 'Sine me nihil potestis facere' to mean that individuals can accomplish nothing without God, not that they can do nothing apart from him. The point is a crucial one: not only does it distinguish Bede from Augustine, for whom the verse means that the entirety of one's righteous choice is from God, but it informs how one understands Bede's own sweeping affirmations of human dependence" (*Striving with Grace*, 76). Bede's emphasis on praying for grace, however, does not seem too far removed from Augustine's own statements, not least of all his famous prayer in the *Confessions* we saw earlier, "Give what you command, and command what you will." Even in this commentary, Bede quoted from a passage in which Augustine himself described how the apostle Paul requested prayers: "For the apostle prays for the people, the people pray for the apostle who says, 'Praying at the same time also for us, that God may open for us the door of the word'(Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 167; cf. Augustine, *In Ioh. Ep.* 1.8). It is not clear, therefore, that such statements made by Bede deviate from the bishop of Hippo.

[239] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 187; cf. John 15:5, Ps 27:9.

[240] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 30; cf. Rom 3:28.

> for this reason instead, that no one should think he has come to the gift of righteousness which is in faith by the merits of his former good deeds.[241]

Since Paul was reacting against those "were boasting of their works without the grace of faith," he thereby stressed that "so great is the virtue of faith that as soon as its mysteries are perceived it can make a righteous person out of an irreverent one."[242] On the other hand, noted Bede,

> Because James was writing to those who held that faith without works was wasted, fittingly he brought forward that example in which the superior faith of Abraham which was also previously praised by the witness of scripture showed itself, because it had not become listless and useless in his heart but had flamed up and was now ready to obey the divine commands.[243]

For Bede, the order was clear: "Those who have received divine grace respond by righteous works."[244] Although Bede could emphatically reiterate Paul that "the grace of God justifies the wicked" and "causes them from being wicked to be righteous," God's grace entails good works for those upon whom it has been bestowed.[245]

While Bede allowed that even some who were baptized could fall into sin and thereby be subjugated under the rule of the devil, the elect would ultimately persevere.[246] Referring to the "imperishable and undefiled and unfading inheritance reserved in the heavens in you" described in 1 Peter 1:4, Bede explained that:

> [Peter] says, "reserved in you," instead of saying, 'reserved for you,' that is, reserved now for this reason that it may be given to you at the appointed time in the heavens. Or at least [he means] "reserved in the heavens in you," because he who *gave* to believers "the power of becoming sons of God" is he who gave the same

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[241] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 30.

[242] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 32.

[243] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 32.

[244] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 26.

[245] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 155.

[246] For example, said Bede, "Lovers of the world are subject to the malicious enemy either because they have never been freed from his sovereignty by the waters of rebirth or because by sinning again after the grace of rebirth they have been brought again under his sovereignty (*Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 226).

> persons the power of receiving an inheritance in heaven by persevering to the very end that they may be saved.[247]

Despite his frequent admonishments to strive for holiness and warnings against falling into sin, Bede encouraged his readers by directing them to the intercessory work of Christ on behalf of the elect. Appealing to 1 John 2:1, Bede explained how the incarnation secured the salvation of the elect:

> For the only-begotten Son's interceding for humankind is his showing himself as a human being in the sight of his co-eternal Father, and his having asked on behalf of human nature is his having undertaken the same nature in the elevated rank of his divinity. Therefore, the Lord intercedes for us not with his voice but by having mercy, because what he was unwilling to have condemned in the elect he saved by undertaking.[248]

Furthermore, as Bede indicated in his ensuing comments on 1 John 2:2, it is on behalf of the elect that Christ, through his divinity, makes propitiation with the Father. Here, Bede understood the reference to the "whole world" as the elect that extended beyond John's context:

> The Lord is the propitiation not only for those to whom John was writing and who were then living in the body but also for the whole Church which is spread abroad throughout the whole breadth of the world, extending from the first elect, undoubtedly, 'to the last person to be born at the end of time.'[249]

Here, Bede followed the spirit of Augustine's own commentary:

> "Not our sins only, but also the sins of the whole world." What is this, Brethren? Certainly, "we have found it in the fields of the woods," we have found the Church in all nations. Behold, Christ "is the propitiation for our sins; not ours only, but also the sins of the whole world." Behold, thou hast the Church throughout the whole world.[250]

Thus, like Augustine, Bede did not view this passage as Christ's propitiatory work broadly applying to all persons indiscriminately; rather, Christ intercedes on behalf of his elect.

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[247] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 72; cf. John 1:12.

[248] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 167.

[249] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles,* 167–168; cf. Augustine, *In Ioh. Ep.* 1.8.

[250] Augustine, *Ten Homilies of the Epistle of John*. 1.8, trans. H Browne, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 465.

Bede's closing remarks on 1 Peter noted that "[Peter] began the Letter with grace, he finished it with grace, he scattered grace throughout the middle of it."[251] Bede's words could easily be applied to his own commentary. As we have seen, the sinfulness of man necessitates divine grace if he is to have hope of salvation, which God, in his eternal decrees, has graciously predestined for his elect. Bede's theology of grace thus permeates the pages of his commentary with the recurring theme that, like he described of Peter's epistle, "the Church of Christ cannot be saved except through His grace."[252]

Other New Testament Writings

Bede's other New Testament writings also contain many familiar elements of his theology of grace. For example, two of Bede's longest New Testament commentaries, his *Commentary on Mark* and *Commentary on Luke*, offer several statements attesting to Bede's views on the matter. In his study, Kleist identifies two such instances. For example, in his treatment of the crucifixion in his *Commentary on Luke*, Bede argued that the thief on the cross next to Jesus believed on account of the faith given to him by God: "When inspired by God [the thief] offered to [God] all that he found free in himself, so that . . . he believed with his heart to righteousness (and) confessed with (his) mouth to salvation."[253] In the same work, Bede drew parallels between the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 and the state of fallen humanity. Just as the younger son renounced his father's rule, so does sinful humanity reject the dominion of its creator: "Delighting in his own power, [the son] sought to rule himself through his free will and divest himself of the dominion of his Creator."[254] Though the son sought to rely upon his own powers, the moral of the

[251] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 120.

[252] Bede, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, 120.

[253] Bede, *In Lucam* 6.23. Translated in Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 78–79; cf. 316, n. 114.

[254] Bede, *In Lucam* 4, in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera Exegetica*, ed. David Hurst, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latine*, vol. 120 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1960), 288. Translated in Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 79; cf. 316, n. 115.

story according to Bede, notes Kleist, is that apart from God human beings are powerless.[255]

Bede's references to Pelagius in his New Testament commentaries further speak to Bede's understanding that grace must precede any good action. One such instance arises in Bede's treatment of Luke 8:46 wherein the episode of the woman in the crowd touching Christ's garment gave Bede an opportunity both to condemn Pelagius and stress the need for God's grace: "And Jesus said: 'Someone touched me, for I know my power has departed from me,' and so on. Pelagius would say, if he pleases, he was saved by his own effort. But let us say that 'vain is the salvation of man, with God we will be virtuous.'[256] Although not mentioned by Kleist, Bede's treatment of the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15 also contains a rebuke of the Pelagians. Here, Bede contrasted the humility of the returning son who noted his unworthiness before his father with the pride of the "Pelagians who trust they are able to be saved by their own virtue contrary to the very clear statement of truth which says, 'Without me you are able to do nothing.'"[257]

Other passages in the gospel commentaries contain recognizable features of Bede's theology of grace especially as they relate to election and predestination. As Holder notes, Bede's interpretation of Jesus' miracles "emphasized inner spiritual conversion more than physical transformation."[258] One such example is Bede's comments on Jesus' interaction with the crippled woman in Luke 13:10–13. Bede drew

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[255] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 79. Kleist further argues that this particular example indicates a "Gregorian rather than Augustinian understanding of the will" (316, n. 116). For a discussion on this issue, see chapter 4, pp.163–164.

[256] Bede, *In Lucam* 3, 191; cf. Ps. 60:11–12.

[257] Bede, *In Lucam* 4 (290); cf. John 15:5 [translation mine]: Ubi sunt ergo Pelagianistae qui sua se virtute saluari posse confidunt contra apertissimam veritatis sententiam quae ait: "Sine me nihil potestis facere."

[258] Holder, "Bede and the New Testament," 152.

parallels between her being healed by Christ and the work God does for those "predestined by grace;" just as the woman glorified God after being healed from her infirm spirit, so also are those who Christ lays his hands on in a spiritual sense—understood by Bede here as the spiritual gifts God gives to his people—aroused "for glorifying God with good works advancing steadfast until the end."[259] Writing in another place, Bede drew upon Mark 5:38 and those weeping in the synagogue to make a broader point about God's dealings with his elect. about the wickedness of the synagogues based, Bede implied those who are his elect would not be lost. Despite the synagogue's unfaithfulness, "heavenly piety does not allow [them] to be ruined entirely. Rather, even concerning the end of the age [God] restores his remnants according to the election of grace to salvation and life."[260]

Finally, similar expressions of Bede's theology of grace can be found in his *Commentary on Revelation*, most likely his first exegetical work.[261] In a work largely composed of material borrowed from previous writers, Bede's theology of grace reveals its Augustinian origins despite any substantive treatment or discussion in the

[259] Bede, *In Lucam* 4 (268) [translation mine]: "Vidit praedestinando per gratiam vocavit illustrando per doctrinam imposuit manus spiritalibus donis adivuando erexit ad glorificandum Deum in operibus bonis usque in finem firmam provehendo"; cf. Rom. 8:30.

[260] Bede, *In Marcum* 2, in *Bedae Venerabilis Opera Exegetica*, ed. David Hurst, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latine*, vol. 120 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1960), 499 [translation mine]: "Nec tamen superna pietas funditus eam interire patitur quin potius circa finem saeculi reliquias eius secundum electionem gratiae saulti et vitae restituit.

[261] See Faith Wallis, "Introduction," in *Bede: Commentary on Revelation*, trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 1. All subsequent references from Bede's *Commentary on Revelation* will come from Wallis' translation. On dating the work, see Wallis, introduction, 39–57.

commentary.[262] While the scattered, disparate comments found in the commentary only allow for a cursory treatment of his theology of grace, some key themes can still be found.

First, Bede alluded to the necessity of God's grace in conversion. No one, said Bede, "can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Ghost."[263] Likewise, in his exposition of Revelation 5:6, Bede understood the horns and eyes of the sevenfold spirit as signifying both the gifts and "illumination of grace" given by the Holy Spirit: "The sevenfold Spirit in Christ is compared to horns, because of the eminence of his gifts, and to eyes, because of the illumination of grace."[264] Bede's quotation here of Primasius echoes a similar statement made later concerning humanity's inability to come to God on their own merits or wills apart from grace. Bede, again following Primasius, saw grace underlying Christ's call for the thirsty to come to him in Revelation 22:17: "By saying, 'And he that will, let him take' refers to free will in such a way that grace might immediately be proclaimed in what follows—'the water of life freely'—evidently without preexisting merits."[265] Bede continued: "For even to will is the gift of God."[266]

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[262] On Bede's use of sources, see Wallis, introduction, 22–39. In addition to Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, Faith Wallis points to the fourth-century Donatist bishop Tyconius of Carthage (d. c. 400) and Primasius, bishop of Hadrumetum (d. 560), as the primary sources for Bede's commentary. Furthermore, given Primasius' own reliance upon Augustine, one can find traces of Augustine's theology even in Bede's frequent quotations of Primasius. See also Wallis' pushback against the common charge that Bede's commentary was "derivative, immature, and unassertive" (3, n. 3). On the importance of Tyconius and Primasius on apocalyptic commentaries and their influence upon Bede, see Gerald Bonner, "Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol. 1 (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994), 153–183.

[263] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation* 169; cf. Primasius, *Commentarius in Apocalpsium* 9.61–62. As noted by Wallis, references to Primasius are to the chapter of Revelation and the lines of Primasius' text in the *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 92.

[264] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 138; cf. Primasius, *Commentarius in Apocalpsium* 5.548–549, 562–563.

[265] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 285; cf. Pramasius, *Commentarius in Apocalpsium* 22.253–258.

[266] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 285.

Like Augustine, Bede held that God does give his grace to all equally; rather, it is the elect that receive his gifts that lead to salvation. To his Church God gives his good gifts, Bede argued in reference to Revelation 3:8, "because it trusts, not in its own powers, but in the grace of Christ the king."[267] As elsewhere, Bede employed the distinction between those called and those chosen. Referencing the saints described in Revelation 17:14 as "called and chosen," Bede noted that "Rightly does [John] emphasize 'chosen,' for 'many are called, but few are chosen.'"[268] Those chosen, or the elect, are ones united in Christ, unlike those of the world who are "members of the flesh of the dragon."[269] The saints are those who "have the sign of God upon their foreheads," and who "the living God has reckoned their number to be inviolable and fixed."[270] Similarly, they are the ones whose names are known to God and written down in his book of life: "For the book of life is the infallible foreknowledge of God concerning those to whom eternal life will be given. They are written in it—that is, they are known in advance."[271] Finally, and in reference to Revelation 21:3, it is to the elect that God gives the ultimate gift, himself: "God himself will be the reward of eternal beatitude for the elect, which they will possess forever, because they are possessed by him."[272]

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[267] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation* 127; cf. Primasius, *Commentarius in Apocalpsium* 3.49–50. Here, Wallis notes the "nice Augustinian touch" Bede made to Primasius, replacing "powers of Christ the king" with "grace of Christ the king" (127, n. 122). In effect, Bede made the passage even more explicitly Augustinian.

[268] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation* 235.

[269] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation* 168; cf. Rev 9:3.

[270] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation* 169; cf. Rev 9:4.

[271] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 259; cf. Primasius, *Commentarius in Apocalpsium* 20.304–307. As Wallis points out, Primasius (and by extension, Bede) was quoting from Augustine, *City of God* 20.15.

[272] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 260; cf. Primasius, *Commentarius in Apocalpsium* 21.59–61.

Fittingly, the commentary ends with a condemnation of Pelagius. Commenting on John's benediction in Revelation 22:21, Bede managed to insert a final rebuke of the Pelagians and another pronouncement of the need for divine grace:

> Let the Pelagians go forth, trusting their own virtue, and deprive themselves of the grace of God. But when the Apostle Paul seeks help and says "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" let John, mindful of his name, answer and say: "The grace of God, by Jesus Christ our Lord."[273]

Thus Bede's New Testament writings, from the gospel commentaries to his *Commentary on Revelation,* consistently affirmed an Augustinian theology of grace: the human race, devastatingly corrupted by sin, can only hope in God's grace for overcoming their pitiful condition. This grace, which God gives to his predestined elect and by which he carries out by the work of his Spirit, makes former lovers of vice into lovers of God, ultimately rewarding them, to use Bede's words, that they "may see and taste of the Tree of Life."[274] This same message, as we will see, also comprised an important theme in his gospel homilies.

[273] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 286; cf. Rom 7:24–25.

[274] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 286.

CHAPTER 4

BEDE'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE IN HIS GOSPEL HOMILIES

Although the preeminent scholar of his day, one must remember that Bede, an ordained priest since the age of thirty, had responsibilities that extended beyond the scriptorium. More than administering the sacraments, Bede viewed his role as a pastoral teacher as particularly important.[1] Therefore, to say that Bede's ministry was essentially a literary one is not to detract from the scholar-priest's great concern for his vocation or the people under his care. As Gerald Bonner notes, Bede did not limit his priestly duties to the monastery: "Bede's spirituality seems . . . to be more pastoral than claustral; he is not simply concerned with his monastic brethren but rather with all the members of Christ's church, clerical and lay, monastic and secular."[2] While Bede surely understood all of his writings, from the scientific and historical works to the biblical commentaries, to fall under the scope of his teaching ministry, perhaps no writing better demonstrated Bede's pastoral role than his *Homilies on the Gospels*. In particular, this chapter seeks to explore Bede's interwoven doctrines of sin and grace as found in this pastoral text. A clear picture emerges from this investigation: humanity is hopelessly corrupted by the fall, and only through God's gracious election and the bestowal of good gifts to his elect could one hope to escape judgment and receive eternal life.

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[1] See Gerald Bonner, "Bede: Scholar and Spiritual Teacher," in *Northumbria's Golden Age*, ed. Jane Hakwes and Susan Mills (Stroud, UK: Sutton Publishing, 1999), 365.

[2] Bonner, "Bede: Scholar and Spiritual Teacher," 365. On Bede's audience and a discussion of the question of whether the *Homilies* were preached or intended to be read, see Lawrence Martin, "Bede and Preaching," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 162–163.

"Where Sin Abounds . . ."

Man, in his original creation by God in the garden, was free from blemish or sin. Bede commented on man's original creation in a Christmas homily drawn from Luke 2:1–14. Like a denarius bearing the image of Caesar, noted Bede, Christians ought to "bear the name of this same king of ours when we remember in all our acts that we are called 'Christians' from 'Christ,' and take care to keep inviolate in us the dignity of his name."[3] According to Bede, Christians bearing the image of their Savior recalls humanity's original purpose and creation in the image of God:

> We also ought to represent his image on the same denarius of our good way of life, which is what he himself taught when he said, "Be holy because I the Lord your God am Holy." Now this is the image of God in which we were fashioned in the first human being, namely that by participating in the divine holiness we might be perpetually holy.[4]

Elsewhere, Bede described Adam's prelapsarian state as "that most blessed life . . . sublime in its incomparable light and peace, clear of every cloud of stinging cares, and glorified by the frequent vision and spoken message of God and angels on earth."[5] In this state, Adam enjoyed perfect fellowship with God and the angels in a state of perfect peace.

Nevertheless, Adam's blessed existence and perfect communion with God and his state of holiness and peace was conditional. Unlike the realm of glory in which the redeemed will "be immortal in such a way that man will not be able to die in it or tempted by the seduction of sin," Adam's immortality depended on guarding himself against the seduction of sin.[6] Despite his blessed state, Adam succumbed to the allure of

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[3] Bede, *Homilies on the Gospels*, 2 books, trans. Lawrence T. Martin and David Hurst, Cistercian Studies Series vols. 110–111 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1991), I.6 (54). Here, as in future citations, references to specific homilies will include first the book number from Martin and Hurst's translation, followed by the number of the specific homily.

[4] Bede, *Homily* 1.6; cf. Lev 19:2.

[5] Bede, *Homily* 1.12.

[6] Bede, *Homily* 1.12.

sin and the deceit of the serpent. This in turn led to disastrous effects upon humanity including separation from the Creator and a will inclined to sin. For Bede, pride lay at the heart of man's original disobedience. Pride was not only a present temptation; rather, pride was the sin that led to humanity's downfall in the garden and a plague that caused the human race to perish.[7] While commenting on Luke's *Magnificat* in an Advent sermon, Bede alluded to the role of pride in the immediate effect of humanity's first sin—exile from God:

> He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their heart because the beginning of every sin is pride. On this account the Lord drove the human race far and wide out into journeying of this exile, casting them out from the stable dwelling of the heavenly fatherland. But for those who are not afraid to remain in their sins he has reserved the graver punishment of a future scattering.[8]

Pride lead to separation from God by expulsion from the garden, and Adam's punishment foreshadowed the eternal separation of the non-elect. This separation further extended to Adam's posterity, the human race, such that "while one is still enclosed in corruptible and mortal flesh one cannot gaze on the uncircumscribed light of divinity."[9]

Bede further commented on man's fall and alienation from God in an Epiphany sermon centered on Christ's baptism. Contrasting the first Adam's disobedience with Christ's obedience at his baptism, Bede wrote:

> And there is a fitting difference [in the fact] that the first Adam, deceived by an unclean spirit through a serpent, lost the joys of the heavenly kingdom, [while] the second Adam, glorified by the Holy Spirit through a dove, opened the entrance to this kingdom. . . . Where the one went out with his wife, having been conquered by his enemy, there the other might return with his spouse (namely the church of the saints), as a conqueror over his enemy.[10]

In addition to a broken relationship with the Creator, Adam's disobedience forfeited his immortal life and exchanged it for bondage to sin: "The gift of immortal life, which the

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[7] Bede, *Homily* 1.4.

[8] Bede, *Homily* 1.4; cf. Luke 1:46–56, Sir 10.

[9] Bede, *Homily* 1.2.

[10] Bede, *Homily* 1.12.

father of this present age, the prince of discord, lost after he was sold, together with his descendants, into the slavery of sin."[11]

Elsewhere throughout the *Homilies*, Bede sprinkled references that alluded to the scope of humanity's fallen condition. Through our first parents, humankind was "stripped of the glory of immortality."[12] Human beings are "all conceived in iniquity and born in moral faults."[13] Sin led to a "corruption of body and mind."[14] Likewise, Adam "lost [the] radiance of the divine countenance by sinning."[15] In their fallen condition, humans are appropriately compared to "ignorant beasts of burden . . . and are properly deprived of the light of truth" and unable to discern spiritual things.[16] The "stupid and iniquitous" and their blind hearts are "darkness," and unable to grasp the light of Christ.[17] Those born of Adam are unable to fulfill the words of the law "by their own powers."[18] Furthermore, all born from Adam possess the "contagion of original sin."[19]

Bede's comments on several important scripture passages offer further insight into both his understanding of fallen humanity and his exegetical method. Appealing to the allegorical sense of scripture in a Holy Saturday homily, Bede likened the deaf-mute whom Jesus healed in Mark 7 to fallen humanity:

> [The deaf-mute] represents those members of the human race who merit being freed by divine grace from the error brought on by the devil's deceit. Man became deaf,

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[11] Bede, *Homily* 1.12.

[12] Bede, *Homily* 1.3.

[13] Bede, *Homily* 1.3; cf. Ps 51:5.

[14] Bede, *Homily* 1.5 (50).

[15] Bede, *Homily* 1.6 (55); cf. Ps 4:6.

[16] Bede, *Homily* 1.8 (76); cf. 1 Cor 2:14

[17] Bede, *Homily* 1.8 (77); cf. John 1:5.

[18] Bede, *Homily* 1.23 (223).

[19] Bede, *Homily* 1.12 (115).

> unable to hear the word of life after, puffed up [as he was] against God, he listened to the serpent's deadly words; he was made mute [and unable to declare] the praises of his Maker from the time when he presumed to have a conversation with his seducer.[20]

Furthermore, for Bede, man's spiritual blindness and deafness was not simply a result of the effects of sin, it was the judgment of God:

> Rightly did [God] close [man's] ears from hearing the praises of his Creator along with the angels—those ears which the unsuspected enemy by his speech had opened to hearing denunciation of this same Creator; rightly did [God] close man's mouth from proclaiming the praises of his Creator along with the angels—that mouth which the proud [deceiver] had filled with his lies about the forbidden food, in order, [as the devil said], to improve upon the work of this same Creator.[21]

Consequently, noted Bede, man's rebellion "which sprouted in a corrupt manner at the root, began to spread in a much more corrupt way in shoots from the branches, so that when our Lord came in the flesh . . . almost the entire world, now deaf and mute, was wondering away from the recognition and confession of the truth."[22]

Bede utilized his allegorical interpretation elsewhere in the *Homilies* to demonstrate humanity's corrupt condition. Commenting on Luke 24, Bede likened unbelievers to a closed tomb:

> But the Jew and the pagan, who ridicule the death of our Redeemer which they believe in, but refuse to believe further in the triumph of his resurrection, continue to be like a tomb still closed by a stone. They are not capable of entering to see that the body of the Lord has disappeared by his rising, because by the hardness of their infidelity they are prevented from becoming aware that a dead person, who has destroyed death's right of entry and has already passed into the heights of the heavens, cannot be found on this earth.[23]

Both Jew and Gentile are implicated, thus Bede highlighted the universality of sin and its effects on all humanity. Although he never mentioned the Pelagian heresy by name, Bede undoubtedly had it in mind in one of the most explicit statements on man's fallen nature in all of the *Homilies*: "It is evident to everyone that there is no one who can live on earth

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[20] Bede, *Homily* 2.6.

[21] Bede, *Homily* 2.6.

[22] Bede, *Homily* 2.6.

[23] Bede, *Homily* 2.10.

without corruption and sorrow; and it is evident to all who are wise, although heretics deny it, that there is no one who can live on earth without being touched by some sin."[24]

Importantly, the extent of sin includes those whom God would eventually redeem, as Bede reminded his fellow monks:

> He brought about the redemption of his people by giving us freedom, at the price of his own blood—we who had been sold into the slavery of sin and were held bound to serving the ancient enemy. . . . Do you want to hear, my brothers, in what condition he found this people, and what he made of them? . . . He found us sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, weighed down, that is, by the long-standing blindness of sins and ignorance, beguiled by the deception and besieged by the errors of the ancient enemy.[25]

Thus, Bede presented humanity as hopelessly lost from the fall, now spiritually blind, deaf, and mute, and unable to recognize the redeemer sent by God. What humanity needed, therefore, was divine grace to open the eyes, ears, and mouths of a fallen race.

". . . Grace Does More Abound"

Bede's depiction of humanity would appear to render it hopeless, but an even more prevalent theme throughout his *Homilies* is that of grace. Grace shines through in all of Bede's *Homilies*, and provides the answer for humanity's otherwise helpless condition. For Bede, grace consisted of God's undeserved, merciful dealings with fallen, sinful humanity, and this was expressed throughout the scriptures in several, often-interwoven ways. Sometimes, God revealed his grace in his actions towards individuals and nations. For example, in a Christmas Eve homily Bede referred to the "singular grace" of having a son born to Mary and Joseph while they remained chaste.[26] Similarly, Bede referred to Christ coming to his own people, the Jews, as a "special grace."[27]

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[24] Bede, *Homily* 1.24.

[25] Bede, *Homily* 2.20.

[26] Bede, *Homily* 1.5; cf. Matt 1:25.

[27] Bede, *Homily* 1.8.

Bede also underscored the numerous ways in which God displayed his grace in a soteriological sense. For him, God's saving work predated creation itself in his work of election and predestination. Although much of corrupted humanity will perish, Bede frequently referred to the few who would persevere and experience God's salvation as the "elect" and less frequently, "chosen ones." Several passages provide a fuller understanding of Bede's use of this term, as well as the related concepts of election and predestination. Remaining consistent with his other writings on the subject, Bede described election itself as evidence of God's gracious dealings with fallen humanity. Drawing parallels between the fig tree that covered Adam and Eve and the fig tree in Proverbs 27:18, Bede offered insight into his understanding of election:

> Because our first parents, shamed by guilt for their transgression, made aprons for themselves from fig leaves, the fig tree can fittingly designate the tendency toward sin, which is wrongfully filled with the sweetness for the human race. Those placed under it can be his elect, those who do not yet recognize the grace of their election—just as the Lord saw Nathaniel when he was situated under the fig tree though Nathaniel did not see him, "For the Lord knows who are his."[28]

God's election is prerequisite for overcoming humanity's sinful state, and to be called among the elect is as gift of God:

> Unless one is called by the gift of God, one will never evade the guilt of the first transgression; he will never evade wrongfully-enticing things under the shelter of his daily-increasing sins; he will never be worthy to come to Christ to be saved. Hence the Apostle says, "For by grace you have been saved, through faith, and not of yourselves. It is a gift of God, not a result of works, lest anyone glory."[29]

For Bede, the elect referred to those who will ultimately persevere and attain blessedness. For example, Christ, the heavenly king, "appeared in the world so that from all the countries throughout the world he might gather the elect into the unity of his faith, just as he himself promised that he would write down their names forever in heaven."[30] Here, Bede linked the elect to those united with Christ and who would ultimately enter

[28] Bede, *Homily* 1.17; cf. 2 Tim 2:19.

[29] Bede, *Homily* 1.17; cf. Eph 2:8–9.

[30] Bede, *Homily* 1.6.

heaven. Elsewhere, Bede delineated the elect into two classes.[31] Drawing upon Matthew 19:28, Bede wrote:

> Hence we should not that there are two classes of elect in the judgment to come, one [made up] of those who will judge with the Lord (concerning them he records in his place [that] they left all things and followed him) and another [made up] of those to be judged by the Lord—these did not leave all things in the same way, but nevertheless from the things which they possessed they took care to give daily alms to the poor.[32]

According to Bede, one's status among the elect depends on one's pursuit of a godly life. Although both "classes of the good" will enter into eternal life, the one who both keeps God's commandments and "follows the counsel which the Lord gave about despising the riches and luxuries of the world, will not only attain life, but he will also be judge, with the Lord, of the lives of others."[33] Conversely, Bede also distinguished two classes of the condemned:

> One is [made up] of those who, after having been initiated into the mysteries of the Christian faith, scorn to carry out the works of faith. . . . The other [class of condemned] is [made up] of those who either never adopted the faith and mysteries of Christ, or, having adopted it, threw it off through apostasy.[34]

Tellingly, Bede did not use the term "elect" for those who will suffer "eternal damnation;" rather, Bede reserved the term for those who, following the universal judgment, God would "lead together to the vision of his brightness."[35]

Elsewhere, Bede distinguished between the two classes of the elect within the context of predestination:

> Besides there are many just people in the Church who, after being freed from the flesh, immediately gain the blessed rest of paradise, waiting in great joy among great choruses of fellow-rejoicers for the time when, having received their bodies,

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[31] For a similar discussion on Bede's classes of the elect, see also chapter 3, pp. 119–124.

[32] Bede, *Homily* 1.13.

[33] Bede, *Homily* 1.13.

[34] Bede, *Homily* 1.13.

[35] Bede, *Homily* 1.2.

> they may come and appear before the face of God. But in truth there are some who were preordained to the lot of the elect on account of their good works, but on account of some evils by which they were polluted, went out from the body after death to be severely chastised, and were seized by the flames of the fire of purgatory.[36]

Thus Bede allowed that while the elect would ultimately experience blessedness, some are "either made clean from the stains of their vices in their long ordeal up until judgment day," or, he noted, "[be] absolved from their penalties by the petitions, almsgiving, fasting, weeping and oblation of the saving sacrificial offering by their faithful friends."[37]

Bede commented further on the nature of predestination while discussing Psalm 68:18. Here, Bede mentioned God's act of predestination in conjunction with his foreknowledge:

> He not only brought away the righteous whom he found in the lower world, but also those whom, though still alive in the flesh, he recognized as belonging to him; and by his death and resurrection he procured the means of salvation for us whom he foresaw were going to believe in him at the end of time.[38]

As was shown in chapter 2, Augustine denied predestination based on foreknowledge because he did not find anything in fallen humanity meriting God's favor. Since the freedom to turn to God itself must be granted by God, it cannot be the basis by which he predestines some to eternal life. For Augustine, foreknowledge, as it relates to predestination, concerns the means by which God saves his elect. One may recall that Bede included this understanding of predestination in his *Collectio*.[39] Taken by itself, merely quoting Augustine in an anthology of his writings may leave room for doubt whether Bede was in harmony with the church father's views. Nevertheless, the fact that Bede linked God's foreknowledge with the means of grace by which God works in the

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[36] Bede, *Homily* 1.2.

[37] Bede, *Homily* 1.2.

[38] Bede, *Homily* 2.7.

[39] See chapter 2, pp. 84–85.

lives of the elect challenges any doubts that Augustine's view on predestination was not also Bede's. In a section on the kingdom of heaven, Bede wrote:

> [The kingdom of heaven] in reality is a much more excellent hidden mystery than the fact that he foresaw us enlightened by him while we were still placed in the shadow of sin. It is a greater thing that he imbued us, the saved, with the grace of knowledge of him, that he disclosed to us the joys of heaven, [and] that he dispersed preachers of his faith into the world, than that he knew in advance, before the ages that we would be saved by the power of his majesty.[40]

Like Augustine, Bede related God's foreknowledge to his work of saving the elect, and an Augustinian interpretation provides a consistent reading in light of Bede's repeated emphasis on God's grace as the source for all good works and virtue.

For Bede, even the elect were in perpetual need of grace, and he went on to describe the innumerable ways God grants his assistance:

> He consecrated for us, even before we were created, the spiritual food of life by which we are to be refreshed; he prepared for us the sign of victory by which we were to be protected from the snares of our enemies; and he opened up for us the way by which we were to follow him to everlasting life.[41]

Following Augustine, Bede understood the start of God's saving work in this life to be the "grace of rebirth": the baptismal font.[42] Bede referred to baptism as "the ceremony of life-giving regeneration" in which God graciously removes the contagion of original sin.[43] Bede drew upon several Old Testament images likewise seen in Augustine's sermons in order to highlight the significance of baptism. Like Abraham whose name was changed after circumcision, those who receive "the purification of saving baptism" likewise are now called by the name of Christ as Christians.[44] Similarly, the waters of the great flood that washed away sinners pointed to the waters of baptism that wash away

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[40] Bede, *Homily* 1.17.

[41] Bede, *Homily* 2.7.

[42] Bede, *Homily* 1.11.

[43] Bede, *Homily* 1.12.

[44] Bede, *Homily* 1.11.

sin.[45] Finally, like the Hebrews who were "liberated from the yoke of Egyptian servitude" by passing through the Red Sea, so too do those who pass through the baptismal waters "receive forgiveness of the sins which were oppressing us.[46]

Although "no human being can be perfectly just apart from the waters of baptism," baptism itself was no sure indicator of one's status among the elect or safeguard against judgment.[47] Like Augustine, Bede allowed that some who received the sacrament of baptism could fall into apostasy. Alluding to the flaming sword that blocked the entry into paradise, Bede wrote:

> For the unfaithful, however, it remains always immovable, and also for those falsely called faithful though they have not been chosen, since they have no fear of entangling themselves in sins after baptism, it is as though the same fire has been rekindled after it has been extinguished, so that they may not merit to enter into the kingdom that they try to obtain with a deceitful and duplicitous heart.[48]

Bede frequently warned against falling into sin and temptation and exhorted his listeners to live godly, virtuous lives. This was accomplished, however, by God's gracious gifts.

Following baptism, the primary grace given to the elect was the gift of the Spirit, and Bede highlighted several operations of the Spirit throughout the *Homilies*. Following the work of regeneration that normally takes place in conjunction with baptism,[49] Bede's frequent emphasis was that Spirit allows the faithful to do works of virtue: "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ because, when the gift of his Spirit was given, he granted also the ability to understand and keep the law spiritually, and he introduced those who served it into the true blessedness of heavenly life."[50] Only the

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[45] Bede, *Homily* 1.14.

[46] Bede, *Homily* 1.16.

[47] Bede, *Homily* 1.12.

[48] Bede, *Homily* 1.12.

[49] Bede allowed that the gift of the Spirit "is not bound by any legal restrictions," and could be given, as in the case of John the Baptist and Cornelius, apart from baptism. See *Homily* 2.19.

[50] Bede, *Homily* 1.2.

Spirit can release sinful humanity from the bonds of sin, and the Spirit accomplishes this work by changing the hearts and minds of those once darkened by human depravity.[51] The Spirit provides "divine insight" into the "hidden mysteries of divine sublimity" that were once unattainable to fallen humanity.[52] Likewise, the Spirit "inflames the hearts" and "manifests how splendid . . . invisible goods are, [and] how much they are to be preferred to all earthly things."[53] All good that believers possess, in both the affections and actions, comes from the Spirit: "whatever good we truly have whatever we do well, this we receive from the lavishness of the same Spirit."[54]

Finally, it is through the "invisible grace of the Spirit" that the elect persevere unto eternal life, and Bede assured those that relied upon the Spirit would not be allowed "to perish from the venom of unbelief."[55] As Aaron Kleist notes, Bede seemed to indicate that man has freedom to either cooperate with or reject God's grace.[56] Bede frequently employed conditional language with respect to securing eternal life: only those who pass through the baptismal waters are *capable* of "securing the forgiveness of sins, and of entering the kingdom of heaven."[57] Similarly, through the Spirit, people "have been made worthy to be restored to life from the death of the soul, and to rise."[58] Bede, however,

[51] Bede, *Homily* 1.15.

[52] Bede, *Homily* 2.16.

[53] Bede, *Homily* 2.17.

[54] Bede, *Homily* 2.14.

[55] Bede, *Homily* 2.14.

[56] Aaron Kleist, *Striving with Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 61.

[57] Bede, *Homily* 2.18.

[58] Bede, *Homily* 2.16.

cautioned his hearers to "keep the mystery of regeneration by which we were made the children of God in baptism."[59]

Although some who partook of the sacraments would fall away, Bede indicated that those truly part of the elect would ultimately persevere. Commenting on John 10:27–30, Bede assured his listeners that God would preserve those who are truly his:

> What he says about his recognizing his sheep surely signifies that he chooses them and predestines them for his heavenly kingdom . . . [Christ] helps those who are struggling that they may be victorious, and crowns those who are victors that they may reign forever, and in his own time he makes the flesh in which they have struggled immortal . . . since he could give immortal life which no one would snatch away from any of those whom he had known as his own before the ages.[60]

Furthermore, noted Bede, the elect can have full confidence of their ultimate standing before God despite the trials and adversities of the present age: "All the elect are truly confident that they will ascend into heaven, according to the Lord's promise that 'Where I am, there will my servant be also.'"[61] Not even the devil's snares and the raging of persecutors can "oppose the salvation of those whom the Lord knows, because those whom he has foreordained to eternal life belong to him."[62] Although the Spirit would withdraw at times the power to perform certain gifts like healing and prophesying, "He remains always so that [the saints] can have virtue [and] live in a marvelous way."[63] Thus, for the elect, although their final victory may come through struggle and trial, the outcome is certain: "In the separation of the final judgment all the elect will come to the right hand of the most high King and Judge."[64]

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[59] Bede, *Homily* 2.14.

[60] Bede, *Homily* 2.24.

[61] Bede, *Homily* 2.18.

[62] Bede, *Homily* 2.3.

[63] Bede, *Homily* 1.15.

[64] Bede, *Homily* 2.21.

The "Reward of Eternal Life": Bede and Merit

Despite its emphasis on grace, the *Homilies* also contain a heavy emphasis on merit. Kleist points to this element in Bede as a substantial shift from Augustine towards a more Gregorian position: "If Gregory occasionally speaks of humans 'meriting' God's gifts, here [in Bede's *Homilies*] it is a pounding refrain, covering everything from individuals' initial liberation from bondage to their ultimate reward in heaven."[65] Kleist rightly notes the tension throughout the *Homilies* between grace and merit. For example, Kleist highlights Bede's Augustinian position that humans love God and neighbor because of the work of the Spirit enkindling the love of God in their hearts.[66] Nevertheless, Kleist argues that victory for sinners "comes also through individuals' faith and prayers," thus preserving a role for human volition.[67] According to Kleist, this element of human volition and effort found in Bede marks a "significant departure from Augustine's view."[68]

This same tension permeates the *Homilies* On the one hand, Bede could speak of those aflame with zeal and pious devotion as "especially worthy of Christ's grace,"[69] but on the other he could write of salvation as wholly the work of the Triune God and not of merits:

> Whenever we recognize that the magnificence of the eternal kings is proclaimed in the books of the holy evangelists, we should fall down humbly before him, implore

[65] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 72.

[66] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 73. For a helpful discussion of Augustine's view of God's love in the context of his views on salvation and justification, see Jairzinho Lopes Pereira, *Augustine of Hippo and Martin Luther on Original Sin and Justification of the Sinner* (Göttigen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2013), 232–243. Writes Pereira, "It is a given fact that love plays a crucial role in Augustine's discourse on salvation. . . . As a matter of fact Augustine maintained that every virtue is a form of love. It is love that sets the pace in the paving of the road towards God and eternal life" (235).

[67] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 74.

[68] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 75.

[69] Bede, *Homily* 1.14.

> his mercy with devout prayers, and attribute whatever sort of good work we are able to have not to our own merits, but always to his grace.[70]

Likewise, Bede could implore his hearers to "shake of the sluggishness of the vices . . . and rouse yourself to the practice of virtues, by which you will be eternally saved,"[71] but he also acknowledged that the Lord "is gentle in bestowing the gift of faith and the heavenly virtues, and just in giving as everlasting reward in the contest of faith and heavenly virtues."[72] Although Bede seems to suggest an element of human volition in those who "willingly present or assent to [God's] counsels," it is God himself who "pours into our heart the memory of his will" through preaching or "his own internal inspiration."[73] Bede could at one and the same time warn of apostasy and affirm that it is the Father who sustains the saints' love and belief in the Son.[74] The Father, "with the Son and the Holy Spirit loves those whom he deems worthy of his love," but Bede also denied that the saints' love for God preceded God's love of them, and that "the merit of human beings may be prior to the favors of heavenly grace."[75] Whereas he could caution his listeners to "preserve [Christ's] grace in us whole and always unimpaired," and "devote ourselves to good works at all times," Bede, referring to John the Baptist in one of the most striking passages in the *Homilies*, affirmed that works of the law provide no room to boast:

> [John] turned the incredulous to the prudence of the just, because those whom he found to be without faith in Christ, vainly glorying in the works of the law, he taught to believe in Christ, to submit themselves with their whole concentration to his grace, and to imitate the prudence of the just ones[76] who had preceded them.

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[70] Bede, *Homily* 1.21.

[71] Bede, *Homily* 1.23.

[72] Bede. *Homily* 1.25.

[73] Bede, *Homily* 1.21.

[74] Bede, *Homily* 2.12.

[75] Bede, *Homily* 2.12.

[76] I.e., the Old Testament faithful.

> They were striving to observe the law most diligently, and nevertheless they had learned to hope for salvation from the gift of the Lord Jesus and not from the justice of their own works. So it is that one of them said, "The just person lives from faith."[77]

Thus, throughout Bede's discussions of merit, grace was never far from the discussion. While Bede reminded his hearers of the necessity of good works, he was clear to them that all good things have their source from God.

Reconciling the Tension: Some Considerations

How does one reconcile Bede's repeated emphasis on grace throughout his other writings with the "pounding refrain"—to use Kleist's words—of human merit? This section offers some suggestions as to why Bede's *Homilies* in particular stressed human merit and good works, often in seeming-contradiction to his emphasis on the primacy of grace. First, we will look at the nature of a homily and show that, by the very nature of the genre, we would expect Bede's emphasis on striving after and performing good works. Second, Bede's historical context may provide clues as to the weight he placed upon merit, his exhortations to right living, and his frequent warnings against apostasy. Finally, we will explore passages in Augustine's own writings that parallel Bede's own comments regarding human effort and merit. Taking these three factors into account demonstrates that one need not necessarily conclude that Bede significantly departed from Augustine's theology of grace.

First, the very genre of the homilies naturally lends itself to greater exhortations to virtue and right living than a biblical commentary or theological treatise. Anthony Dupont's important study on Augustine's sermons helps explain Bede's own emphases found in the *Homilies*. Dupont's work demonstrated that, while the content of Augustine's theology of grace remained the same in both the bishop's systematic treatises, the communication of the topic did differ in the sermons. Prevalent themes

[77] Bede, *Homily* 2.19 (199–200).

found elsewhere in Augustine's treatises receive little to no attention in his sermons, and as Dupont notes, this absence could even extend to foundational aspects of his theology of grace:

> Augustine's *sermones* rarely thematise the idea that faith and prayer—beginning, growth, perseverance, and completion thereof—are essentially gifts of grace. These are core elements of Augustine's anti-Pelagian tractates. Augustine does not contradict the latter in his *sermones*, nor does he provide an adapted view thereof, rather he chooses to say nothing about the grace dimensions of the topics in question or, at least, not to thematise them in any explicit way.[78]

Dupont explains this reality by noting the very genre and intended audience of the sermon itself:

> The difference in the way which a topic is treated in the sermons when compared with the anti-Pelagian tractates can be explained by the pastoral-exhortative intent of the sermons and their target groups. The goal of a homily is to call the attention of believers to their responsibility in the active development of a good life. The target group is generally mixed (sometimes considerably), a sympathetic congregation of believers and not (only) a group of specialised theologians or heterodox thinkers in need of persuasion.[79]

Thus, concludes Dupont: "The difference in genre—sermons compared with systematic and polemical documents and with his letters—has no direct repercussions in terms of content, only for the specific way in which the said content is treated."[80]

Importantly, studies on Bede's *Homilies* present similar conclusions in regards to the monk's purpose and intended audience. Benedicta Ward explains that Bede's homilies, though alike in style to his biblical commentaries, had an entirely different audience in mind. Thus, writes Ward, "The special mark of homilies is the direct application of biblical passages to a specific audience; whereas the commentaries gave

[78] Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones ad Populum During the Pelagian Controversy: Do Different Contexts Furnish Different Insights?* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2013), 615.

[79] Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones*, 616.

[80] Dupont, *Gratia in Augustine's Sermones* 616.

other preachers the material for sermons, here Bede himself made the application."[81] Lawrence Martin likewise notes the complementary role homilies had amongst other teaching functions within the life of the church. Homilies, says Martin, "point out in a generally clear and simple way the doctrinal significance of the Gospel stories and their implications for the life of a Christian."[82] In his essay exploring the "two worlds" of biblical exegesis and the experience of the listener in the *Homilies,* Martin also notes that Bede had a comparable approach to Augustine: "Whether his sermons were actually preached or only written to be read in the *lectio divina*, Bede realized that his task as a preacher was to illuminate the world of the biblical story and the world of his listeners' or readers' experience."[83] In the same essay, Martin reveals how Bede's typological exegesis often resulted in moral application presented to his listener's in unanticipated places. Martin points to one of Bede's Christmas sermons which derived a moral exhortation from the fact Jesus was born during a census, to give an example.[84] The nature of the homily does not exclude doctrinal teaching—this chapter demonstrated that they were a significant aspect of his *Homilies*—but if exegesis and doctrine are utilized in

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[81] Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 64–65. See also George Hardin Brown, *A Companion to Bede* (Woodbride: Boydell Press, 2009), 73–76. Although Brown echoes Ward in that the *Homilies* "resemble his commentaries in general tone and technique (75), Ward's statement that "it is hardly possible to distinguish between homily and commentary" might require some qualification. While the *Homilies*, like his commentaries, often followed a verse-by-verse exposition and his use of typology and allegory, there were noteworthy differences in Bede's methodology, particularly in regards to his attribution of extrabiblical sources. For example, see Lawrence Martin, "Bede's Originality in his Use of Book of Wisdom in his *Homilies on the Gospels*," in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 190–191. See also Martin's "The Two Worlds in Bede's Homilies: The Biblical Event and the Listeners' Experience," in *De ore Domini: Preacher and Word in the Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas L. Amos, Eugene A. Green, and Beverly Mayne Kienzle (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Studies Institute, 1989), 28–29.

[82] Martin, "Bede and Preaching," 168.

[83] Lawrence Martin, "The Two Worlds in Bede's Homilies: The Biblical Event and the Listeners' Experience," 28.

[84] Martin, "The Two Worlds in Bede's Homilies," 34; cf. *Homily* 1.6. Just as Mary and Joseph submitted to Caesar's census, Bede explained the spiritual sense of the passage by exhorting his hearers to render service to their king, Jesus.

service of moral exhortation, it should unsurprising to find a heavy emphasis upon application in Bede's preaching.

Bede's exhortations to the "development of the good life" becomes even more pertinent when considering the ecclesiastical context of his *Homilies*. Throughout his writings, Bede often expressed his disappointment at the moral laxity and corruption he observed in the Northumbrian Church. Several important passages outside of the *Homilies* illustrate his concern, and the most explicit was Bede's *Letter to Egbert*, written near the end of his life in 734. In this letter, Bede levelled several charges against the clergy of his day and laid out in detail the reports that some bishops surrounded themselves with bad company:

> It is reported of some bishops that they have no men of true religion or self-control around them, but instead are surrounded by those who give themselves up to laughter, jokes, storytelling, eating, drinking, and other seductions of the soft life, and who would prefer each day to fill their stomachs with feasting rather than their minds with heavenly offerings.[85]

Bede's harsh rebuke extended also to kings and nobles who established monasteries for power and monetary gain: "There are others who have no lover for the monastic life nor military service, who commit a graver crime by giving money to the kings and obtaining lands under the pretext of building monasteries, in which they can give freer rein to their libidinous tastes."[86] Bede continued by explaining how these same laymen would fill their ranks with "vagrants who have been expelled from monasteries in other places for the sin of disobedience, or whom they lured away from other monasteries":

> They fill the monastic cells they have built with these cohorts of the deformed, and as a hideous and unheard-of spectacle, those same men occupy themselves with their wives and the children they have engendered . . . Also, with equal shamelessness they obtain places where their wives may construct monasteries, in which with the same stupidity they, although laywomen, permit themselves the role of spiritual guides to the handmaids of Christ. To these it would be appropriate to

[85] Bede, *Letter to Egbert*, in Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 345.

[86] Bede, *Letter to Egbert*, 351.

> apply the common proverb: 'Wasps can make honey combs, but use them to store poison rather than honey.'[87]

The tricky business of patronage of monasteries and appointment of ministers by laypersons, who assumed their role out of more worldly than pious motives, threatened to subvert both monasteries and the church itself.[88] For Bede, the minister's moral character was nearly as important as his ability to teach, thus one can imagine the dismay the monk felt when observing self-serving individuals infiltrating the church.[89] Bede's letter has thus been aptly described as giving vent to a "boiling exasperation, and to a dying man's urgency to find solutions which others would have to implement."[90]

Elsewhere in his biblical commentaries, Bede further addressed the problems he saw in the church. For instance, in the preface to his *Commentary on Revelation*, written near the start of his literary career, Bede described the "sloth of our race," referring to the English people.[91] Here, Bede specifically addressed how the English, who owed their faith to Gregory, had "cultivated [the faith] rather lukewarmly, as far as reading was concerned."[92] Likewise, Bede's *On Ezra and Nehemiah* used the rebuilding of the temple following the exile as a platform to address the spiritual concerns he observed in Northumbria. For example, Bede utilized Ezra 6:18, in which the Israelites

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[87] Bede, *Letter to Egbert*, 351–352. J. D. A. Ogilvy helpfully puts Bede's "gloomy picture" in perspective. These "mock monasteries," notes Ogilvy, were "a form of what today would be called tax-dodging and evading the draft." See his essay, "Wearmouth and Jarrow in Western Cultural History," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol. 1 (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994), 243.

[88] John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101. On the issue of patronage in the seventh and eighth centuries leading up to Bede's criticisms and calls to reform, see especially Blair, pp. 100–117.

[89] On Bede's qualifications for a preacher, see Martin, "Bede and Preaching," 159–162.

[90] Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society*, 101.

[91] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, trans. Faith Wallis (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 106.

[92] Bede, *Commentary on Revelation*, 106.

appointed priests to serve in the newly-reconstructed temple, as an opportunity to warn against appointing self-serving priests in his own day:

> The order of devotion required that, after the building and dedication of the Lord's house, priests and Levites be straightaway ordained to serve in it: for there would be no point in having erected a splendid building if there were no priests inside to serve God. This should be impressed as often as possible on those who, founding monasteries with brilliant workmanship, in no way appoint teachers in them to exhort the people to God's works but rather those who will serve their own pleasures and desires there.[93]

Other passages from the same commentary offer similar sentiments. Bede paralleled the shame of the remnants in Jerusalem in Nehemiah 1:3 to those currently in the church who are witnesses to moral corruption:

> [The remnants] were in great distress because their enemies blamed them that the holy city still remained in ruins. But even now in the Holy Church people are rightly afflicted and pricked by a salutary sense of remorse when, even though they themselves have repented of their past wrongdoings, they consider the fact that their neighbors still are subject to sins, so that, through the negligence of those who, having reformed, could have been profitable to many, the devil has free entry into the Church, as through the walls of the ruined city.[94]

Furthermore, continued Bede, then likened the burned-down gates of the city to those who sought after their own interests instead caring for the church:

> It is even more lamentable if those very ones who should have been profiting others through their teaching and personal example show to observers an example of destruction in themselves by living corruptly. For this is what is meant by the fact that the gates of Jerusalem were burned down by enemy flames: that those who ought, by living and teaching well, to have been introducing worthy people into the assembly of the elect and keeping unworthy people out, perish instead in the fire of avarice, self-indulgence, pride, strife, envy, and the rest of the vices that the evil enemy is wont to bring in.[95]

Lastly, Bede condemned those who were eager to divest the people of God of their money through taxes but cared little about the salvation of their souls. Using the

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[93] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 2, trans. Scott DeGregorio (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006), 102. For further comments on the passages from this commentary, see also DeGregorio, "Bede and the Old Testament," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 138–139.

[94] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 3, 156.

[95] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 3, 156–157.

backdrop of the famine that prevented the completion of the temple in Nehemiah 5:1–4, Bede wrote:

> The famine had been caused not only by a scarcity of crops but also by the greed of the rulers, since they were demanding greater taxes from these people than they were able to pay. We see that this occurs among us in the same manner everyday. For how many are there among God's people who willingly desire to obey the divine commands but are hindered from being able to fulfill what they desire not only by a lack of temporal means and by poverty but also by the examples of those who seem to be endowed with the garb of religion, but who exact an immense tax and weight of worldly goods from those whom they claim to be in charge of while giving nothing for their eternal salvation either by teaching them or by providing them with examples of good living or by devoting effort to works of piety for them?[96]

Bede concluded with the plea that a leader like Nehemiah "might come in our own days and restrain our errors, kindle our breasts to love of the divine, and strengthen our hands by turning them away from our own pleasures to establishing Christ's city."[97]

Additionally, Peter Darby points to the so-called "Crisis of 716" as further evidence of decline in Northumbrian society that both troubled Bede and highlighted the monk's eschatological concerns. That year marked the resignation of Bede's abbot, Ceolfrith, and his death shortly thereafter en route to Rome delivering the Codex Amiatinus.[98] Ceolfrith's departure, says Darby, "had a signifanct impact upon the Wearmouth-Jarrow community, [and] especially upon Bede himself."[99] Moreover, political unrest both home and abroad also contributed to Bede's pessimistic outlook. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede mentioned the death of the young King Osred (c. 697–716), a ruler who was condemned by contemporary critics like Boniface as being a

[96] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 3, 184.

[97] Bede, *On Ezra and Nehemiah* 3, 184.

[98] Peter Darby, *Bede and the End of Time* (Surrey, UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 167. In particular, Darby highlights Bede's concerns about Northumbria as evidenced in his *On First Samuel*, a commentary produced at the same time.

[99] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 167.

vicious youth who failed to live up to expectations.[100] The details of his death are uncertain; some accounts said Osred was slain in battle while others claimed he was assassinated by someone within in the court.[101] Whatever the case, Osred's untimely demise consequently led to the throne of Northumbria being contested by various factions.[102] Bede's concerns likewise extended beyond the realm of Northumbria. The monk was acutely aware of the Saracen advances that threatened continental Europe.[103] Bede thus "viewed the world around him as being in an extremely advanced state of decline."[104] One should not underestimate the significance of these circumstances in the eyes of Bede. As Darby helpfully demonstrates, these factors not only signaled to Bede the dire situation in both the Church and in the broader society, they also revealed that the end of the age was drawing near.[105]

Bede's references to the corruption within the church and unrest in society indicate that even "Northumbria's Golden Age" was not without its problems. The monk's condemnations of all manner of immorality spanned the entirety of his career, beginning with his *Commentary on Revelation* and expressed most explicitly in his last surviving written work, the *Letter to Egbert*. Furthermore, as several studies have shown, Bede's concern over the state of the church grew throughout his career and became an

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[100] See Bertam Colgrave, "The Venerable Bede and His Times," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol 1. (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994), 5.

[101] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 168–169.

[102] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 168.

[103] See J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, "Bede's Europe," in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures*, vol. 1 (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994).

[104] Darby, *Bede and the End of Time*, 184.

[105] See also Conor O'Brien, *Bede and the Temple: An Image and its Interpretation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015, wherein he connects Bede's eschatology to an impetus on holy living: "In practice the purpose of Bede's eschatology was exactly the same as that of Gregory the Great: to encourage the reader to turn to a holy life" (69–70).

increasingly-prevalent theme in his later writings.[106] Alan Thacker goes so far as to assert that Bede's concern with church reform "is a key to understanding all of [his] later works, not only his commentaries and homilies, but the hagiography and histories as well."[107] This, therefore, may help to explain Bede's emphasis on striving and merit in his *Homilies*: quite literally expecting that the end of the world was approaching, Bede preached to an audience he thought was neglecting the necessary corollaries to God's grace bestowed upon the sinner, holiness and right living.

Finally, several passages from Augustine reveals that the Bishop of Hippo himself spoke of merits and striving with grace in a fashion similar to Bede. For example, in his own sermons Augustine implored his hearers both to preserve the grace God has granted them through the Spirit and to implore God's help:

> If the Spirit of God withdraws, the human spirit rolls back under its own weight into the flesh, returns to the deeds of the flesh, returns to worldly lusts; and the "last state of such a person will be worse than was the first." So then, hold on to free will in such a way that you implore God's help.[108]

Nevertheless, Augustine reassured his listeners that only by the power of the Spirit can one accomplish this: "You are not in the flesh; and is this because of your own powers? Perish the thought! Because of what, then? . . . 'the Spirit of God dwelling in you.'"[109] Likewise, in his *Sermon* 169, Augustine reminded his hearers that "while [God] made you without you, he doesn't justify you without you. So he made you without your

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[106] See especially Alan Thacker, "Bede's Ideal of Reform," in *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society: Studies Presented to J. M. Wallace-Hadrill*, ed. Patrick Wormald, Donald Bullough, and Roger Collins (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1983), 130–153, and with particular focus on the idea of reform in his commentaries, see Scott DeGregorio, "'Nostrorum socordiam temporum': The Reforming Impulse of Bede's Later Exegesis," *Early Medieval Europe* 2 (2002): 107–122.

[107] Thacker, "Bede's Ideal of Reform," 130.

[108] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 3, vol. 5, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 92; cf. Luke 11:26.

[109] Augustine, *Sermon* 155, 92; cf. Rom 8:9.

knowing it, he justifies you with your willing consent to it."[110] Lenka Karfíková's comments on this passage are helpful: "According to Augustine, the human will is indispensable for the salvation of men, but even the will is bestowed on them, and it is God alone who decides who he will endow with it."[111] Thus, while Kleist is correct that Bede "preserves a role for human volition," such statements in Augustine reveal similar tensions in his own writings.[112] The doctor of grace instructed his readers to use their wills to seek God's help and abstain from the deeds of the flesh while at the same time maintaining that this was achieved by the work of God.

Elsewhere, Augustine also stressed the importance of merit. This is particularly apparent in his *Letter* 194, written during the Pelagian controversy sometime around 419:

> What merit, then, does a human being have before grace so that by that merit he may receive grace, since only grace produces in us every good merit of ours and since, when God crowns our merits, he only crowns his gifts? For just as we have obtained mercy from the very beginning of faith, not because we were believers but because in order that we might be believers, so in the end, when there will be eternal life, he will crown us, as scripture says, "in compassion and mercy" (Ps. 103:4) … For this reason eternal life itself, which we shall certainly have in the end with end, is given as a recompense for preceding merits, but because the same merits to which it is given as recompense were not produced by us through our own abilities but were produced in us through grace, it too is called grace for no other reason than that it is given gratuitously, not because it is not given to our merits but because even the very merits to which it is given were given to us.[113]

Donato Ogliari sums up Augustine's reasoning:

> Grace is thus accorded to the man who lives a life of faith and justice. But such a life, meritorious as it may be, is only made possible by grace. Likewise, eternal life, which presupposes man's meritorious life, is nothing other than the fruit of grace

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[110] Augustine, *Sermon* 169, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 3, vol. 5, trans. Edmund Hill (New Rochelle, NY: New City Press, 1992), 231.

[111] Lenka Karfíková, *Grace and Will According to Augustine* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2012), 338.

[112] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 74.

[113] Augustine, *Letter* 194, in *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the 21st Century*, part 2, vol. 3 (Brooklyn, N.Y.: New City Press, 2004), 296.

> itself which makes the merits possible thus allowing the just and faithful man to enter eternity. Thus grace itself becomes "rewarding" grace.[114]

One passage in particular highlights a similar thought in Bede:

> If by the gift of his grace we pursue him eagerly, always with a pure and untiring heart, he will be propitious toward all our iniquities, according to the promises made to those same fathers of ours; he will satisfy our desire with good things; he will crown us unto eternal life not as a reward for the works of justice which we have done of ourselves, but in the compassion and mercy which he has given us.[115]

Bede affirmed two realities: one must pursue God and strive for virtue, but ultimately salvation is a gracious work of God. God desires our good deeds, but our good deeds are only made possible through the grace that he gives to his elect. If, as Kleist notes, Bede placed a heavy emphasis on merit, he also affirmed that any good action is only achieved through God's grace. Thus Augustine's analysis appropriately summarizes Bede's own position in that when God crowns merits, he only crowns his gifts: "He crowns us indeed in mercy and compassion when he repays us with the reward of heavenly blessedness for the good works which he himself has mercifully granted us to carry out."[116] This survey, therefore, has established several important aspects of Bede's doctrines of sin and grace found in his *Homilies*. Nearly every homily has an echo of the North African church father in their emphasis on the devastating effects of sin and the absolute necessity of God's electing and sustaining grace. Surely, Kleist is right that, despite his emphasis on merit and the ensuing tension it creates in his writings, Augustine would have been pleased.[117]

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[114] Donato Ogliari, *Gratia et Certamen: The Relationship Between Grace and Free Will in the Discussion of Augustine with the So-Called Semipelagians* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2003), 32–33.

[115] Bede, *Homily* 2.19.

[116] Bede, *Homily* 1.2.

[117] Kleist, *Striving with Grace*, 87.

CHAPTER 5

BEDE'S THEOLOGY OF GRACE IN HIS *ECCLESIASTICAL HISTORY*

Bedan scholar and biographer Benedicta Ward deems Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* "the greatest work of history produced in the barbarian world."[1] Completed only a handful of years before Bede's death in 731, the *Ecclesiastical History* covered the history of England from the coming of Julius Caesar Romans in the first-century B.C. up to Bede's own day.[2] Unlike the quest of many modern historians, Bede did not write history "with an attempt to be objectively value-free."[3] And more than simply a chronicler recounting important battles, kings and the building of monasteries, Bede saw himself as a historian who was continuing a tradition established by predecessors like Eusebius of Caesarea. Thus, Bede's history recalled both the miraculous and the mundane, both of which for him demonstrated that history was

[1] Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1990), 111. For a treatment of the *Ecclesiastical History* along with an assessment of its importance through the centuries, see Peter Blair, "Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation* and its Importance Today," Jarrow Lecture, 1959, in *Bede and His World: The Jarrow Lectures 1958–1993*, vol. 1 (Aldershot, UK: Variorum, 1994), 19–34.

[2] See discussion in Peter Hunter Blair, *The World of Bede* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1970), 302. Several works provide helpful discussions on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, including J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History: A Historical Commentary* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1988), which offers a comprehensive, passage-by-passage commentary to the *Ecclesiastical History*. More recently, J. Robert Wright, *A Companion to Bede: A Reader's Commentary on The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), in which the author surveys the entirety of Bede's Ecclesiastical History and offers brief commentary on nearly every chapter of the work, with significant historical events covered by Bede—the Synod of Whitby, for example—naturally receiving a more extensive treatment by Wright than most other sections. For a recent discussion of the context of its composition, see Walter Goffart, "Bede's History in a Harsher Climate," in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 203–225.

[3] Wright, *A Companion to Bede*, 12.

both proof of God's providence at work and a record of his salvation. [4] Ward rightly notes, therefore, that the *Ecclesiastical History* "is as much a theology as a history," and the continuation and the climax of his earlier biblical commentaries.[5] If Ward's assessment is accurate, it should not be surprising to find elements of Bede's theology of grace in his *Ecclesiastical History*. Although presented more subtly than in his biblical commentaries, the *Ecclesiastical History* highlights Bede's commitment to an Augustinian theology of grace both in its frequent condemnations of Pelagianism and his understanding of the English as an "elect people."

Bede and the Pelagian Threat

In the preface to his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede wrote to King Ceolwulf praising him for his desire to devote himself "to learn the sayings and doings of the men of old, and more especially the men of our own race."[6] Bede also commented on importance of history:

> Should history tell of good men and their good estate, the thoughtful listener is spurred on to imitate the good; should it record the evil ends of wicked men, no less effectually the devout and earnest listener or reader is kindled to eschew what is harmful and perverse, and himself with greater care pursue those things which he has learned to be good and pleasing in the sight of God.[7]

Although England bore many "good men" for Bede to recount in his *Ecclesiastical History*, it also produced Augustine's great rival and the subject of Bede's frequent

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[4] Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, xix. For a summary of the scholarly discussion on Bede's view of history, as well as his inclusion of miracles in his history and hagiographies, see Timothy Furry, "From Past to Present and Beyond: The Venerable Bede, Figural Exegesis, and Historical Theory" (PhD diss., University of Dayton, 2011), 22–73.

[5] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 114.

[6] Bede, Preface to *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3. All future quotations of the *Ecclesiastical History* are from this edition, and as with subsequent classical references, will be indicated first by the book and chapter divisions (when applicable) and the page number of the translation in parentheses.

[7] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.1 (3).

condemnations: Pelagius. Although condemned centuries prior, Bede viewed Pelagius' teachings as a continuing threat to the English church. Therefore, some discussion on Pelagius' influence in Britain up to the time of Bede is necessary for appreciating Bede's own critiques of the notorious heretic.

With both barbarian raids and the continued loss of a Roman presence, fifth-century Britain was a tumultuous time of change. It was in this context that Pelagius's teachings took root in his homeland. Apart from Italy, notes W. H. C. Frend, Britain "was where Pelagius' notions had their profoundest effect."[8] Regrettably, beyond this fact the details quickly become murky. Rees concurs: "Trying to ascertain the true facts about fifth-century Pelagianism in Britain is like trying to make bricks without straw or at least almost without straw."[9] How Pelagianism first came Britain is itself a mystery, with some suggesting that Pelagius kept in contact with his homeland, or, as J. N. L. Myres suggests, Pelagius' followers brought his doctrine to the island after fleeing the sack of Rome in 410.[10] Both Myres and Frend suggest that Pelagian influence flourished among high-society Britons, but numerous writings indicate that Pelagianism was a problem throughout Britain, and even further to the west in Ireland.[11]

Myres sees the growth of Pelagianism in Britain as coinciding with the growing independence of the Britons following Rome's departure from the island. According to Myres, the Roman Empire during this time amounted to a totalitarian regime: "Imperial officials, especially judges, tax collectors, and police, exercised an

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[8] W. H. C. Frend, "The Christianization of Roman Britain," in *Christianity in Britain: 300–700*, ed. M. W. Barley and R. P. C. Hanson (Leicester, UK: Leicester Univeristy Press, 1968), 44.

[9] Rees, *Pelagius: His Life and Letters* 1:110.

[10] J. N. L. Myres, "Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain," *The Journal of Roman Studies* 50 (1960): 24.

[11] For example, see Alison Bonner, "Was Patrick Influenced by the Teaching of Pelagius?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 63 (2002). See also, Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, "New Heresy for Old: Pelagianism in Ireland and the Papal Letter of 640," *Sepculum* 60, no. 3 (1985).

autocratic authority over men's daily lives which is only possible in conditions of unrestrained despotism."[12] Pelagius' teachings, especially his emphasis on human freedom and a God that would not command what one could not possibly achieve, were thus seeds that fell on fertile ground in Britain: "The Pelagians were revolted at a social and political regime which permitted and encouraged such injustice: and their whole teaching of the relation of God and man was based on the conception that Divine justice could not be remotely like that."[13] On the other hand, Anthony Barrett has maintained, "At best it might be argued that because of its increasing remoteness, Britain in the late fourth century was perhaps relatively hospitable to less-than-orthodox beliefs and to ideas that were not alien to Pelagianism."[14]

Prosper of Aquitaine (c. 388–455), Augustine's ardent supporter during the Pelagian and Semi-Pelagian controversies, provided one of the first indications of Pelagius' influence in Britain. In his *Chronicle*, Prosper first noted the rise of Pelagius and summarized his teachings:

> At that time the Briton Pelagius set forth the doctrine bearing his name against the grace of Christ; Caelestius and Julian [of Eclanum] were his assistants. He attracted many people to his erroneous views. He proclaimed that each person is guided to righteousness by his own will and receives as much grace as he deserves, since Adam's sin injured only himself and did not also bind his descendants. For this reason it would be possible for those so wishing to be completely without sin and for all little children to be born as innocent as was the first man before transgression; nor are children to be baptized so they can be divested of sin but so they can be honored with the sacrament of adoption.[15]

After describing the conciliar indictments that followed in the wake of Pelagius, Prosper noted how Pelagianism spread to Britain under the auspices of a certain "Agricola the Pelagian":

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[12] Myres, "Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain," 26.

[13] Myres, "Pelagius and the End of Roman Rule in Britain," 27.

[14] Anthony Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions," *Brittania* 40 (2009): 200.

[15] Prosper of Aquitaine, *Chronicle*, trans. Alexander Murray, in *From Roman to Merovingian Gaul: A Reader* (Tonawanda, NY: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 65.

> Agricola the Pelagian, the son of Bishop Severianus the Pelagian, corrupted the churches of Britain by introducing his own doctrine. On the recommendation of the deacon Palladius, Pope Celestine sent Germanus, bishop of Auxerre, as his representative, and when the heretics had been cast down, he guided the Britons to the Catholic faith.[16]

In his work *Against Cassian*, Prosper further recounted the purging of Pelagianism:

> Nor was [Celestine] less alert in taking care to free Britain from the same infection: he banned from that remote corner of the ocean some enemies of the grace of God who took refuge there as in the land of their birth, and while thus endeavoring to keep that island of the Roman Empire in the Catholic faith, he ordained Palladius to be the bishop of the Irish and so drew this pagan nation to the Christian fold.[17]

As Prosper described, in 429 Pope Celestine sent Germanus to Britain to counter the Pelagian influence there. Little else is known about Agricola apart from Prosper's reference, but Barrett offers the possibility his father, the bishop Severianus, could have been one of the Italian bishops who refused to subscribe to the excommunications in 418 and subsequently fled to Britain hoping to escape imperial law.[18] Whatever the case may be, the activity of Agricola caused a big enough rift in the British church that the Pope himself ordered Germanus to lead a party to ensure that Britain remained Catholic.

Constantius of Lyon (c. 410–490) recorded another mention of Germanus' mission to Britain in his *Life of Saint Germanus*, a work most likely composed between 475 and 480. Constantius' account includes extra details not found in Prosper's Chronicle:

> About this time a deputation from Britain came to tell the bishops of Gaul that the heresy of Pelagius had taken hold of the people over a great part of the country and help ought to be brought to the Catholic faith as soon as possible. A large number of bishops gathered in synod to consider the matter and all turned for help to the two who in everybody's judgment were the leading lights of religion, namely Germanus and Lupus, apostolic priests who through their merits were citizens of heaven, though their bodies were on earth. And because the task seemed laborious, these

[16] Prosper, *Chronicle*, 68.

[17] Prosper of Aquitaine, *Against Cassian*, trans. P. de. Letter, in *Prosper of Aquitaine: Defense of St. Augustine*. Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 32 (New York: Newman Press, 1963), 134.

[18] Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions," 200–201.

> heroes of piety were all the more ready to undertake it; and the stimulus of their faith brought the business of the synod to a speedy end.[19]

Following an account of Germanus and his party persevering through the assaults of demons on their sea voyage, Constanitus detailed the work of ridding Pelagianism from the island through preaching and miracle working:

> And now it was not long before these apostolic priests had filled all Britain, the first and largest of the islands, with their fame, their preaching, and their miracles; and, since it was a daily occurrence for them to be hemmed I by the crowds, the word of God was preached, not only in the churches, but at the crossroads, in the fields, and in the lanes. Everywhere faithful Catholics were strengthened in their faith and the lapsed learned the way back to the truth. Their achievements, indeed, were after the pattern of the apostles themselves; they ruled through the consciences, taught through letters and worked miracles through their holiness. Preached by such men, the truth had full course, so that whole regions passed quickly over to their side.[20]

Undaunted by the success of Germanus and his priests, the Pelagians challenged the Catholics to a debate in the presence of many onlookers. Constantius described the scene:

> The holy bishops gave the privilege of opening the debate to their opponents, who took up the time of their hearers with empty words drawn out to great length but to little purpose. Then the revered prelates themselves poured out the floods of their eloquence, mingling them with the thunders of the apostle and the Gospels, for their own words were interwoven with the inspired writings and their strongest assertions were supported by the testimony of Scripture. Empty arguments were refuted, dishonest pleas were exposed; and their authors, as each point was made against them, confessed themselves in the wrong by their inability to reply. The jury of the people could hardly keep their hands off them and were not to be stopped from giving their verdict by their shouts.[21]

The miracle of curing the blindness of a daughter of a man of "high military rank" further confirmed the victory of Germanus over the Pelagians, and when "this damnable heresy had been thus stamped out, its authors refuted, and the minds of all reestablished in the true faith," Germanus and his party gave thanks to God at the shrine of the martyr Alban.[22]

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[19] Constantius of Lyon, *The Life of Saint Germanus of Auxxere* 12–13, trans. F. R. Hoare, in *Soldiers of Christ: Saints and Saints' Lives from Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Thomas F. X. Noble and Thomas Head (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995).

[20] Constantius, *The Life of Saint Germanus* 14.

[21] Constantius, *The Life of Saint Germanus* 14.

[22] Constantius, *The Life of Saint Germanus* 16.

While the two accounts agree on some basic details of Germanus' mission to Britain, Prosper's and Constantius' account vary in significant ways. This has led some scholars to question the accuracy of Constantius' account. Barrett points to the lack of a date, chronological imprecision, no record that a Gallic synod took place as Constantius described, and no specified locations in Britain where these events took place and concludes that "this passage certainly meets the standards of hagiography, in that it enhances the virtues of its subject. But it is in some respects unsatisfactory as a part of an historical narrative."[23] Nevertheless, Barrett proposes a charitable reading of Constantius, and suggests that the author had access to an official account of the organization of the mission—perhaps the same source utilized by Prosper. Notes Barrett: "This is a useful demonstration that for all its colour the *Vita* is not merely the product of an over-fertile imagination nurtured by a credulous tradition."[24]

More puzzling, however, is Constantius' reference to a second mission after a revival of Pelagianism on the island:

> Meanwhile, the news came from Britain that a few promoters of the Pelagian heresy were once more spreading it; and again all the bishops joined in urging the man of blessings to defend the cause of God for which he had previously won such a victory.[25]

As in the earlier mission, Constantius described a tumultuous sea voyage incited by the malice of demons and a "leading man of the country" bringing his son seeking healing from the party. Germanus was pleased to find out that most of the people had persevered, and that "the fallings-away had been the work only of a few."[26] Once again, Germanus subdued the Pelagians through his preaching and miracle working:

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[23] Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions," 201.

[24] Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions," 204.

[25] Constantius, *The Life of Saint Germanus* 25.

[26] Constantius, *The Life of Saint Germanus* 26.

> The crowds were overwhelmed by the miracle and the Catholic faith implanted in them was strengthened in all of them. There followed sermons to the people to confute the heresy, the preachers of which were by common consent banished from the island. They were brought to the bishops to be conducted to the Continent, so that the country might be purged of them and they of their errors. The effect of all this was so salutary that even now the faith is persisting intact in those parts. And so, with everything settled, the blessed bishops made a prosperous journey back to their own country.[27]

As Barrett notes, "There is something that is undeniably unsatisfactory about the second mission as reported, and the accounts of the two events seem hardly to come from the same hand."[28] Once again, Constantius did not provide any specific details about the mission, and neither Prosper nor any other source mentions it. Thus, Barrett concludes that Constantius, whose "sources for Britain were scarce and confused," was simply mistaken in his account of the second mission.[29] More likely, Constantius either conflated two accounts of the same mission.

Interestingly, Gildas never mentions Pelagius or Pelagianism in his history, *The Ruin of Britain* (c. 540). E. A. Thompson supposes that "we may take it as an ascertained fact that when Gildas was writing, and in the place where he was writing, Pelagianism was dead, buried and forgotten."[30] This correlates with both Prosper's and Constantius' assertions that Pelagianism had been stamped out of Britain by Germanus' mission. Curiously, however, Gildas—most likely unknowingly—quoted from Pelagian writings, which for Thompson is evidence that Pelagian works still circulated even after the movement died out.[31] In their study, Michael Herren and Shirley Brown identify numerous traces Pelagianism in Anglo-Saxon and Celtic literature in the sixth and seventh centuries. If not explicit references to Pelagius, his ideas—or even softened,

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[27] Constantius, *The Life of Saint Germanus* 27.

[28] Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions," 207.

[29] Barrett, "Saint Germanus and the British Missions," 213.

[30] E. A. Thmopson, "Gildas and the History of Britain," *Britannia* 10 (1979): 211.

[31] Thompson, "Gildas and the History of Britain," 212.

"Semi-Pelagian" forms of it—continued to crop up in literature of the time. As the authors note, "Pelagius continued to be a talking point among the faithful. It is fair to say that Pelagian thought influenced—and disturbed—the Churches of the British Isles for more than four centuries."[32] In his *Ecclesiastical History,* Bede himself referenced a Pelagian revival in Ireland as late as the mid-seventh century, evidenced by a letter by Pope John to the Irish urging them to abandon the old heresy:

> We have learnt that the poison of the Pelagian heresy has of late revived amongst you; we therefore exhort you utterly to put away this kid of poisonous and criminal superstition from your minds. You cannot be unaware that this execrable heresy has been condemned; and not only has it been abolished for some two hundred years but it is daily condemned by us and buried beneath our perpetual ban. We exhort you then not to rake up the ashes amongst you of those whose weapons have been burnt.[33]

Pelagianism might have been dead as a movement, but there are indications that its ideas continued to take hold in the British Isles. As we will see, Bede himself saw it as a present reality in the eighth-century, and a reality that attached itself to another important controversy that faced the Northumbrian church.

In book one of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede briefly described the beginning of the Pelagian controversy during the reigns of Arcadius and Honorius. It was during this time, recounted Bede, that "the Briton Pelagius spread his treacherous poison far and wide."[34] Here, Bede offered little by way of analysis or critique of Pelagian views save for the comment that the Pelagians "[denied] our need of heavenly grace."[35] Bede also

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[32] Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2002), 101. For a criticism of some of their conclusions, see Gilbert Márkus, "Pelagianism and the 'Common Celtic Church': A Review of Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, *Christ in Celtic Christianity: Britain and Ireland from the Fifth to the Tenth Century*," *Innes Review* 56 (2005): 165–213.

[33] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.19 (104). For studies on Bede's attitudes towards heresy, see John Eby, "The Petrification of Heresy: Concepts of Heterodoxy in the Early Middle Ages," (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1998), and Arthur Holder, "Hunting Snakes in the Grass: Bede as Heresiologist," in *Listen, O Isles, Unto Me: Studies in Medieval Word and Image in Honour of Jennifer O'Reilly*, ed. Elizabeth Mullins and Diarmuid Scully (Cork: Cork University Press, 2011).

[34] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.10, 21.

[35] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.10, 21.

made a passing reference to Julian of Eclanum, "who had long been stirred by an intemperate desire to get back his bishopric," and despite the efforts of Augustine and "the rest of the orthodox fathers" in answering the Pelagians, they "failed to correct their folly; and, what was worse, the madness which should have been healed by turning to the truth was rather increased by rebuke and contradiction."[36]

Bede also drew from both Prosper and Constantius in his retelling of Germanus' mission to stamp out Pelagianism in Britain. Pelagianism, which Bede described as a "perverse teaching" which blasphemes the grace of Christ, had been introduced by a certain Agricola, the son of the Pelagian bishop Severianus.[37] The heresy, said Bede, "had corrupted the faith of Britain with its foul taint."[38] Although the Britons did not accept his teaching, they "could not themselves confute by argument the subtleties of the evil belief."[39] Thus follows Bede's retelling Germanus of Auxere's call and voyage to Britain in order to combat the heresy and "restore salvation to the people."[40] Following their safe arrival to Britain, Germanus and the orthodox bishops "preached the word of God daily not only in the churches but also in the streets and in the fields, so that the faithful and the catholic were everywhere strengthened and the perverted recognized the true way."[41] Consequently, the Britons embraced orthodox teaching, while the Pelagians, or "authors of false doctrine," went into hiding.[42] Like Constantius, Bede described a final attempt of the Pelagian party to win the people. Bede

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[36] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.10, 21.

[37] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 29.

[38] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 29.

[39] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 29.

[40] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 29.

[41] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 30.

[42] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 30.

pitted the pious Germanus against the prideful Pelagians, and despite being given the opportunity of speaking first during the confrontation, the Pelagians offered "nothing but empty words."[43] Germanus's party, on the contrary:

> Showered upon [the Pelagians] the words of the apostles and evangelists in torrents of eloquence. They mingled their own words with the word of God, supporting their most trenchant arguments by the testimony of the scriptures. Falsehood was overcome, deceit unmasked, so that their opponents, as every argument was presented, could not reply but had to confess their errors.[44]

With the Pelagians defeated, noted Bede, the people witnessing the spectacle signified their verdict in favor of Germanus with applause.

The most substantive critique against the Pelagians in the *Ecclesiastical History* comes from seemingly-unrelated controversy: the Synod of Whitby.[45] For Bede, discrepancy on the timing of Easter between Augustine of Canterbury and the British church carried more significance than a historian's shock at "untidy thinking about dates."[46] Bede's primary concern centered on the unity of the church which he saw as essential for its survival and the underlying Pelagian denial for the need of divine grace that was evident in the British church's refusal to adopt the Roman dating system.

Bede wrote repeatedly on the obstinacy of the British church and their stubborn refusal to adopt a Roman calendar for celebrating Easter. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede included two letters that linked Pelagianism with an improper celebration of Easter. The first letter comes from Pope John directed to the Irish,[47] the second from

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[43] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 31.

[44] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.17, 29.

[45] For the background to the controversy, see chapter 1, 17–18.

[46] Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, xxiii.

[47] See note 33 above.

Ceolfrith, Bede's own abbot, to King Nechtan of the Picts.[48] In Ceolfrith's letter, he described the reasons for the Roman dating of Easter:

> If you also care to know the mystical reason for this, we are commanded to keep Easter in the first month of the year, which is also called the month of new things; because we ought to celebrate the mysteries of the Lord's Resurrection and of our deliverance when our spirits and minds re renewed by the love of heavenly things. We are commanded to keep it in the third week of that month because Christ Himself who had been promised before the law and under the law came with grace in the third dispensation of the world, to be sacrificed for us as our Passover; and because after the sacrifice of His Passion, he rose from the dead on the third day. . . we only celebrate the solemn festival truly if we are careful to keep the Passover with Him.[49]

For Ceolfrith and Bede, to call into question or alter the dating of Easter was to deny "any need for the grace of Christ's resurrection."[50] The letter continues by making this very point:

> Whoever argues, therefore, that the full Paschal moon can fall before the equinox disagrees with the teaching of the holy Scriptures in the celebration of the greatest mysteries, and agrees with those who trust that they can be saved without the grace of Christ preventing them and who presume to teach that they could have attained to perfect righteousness even though the true Light had never conquered the darkness of the world by dying and rising again.[51]

Thus, for Bede, "a disregard for proper Easter practices can be read as being like a Pelagian rejection of man's need for grace. In the hands of Bede, these two themes become related, ideological tools for distinguishing those worthy of paradise from those who are not."[52]

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[48] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.21.

[49] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.21, 281.

[50] Arthur Holder, "The Anti-Pelagian Character of Bede's Commentary of the Song of Songs," in *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages: Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages*, ed. Claudio Leonardi and Giovanni Orlandi (Tavarnuzze, Impruneta (FI): Sismel-Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2005), 101.

[51] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.21, 282.

[52] Sharon M. Rowley, *The Old English Versions of Bede's Historia Ecclesiastica* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), 86. For a helpful analysis and summary of the Easter controversy as it related to Pelagianism, see also Aaron Kleist, *Striving with Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 66–68.

Arthur Holder finds a similar connection in Bede's *On the Song of Songs*, a work he dates to around 716. Holder does not find it inconsequential that Bede wrote *On the Song of Songs* around the same time that the Picts and monks at Iona—who had held out for decades even after the Synod of Whitby in 664—finally accepted a Roman dating for Easter.[53] Holder suggests that this commentary, written around the same time as Bede's other deeply anti-Pelagian *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, points to the immediacy of the Easter controversy and the Pelagianism Bede saw inherent in it. Dáibhí Ó Cróinín sums up the connection between the Easter controversy and Pelagianism:

> To the Roman curia, therefore, anyone who advocated (or who seemed to advocate) celebration of Easter on the fourteenth of the moon was preempting the pasch and, by the same token, denying the efficacy of the Resurrection as the true instrument of man's redemption. Thus were the Irish seen to be resuscitating the "uirus Pelagianae hereseos."[54]

No wonder, therefore, Bede wrote so strongly against Pelagianism during this period: it related directly to the lingering debates on the dating of Easter. Thus, even if Bede did not face openly Pelagian opponents in the same way Augustine, Orosius, and Prosper encountered them three centuries before, Bede nevertheless perceived a very real Pelagian threat in the ongoing Easter debates into the eighth century. As a result, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* demonstrates his clear anti-Pelagian sentiments.

Plebem Suam: Bede and the English

Alan Thacker identifies the "twin themes" that dominated Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* as "the providentially ordained conversion of the English, a new

[53] Arthur Holder, "The Anti-Pelagian Character of Bede's Commentary of the Song of Songs," 101–103.

[54] Ó Cróinín, "New Heresy for Old," 516. Ó Cróinín, however, argues here that the claims made by the Roman party against the Irish were unfounded. Whereas the charge levelled against the Irish was that they denied the efficacy of the resurrection, writes Cróinín, "in fact they were doing no such thing. An unwarranted premise at Rome combined with fortuitous circumstances at home to deceive even men living at the time and led to a chain of reasoning which has misled scholars ever since" (516).

Israel with a divine mission," and "the urgent need for exemplary *doctors,* preachers and pastors to guide the *gens* along that path in the present."[55] Similarly, Benedicta Ward writes that Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* "is commentary on a new people of God."[56] On this subject, that Bede was not writing "value-free history" becomes most apparent: Bede utilized Old Testament allusions in order to draw parallels to what saw as God's judgment of the Britons and God's gracious dealings with the "New Israel," the English people. In so doing, Bede reveled more than just his providential understanding of history; clear traces of Bede's theology of grace emerge from his narrative of the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons. While caution must be taken in extrapolating too far Bede's designation of the *gens Anglorum* as God's elect people, one can nonetheless hear echoes of his theology of grace in the themes and terminology utilized by Bede in his retelling of the call and conversion of the English people.

Bede's history of Christianity on the island begins with the Britons, several of whom Bede described their deeds and held up as exemplary witnesses to the faith. For example, Bede described the account of Alban, who "forsook the darkness of idolatry" and confessed Christ, and who later suffered martyrdom along with a myriad of others "who had been led, doubtless by divine inspiration, to follow the blessed confessor and martyr."[57] Bede even noted how Alban's executioner, "moved by a divine prompting," refused to lay hands on the confessor and consequently himself suffered the sword: "The soldier who had been constrained by the divine will to refuse to strike God's holy confessors was also beheaded there."[58] The Britons, recounted Bede, also withstood

[55] Alan Thacker, "Bede and the Ordering of Understanding," in *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown, WV: West Virginia University Press, 2006), 60–61.

[56] Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, 114.

[57] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.7 (16–18). On dating Alban and his martyrdom, see Frend, "The Christianization of Roman Britain," 38. See also Malcolm Lambert, *Christians and Pagans: The Conversion of Britain from Alban to Bede* (London: Yale University Press, 2010), 5–6.

[58] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.7, 18–19.

several challenges from heretical teachers, from the "deadly poison" of Arius' "evil doctrine," to the influence of Pelagianism described above.[59] Even when the Romans retreated from the island leaving the Britons defenseless against Irish and Pict raiders, Bede praised those who "[trusted] in divine aid when human help failed them."[60]

As Bede retold the story, however, these faithful Britons were like the few prophetic voices crying out amidst the idolatrous people of Israel.[61] We see Bede's "value-free history" at work in his retelling of the Briton's fall and the rise of the English. Like the people of Israel judged by God for their sins, Bede found parallels with the Britons. Bede indicted the Britons on several charges. First, like the Israelites in the book of Judges, the Britons became decadent and godless during times of peace and prosperity subsequent to the subjugation its warring neighbors:

> After the enemy's depredations had ceased, there was so great an abundance of corn in the island as had never before been known. With this affluence came an increase in luxury, followed by every kind of foul crime . . . Not only were laymen guilty of these offences, but even the Lord's own flock and their pastors. They cast off Christ's easy yoke and thrust their necks under the burden of drunkenness, hatred, quarrelling, strife, and envy and other similar crimes.[62]

Even a plague on the island that "laid low so large a number that there were not enough people left alive to bury the dead" was not enough to bring the sinful Britons to repentance from their wicked state, which Bede likened to "spiritual death."[63] Still, Bede

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[59] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.8, 20.

[60] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.14, 25.

[61] For an in-depth look at the parallels between Old Testament Israel and the Britons and Anglo-Saxons in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, see Andrew Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel: Understanding Jews in Anglo-Saxon England* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 101–110.

[62] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.14, 26. For a similar commentary on this passage from Bede, as well as comments on the importance of the book of Judges as it related to understanding and interpreting history in the Middle Ages, see Scheil, *The Footsteps of Israel*, 105–108.

[63] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.14, 26.

withheld his most serious accusation against the Britons until came after they had invited the Anglo-Saxons to the island as protectors.[64]

Whereas king Vortigern of the Britons saw commissioning the Anglo-Saxons as soldiers for hire as an opportunity to provide defense to his lands, Bede understood the move as God's providential working to both judge the Britons and bring salvation to the pagan English: "As events plainly show," commented Bede, "this was ordained by the will of God so that evil might fall upon those [Briton] miscreants."[65] Despite some glimpses of faithfulness among the Britons after the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons—Germanus' success in routing the Pelagian heresy, for example—Bede described how the Britons failed to proselytize their new neighbors: "To other unspeakable crimes … was added this crime, that they never preached the faith to the Saxons or the Angles who inhabited Britain with them."[66] God's judgment upon the Britons culminated at the battle of Chester when the English king Æthelfrith, whom Bede likened to Saul, the king of Israel, "made a great slaughter of that nation of heretics," which included a number of the Celtic monks of Bangor praying and fasting for a British victory.[67] Wallace-Hadrill noted the parallels between the judgment of the Israelites and the ruin of Britain, describing Bede's description of the event as "an historical instance of God's retribution at work in modern times precisely as it had worked in the history if Israel"[68] From the judgment of the Britons, however, God providentially brought about the salvation of a "New Israel."

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[64] See above, chapter 1, pp. 13–14.

[65] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.14, 26.

[66] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.22, 36.

[67] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.2, 73–74. See also the discussion in Alexander Murray, "Bede and the Unchosen Race," in *Power and Identity in the Middle Ages: Essays in Memory of Rees Davies*, ed. Huw Pryce and John Watts (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 52–67.

[68] Wallace-Hadrill, *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People: A Historical Commentary*, 24.

Despite the Britons' reluctancy to evangelize the English, Bede noted that "Nevertheless God in His goodness did not reject the people whom he foreknew, but He had appointed much worthier heralds of the truth to bring this people to the faith."[69] In this instructive passage, we see the impact of Bede's theology upon his history: Bede's understanding of God's predestination and divine foreknowledge shaped his understanding of how the Anglo-Saxons, despite their paganism, came to be a chosen race, a new people of God.[70] Several passages in the *Ecclesiastical History* describe how God providentially worked in order to redeem the English people. For Bede, the most significant factor in "[leading] the English race to the knowledge of truth" was Pope Gregory's commissioning of Augustine to evangelize the island. Gregory, "prompted by divine inspiration," sent Augustine along with a company of monks to evangelize the English.[71] Although Gregory described Augustine as "endowed with good works through the grace of God,"[72] he also cautioned the missionary lest he become proud at his own miracle-workings. Bede included a letter sent by Gregory to Augustine reminding him to demonstrate humility:

> For not all the elect work miracles, but nevertheless all their names are written in heaven. Therefore those who are true disciples ought not to rejoice except in that good thing which they have in common with all the elect and which they will enjoy for ever . . . amidst those outward deeds which you perform through the Lord's power you should always judge your inner self carefully and carefully note within yourself what you are and how great is the grace shown to that people for whose conversion you have received the gift of working miracles.[73]

[69] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.22, 36.

[70] For similar comments on this passage, see Wright, *A Companion to Bede*, 25.

[71] See also the comments above, chapter 1, pp. 15–16.

[72] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.32, 59.

[73] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.31, 58.

Not only did Gregory—and by extension, Bede—view English as "elect," he found it noteworthy to relate the powers given by God to the missionaries in order to bring about their salvation.

Bede recorded several successes of the Augustinian mission, which frequently followed the pattern of conversion first coming through a royal court and resulting in the conversion of the people. For example, in book two, Bede described the continuing spread of the gospel by the preaching of the Bishop Paulinus.[74] Despite Paulinus' successful efforts at converting his household, Edwin, the pagan king of Northumbria, "was unwilling to accept the mysteries of the Christian faith."[75] Consequently, Pope Boniface V (c. 575–625) sent Edwin a letter which Bede included, exhorting the king to accept the God who "opens the doors of the heart so that He Himself may enter," who "by His secret inspiration pours into the human heart revelation of Himself," and who "in His mercy and lovingkindness towards all His creation [melts], by the fire of His Holy Spirit, the frozen hearts of races even in the far corners of the earth to knowledge of Himself."[76] Ultimately, however, the change of Edwin's "hard" and "cold" heart came through a vision he received directly from God that saved the king from the plots of his rival, Æthelfrith: "Such was the letter Pope Boniface wrote concerning the salvation of King Edwin and his race. But a heavenly vision which God in His mercy had deigned to reveal to Edwin . . . helped him in no small measure to understand and accept in his heart the counsels of salvation."[77] Impressed by this vision and accepting the Christian faith, wrote Bede, "King Edwin, along with all the nobles his race and a vast number of the

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[74] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 1.22, 37. See also above, chapter 1, p. 16.

[75] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.9, 86.

[76] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10, 87.

[77] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.12, 91.

common people, received the faith and regeneration by holy baptism."[78] Drawing from the language of Acts 13:48 in one of the most explicit statements on the subject of election in the *Ecclesiastical History*, according to Bede "Paulinus continued to preach the word of the Lord in that kingdom for six years, that is, until the end of the king's reign, with his consent and favor. As many as were foreordained to eternal life believed and were baptized."[79]

Where the Britons failed, the English were faithful as that People of Israel, "newly-established in their own promised land, the island of Britain."[80] Even though the Irish had helped to establish further Christianity in Northumbria subsequent to Paulinus' departure, Bede noted that it was the English, by God's providence, who would in time convince their Celtic brothers on the proper, Roman manner of Easter and tonsure:

> It is clear that this happened by a wonderful dispensation of divine mercy, since [the Irish] had willingly and ungrudgingly taken pains to communicate its own knowledge of God to the English nation; and now, through the English nation, they are brought to a more perfect way of life in matters wherein they were lacking.[81]

Bede contrasted the faithfulness English with the continued obstinacy of the Britons:

> On the other hand the Britons, who would not proclaim to the English the knowledge of the Christian faith which they had, still persist in their errors and stumble in their ways . . . while the English are not only believers but are fully instructed in the rules of the catholic faith.[82]

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[78] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.14, 97.

[79] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.14, 97: "Credebantque et baptizabantur quotquot errant praeordinati ad vitam aeternam." Although Wright helpfully points to this passage as highlighting Bede's doctrine of predestination, one need not adopt his conclusion that "Such a doctrine, if Bede held it rigidly and consistently, would put his understanding of divine retribution, which assumes the free will to make a choice even against God, at odds with Bede's sense of God's intention for England's national destiny" (*A Companion to Bede*, 55).

[80] Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A. D. 200–1000*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 351.

[81] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.22, 287.

[82] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.22, 287. On Bede's sometimes unfair critique of the Britons, see Murray, "Bede and the Unchosen Race," 62–63, wherein Murray even notes racial overtones to Bede's harsh criticisms. For an extensive discussion of Bede's perception of the Britons as "rebels," see N. J. Higham, *An English Empire: Bede and the Early Anglo-Saxons* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 30–37.

Thus, throughout the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede related the divinely ordered plan in the making of the English nation from the fall of the "Old Israel," the Britons, to the election of a new people of God brought about in time in God's providence by the preaching and efforts of grace-filled preachers and missionaries. Bede closed his magisterial history by noting the 285 years from the coming of the English to Britain to the present time.[83] Encouraged that many in Northumbria had laid aside their weapons and taken the tonsure, Bede commented, "Let the earth rejoice in [God's] perpetual kingdom and let Britain rejoice in His faith and let the multitudes of isles be glad and give thanks at the remembrance of His holiness."[84] Viewing history as inseparable from theology, Bede articulated how God, in his foreordained plan and by the outworking of his providence, made a nation of pagans a *plebum suuam*: a people of his own.

[83] An insertion that, notes Murray, further reveals Bede's predestinarian overtones. See Murray, "Bede and the Unchosen Race," 58.

[84] Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.23, 290.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset of this dissertation, this project sought to find some common ground between the medieval church and that of current evangelicals. Hopefully, this study has demonstrated that the works of the Venerable Bede, almost all of which are approaching 1,300 years since their writing, do provide important examples of shared convictions with modern-day Protestants. Notably—and especially given the subject of this project—Bede's theology of grace helps bridge the gap between the often-strange landscape of the Middle Ages and our contemporary setting.

Although isolated geographically from the rest of Christendom, Bede's writings reveal that he was nevertheless acutely aware of his place in the broader, universal church he cared for and about which he wrote so often. By means of the magnificent library at Wearmouth-Jarrow, the monk sat before the lecterns, as it were, in Milan under Ambrose, in Jerusalem under Jerome, in Rome under Gregory, and in Caesarea under Basil. Most importantly, however, was Bede's admiration and debt owed to Augustine. As demonstrated in chapter 2, not only did Bede have at his disposal an impressive collection of Augustine's writings—by some accounts over forty individual works—the monk also would have had access in that material to the foundational tenets of Augustine's theology of grace.

We have seen throughout the course of this dissertation important points of agreement between Augustine and Bede in their theology of grace. Like Augustine, Bede recognized the impact of the first sin in Genesis 3. Adam and Eve were created immortal and incorruptible, and had they remained obedient would have inherited eternal life. In their pride, and succumbing to the temptation of the serpent, the first parents ate of the

forbidden fruit and consequently were cursed by God. Their fall entailed both the reality of not only physical death, but spiritual death and separation from God. Because of original sin, both the effects and curse of the fall extend to all of Adam and Eve's progeny: all of humanity is guilty in Adam, and all likewise inherit a corrupt nature that is both bound to the desires of the flesh and opposed to God. By its own power, the human will is incapable of pleasing God.

Given humanity's fallen condition, Bede followed Augustine in his emphasis on humanity's utter dependence on grace as its only hope for redemption. God demonstrates his grace firstly in election and predestination. The "elect"— one Bede's favorite terms for designating God's people, first in Ancient Israel and subsequently in the church—was that inviolable and fixed number of God's chosen people who were called out before the foundation of the world and who would ultimately believe the gospel and persevere until the end. God did not give the "grace of election" to all, but, like Augustine, only to those he has predestined for life—a concept defined word-for-word by Augustine for Bede in the monk's *Collectio*. Bede maintained that election was not the result of works or merit, but was itself wholly dependent upon God's grace and mercy. To the elect, God gives the gracious gifts that would lead them to salvation. Beginning with baptism which removes the stain of original sin, God gives the gift of the Spirit who illumines, convicts, converts, and sanctifies. From the beginning of faith to the good works done out of love for God, Bede attributed all good things that bring the elect from condemnation to glory to God's grace. Although merits differ among the elect, all virtue possessed by them ultimately stems from divine grace, and all will attain blessedness. Given the fallen world in which they inhabit, however, even the elect will struggle with temptation and sin. Nevertheless, by the grace of the Spirit the elect are inevitably called to repentance. Through the power of the Spirit, God's will preserve his elect so that they overcome all manner of trial and gain entrance into his heavenly kingdom.

Some evangelicals may wince at Bede's repeated emphasis on merit. As Aaron Kleist rightly notes, "there runs a tension between grace and merit" throughout the Northumbrian scholar's works.[1] This tension, as we saw, was especially evident in Bede's *Homilies,* but present in other works as well. Chapter 4 provided a possible alternative to Bede's having parted ways with Augustine on this point. First, we saw parallels in Augustine's own writings, especially in his sermons, for even the Bishop of Hippo could commend his hearers to pray for grace, and that when God crowns one's merit, he only crowns his own gifts. Furthermore, we noted how Bede's own ecclesiastical and political context may provide clues as to why Bede placed so much weight on merit and, to use Kleist's words, striving with grace. The moral decline as he saw it in both the sacred and secular realms of Northumbria compelled Bede to admonish his readers and hearers of the necessity of good works and merit, even if he ultimately attributed them to God's grace. The issue, therefore, could be attributed to a matter of emphasis given his context rather than to significant deviation from Augustine's views. Finally, one must remember that for Bede, God had secured the ultimate destiny of the elect. Having been predestined by God for eternal life, they receive his gracious gifts that entails their eventual salvation. Put another way, for the elect salvation is not merely made possible by grace, but a certainty rooted in God's acts of election and predestination, and carried out in the subsequent ministry of the Holy Spirit.

While Bede's theology of grace, along with its emphasis on merit, may fall short of modern-day Protestants' expectations—one must remember that the Reformers' doctrine of imputation would not be formulated for another 700 years—similar critiques could be levelled against Augustine himself. Nevertheless, Bede's works consistently presented the primacy of grace in salvation. While good works do constitute an important

[1] Aaron Kleist, *Striving with Grace: Views of Free Will in Anglo-Saxon England* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2008), 82.

theme in Bede's writings, to imply that works and grace are simply two sides of the same coin would diminish the primary weight Bede placed on God's grace as the beginning of any and all meritorious actions. Those saved by grace will necessarily perform good works, but for Bede grace was always the antecedent. For the elect, it is by God's grace that they continue in virtue until, to paraphrase 1 Peter, they attain that imperishable, undefiled, and unfading inheritance reserved for them in the heaven.[2] This dissertation concludes, therefore, that Augustine would have recognized Bede's theology of grace as his own.

Bede promoted an Augustinian theology of grace from his earliest works to what is often understood as his crowning achievement, his *Ecclesiastical History*. It is fitting, therefore, that on his deathbed Bede glorified the God to whom he owed his salvation. Cuthbert, a disciple of Bede who is not to be confused with the subject of his *The Life of Saint Cuthbert*, recorded the final moments leading up to his mentor's death in 735. In deteriorating health and surrounded by his weeping brethren, Bede's last utterance was a praise to the Triune God: "And so upon the floor of his cell, singing 'Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,' and the rest, he breathed his last."[3] Although Cuthbert assured his readers that "many more stories could be told or written about him," regrettably for historians his "fuller account" of Bede's life was either lost or never written.[4] Consequently, Bede's legacy comes not from the scant details of his life but from the fruits of the countless hours he spent in writing and pouring over the scriptures in the scriptorium at Wearmouth-Jarrow that were intended to build up and edify future generations of Christ's church. Since he himself purposefully

[2] 1 Pet 1:4.

[3] Cuthbert, *Letter on the Death of Bede*, in *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Judith McClure and Roger Collins (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 302. On Bede's death, see also Blair, *The World of Bede*, 307–309.

[4] Cuthbert, *Letter on the Death of Bede*, 303.

left historians with so little biographical information, one may presume that this is exactly as Bede would have wanted it.

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ABSTRACT

FILIUS GRATIAE: THE VENERABLE BEDE'S
THEOLOGY OF GRACE

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This dissertation argues that the Venerable Bede held to and promoted an Augustinian theology of grace: humanity is hopelessly corrupted by the fall, and only through God's gracious election and the bestowal of good gifts to his elect could one hope to escape judgment and receive eternal life.

Chapter 1 sets the context of the discussion by surveying the history of research on Bede's theology of grace, and by providing a brief synopsis of the monk's life, career, and historical setting.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of Augustine's theology of grace, with particular emphasis given to exploring works of the African bishop that were accessible to Bede. This discussion thus provides a standard by which to assess Bede's own thinking on the matter.

Chapter 3 explores Bede's theology of grace as found in his biblical commentaries, beginning with a discussion of the scholar's exegetical method. Given the breadth of Bede's exegetical works, this chapter limits the discussion to works most pertinent to the monk's theology of grace from both his Old and New Testament commentaries, and thereby provides a representative sample of his teaching on the subject.

Chapter 4 examines Bede's *Homilies*, which further reveal the influence of Augustine. Some discussion is also given seeking to reconcile the apparent inconsistency between Bede's statements on grace and his emphasis in the *Homilies* on merit.

Chapter 5 discusses elements of Bede's theology of grace found in his most well-known work, the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. In particular, this chapter highlights Bede's commitment to an Augustinian theology of grace both in his frequent condemnations of Pelagianism, his assessment of the seventh-century Easter controversy, and his understanding of the English as an "elect people."

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