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## The Venerable Bede as scholar, gentile, and preacher<sup>1</sup>

“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 ... 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 father on Holy Scriptures, or to add notes of my own to clarify their sense and interpretation.”<sup>2</sup>

When presented with the opportunity to write on the individual identity of Bede, one naturally and rightly gravitates to this remarkable autobiography and bibliography included by him at the end of his most famous work the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. This passage is a reflection by Bede on his entire life, looking back over the long span of some sixty years. When we use this passage to unlock the identity of Bede, we are in essence seeing the very persona and identity that he wished his readers to understand at the end of his life. The question remains whether the Bede of his very first biblical commentary was the same man, possessing the same understanding of his own identities and roles in society, as the older scholar looking back over the length and breadth of his life and career.

As he told us, Bede was born on an estate that was soon to be held by Wearmouth/Jarrow around 673/4.<sup>3</sup> He was given as an oblate to St. Peter’s (Wearmouth) at the age of seven. This means that Bede was probably second or third generation Christian. It also means that he was with Benedict Biscop’s double monastery from nearly its very beginning. Thus, Bede lived, prayed, and worked in a constant construction site, surrounded by building projects of a grandeur relatively unknown to the English of his day. In addition to the great building projects, Bede was also exposed to the ambitious programmes of Benedict and Ceolfrith as they acquired a vast library for their monastery. Undoubtedly Bede participated in the production of the three great pandects, represented by the surviving Codex Amiatinus. Finally Bede’s own works were only possible because he had made use of the intellectual resources amassed by Benedict and Ceolfrith. Bede was thus immersed in an intellectual, physical, and liturgical environment that was meant to reflect the universal practice of Christianity, as represented by the ideal of Rome. There were certainly moments of trouble in Bede’s life: the plague in 686, the departure of Ceolfrith, and the critical reception of his own works to name only a few events. Through it all Bede remained loyal to his monastery and to the ideals of universal Christianity as typified by his monastery and its founders’ wishes.

Bede’s works were immensely popular almost as soon as he was finished with them. Most of his works, especially his biblical commentaries and the *Historia ecclesiastica*, received ardent interest from and dissemination by the Carolingians.<sup>4</sup> Bede proved to be an important thinker and writer throughout the Middle

<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Rosamond McKitterick, Irene van Renswoude, Ian Wood, and, of course, my wife Robin for reading this chapter and providing many helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* V, 24 (ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave/Roger A.B. Mynors, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Oxford 1969) 566f.: *Qui natus in territorio eiusdem monasterii, cum essem annorum VII, cura propinquorum datus sum educandus reuerentissimo abbati Benedicto, ac deinde Ceolfrido, cunctumque ex eo tempus uitae in eiusdem monasterii habitatione peragens, omnem meditandis scripturis operam dedi, atque inter obseruantiam disciplinae regularis, et cotidianam cantandi in ecclesia curam, semper aut discere aut docere aut scribere dulce habui ... Ex quo tempore accepti presbyteratus usque ad annum aetatis meae LVIII haec in Scripturam sanctam meae meorumque necessitati ex opusculis uenerabilium patrum breuiter adnotare, siue etiam ad formam sensus et interpretationis eorum superadicere curaui.*

<sup>3</sup> See Ian N. Wood, *Bede’s Jarrow*, in: *A Place to Believe In: Locating Medieval Landscapes*, ed. Clare A. Lees/Gillian R. Overing (University Park-Pennsylvania 2006) 67–84.

<sup>4</sup> For a description of Bede’s holding in Carolingian libraries see Rosamond McKitterick, *Kulturelle Verbindungen zwischen England und den fränkischen Reichen in der Zeit der Karolinger: Kontexte und Implikationen*, in: *Deutschland und der Westen Europas im Mittelalter*, ed. Joachim Ehlers (Vorträge und Forschungen 56, Stuttgart 2002) 121–148.

Agēs and into the early modern period. While medieval and early modern readers would have recognised Bede as a scriptural scholar and an historian, the modern scholarship of the twentieth century had tended to compartmentalise Bede into various constituent parts. This practice was begun by the famous volume *Bede: His Life, Times and Writings*.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly in that volume Bede the historian was divided from Bede the exegete. After this volume the study of Bede's historical works and his exegetical works diverged. The study of his exegetical works suffered in particular from this divergence because his *Historia ecclesiastica* absorbed much of the attention scholars gave to Bede. The publication of new critical editions and translations of his commentaries, led to a resurgence of the study of Bede's biblical scholarship starting in the late 1980s. More importantly for the general understanding of Bede, however, has been the scholarship over the past ten years. The most recent scholarship has shown that an understanding of any of Bede's works is not complete without incorporating his biblical commentaries. These scholars have advanced greatly our understanding of who Bede was and what he thought he was doing. This new united Bede and the current scholarship can be easily found in the recent volume edited by DeGregorio.<sup>6</sup> My own work is another voice in this new trend, in which I have highlighted how Bede's thought about history could and did change over his long career.<sup>7</sup> In this chapter I shall highlight some of the most important identities of Bede, namely his identification with orthodoxy, the gentile Church, and the priesthood, while remaining equally sensitive to the possibility of continuity or change.<sup>8</sup>

Some of the best sources for understanding Bede's various identities are his biblical commentaries. It is in his biblical commentaries that Bede was writing from the most idealised of all his positions. After all, these texts were meant to explain the realities of the Christian life and religion, and indeed Bede used his biblical commentaries to address and transmit many of his own ideals, such as his understanding of sanctity, the relationship between God and man, and the ideal Christian life to name only a few, to his reader and society. One may object that these texts were merely extracts and epitomes of the patristic authorities and that they therefore reflect not Bede's thought but that of the extracted author. First and foremost, Bede has been acquitted by the great insight and diligence of many scholars over the past twenty years from the accusation of being a mere extractor.<sup>9</sup> As it stands there is a general agreement that Bede was an exceedingly original exegete in many of his works.<sup>10</sup> These types of studies must continue if we are to gain a better understanding of Bede and especially his impact on the longer patterns of Christian thought and belief. There is, however, another way in which to

<sup>5</sup> *Bede: His Life, Times and Writing*, ed. Alexander Thompson (Oxford 1935).

<sup>6</sup> *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown 2006), especially Scott DeGregorio, Introduction: The New Bede, in: *ibid.* 1–10.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Hilliard, *Sacred and Secular History in the Writings of Bede (†735)* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge 2007).

<sup>8</sup> For some discussion of Bede and the *gens Anglorum* see Patrick Wormald, *Bede, the Bretwaldas and the origins of the Gens Anglorum*, in: *Ideal and Reality in Frankish and Anglo-Saxon Society*, ed. Patrick Wormald/Donald Bullough/Roger Collins (Oxford 1983) 99–129; Nicholas Brooks, *Canterbury, Rome and the construction of English Identity*, in: *Early Medieval Rome and the Christian West: Essays in Honour of Donald A. Bullough*, ed. Julia Smith (The Medieval Mediterranean 28, Leiden 2000) 221–246, especially at 232f.; Michael Richter, *Bede's Angli: Angles or English?*, in: *Peritia* 3 (1984) 99–114; Stephen J. Harris, *Bede, Social Practice, and the Problem with Foreigners*, in: *Essays in Medieval Studies* 13 (1996) 97–109; *id.*, *Bede and Gregory's allusive Angels*, in: *Criticism* 44 (2002) 271–289; *id.*, *Race and Ethnicity in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York 2003); Harold Zimmerman, *Angles in Britannia: Ethnic Identity and Its Textual Dissemination in Anglo-Saxon England* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Bloomington 2006). Also Bede has been the recipient of two fairly recent intellectual biographies, namely George Brown, *Bede the Venerable* (Boston 1987) and Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede* (London 2<sup>nd</sup> 1998).

<sup>9</sup> For examples see Roger Ray, *What do we know about Bede's Commentaries?*, in: *Recherches de theologie ancienne et medievale* 49 (1982) 5–20; Arthur Holder, *Allegory and history in Bede's interpretation of sacred architecture*, in: *American Benedictine Review* 40 (1989) 115–131; *id.*, *Christ as incarnate wisdom in Bede's Commentary on the Song of Songs*, in: *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Medieval European Studies 6, Morgantown 2006) 169–188, *id.*, *New treasures for old in Bede's De tabernaculo and De templo*, in: *Revue Benedictine* 99 (1989) 237–249; Joan Hart-Hasler, *Bede's use of patristic sources: the transfiguration*, in: *Studia Patristica* 28, ed. Elizabeth Livingstone (Leuven 1993) 197–204, *id.*, *Vestigia patrum sequens: The Venerable Bede's Use of Patristic Sources in His Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge 1999); George Brown, *Bede's Commentary on 1 Samuel*, in: *Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages. Proceedings of the Conference on Biblical Studies in the Early Middle Ages, Università degli Studi di Milano, Società Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino, Gargnano on Lake Garda, 24–27 June 2001*, ed. Claudio Leonardi/Giovanni Orlandi (Florence 2005) 77–90; *id.*, *Patristic pomegranates from Ambrose and Apponius to Bede*, in: *Latin Learning and English Lore: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature for Michael Lapidge* 1, ed. Katherine O'Keefe/Andy Orchard (Toronto 2005) 132–149; John Kelly, *Bede's exegesis of Luke's infancy narrative*, in: *Mediaevalia* 15 (1993) 59–70.

<sup>10</sup> See DeGregorio, *Innovation generally, but especially Alan Thacker, Bede and the ordering of understanding*, in: *ibid.* 37–64.

use these commentaries. It is a method that I employed in my own work and has proven to be very fruitful. The method is based on the simple supposition that all the words in Bede's works were chosen by him to be there. In other words, it does not matter if the words were Augustine's, they become the sentiments of Bede by their very inclusion in his work. Bede chose and agreed with the opinions that he included in his works, and often when faced with a difficult decision or an irreconcilable problem, he would give his reader a number of options and leave the difficulty at that. The extracted passages are more helpful as an indication of Bede's own thoughts, than for studying his conception of self-identity. Nevertheless passages chosen by Bede should never simply be ignored. A chronological element does need to be added to this method, because the contents of the commentaries, and indeed any of his works, reflect the text as he wanted it at the time that he finished and possibly disseminated it. As we shall see there is a reason that the Bede of the 730s decided to write a Retractions to his earlier Acts commentary from ca. 709. Bede's voice as a reformer and spiritual authority has already been addressed by Roger Ray and Scott DeGregorio;<sup>11</sup> I wish to dwell on some of the aspects of Bede's self identifications that can be gleaned from his works.

One of Bede's chief concerns in his earlier works was to maintain a persona of orthodoxy. Bede's sensitivity to this issue was probably derived from a traumatic experience connected to one of his very first works *De temporibus*. This work, but chiefly the world chronicle contained in it, was received with derision at Wilfrid's episcopal table, to such an extent that Bede was labelled as a heretic, although this accusation probably had more to do with a misunderstanding of Bede's new dating system and possibly the detractors' entrenched notions of apocalyptic expectations than any error on Bede's part.<sup>12</sup> The difficulty was that Bede's new calculation of the age of the world according to Jerome's Vulgate did not accord with the older Eusebius-Jerome/Septuagint reckoning. No doubt the sensitivity, or lack thereof, about time calculation with regard to the Easter controversy intensified the harsh peer review that Bede received. As Bede interprets Plegwin's report of the reaction to the *De temporibus*, "namely that you had heard it babbled out by lewd rustics in their cups that I was a heretic."<sup>13</sup> The problem the 'lewd rustics' had with Bede was that his reckoning of the Incarnation did not fit their own idea of how the years ought to be reckoned. Bede saw this charge of heresy for what it really was, namely a charge by clerics around the bishop who adhered to a position of chiliasm.<sup>14</sup> Indeed Bede stated in his letter to Plegwin that he was asked daily by rustics how many days were left in the final millennium, a request which frequently angered Bede.<sup>15</sup> Bede's long and detailed letter to Plegwin is a defence of his own method of calculation and an effort to clear himself to his Bishop Wilfrid. Although it is an argument from silence, it is worthy of note that Plegwin did not report anyone coming to Bede's defence. Bede had to draft his own defence. The reaction to Bede's work and the criticism he received would be a lifelong inspiration for waging a campaign against those rustics who misunderstood the orthodox teachings about the end of time. He even informed us that it was not just the rustics at the Episcopal table that were of a great nuisance to Bede, but a larger body of rustics with whom he had daily contact: "On this matter I confess I am quite grieved, and often irritated to the limit of what is permissible, or even beyond, when every day I am asked by rustics how many years are left in the final millennium of the world, or learn from them that they know that the final millennium is in progress."<sup>16</sup> Bede wasted no time in formulating his defence in his letter to Plegwin, and then he went

<sup>11</sup> Roger Ray, *Who did Bede think he was?*, in: *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Medieval European Studies 6, Morgantown 2006) 11–36; Thacker, *Ordering* 37–64; Scott DeGregorio, *Nostrorum socordiam temporum: The reforming impulses of Bede's later exegesis*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 11 (2002) 107–122; id., *Bede's In Ezram and Neemiam and the reform of the Northumbrian church*, in: *Speculum* 74 (2004) 1–25; id., *Footsteps of his own: Bede's Commentary on Ezra-Nehemiah*, in: *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown 2006) 143–168.

<sup>12</sup> The reaction to Bede's *De temporibus* and his subsequent defence of that work can be found in Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam* (ed. Charles W. Jones, *Opera Didascalica*, CC SL 123C, Turnhout 1980) 617–626 (trans. Faith Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time* [Liverpool 1999]) 405–415.

<sup>13</sup> Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, ed. Jones 617, trans. Wallis 405: *Sed haec tristi mox admixtione confudit, addendo videlicet quod me audires a lasciuentibus rusticis inter hereticos per pocula decantari.*

<sup>14</sup> Chiliasm, or millenarianism, was the belief that the end of the world could be known and reckoned and usually the proponents of this belief thought that the end was coming within a generation or two.

<sup>15</sup> Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, ed. Jones 624.

<sup>16</sup> Bede, *Epistola ad Pleguinam*, ed. Jones 624, trans. Wallis 413: *Vnde et ipse satis doleo, fateor, et quantum licet uel amplius irasci soleo quoties a rusticis interrogor quot de ultimo milliario saeculi restent anni.*

on the offensive with his commentary on the Apocalypse. Furthermore in his commentaries on the Catholic Epistles, the Gospel of Luke, and finally his *De temporum ratione* we can find numerous examples of Bede undermining the position of those that thought the time of the end of the world could be predicted.

The end of times would return to bother Bede again in his relationship with Bishop Acca of Hexham (709–731), his bishop, great patron and the dedicatee of many of his biblical commentaries.<sup>17</sup> It has been argued that Bede and Acca had a cold and professional relationship.<sup>18</sup> In the preface to his commentary on Mark, however, Bede stated that while many had requested him to write the commentary he finally decided to write the work most of all because of Acca.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Bede sent his *De templo* to Acca as a means of consoling him in his times of tribulation.<sup>20</sup> Faced with such expressions of affection that were accompanied by large literary works it seems difficult to maintain the position of cold and professional distance between the monk and his bishop. Such warmth did not, however, prevent Bede from defending his position as an orthodox thinker and writer to his bishop.

The defence of his orthodoxy comes in the form of a letter written to Acca about some questions the bishop had concerning an interpretation taken by Bede in his commentary on Samuel.<sup>21</sup> In the two letters sent to Acca by Bede the first dealt with the historical interpretation of the movement of the Israelites from Egypt to the Promised land. The other letter was a response to Acca which “pertains to faith regarding things to come, we must take care not to run into the pit of a most impious heresy should it be considered otherwise than is proper.”<sup>22</sup> The use of the first person plural in this passage highlights that Bede felt orthodoxy was on the line for both himself and his bishop/reader. Bede most often used an impersonal construction for his comments, although frequently he would use a direct address in the second person to his reader. There are a small number of passages, however, like the one above where Bede uses first person, singular or plural. Due to this variety we can assume that when Bede said ‘we’ he was not simply using a polite construction, but meant himself and his reader.<sup>23</sup> Acca had raised the issue of the interpretation of Isaiah 24, 22 after reading some of Bede’s commentary on Samuel.<sup>24</sup> Bede considered Isaiah 24, 22 to be fraught with danger for the student of Scripture. The passage seems to indicate that the Devil and the reprobate would be released from hell after a long period of time.<sup>25</sup> Bede chastised Acca for misreading his commentary, but nevertheless he set out an answer to this dangerous interpretation as simply and clearly as possible. By the end of the letter Bede was not even sure himself if he had sufficiently explained the prophet, but at least he had explained the foolishness of believing damnation was not eternal.<sup>26</sup> We can hear in Bede’s cautionary tone in this letter the repercussions of his first round of controversy over the end of times. We may also suppose that Bede, in order to maintain his status as a favoured protégé of Acca, needed to reassure Acca that he had not made a grave error. If the text were to be understood allegorically about the things to come, then it seems that the reprobate would be freed eventually from their punishment. Bede stated that God alone knew the answer to this question, but that everything else in the Bible seemed to indicate that the punishment would be forever.<sup>27</sup> Bede did provide in the commentary a detailed description of the end of times, but it was achieved in the same way as many of his other commentaries, of building a precise chronology of events, while leaving the actual beginning of the events unknown.

<sup>17</sup> *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica* 1 (ed. Charles Plummer, Oxford 1896) XLIX, note 2. The works are: *In Genesim*, *In Samuel*, *De templo*, *In Ezra et Neemiam*, *In Marcum*, *In Lucam*, *In acta*, *De mansionibus filiorum Israel*, and *De eo quod ait Isaias*.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Goffart, *The Narrators of Barbarian History (A.D. 550–800)* (Princeton 1988) 295–296, note 261; id., *The Historia ecclesiastica: Bede’s agenda and ours*, in: *The Haskins Society Journal* 2 (1990) 29–45, at 42f.; id., *Bede’s History in a harsher climate*, in: *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown 2006) 203–226, at 219f.

<sup>19</sup> Bede, *In Marci evangelium expositio* (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 120, Turnhout 1960) 432.

<sup>20</sup> Bede, *De templo* (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 119A, Turnhout 1969) 144.

<sup>21</sup> Bede, *De mansionibus filiorum Israel*, PL 94, 699–702. Bede, *De eo quod ait Isaias* ‘Et claudentur ibi in carcerem et post multos dies visitabunter’, PL 94, 702–710, all references to PL volumes are to the columns of the edition.

<sup>22</sup> Bede, *De mansionibus*, PL 94, 699 (trans. Arthur Holder, *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany* [Liverpool 1999]) 29: *Secunda vero, quod ad fidem pertinet futurorum, si aliter quam decet sentiatur, cavendum est ne fovea nefandissimae haereseos incuratur.*

<sup>23</sup> J. Allen/James Greenough, *New Latin Grammar* (New York 1931) 63, note a.

<sup>24</sup> Bede, *On Isaiah*, PL 94, 702.

<sup>25</sup> Bede, *On Isaiah*, PL 94, 702.

<sup>26</sup> Bede, *On Isaiah*, PL 94, 709.

<sup>27</sup> Bede, *On Isaiah*, PL 94, 703.

It seems that eschatology was an extremely sensitive topic for Bede. Twice in his career, if not more, he was questioned and challenged about his work when it pertained to the end of times. Fundamentally Bede felt the need to defend himself, particularly his orthodoxy, when presented with challenges that were really about the nature of the consummation of the ages. It is in these moments that we can perceive Bede being reactive, responding to outside challenges with zeal and intellectual acumen. The reports of the events leading up to the reconciliation of Iona with the Roman reckoning of Easter were surely a factor in creating this sensitivity. Bede himself, in his earlier commentaries, displayed a concern over the impact of schismatics on the state of the Church. He even remained sensitive to the question of orthodoxy right down to some of his very latest works. A considerable portion of his preface to his commentary on the Gospel of Luke is dedicated to listing the figural representations of the four evangelists according to Augustine in *De consensu evangelistarum* rather than the more conventional pattern of representation.<sup>28</sup> Also a number of comments in his *Retractions* demonstrate that he had changed his opinion about the proper explication of a verse, but since he was following no less an authority than Jerome it was not to be held against him.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the creation of a marginal citation system for his Gospel commentaries demonstrates Bede's intense sensitivity over the question of orthodoxy.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to his attention to orthodoxy, Bede's voice in his works was also very much concerned with his own methods as a Christian scholar. Bede's awareness of his own method in his historical works has long been acknowledged and discussed. In his biblical commentaries, however, there were also moments where Bede informed his reader of his methods, particularly his willingness to employ the allegorical mode of interpretation. On numerous occasions Bede felt the need to defend his practice of allegorical interpretation. These defences, particularly in *On Genesis*, *On Samuel*, *On Tobit*, and *XXX Questions on Kings* should give us some pause. Why would he defend a well established practice of the fathers for which there were already New Testament precedents? One possible explanation may reside in the Antiochene style of exegesis that seems to have been prominent under Theodore of Canterbury, at least in so far as it is indicated in the surviving notes of the Canterbury school.<sup>31</sup> It is also telling that Nothelm, priest of London and future Archbishop of Canterbury, sent to Bede questions mostly concerned with the historical level of *Kings*. It would not be imprudent, therefore, to think about Bede recognising that his more allegorically driven commentaries might be received by an audience that was not completely comfortable with the practice. If Bede were anticipating a debate, then this would also imply that he intended his commentaries to be read by those trained by the school of Canterbury in the Antiochene method. This may be the best explanation of why Bede defended the allegorical method on many occasions. After all the main writers of this allegorical style of exegesis before Bede and after the patristic fathers were the Irish scholars.<sup>32</sup> The great contest over the Easter question might have made some, at least in Canterbury, wary of anything that seems to have been preferred in the Irish ecclesiastical circles. That being said it is important to remember that study in Ireland was a wide spread phenomenon throughout the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.<sup>33</sup>

Let us examine more closely Bede's epistolary response to Nothelm, about the book of *Kings*. As Foley noted most of the questions posed by Nothelm were about difficulties in understanding the historical level.<sup>34</sup> Foley rightly claimed that these questions betrayed an interest at Canterbury in the literal level.<sup>35</sup> It is important to remember that Bede was contemporaneous with those who had studied under Theodore and Hadrian, thus

<sup>28</sup> Bede, In Lucam (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 120, Turnhout 1960) 7–10.

<sup>29</sup> Bede, *Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum* (ed. Max Laistner, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 121, Turnhout 1983) 107.

<sup>30</sup> Joyce Hill, Carolingian perspectives on the authority of Bede, in: *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio (Morgantown 2006) 228–229; E.J. Sutcliffe, Quotations in the Ven. Bede's commentary on S. Mark, in: *Biblica* 7 (1926) 428–439; Max Laistner, Source-Marks in Bede manuscripts, in: *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1933) 350–354.

<sup>31</sup> *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (ed. and trans. Bernhard Bischoff/Michael Lapidge, Cambridge 1994); Archbishop Theodore, ed. Michael Lapidge (Cambridge 1995). For a discussion of Alexandrian and Antiochene exegesis and their respective penetrations into the Latin tradition see Beryl Smalley, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame 1964) 1–20. See also Rowan Greer, *Theodore of Mopsuestia Exegete and Theologian* (London 1961) 91–111.

<sup>32</sup> For example see Pseudo-Jerome, *Expositio Quatuor Evangeliorum*, PL 30, 549–608. See also John Kelly, *The Hiberno-Latin study of the Gospel of Luke*, in: *Biblical Studies. The Medieval Irish Contribution*, ed. Martin McNamara (Dublin 1976) 10–20.

<sup>33</sup> Dáibhí Ó Cróinín, Rath Melsigi, Willibrord, and the earliest Echternach MSS, in: *Peritia* 3 (1984) 17–42, at 22f.

<sup>34</sup> William Foley, *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany* (Liverpool 1999) 83.

<sup>35</sup> Foley, *Bede* 83.

all those whom Bede had recorded as flocking to Canterbury for instruction were Bede's peers and audience.<sup>36</sup> When explaining the deeds of Hiel, rebuilder of Jericho, allegorically, Bede felt the need to justify the practice of allegorical interpretation by citing Paul, reminding Nothelm that "I have explained these things allegorically so that you might recall the truth of the Apostle's statement: 'all things happened to them in a figure; and they are written for us'."<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, so tempting was the present relevance of the allegorical interpretation of the Babylonian exile that he included, almost apologetically, the connection between contemporary negligence and the negligence of the people of Israel.<sup>38</sup> This defence and insistence shows that perhaps Bede was aware that the allegorical method of interpretation might not be received as easily in Canterbury as it was by Acca in Hexham. This again points to a possible difference between Canterbury and the Irish influenced North of Britain. Bede's responses to Nothelm, could be understood in this light as an effort to persuade others of the allegorical method that Bede and the Irish found so illuminating. In addition to his championing the allegorical method in his commentaries, Bede also warned on a number of occasions about the danger of the literal/historical interpretation.<sup>39</sup>

We can, with some probability then, conjecture that Bede's statements about the danger of the historical level and his staunch defences of the allegorical method were driven by the disparities between the Alexandrian scholarship of Northern Britain and Ireland on the one hand and the Antiochene scholarship of the Canterbury school on the other. This might be viewed best in terms of friendly competition, but Bede's defensive tone for his allegorical explanation to Nothelm seems to indicate that Bede at least thought there might be some resistance to his preferred method. Here we have an old debate reborn in Anglo-Saxon England, despite the resolution of that debate in the east many generations before.

We can see, then, that Bede's voice as an orthodox thinker and one of the proponents of interpreting Scripture on the allegorical level, in addition to the other levels, was an integral part of his scholarly identity. These observations that I have made concerning his orthodoxy and methodology accord with the interpretation of Bede's literary programme as described by Ray. Ray has argued persuasively that Bede was fully conscious of his role as a builder of Christian Latin culture.<sup>40</sup> These defences of his orthodoxy and method can, however, be turned around. They show that Bede was confident and willing to be a spokesman for orthodoxy. He was the arbiter of orthodoxy in his texts, and his defences convey the nature of that orthodoxy. There are, however, some other aspects of Bede's identity that are fundamental for understanding his view of the world.

One of the most important aspects of Bede's identity was his identification with the Gentiles of the biblical narratives. Bede was convinced of his membership in the Church of the Gentiles (*ecclesia gentium*). He began his exploration of the relationship between God, the Church, and the Gentiles at the very beginning of his career with his commentary on Acts. The emphasis on the importance in the history of salvation of the calling of the Gentiles was maintained throughout all of Bede's commentaries, right down to his very last commentary, the Retractions on Acts.

Very early on in his career, in his commentary on 1 Peter (ca. 706), Bede identified himself and his readers explicitly with the Gentiles: "Up to this point blessed Peter has been instructing the Church in general, enlarging on either the benefits by which the divine condescension deigned to call us to salvation or on the gifts with which he deigned once to honour the Jews but now us."<sup>41</sup> And again in the context of his discussion of the chosen race, the people set apart, Bede emphasised through the use of first person plural that he and his reader had been added to the chosen people of God and that their new homeland was now in heaven.<sup>42</sup> Both of these passages reveal that an integral part of Bede's own identity was as a Gentile gained by the fulfilment

<sup>36</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* IV, 2, ed. Colgrave/ Mynors 332–334.

<sup>37</sup> Bede, *In Regum librum XXX quaestiones* (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 119, Turnhout 1962) 309–310 (trans. William Foley, *Bede: A Biblical Miscellany* [Liverpool 1999]) 89–138.

<sup>38</sup> Bede, *In Regum librum XXX quaestiones*, ed. Hurst 320.

<sup>39</sup> For example see Bede, *In primam partem Samuhelis libri IV* (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 119, Turnhout 1962) 137.

<sup>40</sup> Ray, *Bede* 14–17, 35.

<sup>41</sup> Bede, *Commentary on 1 Peter* (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 121, Turnhout 1983) 238 (trans. David Hurst, *Bede the Venerable Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles* [Kalamazoo 1985]) 89: *Hucusque beatus Petrus generaliter ecclesiam instituit explicans uel beneficia quibus nos divina pietas ad salutem uocare uel don quibus aliquando Iudaeos nun autem nos honorare dignata est.*

<sup>42</sup> Bede, *Commentary on 1 Peter*, ed. Hurst 237f.

of Christ's great commission to spread the Gospel to the four corners of the earth. Indeed, he thought that the apostolic commission was still in operation in his own day.<sup>43</sup> This identification with the saved Gentiles makes every passage where Bede discussed the Gentiles and their inclusion in the Church an explicit statement about his own understanding of his place in the Christian world. This identification is also one of the primary reasons why Bede was so obsessed with finding the call of the Gentiles in every one of his biblical commentaries. In fact, even his historical works, especially the chronicles and the *Historia ecclesiastica*, can be interpreted as expressions of the successes and failures of this group to which Bede belonged.

Bede reiterated his explicit identification with the Gentiles in his later commentary on Genesis. In this commentary Bede identified all the Gentiles as the literal descendants of Japeth, one of the sons of Noah. The great revelation to Bede from Genesis was that the sons of Japeth dwelt in the tents of Shem, who represented Israel. This dwelling in the tents of Shem was accomplished when the Gentiles came to Christ and therefore had a hope of reaching the heavenly homeland.<sup>44</sup> This passage from Bede's commentary highlights the intimate connection between Israel and the Gentiles, who become bound together by Christ. It also emphasises Bede's own understanding of the temporary nature of this life. What was more important than identification with the Gentiles was identification with the Gentiles gained for Christ. God could be called Abba by the Gentiles only because of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> In the same way Bede could identify himself and his readers as the descendants of Abraham.<sup>46</sup> Bede even stated that our fathers imitated the ancient Israelites in their exodus through their process of redemption starting with the sacrifice of Christ and being led by the apostles and the Church through the desert of this world until reaching the heavenly homeland.<sup>47</sup> This identity as a Gentile gained by the Church for Christ was constant throughout Bede's entire literary career and it was an identity that he shared with his reader. The great fervour of English missionaries is proof that in this case Bede's zeal for the expansion of the gentile Church was shared by his own people.

In his later commentaries Bede specifically saw himself as a participant in what he understood as the greatest struggle of all time. This struggle was the great spiritual warfare between Jesus and His Church versus the Devil and his malignant band.<sup>48</sup> This was a battle over souls, one fought chiefly by the shepherds of the Church. Bede's works, particularly his later ones, possess a strong pastoral voice. I am using pastoral in its broadest possible sense of shepherding others in the faith. Bede did not believe, however, that his role was only as one of the shock troops of Christianity.<sup>49</sup> The role of preacher/teacher was intimately connected, for Bede, to a priestly identity.<sup>50</sup> Indeed it is worth noting that his literary campaign did not really begin in earnest until he had been ordained a priest at the age of thirty. On a number of occasions Bede stated that he and his reader were responsible for providing the very basics of Christian education, convincing people to renounce Satan and accept baptism.<sup>51</sup> The passage from *De templo* is worth citing in full:

“In building the house of the Lord, first of all the wood and stones must be hewn from the mountain because those whom we seek to train in the true faith we must first teach to renounce the devil... Then we must have to look for large precious stones and lay them in the foundation of the Temple, so that after they have renounced their former way of life, we may remember in all things to watch over their life and conduct, and set before our hearers for imitation those whom we know to cling in a special way by the virtue of humility to the Lord, people whom we see persevering unflinchingly with invincible constancy of spirit like squared stones, in a certain sense, and whom by their merit and repute we have found to be large and precious stones.”<sup>52</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Bede, In Habacuc (ed. J.E. Hudson, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 119B, Turnhout 1983) 389.

<sup>44</sup> Bede, In Genesim (ed. Charles W. Jones, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 118A, Turnhout 1967) 138.

<sup>45</sup> Bede, In Marcum, ed. Hurst 616–617.

<sup>46</sup> Bede, In Genesim, ed. Jones 170–171.

<sup>47</sup> Bede, In Ezra et Neemiam (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 119A, Turnhout 1969) 369.

<sup>48</sup> For a further discussion of this theme see Hilliard, *History*, especially 80–82, 101f., 112f., and 121–124.

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion of Bede's role as a doctor see Thacker, *Ordering*, especially 42–44.

<sup>50</sup> Bede, In Samuel, ed. Hurst 117f., id., *De tabernaculo* (ed. David Hurst, *Opera Exegetica*, CC SL 119A, Turnhout 1969) 28.

<sup>51</sup> Bede, *De templo*, ed. Hurst 155f.; id., In Ezra, ed. Hurst 322f.

<sup>52</sup> Bede, *De templo*, ed. Hurst 155f.: *In aedificanda domo domini primo sunt ligna et lapides caedendi de monte quia eos quos in fide ueritatis instituere quaerimus primo necesse est ut abrenuntiare diabolo ac de sorte primae praeuaricationis in qua nati sunt doceamus renascendo erui. Deinde quaerendi sunt lapides pretiosi et grandes atque in fundamentum templi ponendi ut meminimus abdicata conuersatione priori eorum in omnibus uitam moresque inspiciere eos nostris auditoribus imitandos proponere quos*

This passage tells us many things about Bede's understanding of the duties of his reader and himself, which Bede explained with the use of the first person plural. As the commentary was dedicated to Acca, we are safe to conclude that these duties were to be performed by both Acca and Bede. Both Acca and Bede were meant to give the very beginnings of Christian instruction and to watch over that newly converted flock. It seems likely that Bede thought his responsibilities for teaching the Christian way extended beyond the monastery to those places where the pagan gods had not yet been renounced. Furthermore, the duty of watching over the flock freed from the Devil connotes pastoral responsibility. The probable interpretation of this evidence, then, is that Bede was teaching outside the monastery to the newly converted or even the unconverted.<sup>53</sup> It is possible that Bede was referring only to oblates in his monastery, but the passage seems to imply a less specific group in need of initial instruction, one ministered to equally by Acca and Bede. It may be that the overlap between Bede's and Acca's roles lay precisely in their shared priestly identity.

Of course Bede's role as a pastor extended beyond the mere basics of the tenants of Christianity. Both he and his reader were meant to be assisted in their teaching, correcting, and suffering by the writers of Scripture.<sup>54</sup> Not only was Scripture to prepare Bede and his reader, but also the study of the fathers was meant to shame them into action.<sup>55</sup> While Bede was fascinated by the universal spread of the Gospel and was assured of the success of that spread, nevertheless he recognised that one person could not achieve the conversion of all nations. Bede stated that both he and his reader could participate in the conversion of all nations by working diligently in their own particular time and place, all the while hoping for the salvation of the whole world.<sup>56</sup> In addition to converting others, the Christian teachers were meant to be the defences against the enemy and if required to chastise neighbours, but only after one was sure there was error.<sup>57</sup> All of these passages where Bede connected himself and his reader through use of the first person plural prove that Bede truly thought of himself as one of the doctors, one of the champions on the frontline in the struggle against the Devil and his band. We do not need to make the logical connection between Bede's efforts and his identity as a spiritual authority; he has made that connection for us.

Bede discovered through his intensive study of the biblical text that the most effective form of preaching was through examples. This was not a conclusion to which he came immediately, but one that he reached in the middle of his career.<sup>58</sup> For example Bede declared that when we read the lives of the saints we learn how to lift ourselves from earthly concerns and desires.<sup>59</sup> Bede even launched into a prayer that we, Bede and his reader, might learn by reading the words, deeds, and suffering of the apostles and their successors.<sup>60</sup> Furthermore Bede emphasised how the preacher must live up to high standards in order for his preaching to be truly effective.<sup>61</sup> The combination of these two ideals bring us back to where we began with Bede's autobiography.

Bede was a very active narrator in his *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*. He explains at every turn why he chose to incorporate particular elements into his narrative and often from whom and how he got his information. Since Bede had emphasised so strongly in his commentaries that examples were useful and necessary tools for the spiritual edification of the faithful, the *Historia ecclesiastica* must then be understood as a pastoral text, a repository of models of holiness for the spiritual benefit not only of the reader, but of any who received these examples in the context of preaching. Like the commentaries then, the *Historia ecclesiastica* not only af-

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*per uirtutem humilitatis specialiter domino adhaerere nouerimus quos inuincibili mentis stabilitate quasi quadratos quodammodo atque ad omnes temptationum incursus immobiles perdurare conspicimus quos pretiosos et grandes merito ac fama compositum.*

<sup>53</sup> For a helpful summary of the minster debate see Eric Cambridge/David Rollason, *Debate: The pastoral organization of the Anglo-Saxon Church: a review of the "Minster Hypothesis"*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995) 87–104; John Blair, *Debate: Ecclesiastical organization and pastoral care in Anglo-Saxon England*, in: *Early Medieval Europe* 4 (1995) 193–212. More recently see Catherine Cubitt, *The clergy in early Anglo-Saxon England*, in: *Historical Research* 78 (2005) 272–287; John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Bede, *De templo*, ed. Hurst 153.

<sup>55</sup> Bede, *In Ezra*, ed. Hurst 277f.

<sup>56</sup> Bede, *In Ezra*, ed. Hurst 258.

<sup>57</sup> Bede, *In Samuel*, ed. Hurst 97; *In Genesim*, ed. Jones 220.

<sup>58</sup> Hilliard, *History* 117f., 126f.

<sup>59</sup> Bede, *De templo*, ed. Hurst 164f.

<sup>60</sup> Bede, *De templo*, ed. Hurst 210.

<sup>61</sup> For example, according to Bede, *In Lucam*, ed. Hurst 141f., 158, Jesus was the model preacher because he presented a life that was worthy of emulation.



fectured the reader, but also was a tool for the use of preachers. Since the *Historia ecclesiastica* can be considered a text which preaches chiefly through examples, then the identity of the preacher himself becomes important. It is possible that Bede saw his history as his greatest work and that is why he chose to attach his own autobiography and bibliography to the work.<sup>62</sup> There is one other possibility. Bede was biblically mandated to provide useful examples of past holy men in order to improve the faith of his reader, but a successful preacher also abided by what he preached. The inclusion of the author's life then was a permanent witness to the fact that the author was worthy of attention; or, in other words, like Bede's description of Gregory the Great and his *Dialogues*, the author not only gave examples of the virtues of the saints but he lived up to those virtues.<sup>63</sup> The autobiography at the end of the history would give future readers enough information about the author not only to trust in him, but to also accept his message because the man himself strove to be a good monk and Christian. Preaching was worthless without deeds; Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica* was his preaching and his life attested to his deeds. In addition to shoring up the validity of the *Historia ecclesiastica*, Bede's bibliography attached to his autobiography lends the authority of his holy life to all of his previous works.

Bede's voice, his authorial persona, is strong and active in almost all of his works. If anything his voice became even stronger and more active as he matured and grew comfortable with his own position and authority. I have attempted to limit myself in this essay to those passages where Bede specifically indicated his identities, but all of his works can be used to study his understanding of the world. After all, every word, every sentence, and every comment was chosen by Bede for his works and therefore his choices reflect his own intentions and attitudes.

We have seen that Bede was extremely sensitive to criticism and also very proud of his own choice in method, especially his method of interpreting the biblical text allegorically. On a number of occasions Bede anticipated his respondents and made ardent defences of his own method. The scholarly voice that comes through his works is one of confidence and prudence.<sup>64</sup> His strong defences of his allegorical method hint at the possibility of a debate between the intellectual circles centred around the North of Britain and Canterbury. We will never be certain, but the tone and effort of Bede's comments suggest that he did not compose his works in a vacuum.

We have also seen how the biblical text shaped Bede's own understanding of his identity as a member of the Gentiles. Bede's study of the Bible brought him into contact with the very concept of the Gentiles, and he celebrated throughout all of his works the salvation and inclusion of this group with which he so closely identified.

Finally we have clear proof that Bede, as a priest/teacher, thought himself spiritually responsible to those around him. He identified with those who had to teach the very fundamentals of the Christian faith and he also identified with those doctors who were needed for the defence of the Church. Bede's role as a preacher combined with his opinion that examples were the most effective means of preaching coloured his later historical works, particularly the *Historia ecclesiastica*. Overall we might say that this role of Bede as one responsible for the faith of his people and readers is the dominant role revealed in his works. Bede was not a fragmented person, rather he bent everything at his disposal to achieve his main goal, a better Christian society. Through his works we can gain an understanding of how Bede came to understand his own identities and roles in society, but even more so his works were attempts to persuade and inform his own people of their new identity as a Christian people. It is clear from his works that Bede was not a troubled ego, or at least he possessed a great confidence in his own identities and roles, enough so that he could attempt to persuade others of the nature of those shared identities. Even the account of his death gives us only a picture of serenity<sup>65</sup>. That is not to say that Bede did not face many troubles in his life, a few of which I have mentioned above, but he faced them fully aware and confident in who he was. In the end this view of Bede's life and works is not only a testament to Bede himself, but also to the formation he received from Benedict and Ceolfrith at Wearmouth/Jarrow.

<sup>62</sup> Charles W. Jones, *Saints' Lives and Chronicles in Early England* (Ithaca 1947) 81 and 218.

<sup>63</sup> Bede, *Historia ecclesiastica* II, 1, ed. Colgrave/Mynors 126–130.

<sup>64</sup> Thomas Aquinas Carroll, *The Venerable Bede: His Spiritual Teachings* (Washington D.C. 1946) 51.

<sup>65</sup> Cuthbert, *Epistola de obitu Bedae* (ed. and trans. Bertram Colgrave/Roger A.B. Mynors, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Oxford 1969) 579–587.

