

VIRGINITY AND THE MARRIED-VIRGIN SAINTS IN ÆLFRIC'S *LIVES OF SAINTS*:
THE TRANSLATION OF AN IDEAL

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
Graduate Department of Medieval Studies,
University of Toronto

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Thesis Abstract

Title: Virginité and the Married-Virgin Saints in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*: The Translation of an Ideal

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Among the narratives included in his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric of Eynsham translates three *passiones* of married-virgin saints: *Passio Sancti Iuliani et Sponse Eius Basilisse*, *Passio Sanctæ Ceciliæ Virginis*, and *Passio Chrisanti et Dariæ Sponse Eius*. This study offers a literary examination of Ælfric's construction and development of the virginal ideal in these *passiones*.

(1) The study begins with an examination of the vocabulary of purity and body (*virginitas*, *castitas*, *integritas*, *corpus* and *caro*) in seminal works by Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Aldhelm, each of whom helped establish virginity as the preeminent form of the Christian life. The symbolic, sacramental claims of virginity proposed in these texts call into question modern interpretations of virginity as the repudiation of sexuality and the means by which male authors exercised control over women's bodies.

(2) Ælfric addresses the necessity of sexual purity in two discursive works: the "Letter to Sigefyrth" and the homily *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*. An examination of the Old English vocabulary of purity and body (*mægðhad*, *clænnes*, *lichama*, and *flæsc*) in these works illustrates that, although working in the tradition of the Church Fathers, Ælfric's call for sexual purity arises from his particular concern for holy service. Moreover, his explicit concern for the inclusion of both sexes in this life of service redresses any disproportionate emphasis upon female virginity.

(3) A comparison of Ælfric's translation of the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa with the Latin version found in the Cotton-Corpus Legendary reveals not only Ælfric's promotion of regular monastic values over ascetic ones, but also his deliberate avoidance of attaching the need for sexual purity specifically to women. Throughout the *passio*, virginity signifies the saints' eternal priorities and heavenly allegiance.

(4) The *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria contains a much more sexualized representation of the conflict between the saints and their antagonists, while the *passio* of Cecilia focuses upon the celestial nature of the virginal life. In neither, however, does the promotion and importance of

physical purity account for virginity's significance. Instead, Ælfric's depiction of virginity in these two *passiones* pushes virginity's symbolic, sacramental capacity to the forefront.

The study concludes with a brief examination of how Ælfric's expressed purpose for these *passiones* and his treatment of virginity relate to the late Anglo-Saxon context.

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Abbreviations

<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>ASE</i>	<i>Anglo-Saxon England</i>
<i>ASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
CSLP	Corpus Scriptorum Latinorum Paravianum
EETS	Early English Text Society
MGH	Monumenta Germaniæ Historica
PL	Patrologia Latina

Introduction

Virginity is a pretious Jewell, a faire garland, a never fading flowre, for why was Daphne turned to a greene Bay tree, but to shew that virginity is immortal?... Virginity is a fine picture, as Bonaventure calls it, a blessed thing in it selfe, and if you will beleewe a Papist, meritorious.

Robert Burton¹

The four species of interpretation used by medieval authors occupy such a place in literary studies as to be commonplace. From Late Antiquity through the Middle Ages, literal, historical, allegorical, and tropological interpretations stand side-by-side in written works of all categories, the richness of such polyvalence providing the overriding rule that unites the diverse representations within one work. This aspect of polyvalence runs throughout the many works on the ideal of virginity from the Latin Fathers of the Early Church to Ælfric of Eynsham in Anglo-Saxon England. Virginity is interpreted in many ways simultaneously, depicted variously, and recommended for many reasons without any perceived discontinuity or disjunction in the mind of the authors. The Fathers and Ælfric portray virginity as the angelic life on earth, the *vita angelica*, and as the sacrificial union of body and soul in the service of God. Virgins they depict as types of the Church, prophetic figures of the heavenly, resurrection life, or types of Christ, the new Adam, victorious over the fallen world.

What follows is a literary examination of the construction and use of the virginal ideal in the very specific context of the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints as translated into Old English by Ælfric of Eynsham as part of his *Lives of Saints*.² Much attention has been directed towards Ælfric's saints in general, and his virgin saints in particular, in recent years. A few exemplary studies come to mind immediately like those of Mary Clayton, Hugh Magennis and Paul Szarmach.³ Among Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* his married-virgin saints have not received any such attention, despite the fact that they offer much to the study of virginity, and the gender implications

¹ Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, vol. III, eds. Thomas C. Faulkner, Nicholas K. Kiessling, Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994) 237-38.

² Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, ed. W.W. Skeat, 2 vols. (Vol. I: EETS o.s. 76 [1881], 82 [1885], repr. in one vol. 1966; Vol. II: EETS o.s. 94 [1890], 114 [1900], repr. in one vol. 1966). Footnote citations to these texts will follow the short titles laid out by the Dictionary of Old English. A *Microfiche Concordance to Old English: The List of Tests and Index of Editions* compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey and Richard Venezky (Toronto, 1980). *Passio Sancti Iuliani et Sponse Eius Basilisse* (Skeat, vol. I, 90-115) = ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa); *Passio Sanctæ Cecilie Virginis* (Skeat, vol. II, 356-77) = ÆLS (Cecilia); *Passio Chrisanti et Darie Sponse Eius* (Skeat, vol. II, 378-99) = ÆLS (Chrysanthus).

³ E.g. Mary Clayton, "Ælfric's Judith: Manipulative or Manipulated?" *ASE* 23 (1994): 215-27; Hugh Magennis, "No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons: Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 26 (1995): 1-21; Paul E. Szarmach, "Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia," *New Readings in Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990). Clayton's study of Judith is obviously not on a virgin saint per se, but it touches upon similar issues of sexual purity and representation.

of the idealization of virginity. By “married-virgin saints” I refer to those men and women who commit themselves mutually to a life of faith within the context of virginally chaste marriage. In Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*, these include the *Passio Sancti Iuliani et Sponse Eius Basilisse*, *Passio Sanctæ Cecilie Virginis*, and *Passio Chrisanti et Dariæ Sponse Eius*. Though at the beginning of their marriages these husbands and wives do not equally share the desire for virginity, the commitment to virginal chastity ultimately becomes one of the central and distinguishing figures of their married and ministerial lives. The married-virgin saints provide an excellent opportunity for examining the assumptions about virginity and sexual purity’s greater importance to women’s sanctity. These *passiones* represent men and women pursuing the life of faith side-by-side as ever-chaste husbands and wives. With their pure life, they prefigure the resurrection life of all Christians, joining together in spirit rather than body to live on earth the life of angels.⁴ The narratives of these saints, I suggest, place the greatest emphasis upon the spiritual values that find powerful expression in the sign of virginity.

Such a study, however, cannot begin with the Old English *passiones* themselves, nor even with an examination of Ælfric’s general teaching on virginity. Although this study does not attempt to present a history of the ideal of virginity, and I do not aim to construct a monolithic interpretation of virginity descending in a direct line from Ambrose to Ælfric, any merely synchronic examination of the ideal of virginity, without reference to its diachronic progression or without an attempt to historicize it, could not do justice to the complexity of the sign of virginity in the Ælfrician *passiones*. Thus, I turn first to the writings of the Latin Fathers that helped establish and promote the virginal life.

Over the last twenty-some years, various scholars have shown particular interest in the consequences of the late antique and medieval emphasis upon women’s virginity. For, although the virginal life applies to both men and women, the great number of treatises on virginity are addressed to women, and much of the rhetoric on the subject specifically concerns female virginity. Questions have been raised concerned with the interesting, but perhaps anachronistic, issues of women’s self-actualization, autonomy and power. Beneath many such studies there lies the conviction that the Church Fathers were consumed with the notion of controlling women’s bodies. Others studies examine these writings in order to explore ways in which female readers could have interpreted these texts for themselves and deliberately thwarted such attempts to control them. The modern reader often finishes these studies with a sense that it would have been

⁴ Mt 22:30.

impossible for male authors addressing the subject of virginity, or female readers committed to the virginal life, to have been caught up with issues other than those of control, identity, or autonomy.

A very brief survey will illustrate the tenor of much of this scholarship. In much of this literature we encounter a conviction that sexual physicality plays as essential and existentially defining a role for women as it does for virginity. As Rosemary Ruether explains, the “assimilation of male-female dualism into soul-body dualism in patristic theology conditions basically the definition of woman, both in terms of her subordination to the male in the order of nature and her ‘carnality’ in the disorder of sin.”⁵ As a result of this conflation of dualisms, Joyce Salisbury writes, women become identified with carnality, and this association consequently justified their subordination: the flesh ought, by nature, to be subject to the spirit.⁶ Virginity, then, becomes a means of shedding the burdensome female nature. Jane Tibbets Schulenberg claims that the requirement of physical inviolability equaled a woman’s repudiation of her “female sexual identity.”⁷ Thence, women who maintained the virginal life transcended the encumbrances and limitations of their female gender through a life of negation. Schulenberg proposes that the virginal life equalized the spiritual imbalance between men and women by making the latter “sexless, gender-neutral beings.”⁸ Pauline Stafford’s recent article on the gender implications of the Benedictine Reform places this equating of women with the body firmly in the context of tenth-century Anglo-Saxon England. Referring to the temptation scene in the Life of St. Eugenia, Stafford identifies several ideological oppositions in the representation of the female body. Of the confrontation between the saint (who has disguised herself as a man in order to pursue the monastic life) and the widow who seeks to tempt the young “monk” sexually and monetarily, Stafford writes:

‘Woman’s’ sexual body, land and non-communal possessions were combined as the opposite of the monastic ideal which Eugenia had sought. ‘Woman’ was impure body, but she was also private, or rather familial, property, and both were transferred through marriage. She was thus not only quintessentially feminine but, in tenth-century reforming terms, quintessentially lay. In reemphasizing the symbolic western association of ‘Woman’ with impurity, reformers made it clear that gender hierarchies remained a

⁵ Rosemary Radford Ruether, “Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church,” *Religion and Sexism: Images of Woman in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (NY: Simon and Schuster, 1974) 156.

⁶ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (New York: Verso, 1991) 21.

⁷ Jane Tibbets Schulenberg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1998) 128. See also R. Howard Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny and the Invention of Western Romantic Love* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991) 93.

⁸ Tibbets Schulenberg 128.

fundamental point of reference.⁹

Stafford's reading certainly illustrates the strength and complexity of this presumed link between women and the sexual which translated into the need to constrain, even deny, the physical body through the life of virginity. Here all the less estimable ends of these dichotomies find their "incarnation" in women: *lay* versus monastic, *impurity* versus purity, *private* versus communal. Such interpretations place upon the female body a heavy weight indeed.

This proposed negation and self-alienation inherent in the life of virginity is not without benefits for women, and here enters the interpretation of the virginal life as a source of autonomy or power. Salisbury proposes that women's renunciation of their sexuality conferred upon them a modicum of self-determination over their physical bodies and their lives. She sees this "freedom" of the virginal life--its liberation from constraints and assumptions of gender--as the explanation for its popularity among women.¹⁰ Jo Ann McNamara takes this reconstruction of women's views of virginity to its logical extreme, when she writes (without recourse to any discernible source) that:

Virgins and honorary virgins had their own ideas about their status. They saw themselves transformed and lifted beyond the constrictions of the gender system... Some consecrated women apparently felt that, having transcended their physiological differences from men, they could break down all gender barriers.¹¹

If we examine the treatises themselves, however, the evidence for such transformations or for the "traces of [female readers'] resistance to the male textualization of their flesh" is neither unproblematic nor self-apparent.¹² My object here is not to dispute readings which emphasize the schism between male and female, the conflation of woman and body, or readings of the Fathers which look for interpretations which offered women something other than a 'formula of control.' These interpretations offer much that is constructive as well as provocative. First, foremost and undeniably, virginity is a literal, physical condition. Bodies are in question. Virgins' (men's and women's) understanding of themselves as physical as well as spiritual creatures is very much at issue in the idealization of virginity.

Yet the virginal ideal concerns far more than sexuality and the human body. I would like to offer two caveats for the following study of virginity as an ideal. Neither is original to me. Both

⁹ Pauline Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reform in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England," *Past and Present* 163 (1999): 9.

¹⁰ Salisbury 4.

¹¹ Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) 43.

¹² Virginia Burrus, "Word and Flesh: Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 29.

can stand repeating. The first has already been alluded to: if we reduce the ideal of virginity to intactness alone, we transform it into something with which no one of the Church Fathers ever would have agreed. They all argue (admittedly with varying degrees of fervor) that true Christian virginity entails more than physical intactness alone. Physical purity may be the *sine qua non*, but volition and purity of the mind bear as much upon the quality and value of virginity as does the unstained body. Peter Brown has warned against trivializing virginity by reducing it to the mere repression of sexuality.¹³ Along similar lines, Virginia Burrus has pointed out that physical virginity is but a 'sign,' the very rhetoric of which encompasses wider issues of Christian community and doctrine as well as a specific concern for physical intactness.¹⁴

The second caveat concerns the danger of anachronistic concerns. We live in a culture dominated by the rhetoric of 'rights,' personal freedoms and expression: a culture, moreover, which I would go so far as to say, frequently confuses sexuality with sexual activity. In light of such presuppositions, the choice to abstain from sexual activity can only be interpreted as a negative choice, a repudiation of one's very self. Stafford's glossing of chastity as "spiritual castration" illustrates this interpretation of chastity as the repudiation of sexuality (not just sexual activity) and the embrace of asexuality.¹⁵ While our texts may ultimately make these very claims,¹⁶ I believe that we need to be aware of our own assumptions and not attribute to Ælfric, or the Church Fathers, the same perceived relationship between sexual activity and personhood that pervades our own culture. As for women's desiring autonomy or independence, it is possible that these values, indeed the very desires, found expression in forms different from those which we today enjoy. Of this tension, Kate Cooper writes that "it is misleading to look [in the virginal ideal] for the kind of freedom or autonomy that might emerge in a postindustrial society. The medium of prestige in our texts was a certification of *moral authority*, a *bonum* whose potency... should not be underestimated."¹⁷ Her exhortation that readers be sensitive to the symbolic values of the language of gender, values driven by the texts' historical paradigm, and not our own, holds as true for the Anglo-Saxon period as the Late Antique period which she addresses.¹⁸ In this light,

¹³ Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church," *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn et al. (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 428.

¹⁴ Virginia Burrus, "Word and Flesh: Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 35.

¹⁵ Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen" 10.

¹⁶ The early doctrine of the Eastern and Western Churches on the relationship between God's creation of male and female sexuality vis-à-vis the Fall has much to say to the question of virginity and asexuality.

¹⁷ Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1996) 84. My italics.

¹⁸ Cooper 4.

the discourse on virginity requires that other questions be asked, questions that allow for the powerful, symbolic potential of this ideal. A virgin's sequestering of her (or his) body from societal and familial claims cannot be read simply as a grasping after prestige or autonomy, any more than the choice of virginity can be interpreted as the unequivocal repudiation of the sexual, physical body, or the Fathers' treatises on virginity reduced to so many repressive dictums of grumpy misogynists. Claims of sanctification made by the Fathers for the virginal body as well as the resilience of this ideal over centuries suggest that such claims be taken seriously.¹⁹

To the end of sketching out the textual foundation of the ideal and idealization of virginity, I have selected from the seminal works on virginity by three Western Church Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome, and the later, formidable Anglo-Saxon "Father" Aldhelm. Throughout their works, dealt with in the first chapter as outlined below, the notion of polyvalence mentioned initially rises forcefully. Image vies with image, as the Fathers pile biblical allusions, figures, and types, one upon another. One representation of the supremacy and glory of virginity jostles another as these authors attempt to depict the glory and importance of the virginal life of faith.

Rather than attempt to summarize or present a history of the idealization of virginity, I have tried to elucidate how Ælfric, following in the tradition of his predecessors, employs the sign of virginity in the narratives of the married-virgin saints: a sign, I have become convinced, that relies as much upon a spiritualizing as physical vision of virginity. The ideal of virginity relies not only on types taken from the biblical tradition, but also serves a figural purpose itself. Indeed, I will argue, in the end, virginity plays a sacramental role. The Fathers employed typological interpretations to help establish virginity as a grace instituted in the New Testament, but the ideal does not conclude with virginity as the end and fulfillment of earlier Old Testament types. Virginity continues to point beyond itself and this signifying role sheds light upon the attraction and popularity of the virgin saints' lives and passions. From Ambrose, the fourth-century Bishop of Milan and "architect" of the virginal ideal, to Ælfric, a tenth-century abbot of Eynsham and dedicated Christian pedagogue, the figural aspect of virginity invites interpretations that focus upon other issues than physical purity, and these interpretations have consequences for persons other than virgins alone.

The question at hand--what is virginity?--is deceptively obvious. Beyond its primary denotation of virginal intactness, what did that word connote to Ælfric and the Fathers who preceded him? What did the ideal offer those living out the ascetic-monastic life? What then did it

¹⁹ Brown 436.

offer the wider Christian community? We know from Ælfric's prefaces to his *Lives of Saints* that he considers these narratives taken from the monastic sanctorale as fitting models of holiness for the laity. In both the Latin and Old English prefaces Ælfric informs the laymen Æthelweard and Æthelmær that the examples of the saints provide the faithful with "encouragement" or "edification," and that they "refresh the sluggish in faith."²⁰ Through an examination of Ælfric's portrayal and construction of virginity as an ideal, first in his more direct expositions of the subject and then in his *passiones* of the married-virgin saints, I hope to identify the concerns which define Ælfric's representation of virginity in these texts, and to set forth the significance of the sign of virginity for devout readers.

Perhaps under Augustinian influence, I find the tripartite notion of the sign, as developed by Ferdinand de Saussure, particularly helpful for exploring the values and expectations implicit within the sign of virginity. Saussure constructs the 'sign' as follows. 'Signal' (*signifiant*) denotes the "sound pattern" of a word, whereas 'signification' (*signifié*) refers to the concept communicated by this word.²¹ 'Signals' do not concern us here. The notion of signification is, however, of particular importance to the concept of virginity as a constructed ideal. Beyond their denotation of 'intactness' and 'physical chastity,' signs like Old English *mægðhad* and Latin *virginitas* carry 'values' defined by the cultural connotations and implicit assumptions lying beneath the surface of the sign's primary denotation. The significations of the vocabulary referring to physical purity reveal the symbolic role of the sign of virginity which I propose was of vital importance to its resilience and power as an ideal. Because virginity is first of all a corporeal condition, the body necessarily enters into the discussion. Within these frail jars of clay virgins preserve a treasure upon which attributions of spiritual blessing and an elite, even redemptive, status converge. The contexts and images in which the signs for the physical body occur illuminate the intersection of corporeal and spiritual values invested in virginity. More importantly, they reveal how Ælfric's concern for the virginal body differs from the Fathers'. Rather than attempt a diachronic history of the various signs for purity and body, I employ the concept of the sign simply to identify and analyze the terms and topoi pertaining to an ideal which captured and

²⁰ ÆLS (Preface) 71. "...getrymminge"; "Præfatio," Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, vol. I, 2.15-16. "...fide torpentes recreare." Also ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 341-46. In his article "Ælfric's Sanctorale," Michael Lapidge places great emphasis upon the liturgical aspect of Ælfric's project. I believe the two prefaces to the collection indicate quite clearly that while the medium may have been liturgical, Ælfric's motivation was pastoral. Lapidge, "Ælfric's Sanctorale," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives in Their Contexts*, ed. Paul Szarmach (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1996) 115.

²¹ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, transl. Roy Harris (La Salle: Open Court, 1983) 67; translator's introduction xi.

held the imagination of the Western Church for more than a millennium.

Chapter 1 of this study examines various aspects of the ideal of virginity in a few select works on virginity. These include: Ambrose's *De virginibus* and *De virginitate*; Jerome's *Epistula XXII* (the letter to Eustochium) and treatise *Adversus Jovinianum*; and Augustine's works on the three grades of chastity namely, *De bono coniugali*, *De sancta virginitate*, and *De bono viduitatis*. These works demonstrate their influence in the prose *De Virginitate* of the Anglo-Latin writer Aldhelm, whose difficult Latin works exercised a considerable influence upon authors of the Benedictine Reform like Bishop Æthelwold under whom Ælfric received his training.²² (Although he himself rejected such an exhaustingly difficult Latin style, Ælfric's own writings reveal that he was acquainted with Aldhelm's work.²³) These four writers employ a range of methods, like typologizing and scriptural exegesis, to illuminate the superlative nature and rank of virginity. After a brief examination of the words *virginitas*, *castitas*, and *integritas*, this chapter surveys the themes and topoi central to the portrayal and establishment of virginity's preeminence. Following a similar examination of the primary signs for the body, *corpus* and *caro*, the chapter concludes with an exploration of the manner in which the virgin was to understand her relationship to her own body as she practised and perfected holy chastity.

Throughout this first chapter I refer to and quote the Fathers at length in an effort to let these texts speak for themselves, as it were. Paraphrasing inevitably involves interpretation, and I believe that in regard to this sometimes contentious topic, it is important to provide the Fathers' writings alongside my analysis. The reader may then decide for her or himself whether my analysis is justified. If proof of the treacherous nature of these waters be needed, then Jo Ann McNamara's recent tome on women's monasticism can serve as an illustration of the dangers of expository paraphrasing and hypothesizing beyond one's data.²⁴ To do complete justice to the Latin vocabulary in question would obviously require a thesis of its own, and since my concern lies in Ælfric's construction of the ideal of virginity in Old English in relation to the established tradition of the Fathers, the first chapter is far from exhaustive. I do not discuss every issue and theme

²² See Michael Lapidge, "The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature," *ASE* 4 (1975): 73-76. (For Ælfric's reaction *against* Aldhelm's influence, 101.) Lapidge, "Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher," *Bishop Æthelwold: His Career and Influence*, ed. Barbara Yorke (Wolfeboro, New Hampshire: Boydell Press, 1988) 97-100. Lapidge and Michael Winterbottom, "Introduction," *Wulfstan of Winchester: the Life of Saint Æthelwold* (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1991) lxxxviii. (Here the editors note Æthelwold's stylistic debt to Aldhelm in the *prohemium* of the *Regularis Concordia*). The most recent contribution to the question of Aldhelm's influence upon the Benedictine Reforms is Mechthild Gretsch's *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1999).

²³ Lapidge, "The Hermeneutic Style" 101; "Æthelwold as Scholar and Teacher" 108.

²⁴ See p. 4, footnote 11.

which plays a role in the Latin Fathers' portrayal of virginity. My treatment of the Virgin Mary is, for example, markedly cursory. Because her role and cult in the Anglo-Saxon context have been so well discussed by Mary Clayton, and because Ælfric himself avoids much related to the Virgin's cult which he considers apocryphal, I have taken the liberty of sidestepping her role in the Latin texts in order to focus instead upon themes and figures which have not been as thoroughly developed elsewhere and which surface in the Ælfrician writings discussed in the following chapters.²⁵

The second chapter takes up the same questions of signification with respect to the Old English signs for virginity and body, based upon the vocabulary found in Ælfric's discussions of virginity as well as in his *passiones* of the married-virgin saints. While Ælfric wrote no treatises on virginity as did the Church Fathers, certain of his works nevertheless display a concern for sexual purity, especially in connection to the service of God. In order to establish Ælfric's more general representation of virginity before turning to the exemplary works of the married-virgin saints, I have chosen to examine the vocabulary of purity and body in one of Ælfric's pastoral letters, his "Letter to Sigefyrth," and one of his homilies, *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*. Ælfric wrote his letter to the layman Sigefyrth in order to defend the celibacy of the priesthood, but he addresses the subject of purity more generally as well. His homily on Mary's Nativity moves swiftly from the subject of the Virgin to virgins in general, and he bases his treatment of the subject in large part on Augustine's *De sancta virginitate*. I attempt here to lay out the significations and values of the virginal life as revealed by a close examination of the following terms: *mægðhad* 'virginity,' *clænnnes* 'purity' or 'chastity,' *lichama* 'body,' and *flæsc* 'flesh.'

The selection of these particular words requires some comment. Although this chapter is not a lexical study proper, I have tried to be as thorough as possible in my examination of these

²⁵ Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1990).

particular terms. There are of course other terms for 'purity,' 'body,' and 'flesh.'²⁶ I selected *mægðhad* and *clænnes* because these are the words most commonly used by Ælfric to denote 'virginity,' 'chastity,' and 'purity.' The selection of *lichama* and *flæsc* is a little more problematic, for there are numerous words used to signify the physical body. *Lichama* is by far the signifier most frequently employed by Ælfric.²⁷ It is an irony of the history of the English language that *bodig*, the word that eventually won the semantic day, occurs only six times in Ælfric, and never in the texts under discussion here.²⁸ The Old English word *lic* I eliminated on the grounds of its frequent denotation of the 'dead body.'²⁹ Where *lic* does not refer to the dead body, it frequently denotes the body reduced to its most objective status. For example, in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria, when Chrysanthus' persecutors sew him up in rawhide, Ælfric refers to the saint's *nacod lic*.³⁰ The body denoted by *lic* does not appear to have the same active status as either the *lichama* that engages with the soul in (or in opposition to) the Christian life, or the *flæsc* which Ælfric sometimes sets up in opposition to the life of the soul. In addition to *flæsc* and *lichama* showing up as glosses for *caro* and *corpus*, the two words demonstrate a range of signification

²⁶ In addition to consulting *A Thesaurus of Old English in Two Volumes, Volume I: Introduction to Thesaurus, Volume II: Index*, by Jane Roberts and Christian Kay (London: Kings College London, 1995), I also searched the Dictionary of Old English's online corpus for glosses of the related Latin terms and then searched the Ælfrician corpus for occurrences of these Old English terms. For example, the Latin *integritas* where it denotes virginal intactness is variously glossed: *integritate corporis*, *fulfremednyss lichaman* (LibSc 13.24); *carnis integritas*, *flæsces fulfremednyss* (LibSc 13.26); *integritatis*, *ansundnesse* (ArPrGl 1 2.1). The most abundant glosses for *integritas* are the Aldhelm glosses which include forms of 'onwealhnes,' 'ansundnes,' 'clænnes,' 'sidefulnes' (e.g. AldV 1 449, 1630, 2160; AldV 13.1 1718). Ælfric nowhere uses 'onwealhnes.' Although he uses *ansund* in conjunction with *mægðhad* (e.g. ÆLS[(Julian and Basilissa) 43], the only instance of 'ansundnes' refers to the wholeness of gemstones, not virginal intactness (ÆCHom I, 4 208.63-64). As for 'sidefulnes,' Ælfric tends to employ this word to denote the virtue of modesty or purity of a more general nature. (Cf. ÆLS (Pr Moses) 120; ÆAbusMor 161) Neither the words which I have selected nor any of the synonyms for body or purity is, to the best of my knowledge, included among the Winchester vocabulary. Cf. Helmut Gneuss, "The origin of Standard Old English and Æthelwold's school at Winchester," (ASE 1 [1972], repr. *Language and History in Early England*. Aldershot: Variorum Press, 1996), 63-84. Gneuss suggests a possible shift from the use of *afeormian* to (*ge*)*clænsian*, but that is the closest that any of our words approach to official Winchester vocabulary (77). Also, Walter Hofstetter, *Winchester und der späaltenglische Sprachgebrauch* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987) 38-66; Hofstetter, "Winchester and the standardization of Old English vocabulary," ASE 17 (1988): 139-61.

²⁷ There are about five hundred occurrences of noun forms of *lichama*- and *lichoma*-. If adjectival and adverbial forms are added to this there are well over six hundred instances of *licha/om*- throughout the Ælfrician corpus.

²⁸ ÆCHom I, 26 389.42; ÆCHom II, 39.1 292.158; ÆLS (Edmund) 137, 165; ÆHomM (Ass 9) 301; ÆGI 319.16.

²⁹ E.g. ÆCHom I, 7 238.206; ÆCHom II, 2 13.54; ÆLS (Julian & Basilissa) 210, 269, 430, 432. Ælfric uses *lic* to gloss both *corpus* (ÆGI 319.15), and *cadaver* (ÆGI 319.17).

³⁰ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 160. See also ÆLS (Cecilia) 13, ÆCHom I, 18 246.18.

paralleling the Latin terms.³¹ I confine the discussion of *mægðhad*, *clænnes*, *lichama* and *flæsc* primarily to those occurrences of these words in the “Letter to Sigefyrth” and *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*. I have, however, to the best of my knowledge, examined every occurrence of these words (in addition to their related adjectival and adverbial forms) throughout the Ælfrician corpus and I draw upon the wider corpus as necessary.

With Chapter 3, the discussion turns to the narratives of the married-virgin saints. This chapter consists of a close examination of Ælfric’s translation of the *Passio Sancti Iuliani et Sponse Eius Basilisse* in comparison to the Latin tradition represented by the Cotton-Corpus Legendary which is generally accepted, with some reservation, to be closely related to the exemplar for Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints*.³² This chapter examines how Ælfric takes up some of the themes seen in the first and second chapters in his celebration of these saints and the virginal life they choose. The comparison with the version found in the Cotton-Corpus Legendary reveals several significant changes in Ælfric’s translation with regard to the role of the female saint, Basilissa. His modifications of Basilissa’s role in the narrative, together with certain omissions, reflect not only upon Ælfric’s own prioritization of the regular life over the ascetic, but suggest a purposeful avoidance of an especial connection between sexual purity and women. Virginity’s prominence in this *passio* depends upon its signification of the eternal, rather than upon a concern for corporeal

³¹ In order to give a sense of the range of these two signs, and demonstrate why I chose these terms as parallels to *caro* and *corpus*, the following is a brief survey of Ælfric’s use of *flæsc*- and *licham*-. *Flæsc*: in collocation with *lust* (ÆLS [Auguries] 1; ÆCHom II, 6 55.94); the fallen condition of man from the time of Adam (ÆLet 2 [Wulfstan] 1.9; ÆCHom I, 38 506.20); *flæsc* and *blod* (free of the moral connotation) (ÆCHom II, 12.2 123.466); in opposition to the spirit, but not morally negative (ÆCHom I, 27 405.158-59); of the Eucharist (ÆCHom II, 15 162.70, 152.71, 156.193); of Christ’s incarnation (ÆCHom I, 2 194.126-27; ÆCHom I, 3 200.66; ÆHom I 51.403); of bodily resurrection (ÆCHom I, 35 482.201); of meat (ÆCHom II, 15 150.8, 158.273); gloss of *caro* (ÆGI 298.11, 316.5; ÆLS [Auguries] 1; ÆLet 2 [Wulfstan] 1 8a; ÆLet 3 [Wulfstan] 2 13). *Lichama* covers a wide range from mere perishable, mortal body (ÆCHom I, 1 182.16-17) to human body in relation to the soul. The passages containing collocations of *lichama* and *sawol* most clearly illustrate the difference between the values and signification of the two words. Though different in nature (ÆCHom I, 19 328.101-329.105), the *lichama* is forever inseparably united to the soul, whether in the sins of the body or in the pursuit of righteousness, and consequently for all eternity (ÆHom I 11.481; ÆCHom II, 45 343.272). Ælfric compares the human experience of life in both soul and body to Christ’s dwelling in both divinity and humanity (ÆCHom I, 2 196.174-80; ÆCHom I, 30 438.271-73). The soul is the life of the body as it is not to the flesh (ÆLS [Christmas] 143). Other contexts and connotations of *lichama*: of human perishability (ÆCHom I, 16 308.32-33; ÆCHom II, 36.1 270.81; in collocation with *deadlic* or *deað* (ÆCHom I, 7 209.241, 246); of eternity and bodily resurrection (ÆCHom I, 27 405.156-57; ÆCHom II, 43 314.118; ÆCHom II, 21 187.23); of the type of the Church (ÆCHom II, 15 157.229, with *limu*; ÆHomM8 [Ass 3] 153, 168); of the Eucharist (ÆCHom II, 14.1 139.47; ÆCHom II, 15 152.78, 153.100; ÆLS [Peter’s Chair] 224); of Christ’s incarnation (ÆCHom I, 7 235.119); of human physicality, sensibility, etc. (ÆCHom I, 32 458.209; ÆCHom II, 26 214.44); as offering to God (ÆCHom I, 32 454.99; ÆCHom I, 11 273.197-99; ÆCHom II, 12.1 120.36); gloss of *corpus* (ÆLS [Cecilia] 23; ÆGram 16.16, 59.4, 233.1).

³² Patrick Zettel first proposed a relationship between Ælfric’s *Lives of Saints* and Cotton-Corpus Legendary in his “Ælfric’s Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in B.L. MS Cotton Nero E i + CCCC MS 9 and Other Manuscripts.” (Diss. Oxford University, 1979.) See Chapter 3 below for a synopsis of the debate over Zettel’s conclusions.

purity as such.

The fourth chapter turns to the *passiones* of Chrysanthus and Daria, and of Cecilia. In these two narratives, as in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, virginity functions as the sign of a paradigmatic opposition. Here, however, the opposition between the virginal Chrysanthus and Daria and their irrational, sexualized antagonists is far more earthbound. Cecilia's *passio* takes up topoi similar to those seen in Julian and Basilissa's narrative, and focuses upon the celestial nature of the virginal life. In neither *passio* does the promotion or importance of physical purity explain the full significance of virginity. Indeed Ælfric's depiction of virginity in these two *passiones* pushes virginity's symbolic capacity to the forefront in a manner that requires an increasingly sacramental interpretation of the sign of virginity.

This study concludes with a brief examination of the purpose of these *passiones* as laid out by Ælfric in his "epilogue" to Chrysanthus and Daria's story. Again, Ælfric significantly modifies his probable source, developing the purpose of these holy narratives in light of the coming end times. The apocalyptic concerns which dominate the epilogue, in combination with Ælfric's explicit statements that the miracles of these saints will have no counterparts in the end-time persecutions, push the exemplary role of the saints toward a more symbolic rather than practical *imitatio* per se. Such an interpretation of the saints helps underscore the spiritualizing and symbolic aspect of the ideal of virginity in these texts. Rather than simply depicting physical virginity as the preeminent life of faith, Ælfric offers virginity as a preeminent symbol, a sign whose rich polyvalence embraces the larger Christian community as well as the virgin.

Chapter I

*So dear to Heav'n is Saintly chastity,
That when a soul is found sincerely so,
A thousand liveried Angels lacky her,
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,
And in cleer dream, and solemn vision
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,
Till oft convers with heav'nly habitants
Begin to cast a beam on th' outward shape,
The unpolluted temple of the mind,
And turn it by degrees to the souls essence,
Till all be made immortal.*

John Milton ¹

Over the course of the fourth and fifth centuries, treatises on the practice and practicality of virginity proliferated throughout the newly legalized Church. Greek and Latin Fathers alike promoted virginity as the highest expression of the Christian life. Classical rhetoric, Scripture, the lives of ascetics, and the deaths of martyrs all played a role in this historic phenomenon as author after author declared and defended his position in a contest of ideologies which would prove defining for the Church not only in this early period, but throughout the centuries to follow. The authority of Cicero and Solomon alike, the voices of holy virgins who died protecting their purity, and of the celebrated matrons who lived abstinent lives of reclamation, each “contributed” ably and eloquently to the Fathers’ treatises. Among the Latin Fathers, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome helped establish the importance and idealization of virginity in these early centuries. If the formation of virginity as an ideal is traced northward to Anglo-Saxon England several centuries later, a fourth “Father” may be added. Aldhelm, abbot of Malmesbury and later Bishop of Sherborne, followed closely in the tradition of his predecessors as he celebrated the glories of virginity in the first flowering of monasticism in Anglo-Saxon England. For each of these Fathers, the point was rarely mere “intactness.” Bodily purity itself is too small a concern. The essence of virginity in these texts surpasses the limits of the frail human corpus and strains towards the perfection and grace of an Edenic past and paradisiacal future. Far from inscribing mere prohibition and repression on the virginal body, as has sometimes been asserted, the Fathers used virginity as the text on which they wrote a discourse of eternity.

Obviously the language of virginity can never be spiritualized to the point of erasing the body, for that would erase virginity itself. The preservation of physical, intact purity is inseparable from the spiritual ideal, and Jerome’s vituperative *Adversus Jovinianum* testifies to how strongly at least one of the Church Fathers felt the need to defend and champion virginity as *virginity*.

¹ John Milton, *Comus: A Mask* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1926) 16.

Ontological caveats notwithstanding, the works of Ambrose, Augustine and Aldhelm--and even the strident voice of Jerome--offer readings of the ideal which point continually beyond the body. Like the figure of John the Baptist throughout Renaissance painting, forever pointing at Christ, the ideal of virginity presented by the Fathers (and by Ælfric in the works examined in later chapters) directs the reader to look beyond the mere sign of physical intactness to what lies beyond. From among the various theories as to why virginity attained such ideological and theological prominence² one thing can be asserted with certainty: virginity came to be interpreted as the most perfect expression of the Christian life. Various writers took up the topic, but it was Ambrose Bishop of Milan, more than any other Western Father, "who catapulted the virginal ideal to prominence in the Latin Church," employing the craft of typological exegesis in an attempt to express fully the worth and honour of virginity.³ Jerome and Augustine of Hippo were two other early Fathers whose influence reverberated not only through late Antiquity, but indeed throughout the Middle Ages. The continuing tradition of treatises on the ideal of virginity, as well as the exaltation and institutionalization of virginity (seen in the proliferation of the monastic orders and the increasing insistence upon the celibacy of the priesthood) all attest to the lasting importance of this ideal. Later writers like Aldhelm knew the works of these Church Fathers and referred to them extensively in their own works on the virginal life.

Ambrose wrote about virginity copiously and his works were seminal to the development of perpetual chastity as the ideal expression of the faithful Christian life. Of his numerous

² Kate Cooper discusses the promotion of holy virginity as a response to the need for religious identities beyond that of the merely clerical, such as those available in the pagan household and cultic system (*The Virgin and the Bride: Idealized Womanhood in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Harvard UP [1996], at 74-77); Averil Cameron hypothesizes that the focus upon virginity was intimately linked to the contemporary doctrinal debate over Christ's incarnate nature and the related issue of the Virgin Mary's motherhood and virginity (*Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire*, Los Angeles: U of CA Press [1991], 68-73); The most invaluable contribution to this complex subject is Peter Brown's *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988), in which he examines the multiple meanings and emphases of virginity, from virginity as the heir to martyrdom to virginity as the repudiation of the values and workings of a fallen world. Other studies which explore the more sexually pessimistic side of virginity, and posit women's (re)interpretations of virginity include Virginia Burrus, "Word and Flesh: Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 27-51; Elizabeth Castelli, "Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2.1 (1986): 61-88; Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (New York: Verso, 1991).

³ Cooper 78.

treatises, only the *De virginibus* and *De virginitate* are discussed here.⁴ In both works he strives “to sow the seeds of integrity and stir up the pursuit of virginity,”⁵ and to defend himself against the attacks he endures for preaching *castitas*.⁶ He wrote *De virginibus* (377 A.D.) for his sister, Marcellina, a consecrated nun. In Book I of *De virginibus* Ambrose defends the virginal life. In Book II he sets before Marcellina a pattern of life befitting the consecrated, and in Book III he recalls his sister’s consecration and Pope Liberius’ address on the occasion before returning again to set forth the right practice and life of a virgin. *De virginitate* (c. 378 A.D.) is a similarly wide-ranging defence of the virginal life, in which Ambrose instructs the virgin at length on the cultivation of her interior life.

If Ambrose lays the foundation for virginity as the ideal expression of the Christian life, Jerome pulls out all the offensive and defensive rhetorical weapons at his disposal in order to entrench that ideal as revealed truth. The letter “Ad Eustochium” and the first book *Adversus Jovinianum* are representative of the concerns and methods found throughout Jerome’s œuvre.⁷ These two texts demonstrate the conflicting mixture of pastoral concern found in Jerome’s letters to female friends, and the acerbic, seemingly misogynistic, tone which riddles his infamous apology for the virginal life. In his letter to Eustochium (384 A.D.) Jerome carefully spells out for her the reasons for preserving one’s purity and the manner of life which befits a virgin. *Adversus Jovinianum* (392 A.D.) is the one text included in this study which is not specifically addressed to a female or even necessarily ascetic audience. It is included because it contains one of his most comprehensive justifications of virginity.⁸ The troubling nature of Jerome’s rhetoric in the

⁴ Ambrose, *De Virginitate*, ed. Egnatius Cazzaniga, CSLP (Turin: G. B. Paravia & C., 1948). English translation: *On Virginity*, trans. Daniel Callam (Saskatoon: Peregrina Publishing Co., 1987). Ambrose, *De Virginibus, Libri Tres*, ed. Egnatius Cazzaniga, CSLP (Turin: G. B. Paravia & C., 1948). English translation: “Concerning Virgins,” *St Ambrose Select Works and Letters*, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 10 (Oxford: James Parker & Company, 1896) 361-87. Hereafter in notes, I refer to these works by the short titles of the *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*, AMBR.Virgin. and AMBR.Virg.Marc., followed by page and line number. For all the Fathers under discussion, where I have quoted from translations, the source is duly noted. Otherwise, the translations provided are my own.

⁵ AMBR.Virgin. 13.2. “...iacere semina integritatis et virginitatis studia provocare.”

⁶ AMBR.Virgin. 12.13-19.

⁷ Jerome, “Ad Eustochium, Epistle XXII,” *Hieronymus, Epistularum Pars I, I-LXX*, ed. Isidorus Hilberg, CSEL 54 (Vienna: G. Gerold, 1996) 143-211. English translation: “Letter XXII. To Eustochium,” *St Jerome Letters and Select Works*, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 6 (Oxford: James Parker & Company, 1893) 22-42. Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum Libri Duo, PL 23*, ed. J. P. Migne (1883) 221-395. English translation: “Against Jovinian,” *St Jerome Letters and Select Works*, eds. Henry Wace and Philip Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church 6 (Oxford: James Parker & Company, 1893) 346-416. References hereafter in notes are by *Fontes’* short titles, *HIER.Epist.XXII.* and *HIER.Adv.Jovin.*, followed by page and line numbers.

⁸ I focus on Book I of *Adversus Jovinianum* because Jerome particularly addresses the subject of virginity in the first half of the treatise.

Adversus Jovinianum requires a caveat, for it is important to keep in mind that the desire to destroy Jovinian impelled Jerome to employ his formidable rhetorical skills. Although later readers may not have fully recognized it, Jerome's commitment to refuting Jovinian may have led him to assert positions in the *Adversus* to which he himself was not fully committed. Given the occasionally stark contrast between the tone of "Ad Eustochium" and that of *Adversus*, it is possible that he shifted the focus and nature of his argument as was most expedient. John Oppel in his article, "Saint Jerome and the History of Sex," provides a surprisingly sympathetic reading of *Adversus*. He interprets *Adversus* as Jerome's attempt to place men and women (specifically within marriage) on a more equal footing, by eliminating that which inserts the struggle for power into human relations: sex.⁹ Regardless of its possible subtleties and pitfalls, the *Adversus* played a fundamental role in the tradition of texts on virginity. References to it surface time and again in the works of later writers like Aldhelm, sometimes with all the vehemence with which Jerome first attacked Jovinian.

Even in his own time much of the *Adversus* was considered "outré" by other supporters of the ascetic ideal.¹⁰ Augustine, for one, in his *De bono coniugali*, *De sancta virginitate* (both circa 401 A.D.) and *De bono viduitatis* (414 A.D.) tried to temper Jerome's acerbic defense of the supremacy of virginity. At the same time he too took issue with the "heretic" Jovinian's claims that marriage and virginity were of equal value.¹¹ In *De bono coniugali* Augustine steps to the defense of marriage upon the basis of its three goods (children, fidelity and sacrament), while maintaining the orthodox argument for the superiority of virginity. He continues this defense in *De sancta virginitate* with greater theological subtlety, and finally completes his treatment of the three respective grades of chastity in *De bono viduitatis*, which he addressed to the recently veiled widow Juliana.

Aldhelm's prose *De Virginitate* (c. 672) is the last of the Latin works to be dealt with in this

⁹ John Oppel, "Saint Jerome and the History of Sex," *Viator* 24 (1993): 17.

¹⁰ Brown 411-12.

¹¹ Augustine, *De bono coniugali* and *De sancta virginitate*, in *Sancti Aureli Augustini*, ed. J. Zycha, CSEL 41 (Vienna: G. Gerold, 1900) 186-231; 234-302. English translation: "The Good of Marriage" and "Holy Virginity," *Saint Augustine Treatises on Marriage and Other Subjects*, trans. Charles T. Wilcox; John McQuade, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1955) 3-51; 135-212; *De bono viduitatis*, in *Sancti Aureli Augustini*, ed. J. Zycha, CSEL 41, 1900, 304-343. English translation: "The Excellence of Widowhood," trans. Sister M. Clement Eagan, *Saint Augustine: Treatises on Various Subjects*, ed. Roy J. Deferrari (Fathers of the Church, Inc.: New York, 1952) 267-319. The short titles, AVG.Bon.coniug., AVG.San.virgin., and AVG.Bon.viduit., are likewise followed by page and line numbers.

chapter.¹² Aldhelm is, for the purposes of this study which looks towards the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon writer Ælfric, a transitional figure. He addressed his difficult treatise to Abbess Hildelith and the nuns at the double monastery of Barking, Essex. The influence of Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine can all be seen in Aldhelm. The florid language with which Aldhelm alternately praises virginity and criticizes that which threatens it colours the *De Virginitate* with an acidic quality similar to Jerome's tone in *Adversus Jovinianum*. Beneath Aldhelm's rhetoric, however, there lies a more moderate tone than one finds in Jerome, for Aldhelm in the end is, like Augustine, deeply concerned about the preservation of humility as well as virginity. Throughout his impassioned celebration of the honour and glory of virginity, he cautions continually against the sin of pride which will forever tarnish virginity's glory.

The first three of these authors, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, each contributed to the shape of the virginal ideal which held sway in the Roman Church throughout the Middle Ages. Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* provides a glimpse into one early Anglo-Saxon's reception and transmission of that Latin ideal to English nuns under his spiritual tutelage. Each of these authors proposes that the life of perpetual chastity ought not only to shape the manner in which virgins perceive and relate to the world around them, but also to rule the relationship between their own souls and the troublesome physical bodies which they occupy during this life.

In this chapter I propose only to examine particular themes and topoi in Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and Aldhelm. What follows is intended as an introduction to these formative texts on virginity. To do justice to these writers would, however, require a thesis in itself, and the point of this chapter is not so much the individual teachings of the Fathers, but the foundation which they laid for all writings on virginity leading up to the time of Ælfric of Eynsham during the tenth-century Benedictine Reform. The study which follows is divided into two major sections. The first section focuses upon virginity per se and the second on the physical body in which the virginal life is led. After surveying the terminology (*virginitas*, *castitas* and *integritas*), we turn to the topos of the three grades of chastity, beginning with a comparison of marriage and virginity, and then moving on to the hierarchical treatment of all three grades. Methods by which the Fathers constructed virginity as the authoritative Christian life and made it synonymous with spiritual prestige are next proposed, followed by an exploration of the images applied to virgins and the sacramental implications of that imagery. With this, the study moves into the second half,

¹² Aldhelm, *De Virginitate, Aldhelmi Opera*, ed. Rudolf Ehwald, MGH, Auctores Antiquissimi 15 (Munich, 1884) 226-323. English translation: "The Prose *De Virginitate*," *Aldhelm the Prose Works*, trans. Michael Lapidge and Michael Herren (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979) 59-132. Hereafter, I refer to it by the short title ALDH.Pros.virg., followed by the page and line number.

beginning with the evidence for the Fathers' gendering of the virginal body. After this the relevant terminology (*corpus* and *caro*) and its signification is discussed with particular reference to the Pauline distinction between *soma* and *sarx* ('body' and 'flesh'). The imagery pertaining to the body which reflects upon the value and role it plays in the virginal life is surveyed, and finally, I conclude with a discussion of the Fathers' constitution of the relationship between the virgin and the earthly body in which she pursues purity.¹³

I. *Virginitas, Castitas, Integritas*

A. Terminology

In the works of Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Aldhelm, *virginitas*, *integritas* and *castitas* can each denote the state of consecrated virginity.¹⁴ Of these three *castitas* has the widest range of meanings, and can be applied to any of the three grades of chastity (i.e. virginity, marriage and widowhood). Wives and husbands who render the debt of the marriage bed to one another for the procreation of children, together with widows who live abstinently after the death of their spouse are equally 'chaste.' Through the preservation of pure and perpetual virginity, however, virgins live the highest form of chastity. Aldhelm's exhortation that virgins "elevated on the lofty pinnacle of virginity" not look down upon those who only attain the "second grade of chastity" illustrates the potential distinction between the terms *virginitas* and *castitas*.¹⁵ Unlike the traditional formulation of the three grades of chastity as virginity, marriage and widowhood, Aldhelm transforms the grades into 'virginity,' 'chastity,' and 'conjugalit.'¹⁶ Here *virginitas* refers to virginal intactness and *castitas* to deliberate abstinence. None of the Fathers, however, consistently preserves the distinction between virginity and chastity. Thus in his interpretation of virginity as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy Jerome writes that with the coming of the Holy Spirit young men and women "thirst for virginity, and burst forth in the intoxication of chastity."¹⁷ Sometimes the Fathers avoid the potential ambiguity of *castitas* by using alternate words like *pudicitia* ('chastity' or 'modesty') or *castimonia* ('chastity') to denote 'chastity,' as in

¹³ Because these texts, with the exception of *Adversus Jovinianum*, were addressed to women, I employ feminine pronouns throughout the chapter when referring to virgins, even though the texts themselves frequently employ masculine pronouns when discussing virgins. Interestingly, just the opposite is true in the case of *Adversus*. Here, in a text not addressed to women, Jerome often refers to virgins with feminine pronouns, perhaps revealing all the more clearly his own conviction of the importance of virginity for women.

¹⁴ In the discussion which follows, I do not always refer to all four authors for each particular element. In some cases this is because one or two authors did not refer to a particular topos/image within their work. In other cases this is because their work coincides closely with the work of another author who develops the element in greater detail or to greater effect.

¹⁵ ALDH.Prov.virg. 242.16-18. "...edito virginitatis fastigio sublimati ... secundum castitatis gradum." Trans. 70.

¹⁶ ALDH.Prov.virg. 248.11. "...virginitas, castitas, iugalitas." Trans. 75.

¹⁷ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 265.26-30. "...virginitatem sitiunt; et in crapulam castitatis eructant." [Zec 9:17; Rom 7: 6.]

Ambrose's reference to the chastity of consecrated widows as *castimonia* (a word applied far less frequently to virgins).¹⁸ Another strategy for clarifying the precise nature of the chastity in question is the use of descriptive and restrictive clauses. For example, Augustine, who freely applies the term *castitas* to both abstinence within marriage and to lawful sexual relations, writes of "the chastity of continence" and "the chastity of marriage."¹⁹ For Augustine, obedience or fidelity is the defining characteristic of *castitas* whether the chastity be that of a wife toward her husband, or a virgin or widow toward God. As he writes, "There can be obedience to precepts without virginity, but there cannot be this obedience without chastity... Virginity can exist by itself without obedience, since the woman can, although accepting the councils of virginity and guarding her virginity, neglect the precepts."²⁰

Integritas literally denotes 'wholeness' or a condition of completeness. Like *virginitas* it can refer to a more technical state of physical purity which is not contingent upon obedience. As signs for physical virginity, these words unambiguously refer to the virginally 'intact.' Both words, however, appear in contexts treating non-corporeal, spiritual virginity. For this reason, Ambrose warns his reader that "virginity of the flesh alone does not constitute merit, but rather virginity (*integritas*) of the mind."²¹ Augustine uses *integritas* analogously with reference to the virtues of the Church in order to describe how all Christians participate as members of the Virgin Church through the *integritas* of faith, hope and love.²²

As the sign for corporeal, virginal purity, *integritas* occurs with a significantly higher frequency in Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* than any of the other Latin works concerned. In addition to this, he also uses a greater number of modifiers denoting the condition of being intact, whole, or

¹⁸ AMBR.Virgin. 7.6-8. In the case of "*integritatis castimonia*" where *castimonia* denotes virginal chastity, Aldhelm combines it with *integritas* so as to leave no doubt as to the type of chastity in question. ALDH.Pros.virg. 293.4. "...innocent purity" (literally "the chastity of her wholeness"). Trans. 107.

¹⁹ AVG.Bon.coniug. 223.24 - 224.2. "...*castitatem continentiae... castitatem nuptialem.*" Trans. 44.

²⁰ AVG.Bon.coniug. 225.14-16. "*Ideoque obædientia præceptorum sine virginitate quidem potest, sed sine castitate esse non potest. Ad castitatem namque pertinet non fornicari, non mæchari, nullo illicito concubitu maculari... Virginitas autem propterea potest esse sine obædientia, quia potest femina consilio virginitatis accepto et custodita virginitate præcepta contemnere.*" Trans. 46.

²¹ AMBR.Virgin. 8.18-19. "...*meritum non sola carnis virginitas facit, sed etiam mentis integritas.*"

²² AVG.Bon.viduit. 319.15-18. "*Cui ecclesia ipsa, cuius membra sunt, coniux est, quæ fidei, spei, caritatis integritate non in solis virginibus sanctis, sed etiam in viduis et coniugatis fidelibus tota virgo est.*" "The Church itself, of which they are members, is likewise His Bride, and by the integrity of faith, hope, and charity, not only in holy virgins, but also in widows and the wedded faithful, is ever a Virgin." Trans. 294.

unspotted.²³ The increased frequency of *integritas* does not necessarily indicate a heightened concern for physical purity. Instead the frequency of *integritas* actually results from a greater number of comparisons in Aldhelm between physical and spiritual virginity, wherein he employs *integritas* to signify the physical and *virginitas* (and its synonyms) to signify the spiritual. If Jerome was concerned (as we shall see) with the maintenance of physical purity and the pitfalls into which the flesh could lead the virgin, then Aldhelm's great fear is the separation of physical purity from spiritual chastity. All of the Fathers, Ambrose perhaps least of all, warned of the loss of spiritual virginity, but Augustine and Aldhelm admonish persistently that physical integrity--without question a beatific condition--must be mirrored by inner faithfulness and spiritual chastity. To this end Aldhelm enjoins his readers, "Let the perfection of blessed virginity be adorned... by the pious chastity of the interior."²⁴ By using *integritas* here to specify a feature of virginity, but not the whole, Aldhelm restricts *integritas* to 'intactness,' while allowing *virginitas* to encompass the wider (ontological) concerns of the nature and quality of the virgin's purity.

B. The Three Grades of Chastity

Before turning to the topos of the three grades of chastity proper, it must be noted that in this early period of the virginal ideal, marriage rather than widowhood competed with virginity for the bodies of Christians. Widowed men and women could live in an abstinence which imitated the virginal life, as did the grandmother and mother to whom Augustine addressed his *De bono viduitatis*. But the idealization of virginity displaced the rank and honour accorded to married women of this period. Peter Brown notes that a variety of forms of continence were practised in the early Church, even within marriage. So vows of perpetual continence existed side-by-side with the pervasive practice of "temporary continence," but the latter "never came to bear the same symbolic charge" as perpetual continence.²⁵ The Fathers' promotion of virginity concerns more than 'sex' or 'repression,' and their exaltation of virginity over marriage presented several threats

²³ Throughout the *De Virginitate* Aldhelm modifies terms for virginal purity with adjectives for 'intact,' 'whole' or 'uncontaminated.' Indeed, he begins by identifying his purpose in writing this treatise for the nuns of Barking as the veneration of "the glory of incorrupt virginity" (321.4, "*intactæ virginitatis gloria*" [trans. 130]). He describes Gregory Nazianzus as guarding a "crown of undefiled purity" (263.95, "*illæsa puritatis coronam*" [trans. 86]). Alluding to II Cor 4:7 Aldhelm identifies the treasure borne about in earthen vessels as that of "intact virginity" (246.20, "*illæsa virginitas*" [trans. 74]). *Illibata*, meaning 'undiminished' or 'unimpaired,' also occurs frequently in Aldhelm. St Luke, for instance, is described as "the purest devotee of unimpaired chastity" (256.19-20, "*illibatæ castitatis comes pudicissimus*" [trans. 82]). Aldhelm praises a hermit for his "unimpaired gift of pure virginity" and his avoidance of women. (267.18, "*puræ virginitatis munus illibatum*" [trans. 89]). Aldhelm claims that the "uncontaminated chastity of [Pope Sylvester's] body" supported and endowed the pope with the power to conquer a dragon and perform miracles (258. 2-3, "*incontaminata corporis pudicitia*" [trans. 82]).

²⁴ ALDH.Prov.virg. 313.15-16. "*Ornetur...beatæ virginitatis integritas...interioris religiosa castitate!*" Trans. 124.

²⁵ Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church," *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff, Jean Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 428.

to the secular status quo. By negating the role of sexuality within the realm of society, virginity negated the dominance of the earthly social order. As Brown points out, discussions of virginity merge the issues of individual sexuality and “the social implications of marital intercourse.”²⁶ To interpret these texts as attacks upon “the joys of sex” is to misconstrue the force with which the acceptance of a sexual role “implied solidarity in a willingness to be married... [which], in turn, implied a willingness to be conscripted into society as normally constituted in a late classical... environment.”²⁷ The preeminence of ascetic ideals in general, and virginity in particular, secured a social hierarchy that competed with the traditional Roman aristocracy and eventually reordered its terms fundamentally.²⁸

This particularly current debate concerning societal roles and pressures may account for Ambrose’s focus upon the comparison between marriage and virginity in his *De virginitate* and *De virginibus* and his disregard for the ranking of all three grades of chastity. He wishes to illuminate the chasm which lies between the grace inherent to the virginal state and the grace afforded to the married. For their parts, Jerome and Augustine both refer to the paradigmatic shift between the Old and New Testaments, the law and grace, as a means of concretizing the supremacy of virginity over marriage, and Aldhelm, although he refers to the distinction between marriage and virginity in the context of the *vita angelica* (discussed below), addresses far more attention to comparisons of the three grades of chastity together than the contrast between marriage and virginity alone.

The central biblical precedent for the preference of virginity over marriage comes from St Paul’s teaching that virgins are not distracted from serving the Lord and thus “may be holy both in body and spirit” in a manner which the married cannot.²⁹ This does not mean that the married are not holy in body and spirit; the difference is one of quality. “In marriage,” Ambrose explains, “is

²⁶ Brown, “The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church” 428.

²⁷ Brown, “The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church” 428-429.

²⁸ This shift had serious consequences for the ranking of marriage and virginity. Rather than private moral conduct (such as sexual temperance and familial relations) being the most important indicator of public honour, the criteria for rank and mobility palpably shift with the rise of asceticism and the positive social perception of married couples finds itself on unstable ground. (Brown, *Body and Society* 146. The growing attention to sexual abstinence as the qualification for honour (for men and women alike) had ramifications both for the real and symbolic constructions of civic honour, the sign of which had traditionally been “marital concord” (Cooper 82-83). Cooper proposes that the Fathers’ treatment of virginity offered women a means of disassociating themselves from an ancient stereotype uniting ‘women’ and ‘sexuality.’ Ultimately, the application to the rhetoric leaves the stereotypes concerning feminine virtue in place, merely excepting the individual virgin from them, and leaving the wife in a less laudable position than she had occupied previously (Cooper 85-86). For a comprehensive survey of ancient Greek and Roman philosophical constructions of ‘woman’ in relation to ‘man,’ see Prudence Allen, R.S.M., *The Concept of Woman: the Aristotelian Revolution 750 B.C. - A.D. 1250* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

²⁹ See I Cor 7:32-35. All biblical quotations are from the Douay-Rheims translation. *The Holy Bible Translated from the Latin Vulgate*. [The Old Testament at Douay, 1609, the New Testament at Rheims, 1582] (1899; Rpt. Rockford IL: Tan Books and Publ., Inc., 1971).

the remedy for weakness, in [virginity] the glory of chastity.”³⁰ The remedy comes at a high price, for it lays such a heavy burden upon the married that Ambrose maintains that it is better not to marry.³¹ There is a fundamental dichotomy between the inclinations or pleasures of the flesh which lead to marriage and the desire for holiness.³² One cannot both indulge those desires and preserve holiness of body and soul. The virginal body thus becomes the sign of a sanctified spirit. It is the virgin’s proof of heavenly citizenship, whereas the married, distracted by desire and pleasure, are citizens of the earthly kingdom.

While Ambrose contrasts marriage and virginity, he does not belittle fundamentally the state of marriage. Jerome, on the other hand, in his eagerness to demolish Jovinian’s unthinkable contention that marriage and virginity are of equal value, treads heavily upon the line between distinction and debasement. Despite John Oppel’s subtle reading of *Adversus* as Jerome’s attempt to raise marriage out of its fallen human pattern by establishing sexual renunciation as the norm within marriage, other contemporary documents suggest that *Adversus* was not read this way.³³ Augustine--whom no one could accuse of *not* being a subtle reader--clearly felt that a defense of marriage was required by *Adversus*, and he responded with *De bono coniugali*. In any case, whether one interprets Jerome’s elimination of the sexual element as an attempt to rehabilitate marriage, or as a fortification of the cause of virginity, Jerome is manifestly uncomfortable allocating sexual activity a place in the Christian life. To accomplish this he relies upon the account of the Fall, to argue that Adam and Eve only enjoyed undiminished fellowship with God as long as they preserved their virginity.³⁴ From his juxtaposition of prelapsarian virginity against postlapsarian marriage, we can see that, for Jerome, sexual intercourse was never intended to be the

³⁰ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 13.6-7. “*Ibi remedium infirmitatis, hic gloria castitatis.*” Trans. 367.

³¹ AMBR.Virgin. 14.1-3. “*Quo dicto et graviora iudicaverunt onera vinculi coniugalīs, et veræ integritatis gratiam prætulerunt.*” “By this saying they both pronounced the burden of the bond of marriage heavier, and properly preferred the grace of integrity.” [Mt 19:10.]

³² AMBR.Virg.Marc. 13.24-14.3. “*Filii enim huius sæculi generantur et generant, filia autem regni abstinet a voluntate viri et voluntate carnis, ut sit sancta corpore et spiritu.*” “For the daughters of this age are conceived and conceive; but the daughter of the kingdom refrains from wedded pleasure, and the pleasure of the flesh, that she may be holy in body and in spirit.” Trans. 367. Cazzaniga notes variant manuscripts readings of *voluptas* rather than *voluntas* in these lines.

³³ Oppel, “Saint Jerome and the History of Sex,” *Viator* 24 (1993): 1-22.

³⁴ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 225.2-5. “...ut qui nudi et expediti, et absque ulla macula virgines, Domini consortio fruebantur, dejecti in vallem lacrymarum, tunicis consutis et pelliceis vestirentur.” “... so that they, who were naked and free, and virgins without any stain, who enjoyed fellowship with the Lord, were cast out into the valley of tears, and clothed with stitched tunics and skins.”

human lot. Indeed, its presence serves as a continual reminder of humanity's fall into sin.³⁵ In this regard Oppel is correct because Jerome saw humanity's story as one of a lamentable fall "from innocence into sexual servitude" followed by centuries of struggle to climb out of this moral morass.³⁶ In opposition to the sexual servitude of marriage, virginity is the reclamation of a prelapsarian innocence with which marriage can neither compete nor compare. Although for a time marriage supplanted virginity's rightful place, Christ's coming corrected that usurpation and restored God's original (i.e. virginal) design.

As Jerome opposes humanity's pre- and postlapsarian sexuality, Augustine juxtaposes the revelation of the Old and New Testaments in order to clarify the efficacy and superiority of the virginal life. While allowing marriage a greater degree of righteousness than Jerome does, Augustine affirms the same hierarchy by assigning marriage to the Old Testament as opposed to virginity which reflects more fully the condition and life of grace revealed by Christ in the New Testament. Under the Old Law marriage served a spiritual purpose that has been fulfilled with the coming of Christ.

For, in [contemporary persons] the very desire for children is carnal; in those, however, it was spiritual, because it was in accord with the mystery of the time. In our day, it is true, no one perfect in piety seeks to have children except spiritually; in their day, however, the work of piety itself was to propagate children even carnally, because the generation of that people was a harbinger of future events and pertains to the prophetic dispensation.³⁷

In the past the carnal act of begetting children served a spiritual purpose, thus making procreation an act of piety. Now that the propagation of children no longer serves a spiritual purpose, however, it merely gratifies the flesh. While in *De bono coniugali* Augustine maintains a moderate line of instruction concerning marriage as an Old Testament ideal supplanted by the New Testament gospel of virginity, in *De sancta virginitate* he expresses the disparity between marriage and virginity, Old and New Testaments, more definitively. Christ's coming has completely transformed the nature of human relations so that people may now associate in holy and spiritual

³⁵ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 245.50 - 246.4. "...castitatem semper operi nuptiarum fuisse praelatam. Ac de Adam et Eva illud dicendum, quod ante offensam in paradiso virgines fuerint; post peccatum autem, et extra paradisum protinus nuptiae." "...chastity was always preferred to the condition of marriage. And as regards Adam and Eve we must maintain that before the fall they were virgins in Paradise: but after they sinned, and were cast out of Paradise, they were immediately married." Trans. 359.

³⁶ Oppel 8.

³⁷ AVG.Bon.coniug. 212.24 - 213.5. "In istis enim carnale est ipsum desiderium filiorum, in illis autem spiritale erat, quia sacramento illius temporis congruebat. Nunc quippe nullus pietate perfectus filios habere nisi spiritaliter querit; tunc vero ipsius pietatis erat operatio etiam carnaliter filios propagare, quia illius populi generatio nuntia futurorum erat et ad dispensationem propheticam pertinebat." Trans. 34.

human relations, rather than participating in the propagation of the race.³⁸ Without slighting the goodness of marriage or deprecating human sexuality, Augustine encourages an intercourse which is spiritual, holy and pure-- whether abstinent, or continent. Augustine does not, as Jerome does, emphasize a disjunction between the necessity of sexual intercourse and progeny among the Old Testament patriarchs and the "revelation" of virginity in the lives of Christ and disciples. Instead he focuses a new model for human relations: relations free of the sexual urge. He attempts to raise these relations above the carnal in *De sancta virginitate* by juxtaposing the prophetic nature of Old Testament marriage (i.e. the production of the Davidic line from which Christ was born) with the present freedom to remain virginally chaste. Despite the goods of marriage which Augustine duly praises throughout *De bono coniugali* (children, faithful rendering of the *maritale debitum*, and sacrament), he recommends to virgins that to take up the procreation of children is to willingly burden oneself with the tribulation of the flesh at a time when there is no need for such tribulation.³⁹

From the comparison of marriage and virginity, we move to the topos of the three grades, the hierarchy of which originates in the parable of the sower. In their interpretation of the parable, the Fathers assigned the hundred-fold reward to virginity, the sixty-fold to widowhood and the thirty-fold to marriage.⁴⁰ Comparisons of the three grades appear in various contexts, sometimes as the primary subject under discussion and other times as supporting evidence for some other benefit of virginity. It is interesting that Ambrose, the architect of the virginal ideal, has very little to say regarding the hierarchy of the three grades of chastity. His *De virginitate* contains only one reference to the three grades in which he describes each grade's positive contribution to the Church.⁴¹ Rather than explicitly contrasting the rewards of the three grades, or emphasizing virginity's prerogative, Ambrose simply assigns each grade a place within Holy Church. So,

³⁸ AVG.Bon.coniug. 201.3-7. "...nunc vero, cum ad ineundam sanctam et sinceram societatem undique ex omnibus gentibus copia spiritalis cognationis exuberet, etiam propter solos filios conubia cupientes, ut ampliore continentia bono potius utantur, admonendi sunt." "But now, since the opportunity for spiritual relationship abounds on all sides and for all people for entering into a holy and pure association, even they who wish to contract marriage only to have children are admonished that they practice the greater good of continence." Trans. 22.

³⁹ AVG.San.virgin. 249.8-12.

⁴⁰ Mt 13:8

⁴¹ AMBR.Virgin. 16.18-22. "*Est ergo Ecclesiae ager diversis fecundus copiis. His cernas germina virginitatis flore vernantia, illic tanquam in campis silvae viduitatem gravitate pollentem, alibi tanquam uberi fruge coniugii Ecclesiae segetem replentem mundi horrea... in quibus fidelis conjugii fructus exuberat.*" "This, therefore, is the soil of the Church fruitful in its diverse abundance. Here you may see the buds of virginity springing into full-bloom, there widowhood, as in the glade of a wood, powerful in its gravity, elsewhere, as if fertile produce, the crop of marriage replenishing the granaries of the world for the Church... in which [granaries] the fruit of faithful marriage abounds."

although Ambrose consistently asserts the superlative nature of virginity in *De virginitate* and *De virginibus*, he refrains from doing so at the expense of the other two grades. Augustine, while setting forth the preeminence of virginity in the separate treatises addressed to the individual three grades,⁴² does not emphasize the disjunction between the three grades in any of these works. Encouraging his readers to seek chastity in whatever grade they find themselves, Augustine holds up Susanna, Anna, and the Virgin Mary as role models for the wife, widow and virgin. He actually expresses discomfort with the traditional ranking of the three grades of chastity and the hundred, sixty and thirty-fold rewards assigned to them, because they do not allow for other considerations. Where, for example, does the martyr fit in this scheme? In the end, Augustine maintains the traditional ranking and value of the three grades because the greater rewards are due to those who offer the greater sacrifices. Thus, to virginity the greatest reward of all is due.⁴³ Unlike Ambrose and Augustine, Jerome and Aldhelm treat the disparity between the three grades at length. If Ambrose avoided promoting virginity by disparaging marriage or widowhood, the opposite is true of Jerome. And where Augustine found the hierarchy of the three too restrictive, Aldhelm adapts the hierarchy in order to accommodate and encourage his own particular vision of abstinent chastity.

Despite Jerome's assertions that he does not seek to belittle the other grades of chastity, the vitriolic tenor of his rhetoric appears to do just that as he defends the primacy of virginity. His commendation that "In every grade and sex chastity holds preeminence," merely affirms that a sober modesty befits persons of all grades.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, such chastity does not mitigate the distinction between grades which arises from the lower grades' carnal knowledge and sexual activity. These experiences require that even abstinent wives and widows must always rank below

⁴² E.g. AVG.Bon.viduit. 311.18ff. Also, AVG.Bon.viduit. 326.14-17. "*Pervenimus autem, quod ad hanc rem, de qua loquimur, adinet, ut continentiam coniugio præponamus, sanctam vero virginitatem etiam continentie viduali....*" "In our discussion we arrived the conclusion that continence should be preferred to marriage, and holy virginity to continence in widowhood." Trans. 301.

⁴³ AVG.Bon.viduit.317.23-25. "*In coniugali quippe vinculo si pudicitia conservatur, damnatio non timetur; sed in viduali et virginali continentia excellentia muneris amplioris expetitur.*" "In the marriage bond, no condemnation is to be feared if chastity is preserved, but, in the continence of widowhood and virginity, the excellence of a more perfect oblation is required." Trans. 292.

⁴⁴ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 270.45-46. "*In omni gradu et sexu tenet pudicitia principatum.*"

virgins.⁴⁵ Jerome may contend that he does not see the sexual intercourse which distinguishes the second and third grades of chastity as thoroughly sinful or defiling, but the vehement nature of his rhetoric belies that claim. In the passage where he refutes Jovinian's claim that there is no difference between baptized virgins and baptized widows, for example, he appears to collapse sexual activity in general to a uniform condition of unrighteousness.⁴⁶ Freely admitting that baptism purifies widows, wives, and harlots, Jerome argues that if there's no difference between baptized virgins and widows, then baptized prostitutes are equal to virgins, and this cannot be.⁴⁷ Without diminishing the power or grace of redemption, Jerome opposes Jovinian's qualifications of the superiority of the virginally pure. Sexual intercourse ingrains a history upon the mind and body that even the waters of baptism cannot wash away. There may be no male and female in Christ, but there is, for Jerome, virgin and non-virgin. Virgins alone can approach God with minds that are free of all polluting memory.⁴⁸ In Jerome's thinking, only God's allowance for pervasive human weakness accounts for the fact that virginity is not a general commandment to all Christians.⁴⁹ So great is the disjunction between the first and the remaining grades of chastity that Jerome proposes that virgins--the "first-fruits" of the Church--provide the compensatory sacrifices for the rest of the Church. In this passage (which will be treated at greater length below), Jerome implies that without this "tithe" the other grades cannot be saved.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 267.55 - 268.5. *"Non nego beatas esse viduas, quæ ita post baptismum manserint; nec illarum detraho merito, quæ cum viris in castitate perdurant, sed sicuti hæ majoris apud Deum præmii sunt, quam nuptæ conjugali officio servientes, ita et ipsæ æquo animo patiantur virginitatem sibi præferri. Si enim illas sera pudicitia post despumatas corporis voluptates erigit contra maritatas, cur non infra perpetuam castitatem esse se noverint?"* "I do not deny that widows, who remain such after baptism, are blessed; nor do I detract from the merit of those women who dwell in chastity with their husbands, but just as these women have a greater reward before God than married women serving the conjugal office, thus also let them grant with equal spirit that virginity is preferred to themselves. For if 'late' chastity raises them after those desires of the body have been worked off, in contrast to the married, why should they not recognize themselves to be lower than perpetual chastity."

⁴⁶ Elsewhere Jerome attributes hostility toward the message of virginity to his opponents' fear there will be a lack of prostitutes and adulteresses: *"Vereris, ne si virginitatem plures appetierint, cessent lupæ, cessent adulteræ, ne infantes in urbibus villisque non vagiant?"* (HIER.Adv.Iovin. 271.29-31. "Are you afraid that if many strive after virginity, prostitutes will slack off, adulteresses will slack off, and infants will not wail in the cities and villages?") The suggestion that only the desire for illicit sexual intercourse would motivate the criticism of the virginal life leaves little maneuvering room for those who would argue for licit sexuality. By setting up prostitution and adultery as the antithesis of virginity, Jerome reduces all sexual intercourse to one plane, and a debauched one at that.

⁴⁷ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 267.17-21.

⁴⁸ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 267.21-28.

⁴⁹ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 268.11-10. *"Quomodo de virginibus Apostolus dicit se non habere præceptum, et tamen dat consilium, quasi misericordiam consecutus a Domino, et hoc agit in omni illa disputatione, ut virginitatem præferat matrimonio, et suadet quod imperare non audet, ne injicere videatur laqueum, et plus imponere ponderis, quam potest hominum sustinere natura."* "Just as the Apostle says he has no commandment respecting virgins and yet gives his advice, as one who has obtained mercy from the Lord, and is anxious throughout the whole discussion to give virginity preference over marriage, and advises what he does not venture to command, lest he seem to lay a snare, and to put a heavier burden upon man's nature than it can bear." Trans. 371.

⁵⁰ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 281.28-34.

Of these authors, Aldhelm directs the most attention to the hierarchy of the three grades. In these discussions he consistently refers to virginity, abstinent chastity and marriage as *virginitas*, *castitas* and *iugalitas* respectively. The rank designated by *castitas* differs from the second grade of widowhood found in the earlier authors, for Aldhelm specifically opens up the category to the married who live abstinely as well as to the widowed who remain chaste. (Aldhelm's adaptation is not adopted by Ælfric when he addresses the subject of the three grades, as we shall see in the next chapter.) He runs through a long series of comparisons that illustrate the value of each grade, comparing each one to a representative state or condition. In one instance, he writes that "virginity is riches, chastity an average income, [and] conjugality poverty." In another, "virginity is the living man, chastity a man half-alive, conjugality the (lifeless) body."⁵¹ In each comparison, the respective glory, worth or desirability of the grades is readily apparent. After a long string of such comparisons, Aldhelm clearly defines the three grades for his readers. The primary characteristic of virginity is the voluntary desire for celibacy which "unharmd by any carnal defilement continues pure out of the spontaneous desire for celibacy"; chastity "has scorned the commerce of matrimony for the sake of the heavenly kingdom," and marriage seeks within that commerce to produce children who will redeem it.⁵² Although Aldhelm reiterates the ranking of the three grades so thoroughly that he appears to draw unyielding distinctions between the holiness of the virginal and all others, his adaptation of the second grade from widowhood to abstinent *castitas* actually allows for a less rigid value system than is found in Jerome. His adaptation of the second grade places a much higher premium upon the practice of abstinence than Jerome does with his assertions that neither widows nor abstinent wives can compare to virgins and their singular glory. Assuredly, the supremacy of virginity holds true for Aldhelm as well. What the reiteration of the three grades and their metaphoric representations assert, however, is balanced by the values implicit in the adapted grades. Aldhelm, like Augustine, allows for considerations beyond virginal purity to enter the ranking of the three grades.

No discussion of the three grades would be complete without mention of the passage in

⁵¹ ALDH.Pros.virg. 248.14-15, 18-19. "...sit virginitas divitiæ, castitas mediocritas, iugalitas paupertas"; "...sit virginitas homo, castitas semivivus, iugalitas corpus." Trans. 75.

⁵² ALDH.Pros.virg. 249.2-5. "[Quod] virginitas sit, quæ ab omni spurcitia carnali illibata spontaneo cælibatus affectu pudica perseverat, castitas vero, quæ pactis sponsalibus sortita matrimonii commercia regni cælestis causa contempsit, iugalitas, quæ ad propogandam posteritas sobolem et liberorum procreandorum gratia licitis conubii nexibus nodatur." "From the evidence of this distinction, it is permissible to deduce or conjecture what virginity is, which unharmd by any carnal defilement continues pure out of the spontaneous desire for celibacy; (and) chastity on the other hand which, having been assigned to marital contracts, has scorned the commerce of matrimony for the sake of the heavenly kingdom; or conjugality which, for propagating the progeny of posterity and for the sake of procreating children, is bound by the legal ties of marriage." Trans. 75-76.

Apocalypse 14, where St John wrote of the eternal rewards of virgins. The Fathers use the description of the 144,000 following the Lamb of God in order to elucidate the quality of virtue and blessedness separating virgin from non-virgin.⁵³ Although each of the Fathers agrees that these special rewards and heavenly joys are the purview of virgins alone, they employ the passage for different ends, particularly Jerome and Augustine who refer to these verses several times. Jerome sees in the exclusivity of these eternal rewards an indication of the spiritual unworthiness of those who do not remain virginally chaste. Where Jerome focuses on the unpolluted nature of the virgin, Augustine instead interprets these honours as reflections of the virgin's spiritual intimacy with the Lord, an intimacy which has been fostered over a lifetime of physical purity. For both writers physical purity is an essential reflection of spiritual grace.

For Jerome, only defilement can explain this eternal segregation where virgins alone follow the Lamb of God and sing the blessed song which no others can sing: "From this he shows that all who do not remain virgins are polluted, in comparison to purest and angelic chastity, and in comparison to our Lord Jesus Christ."⁵⁴ Juxtaposed against the heavenly hosts, virginal chastity resembles angelic beatitude and Christ himself: it provides the standard before which all else inevitably falls short. The illustrious rewards of virgins serve as an indictment against the other two grades.

Although Augustine in general holds to the claim that virginity by itself and for its own sake does not merit the highest eternal rewards, even he interprets Apocalypse 14 as attributing to virgins a particular glory and honour "on *no other account* than that they remained virgins."⁵⁵ These honours must be measured against his caveats that married and widowed women can attain a righteousness forfeited by strictly intact, but unvirtuous virgins. Nevertheless, the opportunity for virtuous living does not alter the fact that virgins are, by virtue of their intact bodies, eligible for a degree of sanctity and glory that is inaccessible to the non-virgin. Thus, where Augustine exhorts his virginal reader to consider this passage, he repeatedly refers to virginity as the single most important common denominator between the Lamb of God and the 144,000. This similarity

⁵³ Particularly Apocalypse 14: 3-4. "And they sing a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and before the elders. No one could learn that song except the one hundred forty-four thousand who have been redeemed from the earth. It is these who have not defiled themselves with women, for they are virgins; these follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They have been redeemed from humankind as first fruits for God and the Lamb...."

⁵⁴ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 281.22-25. "*Ex quo ostendit omnes qui virgines non permanserunt, ad comparationem purissimæ et angelicæ castitas, et ipsius Domini nostri Jesu Christi, esse pollutos.*"

⁵⁵ AVG.Bon.coniug. 226.15-16. "*...non ob aliud nisi quia virgines permanserunt.*" Trans. 47. My italics.

bestows upon the virgin the grace of an intimacy with Christ from which all others are excluded.⁵⁶ When Augustine separates the eternal rewards of virgins from the rewards of those who lost their virginity, bodily virginity fundamentally divides the two categories.

Many things in Him are proposed to all for imitation, but virginity of the flesh is not proposed to all, for there is nothing they can do to become virgins for whom it has befallen not to be virgins. Let the faithful, therefore, who have lost virginity of body, follow the Lamb, not wherever He goes, but wherever they are able. And they are able to follow Him everywhere, except when He walks in the splendor of virginity.⁵⁷

By proposing that the loss of virginity impairs the “average” Christian from following the Lord in the beauty of virginity, and singing the song which only virgins may sing, Augustine attributes an incomparable reward for righteousness to the preservation of physical purity.

C. Call to the Virginal Life and the Support of the Ideal

The hierarchy of the three grades of chastity together with the ranked division of eternal rewards confirm that the virginal life belongs to the elite. Yet the call to virginity goes out to all Christians. Describing Christ as “the author of virginity,” the Fathers cite his teaching on marriage and divorce as the foundation for virginity as the gospel ideal.⁵⁸ At the same time that they propose that Christ calls everyone to virginity, they admit that few can receive this teaching. Virginity thus becomes the province of a select few, the glory conferred by it becoming the more resplendent for the demanding sacrifices which it requires. In its purest form, virginity is not a yearning after eternal glory, nor is it an escape from earthly tribulation. These may be highly agreeable blessings upon the virgin, but they are not the goal. The choice of virginity reflects a choice to follow Christ more completely as it embodies a life of faith that encompasses mind, soul and body.

While physical purity is obviously the defining feature of the virginal life, the quality of intactness is not the most essential value invested by the Fathers in the sign of virginity. Within the language of Christian faith, virginity signifies the victory over sin. Ambrose illustrates this when he contrasts Christian virgins to the Pythagorean virgin who preserved the “integrity” of the cultic

⁵⁶ AVG.San.virgin. 264.13-17. “*Ite in hæc [gaudia], sequimini agnum, quia et agni caro utique virgo, hoc enim in se retinuit auctus, quod matri non abstulit conceptus et natus. Merito eum sequimini virginitate cordis et carnis, quocumque ierit.*” “Enter into these [joys]. Follow the Lamb, because the flesh of the Lamb is also virginal. For He preserved in Himself in His manhood what He did not take away from His Mother in His conception and birth. You deservedly follow Him wherever He goes because of your virginity of heart and body.” Trans. 174.

⁵⁷ AVG.San.virgin. 265.4-11. “*Et multa in illo ad imitandum omnibus proponuntur, virginitas autem carnis non omnibus; non enim habent quid faciant, ut virgines sint, in quibus iam factum est, ut virgines non sint. Sequantur itaque agnum ceteri fideles, qui virginitatem corporis amiserunt, non quocumque ille ierit, sed quousque ipsi potuerint. Possunt autem ubique, præter cum in decore virginitatis incedit.*” Trans. 174.

⁵⁸ Mt 19:9-12.

secrets despite temptation and torment, but lost the “integrity” of her body: “How much stronger are our virgins, who overcome even those powers which they do not see; whose victory is not only over flesh and blood, but also over the prince of this world, and ruler of the age!”⁵⁹ The preservation of physical virginity alone pales before a virginity which unites body and mind and soul in perfect purity. Ambrose applauds Christian virgins because their chastity represents a *spiritual* victory. It could be argued that the Pythagorean virgin retains her spiritual purity by not divulging the secrets of her faith, but Ambrose clearly sees the two aspects as inseparable: physical virginity reflects the quality of spiritual purity. Virginal intactness manifests spiritual authority as well as expressing one’s own pure, untainted pursuit of faith. To subjugate desire and control the body is to conquer the power of Satan himself.

Of the authors in question, Jerome provides the most aggressive defense of the call to virginity, strategically conflating the claims of the virginal life with the call to Christian faith. Where Ambrose perceives sexuality as a barrier to fullness in Christ, Jerome argues that the virginal life best fulfills the call of Christ. To this end, he interprets St Paul’s statement that he espoused the Corinthian church as a pure virgin to Christ as a more general exhortation to virginal chastity.⁶⁰ Christians are not only to be joined to Christ in pure faith, but in pure *virginitas* as well. Elsewhere Jerome transforms Christ’s call to faith into an invitation to virginity in a similar fashion: “The Master of the Christian race offers the *agwnoqethz* reward, invites candidates to the course, holds in his hand the prize of virginity, points to the fountain of purity, and cries aloud ‘If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink.’ ‘He that is able to receive, let him receive.’”⁶¹ By interpreting the virginal life as the authoritative Christian life Jerome conflates faith with virginity. The possession of virginity can then function as a sign of the most authentic Christian life. This is not to say that in itself virginity constitutes the true life of faith, for Jerome would not go that far. Rather, virginity possesses a privileged capacity both to foster and signify the life of faith. To secure this connection between virginity and Christian faith, Jerome interprets verses dealing broadly with the work of sanctification as referring instead to the work of virginity. Although the

⁵⁹ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 10.11-12. “*Quanto nostræ virgines fortiores, quæ vincunt etiam quas non vident potestates, quibus non tantum de carne et sanguine, sed etiam de ipso mundi principe sæculique rectore victoria est!*” Trans. 366

⁶⁰ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 275.43 - 276.3. “*Nam dum omnes ad pudicitiam et præmium virginitatis invitat, ostendit cunctis gradibus virginitatem esse potioem.*” “For while he invites all to chastity and the reward of virginity, he shows that virginity is greater than all these grades.” [II Cor 11:2.] Earlier in this same passage Jerome interprets ‘milk’ and ‘meat’ (in St Paul’s chastisement of the Corinthians’ spiritual immaturity) as marriage and virginity respectively. See also 275.10-19.

⁶¹ HIER.Adv.Iovin.238.34-37. “*Proponit ἀγωνοθετηζ præmium, invitat ad cursum, tenet in manu virginitatis bravium, ostendit purissimum fontem, et clamat: ‘Qui sitit, veniat, et bibat. Qui potest capere, capiat.’*” Trans. 355. [Jn 7:37.]

sanctification of which St Paul writes could easily be applied to any and all Christians, Jerome instead treats it as a natural consequence of the virginal or abstinent pursuit of God.

While the other Fathers do not go to the lengths to which Jerome does, occasionally blurring the line between virginity and spiritual sanctification, they all agree on the unique and exalted relationship which the virgin shares with Christ. With their interpretations of Christ's teachings to his disciples, the Fathers establish the notion of Christ's spiritual marriage to consecrated virgins, and interpret Christ's own life as laying the foundation for the ideal of perpetual purity. One of Augustine's prayers in *De sancta virginitate* illustrates the primary themes of this relationship: "May Christ, the Son of a virgin and Spouse of virgins, born bodily from a virginal womb, wed spiritually by virginal espousal, help us."⁶² With this invocation Augustine demonstrates that Christ is, in himself, "the principal teaching and example of virginal integrity."⁶³ With this we turn briefly to themes of Christ as author of virginity and spouse of virgins.

First, in his relation to the ideal of virginity, Christ is the author of the perfect, chaste life. Ambrose refers to this when he proposes that the present virginal life is made possible only because of the Incarnation. Christ himself planted the seeds of this heavenly way of life among humanity: "But in truth after the Lord, coming in this body, united the dwelling of divinity and the body without any defect of compounded confusion, then the custom of heavenly life having been spread abroad throughout the whole world grew in human bodies."⁶⁴ At points the revelation of the virginal life appears to usurp the greater redemptive purpose of the Incarnation. Because true virginity originates with Christ's revelation, chaste prophets like Elijah and Miriam serve as signs of future things, such as figures or types of the Church, rather than participants in the fullness of the heavenly virginal life.⁶⁵ Since Christ introduced the authentic virginal life, one that centers on himself, Ambrose grants the virginal life a status as an indicator or sign of the fulfillment of God's design.

Christ's purity and freedom from contamination feature prominently in the Fathers' treatment of his authorship of virginity. His virginity consecrates physical purity for the imitation

⁶² AVG.San.virgin. 236.10-12. "*Adiuvet Christus, virginis filius et virginum sponsus, virginali utero corporaliter natus, virginali conubio spiritaliter coniugatus.*" Trans. 145.

⁶³ AVG.San.virgin. 275.8-9. "*...præcipuum magisterium et virginalis integritatis exemplum.*" Trans. 185.

⁶⁴ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 8.1-4. "*At vero posteaquam Dominus in corpus hoc veniens contubernium divinitatis et corporis sine ulla concretæ confusionis labe sociavit, tunc toto orbe diffusus corporibus humanis vitæ cælestis usus inolevit.*"

⁶⁵ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 7.20-22. "*...indicia futurorum.*" [I Cor 10:11.]

of those who would follow him.⁶⁶ Jerome and Aldhelm encourage their readers to pattern themselves after the incorrupt Lord born of a stainless Virgin who established virginity through his own stainless life.⁶⁷ Aldhelm, however, deliberately constructs Christ's role as author of pure virginity as providing an alternative to an earthly spouse. He recounts how St Lucy adamantly rejected prospective husbands as "authors of corruption," so that she might pledge herself to Christ, "the author of [her] purity."⁶⁸ The relation between Christ and the virgin depicted by Aldhelm here is personal. Christ's Incarnation is not simply a point in history when virginity is established as *the* Christian life. Christ himself is the source of every virgin's chastity. He stands in opposition to an earthly spouse not as divine proxy, but rather as the origin of her purity inviting her to pursue a life shaped by his claims of purity.

Secondly, if Christ is the source of the virgin's purity, he is also her spouse, and her desire: "Christ is the spouse of the virgin, and, if one may say so, of virginal chastity, for virginity is of Christ, not Christ of virginity."⁶⁹ The theme of the virgin as bride of Christ runs throughout the Fathers. Ambrose makes much of intimate imagery from the Song of Songs throughout *De virginitate* in order to help his reader conceptualize her relationship with Christ.⁷⁰ Augustine, however, in *De bono viduitatis* opens up the theme of Christ as spouse to the whole Christian community. Not only virgins and widows, but wives also are wed spiritually to Christ. Augustine argues that through the *integritas* of faith, hope and love all Christians participate in the Virgin Church, which is Christ's bride.⁷¹ He instructs his widowed reader and her daughter first to love Christ as bridegroom, and secondly to consider themselves as members of the Church, his spouse:

With true affection and most holy chastity love to be loved by such a bridegroom.... Strive faithfully, therefore, to please and to unite yourselves to the King who has desired the beauty of his unique Spouse of which you are the members; your daughter by her virginal

⁶⁶ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 255.11-12. "*Nobis autem... virginitatem a Salvatore virgine dedicari.*" "For us, however, virginity is consecrated by the Virgin Savior."

⁶⁷ HIER.Epist.XXII. 168.1-2. "...*mihi virginitas in Maria dedicatur et Christo.*" "For me, virginity is consecrated in the persons of Mary and Christ." Trans. 29.

⁶⁸ ALDH.Pros.virg. 294.4-5. "...*integritatis meae auctorem.*" Trans. 108.

⁶⁹ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 11.7-9. "*Christus virginis sponsus est et, si dici potest, Christus virgineae castitatis; virginitas enim Christi, non virginitatis est Christus.*" Trans. 366.

⁷⁰ E.g. AMBR.Virgin. 24.12-14, 25.16-17.

⁷¹ AVG.Bon.viduit. 319.15-18. "*Cui ecclesia ipsa, cuius membra sunt, coniux est, quae fidei, spei, caritatis integritate non in solis virginibus sanctis, sed etiam in viduis et coniugatis fidelibus tota virgo est.*" "The Church itself, of which they are members, is likewise His Bride, and by the integrity of faith, hope, and charity, not only in holy virgins, but also in widows and the wedded faithful, is ever a Virgin." Trans. 294.

chastity, you by your chaste widowhood, both by your spiritual beauty.⁷²

Neither the daughter's virginal integrity, nor her mother's widowed continence qualify them to be members of the Spouse of Christ. Instead, faith and love, demonstrated by their practice of abstinence, form the basis of "marriage" to Christ, and through this faith they please their heavenly Bridegroom and are joined to him. In *De sancta virginitate*, on the other hand, Augustine develops the theme of the Church's spiritual marriage with respect to virgins who incarnate the Church's espousal to Christ. He explains that "Since, therefore, the whole church is espoused as a virgin to one man, Christ, as the Apostle says, how great an honour her members deserve who preserve in their very flesh this which the whole Church, imitating the Mother of her Spouse and Lord, preserves in the faith."⁷³ Persons of all grades share in the Church's union with Christ, but only virgins can function as living icons of the Church's spiritual purity and union with Christ.

D. Virginité and Elite Spirituality

The call to virginity is paradoxical. It is both general--God invites all to live in virginal purity--and restricted, for only a few have the will and fortitude to answer the call. Those who respond demonstrate a strength and purity of character surpassing that of other Christians. The Fathers rely upon three major themes to reflect the elevated status of virgins which befits their response to a higher calling. First, they credit spiritual charisms and miraculous powers to the possession of virginity. A subset of this concerns the imagery of crowns and palms granted to virgins as the heavenly reward of their purity. Secondly, they praise the virginal life as an earthly *vita angelica*, and lastly they celebrate virginity as a return to prelapsarian innocence.

While the attribution of miracles and powers to the virginal life holds little interest for Ambrose and Augustine, Jerome and Aldhelm repeatedly attribute special blessings and miraculous powers to virgins on account of their commitment to purity. This aspect of virginity surfaces time and again in the *passiones* of the virgin martyrs. As Jerome credits the Virgin Mary's purity for the honour of bearing the Messiah, so too virginity provides the basis for the special honours

⁷² AVG.Bon.viduit. 334.2-3, 14-18. "*adfectibus veris et sanctissima castitate a viro tali amate amari.... Nunc ergo illi regi, qui unicæ sponsæ, cuius membra estis, speciem concupiuit, veraciter simul placete, simul inhærete, illa integritate virginali, tu continentia viduali, ambæ pulchritudine spiritali.*" Trans. 310-311. For another example of Augustine's support of all three grades of chastity in 'marriage' with Christ, see: AVG.Bon.viduit. 308.3-5. "... *'quia corpora vestra membra sunt Christi?'* Tantum ergo bonum est fidelis coniugii, ut etiam ipsa membra sint Christi." "" Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? So great, therefore, is the good of faithful marriage that the bodies of the wedded are members of Christ." Trans. 282.

⁷³ AVG.San.virgin. 236.12-16. "*Cum igitur ipsa universa ecclesia virgo sit desponsata uni viro Christo, sicut dicit apostolus, quanto digna sunt honore membra eius, quæ hoc custodiunt etiam in ipsa carne, quod tota custodit in fide, quæ imitatur matrem viri sui et Domini sui!*" Trans. 145.

granted to both John the Baptist and John the Beloved.⁷⁴ Aldhelm proposes that John the Baptist received the honour of baptizing Christ “because of the integrity of his chastity.”⁷⁵ But it is John the Beloved, rather than John the Baptist, who serves as the archetypal example of Christ’s particular love for and the blessings granted to virgins. Aldhelm attributes John the Beloved’s vision of the 144,000 virgins to his own virginal purity, while, for Jerome, the rhetorical and philosophical heights to which John’s gospel reaches provide the most potent testament to the heavenly blessing of virginity.⁷⁶ Jerome writes, “The virgin writer expounded mysteries which the married could not, and to briefly sum up all and show how great is the privilege of John, *or rather of virginity in John*, the Virgin Mother was entrusted by the Virgin Lord to the Virgin disciple.”⁷⁷ Crediting virginity rather than John, or even the inspiration of the Holy Spirit for the gospel’s depth and beauty, Jerome erases the human agent and makes the preservation of virginity the sole source of spiritual charism.

Although Aldhelm, like Jerome, presents gifts like that of John’s rhetorical grace and beauty as the result of Christ’s affection for virgins, he is not as consistent in the attribution of the miraculous to virginity. He identifies Daniel’s prophetic powers as the reward, even compensation, for his virginity, but does not refer to any causal relationship between virginity and prophecy in the case of Elijah.⁷⁸ In most cases virginity provides the basis for divine protection. Thus of the numerous obstacles which afflicted Joseph--from his brothers’ jealousy to the lust of his employer’s wife--Aldhelm writes that “For as long as he was a companion of pure virginity... divine protection guarded him unharmed.”⁷⁹ As virginity provides the basis for divine protection,

⁷⁴ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 266.43-45. “*Si non praefertur nuptiis virginitas, spiritus sanctus cur maritam, cur viduam non eligit?*” “If virginity was not preferred to marriage, why did the Holy Spirit not choose a married woman, or widow?” The question suggests that Mary’s virginity was the primary, if not only, reason why she was chosen to bear the Christ. Jerome here departs from the tradition of earlier Fathers who had emphasized Mary’s obedience.

⁷⁵ ALDH.Pros.virg. 254.1. “*pro integritate castimoniae.*” Trans. 79-80.

⁷⁶ ALDH.Pros.virg. 235.16-17. “*...auscultare et castis obtutibus contemplare meruit.*” “was found worthy to hear... and to behold with his pure eyes.” Trans. 64. As well as exemplifying the blessedness granted on account of virginity, John the Beloved also serves as a figure for the state of perpetual purity. Jerome interprets Christ’s enigmatic response to Peter’s question about John’s death as a reference to the eternal nature of virginity: “From this it is shown that virginity does not die, nor does it wash away the filth of marriage by the blood of martyrdom, but [virginity] remains with Christ, and its sleep is a crossing over, rather than death.” (HIER.Adv.Iovin. 258.25-28. “*Ex quo ostenditur virginitatem non mori, nec sordes nuptiarum abluere cruore martyrii, sed manere cum Christo, et dormitionem ejus transitum esse, non mortem.*”) [Jn 21: 20-22]

⁷⁷ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 259.45-49. “*Exposuit virginitas, quod nuptiae scire non poterant, et ut brevi sermone multa comprehendam, doceamque cujus privilegii sit Joannes, imo in Joanne virginitas, a Domino virgine, mater virgo virgini discipulo commendatur.*” Trans. 366.

⁷⁸ ALDH.Pros.virg.251.3. “*...pro vicissitudine castitatis repensanda,*” “as reward in exchange for his chastity.” Trans. 77; 249.16. “*vates virginitatis gratia decoratus et spiritu,*” “a prophet adorned with the favor of virginity inspired by the prophetic spirit.” Trans. 76.

⁷⁹ ALDH.Pros.virg. 310.16-18. “*...quamdiu purae virginitatis comes... illaesus divina tutela protexit.*” Trans. 121.

so too its loss can forfeit divine blessing. With editorial selectivity Aldhelm implies that David's adultery, blood guilt, and the loss of his child all arose from his abandonment of the state of virginity. He introduces David as an illustrious king endowed (prior to his marriage) with spotless virginity, and then recounts the king's decline. He associates David's fame with the virginity of his youth rather than his later days when he was bound by the shackles of marriage, prefacing the list of David's failings with the damning phrase "after he had abandoned the state of virginity."⁸⁰

As well as biblical models of virginal glory, Aldhelm provides his readers with examples of the miraculous powers of saints such as Sts Martin and Apollonius who practically shimmer with good works on account of the glory of their virginity.⁸¹ The brief *vitæ* of *De Virginitate* are filled with references to miracles and wondrous displays of power granted "on account of virginity."⁸² Even after their death, miracles are performed on behalf of saints' virginal bodies. St Agatha's "virginal little body," for example, turns back the lava flowing from Mount Aetna.⁸³ St Agatha, however, is an exception. For one of the distinctions between Aldhelm's versions of the male and female saints' lives is that the possession of virginity provides the sign of God's power in most female saints. They themselves do not perform miracles. Their virginity acts as the sign of Christ's power rather than any supernatural acts or performances by these holy women. For this reason, observing the impotence of his sorcery against the saint, the soothsayer Cyprian pronounces that Christ's power is at work in St Justina's virginity. "[H]e recognized on the spot--through the chaste virginity of Justina, by which she cast out and nullified all the instruments of his opposing forces--the unconquerable victory of Christ...though he was a pagan."⁸⁴ The saint's "most chaste virginity" is the locus, instrument and signifier of Christ's power. Her purity provides the silent, but effective, witness to God's power. She is relieved of saying or doing anything because her virginity "speaks" for her. Justina's virginity delivers her from torture and turns her tormentor's eyes to the gospel. Not all the miraculous interventions on behalf of virginity serve an evangelical purpose. In some cases the miracles surrounding the female saint focus the

⁸⁰ ALDH.Pros.virg. 311.11-12. "*opinatissimus regum sub ipso pubertatis tirocinio illibata virginitate præditus antequam copula matrimonii et conubii nodaretur*"; "the most illustrious of kings, endowed with the stainless virginity in the boyhood of youth before he was tied by the bond of matrimony and the shackle of marriage...." Trans. 122; 311.22. "...*relicto virginitatis statu*." Trans. 122.

⁸¹ ALDH.Pros.virg. 261.2-4; 287.12. "...*ob præclaram virginitatis gloriam multis miraculorum signis et prodigiis coruscans*"; "shining forth in many evidences of marvels and miracles as a result of the bright glory of his virginity." Trans. 104.

⁸² Almost every passage where Aldhelm tells of a saint's miraculous powers is followed by *ob* or *propter virginitatem*.

⁸³ ALDH.Pros.virg. 293.4. "...*virginale corpusculum*." Trans. 108.

⁸⁴ ALDH.Pros.virg. 295.12-14. "...*ilico per castissimam Iustinæ virginitatem, qua omnes contrariarum virium machinas exterminans eliminaverat, invictum Christi tropeum...licet paganus prudenter intellexit*." Trans. 109.

attention exclusively upon virgin intactness. The grace granted on behalf of the saint's purity is self-referential, pointing back to the grace which virginity is in itself. Thus the imperviousness of Sts Rufina and Secunda is interpreted by their persecutor as a sign of either their magical power or the sanctity of virginity itself.⁸⁵ He fails to see beyond the thing itself into what it signifies: God's protection of his servants in response to their complete commitment to Him. This confusion between magical powers and the authority granted to virginity speaks of the immense power which virginity bestows upon its possessor.⁸⁶ For both sexes, those who answer the call of virginity imitate John the Beloved's singular commitment to Christ, and are, in turn, blessed with supernatural powers. But the manifestations of those powers differ between male and female saints. Male saints act as a conduit for the miraculous power of virginity. Hence John the Beloved produces a rich gospel and saints like Martin of Tours heal the sick and perform countless miracles. Sometimes virginity is credited as the source of these charisms, but not always. For female saints, as for the Virgin Mary, the miraculous is reflected by the possession and preservation of their physical virginity.

The second theme reflecting the elite and illustrious nature of virginity concerns virginity as the *vita angelica*, or angelic life. From the beginning the *vita angelica* plays a central role in the construction of the virginal ideal with Ambrose, who writes that virginity brings from heaven the life which Christ foretold. Those who dwell in virginity already partake of a life wherein there is no marriage and so are "just like the angels in heaven."⁸⁷ Of all the Fathers, the theme of the *vita angelica* is most pronounced in Ambrose who interprets virginity's angelic likeness as a sign of its consuming focus upon the life of faith.

For Ambrose the connection between physical purity, virginal commitment and the heavenly life is so acute that he proposes that the pure life raises the virgin to an existence of

⁸⁵ ALDH.Prov.virg. 308.3. "*Ista aut magica arte nos superant aut virginitatis in eis sanctitas regnat.*" "Either these (two virgins) conquer us by magic powers, or else the sanctity of virginity reigns in them." Trans. 119.

⁸⁶ This can be seen repeatedly throughout Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* where the miracles performed by and for the saints are attributed to *drycraeft* 'sorcery.' In the narratives of the married-virgin saints, for example, see: ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 76, 111, 152, 174, 179, 184, 323, 376; ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 147, 199, 261.

⁸⁷ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 6.14 - 7.9. "*Quis autem humano eam possit ingenio comprehendere, quam nec natura suis inclusit legibus, aut quis naturali voce complecti quod supra usum naturæ sit? E cælo arcessivit quod imitaretur in terris....[Quæ] non nubunt neque nubentur erunt sicut angeli in cælo. Nemo ergo miretur, si angelis comparentur quæ angelorum Domino copulantur. Quis igitur neget hanc vitam fluxisse de cælo, quam non facile invenimus in terris, nisi postquam Deus in hæc terreni corporis membra descendit?*" "But who can comprehend that by human understanding which not even nature has included in her laws? Or who can explain in ordinary language that which is above the course of nature? Virginity has brought from heaven that which it may imitate on earth....[They] who marry not nor are given in marriage are as the angels in heaven. Let us not, then, be surprised if they are compared to the angels who are joined to the Lord of angels. Who, then, can deny that this mode of life has its source in heaven...?" Trans. 365.

angelic beatitude.⁸⁸ According to this glorious condition, the temptations of this life which assail the average Christian's constancy of mind cannot endanger the virgin. Within her heart one finds no trace of those pleasures, no remnant of the intemperance or lack of self-restraint which ensnare other people, and perhaps once even ensnared angels. Virginity surpasses mere imitation of the heavenly life, for, Ambrose writes, "Chastity also makes angels. The one who preserves chastity is an angel; the one who loses it a devil. Furthermore, religion takes its name from this. She is a virgin who marries God, an adulteress who makes gods."⁸⁹ Ambrose's analogy here equates virginity with authentic unadulterated worship and service of God. For the one who has pledged her virginity, to offer anything less than her pure and chaste service is to commit adultery against her heavenly Spouse.

In his book *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal*, John Bugge claims that the *vita angelica* reflects the influence of Christian gnosis which sought to escape associations of death and sexuality, matter and contamination.⁹⁰ Although it is true that the angelic life is characterized by asexuality, the gnostic rejection of "multiplicity" and refusal to participate in the cycle of human generation and death have less to do with the *vita angelica* than Bugge claims. (For example, Ambrose, who celebrates virginity as the *vita angelica*, betrays relatively little interest in the dangers of the body and the realm of the flesh, or similar "gnostic" concerns which Bugge contends lie beneath the promotion of virginity.) The eschatological notion of eternal citizenship, for instance, has as much (if not more) to do with the fulfillment of faith and divine will as with any gnostic rejection of the material world. With its angelic transformation of mortals, virginity seals the transference of virgins' citizenship, causing them to be numbered among the citizens of Jerusalem: "Therefore that is the city Jerusalem which is in heaven, within which you now are kept as if perfect and immaculate; for nothing common can enter into it. Chastity is not common,

⁸⁸ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 28.8-12. "*Quam præclarum autem angelos propter intemperantiam suam in sæculum cecidisse de cælo, virgines propter castimoniam in cælum transisse de sæculo. Beatæ virgines, quas non inlecebra sollicitat corporum, non conludio præcipitat voluptatum.*" "How remarkable," he writes, "it is, however, that the angels fell to earth from heaven on account of their own lack of self-restraint, and that virgins cross over to heaven from earth on account of chastity. Blessed virgins, whom no lure of the body disquiets, no filth of pleasures casts headlong."

⁸⁹ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 27.17 - 28.1. "*Castitas etiam angelos fecit. Qui eam servavit angelus est, qui perdidit diabolus. Hinc religio etiam nomen accepit. Virgo est quæ Deo nubit, meretrix quæ deos fecit.*" By pairing up the consecration of one's virginity with true faith in opposition to adultery and idolatry, Ambrose casts a dubious light upon the spiritual morality of those who do not 'marry' God through the preservation of virginity. This theme is explored by Virginia Burrus in her examination of the Church Fathers' treatment of the harlot as a figure of idolatry and heresy. See her "Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity."

⁹⁰ John Bugge, *Virginitas: An Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1975) 30-32.

modesty is not common, which are written in the book of life.”⁹¹ Here *castitas*, rather than the individual names of believers, is written into the book of life. As possessors of this celestial virtue, virgins already dwell securely within the gates of the heavenly Jerusalem. Obviously Ambrose is speaking metaphorically of *castitas* raising virgins up “as if perfected and immaculate,” since the virgin can ascend only in spirit during her earthly life. Nevertheless, the heavenly nature of purest chastity dislocates the virgin, so that she no longer belongs to this world. Her spirit already dwells in heaven, the origin and true home of virginity.⁹² She obtains and maintains in this life what all others must wait for until eternity.⁹³ Thus, her angelic life serves a prophetic, signifying role: the virgin is now what all Christians will be one day.

While Augustine also acknowledges virginity as the *vita angelica*, in that physical purity and freedom from sexual union represent the angelic and eternal, he refrains from any claims, like those of Ambrose, that chastity makes angels, or that the preservation of virginity constitutes a heavenly virtue.⁹⁴ With the high nature of their calling and the exceptional nature of the pure life, virgins “display an angelic life before men, and a heavenly manner of deportment before the world.”⁹⁵ This genuine union of virginity and virtue, however, simply reflects what *ought to be*, and Augustine avoids focusing upon the angelic virtue or nature of virgins. Like Jerome, although for different reasons, he chooses not to celebrate the *vita angelica* at length. Where Jerome is afraid of virgins falling into (sexual) sin through over-confidence, Augustine fears for what the sin of pride might do to the virgin’s purity of heart. To each the focus upon the *vita angelica* is counter-productive at best, and deceptive in its security at worst.

Like Ambrose, Aldhelm sees in the glory of virginity an angelic beatitude which sets the virgin apart in two ways. First, Christ himself, as the heavenly object of the virgin’s devotion, reflects her angelic orientation. “In truth,” observes Aldhelm, “a great interval and a large

⁹¹ AMBR.Virgin. 40.4-8. “*Illa est ergo civitas Hierusalem quæ in cælo est, intra quam iam quasi perfecta et immaculata servaris; non enim intrat in eam omne commune. Communis castitas non est, communis pudicitia non est, quæ scribitur in libro vitæ.*” [Apc 21:27.]

⁹² AMBR.Virg.Marc. 10.24-25. “*Si enim ibi est patria, ubi genitale domicilium, in cælo profecto est patria castitatis.*” “Now, if one’s country be there where is the home of one’s birth, without doubt heaven is the native country of chastity.” Trans. 366.

⁹³ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 28.5-7. “*Quod nobis promittitur vobis præsto est votorumque nostrorum usus apud vos. De hoc mundo estis et non estis in hoc mundo.*” “But what is promised to us is at hand for you. And the custom of our prayers is among you. You are of the world and not in the world.” I am assuming that Ambrose is referring here to John 17:16. A negative has, however, been deleted. The Vulgate reads: “*de mundo non sunt sicut et ego non sum de mundo.*”

⁹⁴ AVG.Bon.coniug. 198.20-22. “*... ab omni autem concubitu immunitas et hic angelica meditatio est et permanet in æternum*”; “but freedom from all sexual intercourse is both an angelic ideal here, and remains forever.” Trans. 20.

⁹⁵ AVG.San.virgin. 300.1-3. “*...angelicam vitam hominibus et cæli mores exhibent terris.*” Trans. 209.

dissimilarity of vast proportion exists between the munificence of divine dilection and the affection of baser love: the one rejoices at being a companion of angelic chastity, the other is pleased to be the kindling of marital wantonness."⁹⁶ The love of virgins like that of the angels focuses upon a divine rather than "base," human object. The second effect of the *vita angelica* in Aldhelm is virginity's status as a charism of the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, if the glory of holy virginity is believed to be next kin [literally 'sister'] to angelic beatitude, and the beauteous company of the heavenly citizens wins praise for the merit of chastity, it ought to be extolled with the acclaim which is its due, since among the other ranks of the virtues it is singled out to wield the sceptre of the highest sovereignty and the sway of government;... so the divine majesty... set the special attribute of virginity before all the ranks of virtues in general which are enumerated in the list of the gifts (of the Holy Spirit).⁹⁷

Virginitas, the figure of the resurrection life and the representation of a truly faith-filled life, here becomes a gift of the Spirit (although it is not found in any of the lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament epistles). By ranking virginity first among virtues, Aldhelm grants it a more general spiritual authority, because the virtues are to be practised by the whole body of Christ. In his *History of Dogma*, Adolph Harnack offers one explanation for virginity's priority by interpreting it as the encapsulation of all Christian virtues.⁹⁸ But there is nothing in *De Virginitate* to suggest that Aldhelm preaches virginity in this light. Moreover, his exaltation of virginity above all other gifts of the Spirit, such as prophecy or teaching, implies that virginity serves a wider role within the Church since the Pauline charisms were intended for the edification of the Church, not solely the individual's spiritual benefit. With these claims Aldhelm uses the theme of the *vita angelica* to enhance the moral authority of chaste purity.

While Ambrose and Aldhelm invest the virginal life on earth with heavenly qualities, and Augustine treats virginity as a foretaste of heaven, in each case the principle of the *vita angelica* is the same. The holy chastity of a virginal body, unbroken and untouched by carnal union, signifies the angelic life. Moreover, virgins live according to and for the eternal life, not the earthly life. The *vita angelica* grants the corruptible human body a taste of freedom from the fear of decay to which all are subject. The virginal body exemplifies this resurrection freedom. The *vita angelica*

⁹⁶ ALDH.Pro.s.virg. 246.6-9. "*Revera grande constat intervallum et larga spatiosae intercapidinis differentia inter divinæ dilectionis munificentiam et infimi amoris diligentiam: una se angelicæ castitatis comitem fore gratulatur, altera se maritalis lasciviæ fomitem lætatur.*" Trans. 73.

⁹⁷ ALDH.Pro.s.virg. 234.9-12, 14-17. "*Igitur, si sanctæ virginitatis gloria angelicæ beatitudinis germana creditur et pulchra supernorum civium sodalitas merito pudicitie prædicatur, debitis attolenda est præconiis, cum inter ceteras virtutum infulus summi principatus sceptrum et regnandi monarchiam gubernare dinoscitur.... ita divina maiestas...omnibus generalium virtutum gradibus, quæ in catalogo charismatum enumerantur, speciale virginitatis privilegium præposuit.*" Trans. 63.

⁹⁸ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol.3, trans. Neil Buchanan (NY: Dover Publishing Inc., 1961) 132.

attests that the virgin lives an anomalous life, inhabiting a physical body whose bodily nature her manner of life symbolically abrogates. Through her perpetual chastity the virgin manifests a life of spiritual incorruption.

In addition to the theme of the *vita angelica*, the Fathers employ the topos of heavenly rewards--the crowns and palms awarded to virgins for their faithfulness--to illustrate the glory and honour due to the heavenly life of virginity. Crowns, in particular, surface not only in the Fathers' writings, but also in Ælfric's Old English *passiones* of the married-virgin saints to be discussed in later chapters. The New Testament sources for this imagery portray crowns and palms as the rewards for all righteous Christians, but Jerome, Augustine and Aldhelm restrict this imagery to virgins.⁹⁹ They use these rewards to contrast the honours received by virgins to those of the other grades of chastity, and to illustrate how quickly the illustrious rewards of virginity may be snatched away with the destruction of purity.

Jerome makes much of the virgin's "crown of glory" and warns Eustochium that she is continually in danger of losing her virginity and her heavenly reward.¹⁰⁰ If Jerome emphasizes the uncertainty of these rewards to make the virgin wary for her safety, then Augustine attempts to mitigate the pride that the promise of such honours might foster in the virgin. Assuring her of the eternal prize, he admonishes her not to disparage those who lack the blessing of *integritas*. Instead of taking pride in her virginity Augustine recommends that she "rather be confident that a palm of greater glory has been prepared for her who did not fear to be condemned if she married, but who aspired to be more honourably crowned for not marrying."¹⁰¹ The rewards are not given because the virgin refrains from "sin," but because she desires a higher goal. Love, not fear, is to be honoured.

Of all the works of these Fathers, Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* contains the most references to glories like palms and crowns. Again and again, Aldhelm, who only passingly refers to virginity as a sacrifice and to the virgin's similarity to the ark, depicts the symbols of perpetual chastity's eternal privileges. The "companion of angelic chastity," he writes, is decorated by "the crown of glory with the palm-wreath of virginity on her head."¹⁰² Throughout the *vitæ* in *De Virginitate*, one finds multiple examples of saints who, like St Amos, lived in anticipation of these glories and

⁹⁹ I Cor 9:25, II Tim 4:8; Jas 1:12, 5:4, Apc 2:10, 3:11.

¹⁰⁰ HIER.Epist.XXII. 163.3-4, 8-9; 188.9-12.

¹⁰¹ AVG.San.virgin. 251.22 - 252.3. "...hinc sibi potius maioris gloriæ palmam præparatam esse confidat, quæ non damnari, si nuberet, timuit, sed honoratius coronari, quia non nuberet, concupuit." Trans. 161.

¹⁰² ALDH.Pros.virg. 246.8. "...angelicæ castitatis comitem..." Trans. 73; 246.15. "...cum palma virginitatis coronam gloriæ in capite." Trans. 73.

resisted marriage so that they “would in no way be deprived of the palm of chastity.”¹⁰³ Usually Aldhelm employs these divine insignia when describing a saint’s death or the expected heavenly reward. Sometimes the saint ascends with a palm or crown in hand as the testament to their righteousness, like St Martin of Tours who receives “the crown of integrity” as a reward for his purity.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, Sts Chionia, Irene and Agape ascend to heaven after their martyrdom “with their palm of virginity and their crown of martyrdom” as the glorious emblems of their service to God.¹⁰⁵ In the exceptional case of St Cecilia and her husband, an angel presents these rewards to them during their lifetime as a foretaste of their heavenly glory. The angel exhorts the couple to guard their crowns ““with an immaculate heart and a pure body.””¹⁰⁶ As the gift of heaven, both earned and safeguarded by spiritual and physical purity, these crowns serve as a miraculous testament to the treasure of virginity and the future glory due it.

The third and final theme reflecting upon virginity’s elite spiritual status concerns the representation of perpetual chastity as a return to prelapsarian innocence. Like the *vita angelica* this theme depends upon pure chastity as a renunciation of “normal” human patterns. In the former case virginity looks forward to eternity. In the latter case virginity looks back to humanity’s lost incorruption. Both depend upon the interconnection of virginity and innocence. This notion is found in Ambrose’s exegesis of Christ’s blessing of the children, which he interprets as a reference to the immaculate gift of virginity: “children were presented to be blessed, who, free of corruption, preserved in their immaculate youth the gift of integrity. For of such as these is the kingdom of heaven, who have returned to childish purity as if to an infant’s nature, in ignorance of corruption.”¹⁰⁷ Ambrose equates virginity and natural incorruption in a manner similar to Jerome’s assertion of virginity as a return to the life forfeited by Adam and Eve, except Ambrose does not concentrate upon sexuality as defiling, unlike Jerome to whose argument this point is fundamental. Nor is he desirous of constructing an either/or situation, where the one who lives in virginity imitates the innocence of children, while those who marry necessarily forfeit this innocence. Ambrose instead treats virginity as a disembodied value. It is incorruption, innocence and gift. The body which bears the physiological sign of virginity by remaining incorrupt and innocent is

¹⁰³ ALDH.Pros.virg. 285.1-2. “... invitus nequaquam pudicitiae palma privaretur.” Trans. 102.

¹⁰⁴ ALDH.Pros.virg. 260.3. “...cum palma virginitatis.” Trans. 84; 261.2-4. “...integritatis corona.” Trans. 85.

¹⁰⁵ ALDH.Pros.virg. 307.3. “...virginitatis palma et martirii corona paradisi praemia.” Trans. 118.

¹⁰⁶ ALDH.Pros.virg. 292.22-23. “...immaculato (corde) et mundo corpore.” Trans. 107.

¹⁰⁷ AMBR.Virgin. 14.13-17. “... offeruntur pueri ad benedicendum, qui, corruptelae expertes, integritatis munus immaculata aetate servarint. Talium enim est regnum caelorum, qui in puerilem castimoniam tanquam in naturam infantium corruptelae ignorance remeaverint.”

notably absent from the discussion. The innocence at issue is spiritual rather than physical. Physical integrity is the sign, but not the content of that innocence.

In Jerome's construction of virginity as the signifier of prelapsarian purity, the physical and spiritual are utterly interdependent; virginal purity and spiritual innocence are merely two sides of the same coin. Like Ambrose, whose depiction of the *vita angelica* depends upon the fact that marriage will not exist in heaven, Jerome's depiction of virginity as a return to an unfallen state removes marital relations from God's original and ultimate design for the faithful. Unlike Ambrose, who does not attempt to throw humanity's sexuality into contempt, Jerome explicitly links the advent of sexual activity with the entrance of sin into the human condition. The pursuit of the virginal life is therefore a rejection of the sinful nature:

Eve was a virgin in paradise; the beginning of marriage came after the hide tunics. Your kingdom is paradise. Preserve what you were born, and say, "Return, my soul, to your rest. And know that virginity is of nature, while marriage came after wrongdoing: a virgin is born - the flesh restoring in wedlock what it had lost in the root."¹⁰⁸

Again, the virginal life reflects Paradise and the virgin's heavenly citizenship. More than that, virginity is a return to what is "natural"—natural being for Jerome that which precedes the Fall. From the beginning of creation virginity has been the ideal.¹⁰⁹ If Jerome's thought is taken to its logical extreme, then the Christian faces a choice between marriage and reenacting the Fall, or virginity and living in the grace (re)instituted by Christ.¹¹⁰ Adam and Eve lived chastely before the Fall, and only with sin did their union become sexual. By analogously relating sexual activity, marriage and the Fall, Jerome equates virginity with the sinless condition into and for which humanity was created.¹¹¹

To clarify the repercussions of the association of sin and sexuality, Jerome interprets St Paul's teaching, that a man shall leave his father and mother and cling to his wife, as referring instead to Christ and the Church. Just as we, like Christ, dwell in the flesh, so too we should be chaste as he was. Husbands are commanded to love their wives as Christ loves the Church,

¹⁰⁸ HIER.Epist.XXII. 169.2-7. "*Eva in paradiso virgo fuit; post pellicias tunicas initium nuptiarum. tua regio paradisus. serva, quod nata es, et dic: revertere, anima mea, in requiem tuam. et ut scias virginitatem esse naturæ, nuptias post delictum: virgo nascitur caro de nuptiis in fructu reddens, quod in radice perdidit.*"

¹⁰⁹ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 246.26-30. "*Imago Creatoris non habet copulam nuptiarum. Ubi diversitas sexus aufertur, et veteri homine exuimur, et induimur novo, ibi in Christum renasceremur virginem, qui et natus ex virginem, et renatus per virginem est.*" "The bond of marriage does not possess the image of the Creator. When the difference of sex is laid aside, and we have put off the old man, and have put on the new, then we are reborn as a virgin in Christ, who is himself a virgin, born of a virgin and reborn through a virgin."

¹¹⁰ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 245.17-18. "*Primus Adam monogamus: secundus agamus.*" "The first Adam was married once; the second Adam was not married at all."

¹¹¹ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 245.50 - 246.4. For quotation, see p. 23, footnote 35.

chastely.

Christ was a virgin in the flesh, married in spirit. For he has one Church, concerning which the apostle wrote: "Husbands," he said, "love your wives just as Christ loved the Church." If Christ loves the church holily, if chastely, if he loves the church without any blemish, husbands also should love their wives in chastity.¹¹²

Jerome here reduces St Paul's edict (which is rife with wider social implications) into a teaching on abstinent chastity. Earthly physical union is contrary to the Christian life, for "in comparison with the cleanliness of the body of Christ, every sexual union is impure."¹¹³ As a consequence of the Fall, sexual activity binds the individual to sin and relations which do not, according to Jerome, reflect God's original design. In a fallen world, then, perpetual purity testifies to the individual's faith. Redeeming the virgin from the consequences of Adam and Eve's sin, pure chastity bestows upon the virgin an innocence and righteousness which reflects true union with Christ.

E. The Sacramental and Sacrificial Aspects of Virginity

While the depiction of Christ as author of virginity and themes such as the *vita angelica* help to establish a rationale for the spiritually elite reputation of virginity, these do not sufficiently explain the immense attraction of the virginal ideal. Nor do they fully account for the authority granted to the virginal body by the Fathers. As Peter Brown writes, the question does not so much concern

why the notion of virginity rose to such prominence in late antiquity [but rather] one very peculiar feature of this notion in Christian circles--that is, the enormous symbolic weight placed on the individual human body as an excessively significant locus of the "abnormal, not-natural, holy" mediation of human and divine.¹¹⁴

This mediatory status and the "symbolic weight" to which Brown refers is most clearly developed in the imagery the Fathers use to depict virgins and virginity. Some of these images are mere topoi, such as the metaphor of virginal chastity as a palm or a crown. But others, such as the depiction of the virgin as temple, altar and sacrifice, and the sacramental implications which arise from this imagery, point to the signifying role of the virginal life and reflect the spiritual importance granted to perpetual chastity. We shall see that the sacramental implications of the virginal body vie with more physiologically oriented interpretations like that of virginity as "a sacrifice of sexuality and personal fecundity."¹¹⁵ However true it may be that "By choosing a life of spirituality

¹¹² HIER.Adv.Iovin. 246.10-16. *Christus in carne virgo, in spiritu monogamus. Unam enim habet Ecclesiam, de qua idem Apostolus: 'Viri,' inquit, 'diligite uxores vestras, sicut et Christus Ecclesiam.' Si Christus sancte, si caste, si absque ulla macula Ecclesiam diligit: viri quoque in castitate uxores suas diligant.* Eph 5.

¹¹³ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 249. 27-20. "...quod ad munditias corporis Christi, omnis coitus immunda sit."

¹¹⁴ Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church" 434.

¹¹⁵ Salisbury 29.

a virgin killed the fleshly part of her, thus becoming a martyr to the cause of spirituality,” these interpretations fail to account for the fact that the Fathers did not construct virginity as a pursuit benefiting the virgin alone.¹¹⁶ Through their metaphoric representation of virginity, the Fathers propose that the purity maintained in virginal bodies performs a sacrificial, even sacramental, function for the Christian community. The virgin was so “hedged around with a heavy sacral language” that, Brown writes, “she was no longer a woman; she had become ‘a sacred vessel dedicated to the Lord.’”¹¹⁷

The first set of images containing sacramental and sacrificial implications concern the Old Testament temple, altar and sacrifice as types of the virgin. For Ambrose the imagery of altar and temple is particularly important in relation to the virgin’s physical purity. These images reflect how the preservation of virginity cordons off the virgin as the Lord’s, made powerful in his service and powerfully protected.¹¹⁸ To illustrate the efficacy of virginity, Ambrose relates the story of a virgin imprisoned in a brothel who remained undefiled despite the efforts of her captors. From this story he generalizes that although circumstances threaten the virgin with dishonour, she cannot be defiled. “Everywhere the virgin of God is,” Ambrose affirms, “the temple of God is. The brothel does not bring chastity into disrepute, but rather chastity wipes out the infamy of the place.”¹¹⁹ The virginal body signifies the presence of God, and cannot be impugned in any way. Despite his identification of the virgin as God’s temple, Ambrose’s focus here is upon God’s miraculous defense of the virgin, and not upon any sacral implications of the virgin as temple. In his reference to virgins as altars, however, he portrays for his reader how she contains within herself a microcosm of the sacramental and redemptive work of the Church. In an interesting inversion, Ambrose identifies virgins’ minds rather than bodies as “‘the altars of God,’ on which daily Christ is sacrificed for the redemption of the body.”¹²⁰ Placing priority upon the mind and the spirit, Ambrose’s development of this analogy reveals that if the virgin’s body is the temple of God, it is the incense, as it were, of her spirit that rises to heaven through the ministrations of God. The

¹¹⁶ Salisbury 29.

¹¹⁷ Brown, *Body and Society* 260.

¹¹⁸ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 46.11-12. See I Kgs 13: 1-4.

¹¹⁹ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 45.17 - 46.1. “*Ubi cumque Dei virgo est, Dei templum est. Nec lupanaria infamant castitatem, sed castitas etiam loci abolet infamiam.*”

¹²⁰ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 41.18 - 42.2. “*Neque enim dubitaverim vobis patere altaria, quarum mentes altaria Dei confidenter dixerim, in quibus cotidie pro redemptione corporis Christus immolatur. Nam si corpus virginis Dei templum est, animus quid est, qui tamquam membrorum cineribus excitatis sacerdotis æterni redopertus manu vaporem divini ignis exhalat?*” “Nor indeed would I hesitate that the altars are exposed for you, whose minds I would confidently call ‘the altars of God,’ on which daily Christ is sacrificed for the redemption of the body. For if the body of a virgin is the temple of God, what is the spirit, which, as if the ashes of the limbs had been stirred up by the hand of the eternal priest, breathes forth the vapor of divine fire?”

Eucharistic ritual of Christ's sacrifice to which Ambrose here refers symbolically occurs within the virgin on a daily basis, thereby sanctifying her physical body. Just as the temple contains the altar upon which acts of redemption are performed, so too her body holds within it the altar of a pure and undefiled spirit. At this altar, God alone serves as the priest, offering up the Son, so that the virgin herself is "fragrant" with the presence of God.

While Ambrose applies sacral imagery to virginity, Jerome is the one who truly develops the theological implications of this imagery in order to demonstrate the unique spiritual condition of the virgin. He elucidates the nature of the virgin's special election by describing for Eustochium the special vessels in the temple which were protected from both sight and touch. Moreover, Jerome urges her, she far surpasses the importance of mere vessels of gold or silver.¹²¹ By typologically relating the virgin to the figure of the Old Testament temple, Jerome locates her in the place of the former site of acts of intercession and sanctification, consecrated to God. Through her virginal body she signifies the living fulfillment of the sanctification for which the temple once stood.

According to Jerome's typology, the virgin stands in apposition to the temple in two respects. Firstly, she stands in the position of interceding mediary, and secondly, she symbolizes the dwelling place of God. Building upon this analogy, Jerome offers the human virgin as a figure of that portion within the temple that was curtained off as the most sacrosanct of holy places; he proposes that the virgin is indeed the "Holy of Holies...consecrated by the purity of virginity to God."¹²² In the days before the temple's destruction, the Holy of Holies housed the ark of the covenant, and was entered only once a year by the high priest for the annual sacrifice of atonement.¹²³ To compare the virgin to this sacred place elevates her on two levels. At the most fundamental level, the comparison claims for the virgin the honour and reverence once due to the Holy of Holies. In addition to this, she is sanctified to God as nothing and no one else can be. As the Holy of Holies was the sacred space which none dared enter but the most holy of God's servants, so too the virgin now stands sanctified and untouchable. Set apart for God alone, the virgin is holy and whole unto herself.

Moving inward from the temple to the Holy of Holies, Jerome then interprets the ark of the covenant as a figure of the virgin. Relating the story of how Uzzah was struck dead for unlawfully

¹²¹ HIER.Epist.XXII. 175.17-18. "*Neque enim aureum et argenteum tam carum Deo fuit, quam templum corporis virginalis.*" "Nor indeed was a golden or silver vessel as dear to God as is the temple of a virginal body."

¹²² HIER.Adv.Iovin. 267.37-39. "...*et hæc Sancta sanctorum, quæ virginitatis puritate Domino consecrantur.*"

¹²³ Ex 30:10.

touching the ark, Jerome asserts that the virgin's body is more precious. As Christ superseded the old Adam, so too the physical body of the virgin supersedes the ark of the covenant which the Israelites once carried with them as the symbol of God's presence. Jerome proceeds to emphasize rather than qualify this remarkable comparison. He refers to the "shadows" of the Old Testament and claims that virgins are the fulfillment of those things prefigured by the temple: "The shadow went before, now the reality is [here]."¹²⁴ Jerome describes the virgin with biblical passages that might be applied more accurately to the person of Christ and the Incarnation. As the temple, Holy of Holies, and ark of the covenant formerly stood as ritual objects consecrated to remind the people of God's holiness and their need for sanctification, Jerome proposes that the virgin now stands as the fulfillment of these symbols. Through the preservation and consecration of her virginity, the virgin becomes a living icon of the fulfillment of the Old Testament. She stands where the temple once stood, sanctified by her virginal purity to serve God in an innocence lost in the Fall, and as a prophecy of the eternal life to come.

For his part Augustine explicitly avoids crediting virginity in any way with a righteousness that belongs to Christ alone. When he employs temple imagery with reference to the virginal body, he accordingly marks the separation between God's holiness and that of the human virgin. Most importantly for Augustine, Christ alone is the Holy of Holies. Although through their virginity virgins are made pure in both "spirit and flesh," their purity cannot compare to the purity of "the Word made flesh."¹²⁵ Just as the incarnation of holiness and wholeness is Christ's alone, so too Christ alone fulfills the type of the Holy of Holies. For Augustine, the virgin has no authority to fulfill, even symbolically, those things which the Holy of Holies ritually symbolized.

Aldhelm gives this imagery only passing attention in his *De Virginitate*. Although he, like Jerome, connects the story of God striking Uzzah dead for irreverently touching the ark of the covenant to the protection granted to the sacrosanct virginal body, their interpretations of this image differ.¹²⁶ Where Jerome uses this image to rank the sacred nature of the virgin before that of the ark, Aldhelm is content to draw an equivalence between the two. The relationship is, in Aldhelm's

¹²⁴ HIER.Epist.XXII. 176.1. "*Præcessit umbra, nunc veritas est.*" Jerome may be referring to either Col 2:17, or to Heb 10:1.

¹²⁵ AVG.San.virgin. 278.8-14. "*Iusti sunt: sed numquid sicut tu iustificans inpium? casti sunt; sed eos in peccatis matres eorum in uteris aluerunt. Sancti sunt; sed tu etiam sanctus sanctorum. Virgines sunt; sed nati etiam ex virginibus non sunt. Et spiritu et carne integri sunt; sed verbum caro factum non sunt.*" "[Virgins] are just, but do they, like Thee, make the sinner just? They are chaste, but their mothers nurtured them in sins from their womb. They are Holy, but Thou art even the Holy of Holies. They are virgins, but they were not also born of virgins. They are inviolate both in spirit and in flesh, but they are not 'the Word made flesh.'" Trans. 188.

¹²⁶ ALDH.Pros.virg. 299.7.

eyes, purely metaphoric rather than figural. He recounts for his readers that God divinely protected St Agnes in the same manner which he did the ark of the covenant. Because of her faithfulness the virgin saint receives the same care as did the ark. God will not let his own be defiled. The image of the ark functions for Aldhelm as an image of protection, rather than as a prophetic figure.

The most extreme form which the sacramental representation of the virgin can take incorporates the notion of the virgin as intercessory sacrifice or compensation. As with the temple and related imagery, the sacrificial and Eucharistic imagery which the Fathers apply to the virgin contains sacramental implications. In Christian theology sacrament and sacrifice are inseparable, for the sacramental first and foremost represents symbolically the work accomplished by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. As Louis-Marie Chauvet writes, "if the death of Jesus is expressed theologically in terms of sacrifice, its sacramental representation as a memorial will also necessarily be expressed in terms of sacrifice."¹²⁷ Similarly, attributions of sacrificial mediation, such as in the Fathers' treatment of the virgin as 'sacrifice,' must be examined in terms of their sacramental implications. Nowhere are the implications of this imagery more obvious than in the Fathers' portrayal of children's consecrated virginity as the mediating sacrifice which compensates for their parents' sin. With regard to the virgin's propitiatory role, Brown writes that "'mediation'... is always achieved by introducing a third category which is 'abnormal' in terms of ordinary 'rational' categories.... The middle ground is abnormal, non-natural, holy. It is typically the focus of all taboos and ritual observances."¹²⁸ The history of the ideal of consecrated virginity illustrates this very "abnormality." Brown credits virginity's rise to prominence in this intermediary capacity to the chasm which was perceived to exist between God and man in both pagan and Christian world views. Before the glorious incomprehensibility of God becoming man, writes Brown, "a stunned sense of the mystery... moved over the mind of every great Christian writer."¹²⁹ The prospect of a human virginal mediator was, Brown suggests, infinitely easier to discuss than Christ, the divine mediator. While I do not believe that the sacramental typology of the virgin necessarily reflects this awe-struck tension, I do believe the sacrificial language in which the Fathers (particularly Jerome) couch their praise and justification of virginity accommodates this discomfort and the simultaneous conviction of the necessity of mediation. The perfection attributed to the sacrificial life of virginity

¹²⁷ Louis-Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Representation of Christian Existence*. Trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1987) 291.

¹²⁸ Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church" 432. Quoting Edmund Leach's *Genesis as Myth* (London: Cape, 1969) 10.

¹²⁹ Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church" 433.

opens the door to the view of the virgin as expiatory oblation.

From the very beginning of his *De virginitate*, Ambrose develops the link between the virgin and the sacramental by referring repeatedly to virginity as *sacrificium*. He defends the “sacrifice of chastity” on the grounds that no one objected to the Old Testament hero Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter which was a “sacrifice of blood.” How much less then can anyone object to the “pious oblation” of a daughter’s *integritas*?¹³⁰ While Aldhelm and Jerome both refer to virginity as a sacrifice, only Ambrose blends sacrificial language together with explicitly Eucharistic language. He combines the two in his justification of a virgin’s right to defy her family in order to attain the chaste life. Recounting the incident of a young girl taking refuge at the altar, Ambrose likens the Eucharist on the altar to the virgin claiming refuge. On the altar lies the host, the “sacrifice of virginity,” while the girl herself is a “sacrifice of modesty and a victim of chastity.”¹³¹ The parallel between the gift of the girl’s body and the gift of Christ’s body in the Eucharist could arguably concern the purity of the two gifts. Or it could pertain to the two victims’ willingness to offer themselves in service to God. Ambrose’s general treatment of related images suggests that—although purity and the willingness to serve stir in the virgin a desire to imitate Christ’s sacrifice—there is indeed a sense of virgin as intercessory, even sacramental object at work here.

The sacrificial plays a role in Ambrose’s exhortation that parents foster in their children a desire for the virginal life, because children’s virginity (here specifically daughters’) intercedes for their parents. Ambrose here describes the virgin in sacerdotal and sacrificial language, referring to her as a “gift,” “present,” and “the priesthood of chastity.” Moreover, he continues that she is “the sacrifice of her mother, by whose daily offering the divine power is placated.”¹³² Ambrose’s description establishes the virgin as the sacrificial lamb “slaughtered” to make peace with heaven. This, however, is only part of the virgin’s role, for the word *sacerdotium* in the phrase “priesthood of chastity” typically refers to the priesthood or to the sacerdotal office. Ambrose does not explain whether the virgin herself serves a “priestly,” intercessory role through the willing sacrifice of her physical purity, or whether her virginal body *per ipsum* serves this purpose. It is unclear whether Ambrose construed the compensatory work of the virgin as the result of her voluntary self-

¹³⁰ AMBR.Virgin. 6.6-12.

¹³¹ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 33.9-10. “...*sacrificium virginitatis*”; “*pudoris hostia, victima castitatis*.”

¹³² AMBR.Virg.Marc. 16.18-20, 20-22. “*Virgo Dei donum est, munus parentis, sacerdotium castitatis. Virgo matris hostia est, cuius cotidiano sacrificio vis divina placatur*.” “The virgin of God is a gift, the present of her parents, the priesthood of chastity. The virgin is the sacrifice of her mother, by whose daily offering the divine power is placated.”

dedication, or whether such intercession results inevitably from the consecration of a pure body. Quite possibly he would have found the distinction irrelevant, for in either case, the virgin mediates, standing like the priest between the people (i.e. the virgin's parents) and the judgment of God. Like the sacrifice of Christ celebrated in the memorial of the Eucharist, virginity is offered up as a means of propitiation for sins.

The virgin's sacramental potential obviously plays a role in Jerome's treatment of the virgin as Holy of Holies, for example, which depended upon a sacramental interpretation of the virgin as the fulfillment of the Old Law's place of sacrifice and intercession. Building upon the comparison between the virgin and the Holy of Holies, Jerome identifies the virgin's choice of the pure life as a sacrifice: "It is a mark of great faith and of great virtue to be a pure temple of God, to offer oneself a whole burnt-offering, and according to the same apostle, to be holy both in body and in spirit."¹³³ Her choice of perpetual chastity transforms the virgin into both altar and offering. The metaphor confers sacerdotal and sacramental roles upon virginity. Through the preservation of her virginity she serves as a signifier of sanctification. Furthermore, the image of the virgin as sacrifice, or *holocaustum*, implies her redemptive potential. Jerome moves beyond Ambrose's treatment of the virgin as propitiatory intermediary. Ambrose simply alludes to virginity's sacrificial and redeeming nature, whereas Jerome portrays virginity as providing absolution for the Christian community as a whole, and for mothers specifically.

This second connection between the sacrifice of virginity and women's redemption is found in Jerome's exegesis of I Timothy 2:12-15. In his exegesis of this passage, Jerome teaches that women will be saved by raising their children (literally their sons) to chastity. Using an if-then (*si-tunc*) construction and the language of compensation, Jerome implies that women's salvation depends upon their children's sacrifice of virginity.¹³⁴ The stakes for a woman's salvation are exceptionally high, as if by entering into the bond of marriage (i.e. sexual union) a woman

¹³³ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 239.16-19. "*Grandes fidei est, grandisque virtutis, Dei templum esse purissimum totum, se holocaustum offerre Domino; et juxta eundem Apostolum, esse sanctum et corpore et spiritu.*" Trans. 356. I Cor 7:34.

¹³⁴ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 260.22-28, 33-38. "*Tunc ergo salvabitur mulier, si illos genuerit filios, qui virgines permansuri sunt: si quod ipsa perdidit, acquirat in liberis, et damnum radicis et cariem, flore compensei et pomis.*" "The woman will then be saved if she bears children [lit. sons] who will remain virgins: if what she has herself lost, she attains in her children, and makes up for the loss and decay of the root by the excellence of the flower and fruit." Trans. 366-367. For an examination of how Jerome's interpretation and translation of passages like I Tim 2:12-15 shaped views of not only women's sanctification, but also medieval views of women in general see: Jane Barr, "The Influence of Saint Jerome on Medieval Attitudes to Women," *After Eve: Women, Theology and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice (Reading, Berkshire: Collins Marshall Pickering, 1990) 89-120. See also Jane Barr, "The Vulgate Genesis and Jerome's Attitudes to Women," *Studia Patristica* 17.1 (1982): 268-73. Barr suggests that Jerome's minute changes to scripture had an incalculable effect over the course of the Middle Ages as these passages were treated again and again.

reaffirms in herself Eve's fall. Only the consecration of their children's virginity redeems women's forfeiture of their own. Like the Old Testament requirement of an eye for an eye, this passage suggests that virginity must be offered as compensation for the loss of virginity. In the end, although Jerome here refers to *filios* 'sons' as virgins, mothers' dependence upon their children's sacrificial virginity ties the importance of sexual purity more closely to women.

Jerome's pronouncement that a mother's loss of virginity must be compensated for by the preservation of her child's equates, on one level, virginity and righteousness. The requirement of propitiation ascribes a basic forfeiture of righteousness to the loss of virginity. Here the conflation of lost virginity and unrighteousness attaches particularly to the mother. Jerome's instructions concerning mothers here may represent a general belief that virginity is more important to women's righteousness than to men's.¹³⁵ The focus here, however, may well arise from the fact that the passage in Timothy concerns only women. With respect to the offering of virginity, Jerome makes no claims upon either sex based upon gender, as in the passage discussed above where he referred to the children as *filios* which can denote sons, or sons and daughters. Thus, it appears that the sacrifice of virginity and not the gender of the virgin is important to the mother's salvation.

The second element of Jerome's construction of virgins as sacrifice concerns their status as mediation for the larger Christian community. An example of this can be seen in his description of the virgins of Revelation 14 as the "first-fruits" of God. Jerome uses this passage not only to celebrate the superiority of virginity, but also to construct the salvific indispensability of virgins:

If virgins are the first-fruits of God, then widows and those continently married were the later fruits, that is of the second and third grades; and the lost people cannot be saved before, unless [that people] offers such sacrifices of chastity to God, and reconciles the immaculate Lamb by means of purest sacrifices.¹³⁶

As the first fruits, virgins are rendered by the rest of the Church to God like a sacrificial tithe, just as the first portion of the harvest was required under Levitical law to symbolize the consecration of

¹³⁵ It would be dangerous to speculate further than this because Jerome similarly corrects *sobrietas* to *castitas* when treating the character of bishops (I Tim 3:1-4). He suggests that the word which is rendered in Latin as 'sober' would better be translated as 'chastity': "*sobrium, sive, ut melius in Græco dicitur, vigilantem, id est, νηφαλεον; pudicum, hoc enim significat, σωφρον; ornatum, et castitate et moribus.*" (HIER.Adv.Iovin. 270.18-21. "Sober, or as it is better said in Greek, vigilant, that is νηφαλεον; chaste, for this signifies σωφρον; ornate, both in chastity and in morals.") The sense of watchfulness appropriate to these verses, argues Jerome, is synonymous with chastity. Again as with the earlier passage from I Tim 2:12-15 where he discusses the relationship between a mother and her children's chastity, Jerome here interprets these verses with attention to the relationship between children's chastity and their parents' righteousness. Thus a bishop's authority is invalidated by his children's lack of chastity (HIER.Adv.Iovin. 270.37ff). Again, Jerome makes a related correction in HIER.Adv.Iovin. 274.38ff.

¹³⁶ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 281.28-34. "*Si virgines primitiæ Dei sunt: ergo viduæ et in matrimonio continentes, erant post primitias, id est, in secundo et tertio gradu; nec prius perditus populus salvari poterit, nisi tales hostias castitatis Deo obtulerit, et immaculatum Agnum, purissimus [sic.] victimis reconciliaverit.*"

the whole to God.¹³⁷ Jerome interprets the image as expiatory rather than dedicatory. Virgins are a pure, propitiatory offering for the people's reconciliation to God. The unredeemed cannot be saved prior to virgins. They are first-fruits not only in terms of the hierarchy of the grades of chastity, but also as mediators, whose dedication seals the sanctity of the rest of God's people.

In Augustine, one finds little expression of such imagery. Where Jerome exhorts mothers to raise their children to virginity as a commutation for their own loss, Augustine instead encourages parents in *De bono coniugali* to nourish their children spiritually without referring to the virginal life.¹³⁸ Only in *De bono viduitatis* does Augustine allude to the compensatory aspect of virginity. Addressing a widow who had never wanted to marry, Augustine reassures her that her daughter's commitment gains what she herself has lost.¹³⁹ He then expands upon this idea with the explanation that the daughter's voluntary virginity enhances the "merits" of her mother and grandmother.¹⁴⁰ The younger woman attains the life which the other women desired, so there is a sense of God's purpose and provision behind her virginity which comprehends a "propitiatory" signification. Augustine's formulation here differs from Jerome's. Instead of atoning for others' lost virginity, the girl's consecration provides them with the vicarious fulfillment of their desire. Everyone benefits from her offering, as her desire for perpetual purity bears witness to each generation's love of virginity.

Spiritualizing interpretations of the sacrifice of virginity belong to a larger pattern in early Christianity which looked both to the Old Testament and the apostolic tradition for ways of conceiving "the worship of God [as] sacrifice."¹⁴¹ If the writers of the New Testament urged upon all Christians a sacrifice encompassing the whole person, where purity, obedience and the other virtues wholly consumed heart, mind, body, and will, how much more complete is the sacrificial

¹³⁷ Lv 23:9-12, Ex 23:19. In the New Testament St Paul uses the image of 'first fruits' to refer to all Christians (Rom 11:16).

¹³⁸ AVG.Bon.coniug. 217.5-8. "*Bonum ergo sunt nuptiae, in quibus tanto meliores sunt coniugati, quanto castiores ac fideiores Deum timent, maxime si filios, quos carnaliter desiderant, etiam spiritualiter nutriant.*" "Marriage, therefore, is a good in which the married are better in proportion as they fear God more chastely and more faithfully, especially if they also nourish spiritually the children whom they desire carnally." Trans. 38.

¹³⁹ AVG.Bon.viduit. 316.6-8. "*Gratias autem Domino, quoniam peperisti quod esse noluisti et virginitas prolis tuae compensavit dispendium virginitatis tuae.*" "But, thanks to the Lord, you have brought into the world what you did not wish to be, and the virginity of your daughter has compensated for the loss of your own virginity." Trans. 290.

¹⁴⁰ AVG.Bon.viduit. 325.6-12. "*Illa itaque sancta virgo, quam Christo volentem et petentem obtulistis, vidualibus aviae matrisque meritis addidit aliquid de merito virginali. Non enim nihil inde habetis, quae hanc habetis, et in illa estis, quod in vobis non estis. Nam ut sancta virginitas adimeretur nubentibus vobis, ideo factum est, ut nasceretur ex vobis.*" "That holy maiden, whom you have offered Christ in accordance with her own free will and desire, has by her virginal merit enhanced the merits of the widowhood of her mother and grandmother. It is no small advantage for both of you to have this child, and in her you are what you are not in yourselves. God willed that marriage should deprive you both of the privilege of holy virginity in order that she might be borne of you." Trans. 300.

¹⁴¹ Adolph Harnack, *History of Dogma*, vol. 1, 205.

life of the virgin which so perfectly exemplifies this manner of sacrifice? ¹⁴²

F. Relation of the Physical Body to the Ideal of Virginity.

While true virginity comprehends the whole person, requiring wholeness and holiness of both body and heart, it is the physical aspect of virginity which necessarily establishes the ontological presence or absence of *virginitas*. As we shall see in Chapter 4 with the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria, the testing and proof of physical virginity plays a fundamental role in establishing the sanctity of God's servants. As the token of a higher calling and the evidence of angelic likeness, the virginal body functions as nexus and instrument of divine grace. Because of the significance borne by virginity, a profound importance is naturally invested in the physical body that testifies to this holy purity. Despite the Fathers' unanimity on the importance of corporeal virginity, they do not accord the same degree of importance to the body. Nevertheless, there are two general consequences of the focus on the physical body as the bearer of virginal purity. The first is a marked attention to the singular and irreplaceable nature of virginity. The second is an increasing suspicion of the physical body bearing that fragile treasure. Concern for physical *integritas* and the irreplaceability of virginity figure prominently in the writings of Jerome. Thus, he firmly reminds Eustochium that the loss of virginity can be forgiven, but not restored: God can blot out the penalty of her sin; her virginity and its eternal reward, however, are forever lost.¹⁴³ Jerome's purpose in juxtaposing God's omnipotence in all things (*omnia Deus possit*) against the impossibility of restoring physical virginity is not to qualify God's omnipotence, but to instill in the virgin an awareness of virginity's singular nature. Whether or not the other Fathers seek, like Jerome, to instill apprehension in their virginal readers concerning the security of their virginity may be debated. Nevertheless, the emphasis upon the mutability of "intactness," cannot but exponentially increase concern for the physical body which bears the tenuous sign of virginity.

Throughout Jerome's writings, repeated references to the vulnerability of virginity bear witness to his concern. The tension between virginal purity and the dangers of sexuality are so omnipresent that no virgin can ever be confident. He warns the young Eustochium to remember that she walks among snares that have claimed the purity of "many veteran virgins, on the very

¹⁴² See, for example, Rom 12:1; Phil 4:18; Heb 13:15-17. These come out of the spiritualizing Old Testament tradition seen throughout the Psalms, and Hos 6:6, and, of course, from Christ's call for mercy *rather than* sacrifice (Mt 9:13).

¹⁴³ HIER.Epist.XXII. 150.4-6. "*Audenter loquor: cum omnia Deus possit, suscitare virginem non potest post ruinam. Ualet quidem liberare de pœna, sed non valet coronare corruptam.*" "Boldly I say, 'Although God can do all things, he cannot raise up the virgin after her fall. Indeed He can free her from the penalty, but cannot reward the one corrupted.'"

threshold of death.”¹⁴⁴ If elderly virgins of good reputation with one foot in the grave can lose their virginity, what virgin can possibly trust that her purity is secure? There is a sense here that the virgin may never relax, for the same body which retains the blessing of angelic chastity can fall headlong into sexual sin and forever lose that blessing. Warnings about the dangers that surround the virgin are not merely rhetorical gestures: for so long as she dwells on this earth, the virgin’s chastity is precarious. As Jerome admonishes, “You walk laden with gold; you must keep out of the robber’s way.”¹⁴⁵

All Jerome’s admonitions on the fragility of virginity, and the other Fathers’ injunctions to physical purity must always be read in light of the critical distinction between physical and mental purity. In no way does the glory of physical intactness mitigate the Fathers’ demand that their readers be holy in body *and in spirit*.¹⁴⁶ Only in the union of spiritual holiness and physical purity can the virgin truly please the Lord and give herself over to the consideration of the things of God. This two-fold holiness distinguishes true from false virgins. The latter are merely “virgins in the flesh, not the spirit, whose bodies are whole, whose souls corrupt. But that virginity [which is of body and soul] is the sacrifice of Christ, whose thought has not defiled the mind, nor desire defiled her flesh.”¹⁴⁷ The fact that a corrupt spirit debases virginity illustrates the insufficiency of physical intactness alone. This concept is of particular importance to Aldhelm, perhaps because his audience included abstinent women who had renounced marriage, in addition to consecrated virgins. Whatever the reason, he explains to his readers that only the union of spiritual and external, bodily chastity, will restrain the urges of the body.¹⁴⁸ In other words, the preservation of physical virginity reflects rather than begets true chastity of spirit. Therefore, the importance of virginity arises in part from its signification of the hypostatic union of body and soul in the life of faith. “Carnal chastity” by itself lacks the requisite intention, whereas the truly chaste spirit transforms carnal purity through its temperance of bodily impulses and desires. As Aldhelm explains, the meaningfulness and value of the virginal body as a signifier of holiness is completely

¹⁴⁴ HIER.Epist.XXII. 187.9-12. “*Memento, quoniam in medio laqueorum ambulas et multæ veteranæ virgines castitatis indubitatum in ipso mortis limine coronam perdidere de manibus.*” “Remember that you walk amidst snares and that many veteran virgins, on the very threshold of death, have lost utterly the sure crown of chastity from their hands.”

¹⁴⁵ HIER.Epist.XXII. 146.12. “*Onusta incedis auro, latro vitandus est.*” Trans. 23.

¹⁴⁶ I Cor 7: 34.

¹⁴⁷ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 241.35 - 242.3. “*...sunt virgines carne, non spiritu, quarum corpus integrum est, anima corrupta. Sed illa virginitas hostia Christi est; cujus nec mentem cogitatio, nec carnem libido maculavit.*”

¹⁴⁸ ALDH.Pros.virg. 264.6-10. “*...extrinsecus carnalis tantum pudicitiae immunitatem... cuius imperio indomita corporalis lasciviae petulantia refrenatur.*” Trans. 87. “the stainlessness of bodily chastity - which is only external... the inward impulses of bodily wantonness are restrained.”

dependent upon the adherence of the will.¹⁴⁹ Virginity devoid of intentional, interior purity is actually fleshly. To preserve intactness for its own sake only makes a prison of the mortal body. Pursuing its own ends and desires rather than those of the Spirit, the flesh subjugates the will to preserve virginity, only to make an idol of the virginal body.

The paradox of “pure virginity” is that despite these injunctions on the necessity of the spirit or will, the physical aspect of virginity must always be of greater importance. A virgin’s physical *integritas* is the indisputable testament of her purity. Although the preservation of intactness does not always denote purity of heart and faith, the loss of physical virginity (except in cases of rape) is frequently interpreted as a reflection upon one’s faith or commitment to God.¹⁵⁰ Jerome’s interpretation of the humiliated daughter of Babylon as a figure for the lapsed virgin demonstrates this reading of virginal purity as a sign of spiritual faithfulness.¹⁵¹ The loss of virginity here becomes an act of wanton sin as the virgin prostitutes the members of Christ through her sexual transgression, transforming the temple of the Holy Spirit into a brothel. To forfeit one’s consecrated virginity is to whore what rightfully belongs to Christ, and to lose one’s soul to hell (even marriage would be better than such harlotry). Ultimately, despite the fact that the spirit may qualitatively surpass the body as the most significant feature of virginity, the pure, untouched body remains the critical witness to the virgin’s pure and unflagging commitment to the Lord.

¹⁴⁹ ALDH.Pros.virg. 319.6-8. “*Omne etenim puræ virginitatis privilegium potius in solo liberæ mentis præsidio servatur, quam in arto carnis clustello continetur, et magis inflexibili ultroneæ voluntatis arbitrio tutatur, quam coacto corporis famulatu funditus ad nihilum redigatur.*” Trans. 129. “For every privilege of pure virginity is preserved only in the fortress of the free mind rather than being contained in the restricted confines of the flesh; and it is beneficially safeguarded by the inflexible judgment of the free will, rather than being diminished out of existence by the enforced servitude of the body.”

¹⁵⁰ Given Aldhelm’s reliance upon adjectives stressing ‘intactness’ (e.g. *integrum* and *intactum*) it is significant that in discussing sexual violation, he turns to Augustine to demonstrate how forcible violation does not affect the soul, instructing his readers: “‘Thus the sanctity of the body is not lost provided that the sanctity of the soul remains, even if the body is overcome, just as the sanctity of body is lost if the purity of the soul is violated, even if the body is intact.’” (ALDH.Pros.virg. 319.10-12. “*Ita non amittitur corporis sanctitas manente animi sanctitate etiam corpore oppresso, sicut amittitur sanctitas corporis violata animi puritate etiam corpore intacto.*” Trans. 129.) Again he cites Augustine, writing that “‘Virginity of the flesh is an intact body; virginity of the mind is an uncorrupted faith.’” (ALDH.Pros.virg. 319.22-23. “*Virginitas... carnis corpus intactum, virginitas animæ fides incorrupta.*” Trans. 129.)

¹⁵¹ HIER.Epist.XXII. 150.15-17 [I Cor 6:19.] ; 151.12 - 152.1. “*Rectius fuerat homini subisse coniugium, ambulasse per plana, quam ad altiora tendentem in profundum inferi cadere. Non fiat, obsecro, civitas meretrix fidelis Sion.... [S]tatim ut libido titillaverit sensum, ut blandum voluptatis incendium dulci nos calore perfuderit, erumpamus in vocem: Dominus auxiliator meus, non timebo, quid faciat mihi caro.*” [Is 47]. “It had been more fitting to have submitted to marriage to a man, and to have walked on level plains, than striving for higher places to fall into the depth of hell. Do not, I beseech you, let the faithful City of Zion become a whore.... As soon as passion titillates the sense, when the coaxing fire of pleasure has poured over us with sweet heat, let us burst forth in voice, ‘the Lord is my helper, I will not fear what the flesh may do to me.’” Interestingly, in this passage, Jerome gives the virgin’s physical nature (*caro*) the active status of the subject, reducing the virgin into the object upon which the flesh acts and which God then defends. The passions of her body strive with her as a formidable opponent.

II. *Corpus and Caro*

A. Gendering of the Body

Any discussion of the Church Fathers' teachings on virginity and the body must necessarily address the question of gender. Arguments are frequently made regarding the particular importance of virginity and issues of the body to women. In her book *Forgetful of Their Sex*, Jane Tibbetts-Schulenberg proposes that the Fathers established a mode of thinking in which virginity was perceived as the sole avenue by which women "could transcend their unfortunate sexuality and free themselves from their corporeal shackles."¹⁵² The "exaggerated emphasis" on women's virginity, she continues,

seems to have originated in the concept that women's lives, in contrast to men's, were essentially 'body-centered.' Women were seen as primarily carnal or bodily beings by nature, and therefore in order to lead a spiritual life they needed to deny or renounce the sexual and reproductive aspects of their being (i.e., that which specifically defined them as women) and transcend their gender.¹⁵³

As we shall see in the discussion of the Fathers to follow, and in Ælfric's works on chastity and the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints, this body-centrism is not as self-evident as Schulenberg claims. Her gesture of equating the preservation of virginity with an acceptance of asexuality may not be subtle enough.¹⁵⁴ First of all, the preservation of virginity does not by itself constitute the denial of sexuality or gender. Secondly, the frequent references to bridal and maternal imagery in texts on virginity and saints' *vitæ* attest to writers' reliance on traditional images of women and their roles in order to give the virginal ideal shape. While this use of women's gender does not refute Schulenberg's claim that women were more closely associated with their bodies, it does complicate the assumed relationship between virginity and asexuality. Like Schulenberg, Joyce Salisbury writes that men were not in general defined by their sexual characteristics, such as strength, virility, activity (as opposed to women's sexual passivity) to the degree that women were. She claims that "sexual characteristics... were not really considered central to his being. They merely indicate how manliness would be expressed sexually; sexuality did not define manliness. Women, on the other hand, according to the Fathers, were carnal and sexual by nature."¹⁵⁵ She argues that a dualistic division between men as spiritual and women as carnal pervades the works of the early Fathers. Furthermore, Augustine's attempt to rehabilitate the reputation and worth of sexuality, continues Salisbury, does not actually address the disparity,

¹⁵² Jane Tibbetts Schulenberg, *Forgetful of Their Sex: Female Sanctity and Society ca. 500-1100* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1998) 127.

¹⁵³ Schulenberg 127.

¹⁵⁴ Schulenberg 128.

¹⁵⁵ Joyce E. Salisbury, *Church Fathers, Independent Virgins* (New York: Verso, 1991) 22-23.

since he simply establishes power, rather than sexuality, as the determining differential.¹⁵⁶

On the basis of the texts themselves there appear several reasons to attribute to the Fathers a particular concern for the purity of women's bodies. For instance, most of the primary texts on virginity are addressed to women. Of the treatises under discussion here, only Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum* is not directed to female readers. Even in texts not specifically addressed to virgins or concerning virginity, an association can be found between women and the physical. In an oft-quoted passage from Jerome's commentary on Ephesians, he writes that "'as long as woman is for birth and children, she is different from men *as body is from soul*. But if she wishes to serve Christ more than the world, then she will *cease to be a woman and will be called man*.'" ¹⁵⁷ Similarly one finds in Ambrose's discussion of Luke that "'she who believes progresses to complete manhood.... She then does without worldly name, gender of body, youthful seductiveness, and garrulousness of old age.'" ¹⁵⁸ Such passages certainly imply a conceptual division between men and women, associating spirit and belief with men, as opposed to body and unbelief with women.

One can look to Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical traditions, which so deeply affected the intellectual milieu in which writers like Ambrose, Jerome and Augustine worked, for evidence of the conflicting views on women's intellectual and spiritual capacities, as well as the causes and effects of their physical natures upon those capacities.¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Castelli argues that the Late Antique world employed similar constructions of women's sexuality in social and religious spheres alike. "The religious system adopted the reigning idea of women's sexuality as token of exchange and reinforced it by investing it with theological significance.... For women, their sexuality is synonymous with their identity in this cultural order."¹⁶⁰ Castelli's emphasis upon sexuality rather

¹⁵⁶ Salisbury 50. Other works treating the relationship between women and the physical body include: Eleanor Commo McLaughlin, "Equality of Souls, Inequality of Sexes: Women in Medieval Theology," *Religion and Sexism: Images of Women in the Jewish and Christian Traditions*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1974) 213-266; Jo Ann McNamara, "Sexual Equality and the Cult of Virginity in Early Christian Thought," *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): 145-158; Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Misogynism and Virginal Feminism in the Fathers of the Church," *Religion and Sexism*, 150-183; Elizabeth Robertson, *Early English Devotional Prose and the Female Audience* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee, 1990).

¹⁵⁷ Salisbury 26. Quoting Jerome, "*Commentariorum in epistolam ad ephesios libri III*," PL 26: 533.

¹⁵⁸ Salisbury 26-27; Ambrose, *Expositio Evangelii Secundum Lucam*, PL 15: 1844.

¹⁵⁹ The source here again is Prudence Allen's *The Concept of Woman: the Aristotelian Revolution 750 BC - AD 1250*. In her discussion of the Greek Church Fathers, Elizabeth Castelli postulates the influence of Stoicism may be behind the connection between "pathos [passion] and femininity," "femininity and corruptible bodiliness" (74). She offers a convincing argument for the association of the feminine with the material world which the Christian must transcend ("Virginity and Its Meaning for Women's Sexuality in Early Christianity," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 2.1 (1986): 61-88).

¹⁶⁰ Castelli 86.

than the physical body is worth noting because, within the specific treatises on virginity under discussion, the putative connection between women and the physical body is less developed than one might expect. If Jerome's emphasis upon the prelapsarian nature has assuredly negative ramifications for the association between women and the body, Ambrose's and Augustine's texts addressed to women, on the other hand, contain passages that appear to mitigate the charge that the Fathers circumscribe women's faith in terms of their physical bodies.

In neither *De virginitate* nor *De virginibus* does Ambrose depict the body in a manner that suggests any particular link between the female gender and the corporeal nature. In one passage, he makes explicit use of the feminine gender to explain the manner in which the soul mediates between the body, *corpus*, and the fleshly nature, *caro*: "The soul does not have a gender; but perhaps it acquired a feminine noun because the ardour of the body impels it more violently; she, however, softens the attacks of the flesh with her own certain gentle love and with a persuasive reason."¹⁶¹ Ambrose defines the susceptibility to bodily impulses and passion as "feminine." Yet, that same "feminine" quality enables the soul to deflect the attacks of the flesh which would lead her into temptation, and indicates her authority over impulses of the carnal nature. Ambrose explicitly genders the manner in which the soul, assailed by body and flesh alike, exerts her dominion. Although he associates the female with liability to desires and the physical nature, the image is not a consistently negative one. The feminine soul is not powerless before these attacks, nor does it associate the body exclusively with women. Indeed, if the soul is female, then the body would analogously be associated with the masculine.

Nevertheless, despite the absence of any explicit link here between women and the corporeal nature, certain passages in Ambrose's two works draw together questions of faithfulness and sexuality. Positing a correspondence between men and faith that hints at an inverse correspondence between women and the lack of faith, Ambrose instead bases the relation between women and faith upon the possession of virginity rather than upon a gender binary. His portrayal of Mary Magdalene--which is neither dismissive of women, nor obsessively concerned with denigrating sexuality--implicitly connects sexualized women with infirm belief. It is at first unclear whether she cannot touch Christ (or chastity) because she lacks faith or because she is *mulier* rather than *virgo*. Ambrose eliminates any ambiguity by uniting spiritual doubt with active female sexuality. The one who does not believe is a *mulier*. Likewise the one who falters is justly called

¹⁶¹ AMBR. Virgin. 43.22-25. "*Anima enim sexum non habet: sed ideo fortasse femineum nomen accepit, quod eam violentior æstus corporis agit: ipsa autem impetus carnis amore sui molli quadam et blanda ratione demulcet.*"

a *mulier*, for *virgines* believe right away.¹⁶² Whatever he writes elsewhere, in these texts addressed to a woman on the subject of virginity, Ambrose does not unambiguously link the physical body to women. On the contrary, his distinction between ‘woman’ and ‘virgin’ suggests that the sexual activity of the body—not its gender—is the true problem for the Christian. This does not necessarily require the virgin’s repudiation or transcendence of her sexuality, but rather a willed abstinence from it.

Akin to Ambrose, Augustine furnishes a surprisingly positive interpretation of the body in the unlikely context of a discussion of ritual purity in *De bono coniugali*. Unlike Jerome, who interprets the Levitical law’s requirement of purification after intercourse or menses as proof that bodily acts impede the spirit, Augustine interprets these references to the physical body and purification metaphorically as representations of the need for Christian revelation.¹⁶³ As Augustine develops his analogy, the body ultimately represents the higher nature to which all Christians progress through knowledge and discipline. Men and women alike mature from an “unformed” state through the revelation of the gospel. In this regard women are no more burdened by their physical nature, and no more linked to ‘incompletion’ or ‘lack’ than their male counterparts. In the succeeding chapters, Ælfric’s similarity to the Ambrosian and Augustinian construction will become clear, but Jerome’s construction of the relationship between body and gender (which has less neutral ramifications for women) needs to be noted, for in his writing we can see a problematic association between women and the physical body.

Jerome’s construction of the virginal life as the means by which to regain the paradisiacal life particularly links sexual concerns to women. Eve’s trespass introduced sin, which in turn introduced sexual intercourse into human relations. As opposed to Eve, the Virgin Mary bore the antidote to sinful sexuality through her combined role as mother of Christ, the author of virginity,

¹⁶² AMBR. Virgin. 9.18.

¹⁶³ AVG. Bon. coniug. 217.13-18. “*Sed sicut multa lex ponit in sacramentis et umbris futurorum, quædam in semine quasi materialis informitas, quæ formata corpus hominis redditura est, in significatione posita est vitæ informis et ineruditæ; a qua informitate quoniam oportet hominem doctrinæ forma et eruditione mundari, in huius rei signum illa purificatio præcepta est post seminis emissionem.*” “But, just as the law places many things in mystery and in the shadows of things to come, a certain material shapelessness of this, as it were, in the seed, which when it is formed will produce the body of a man, is placed as a sign of a life shapeless and uninstructed; so, since it is fitting that men be cleansed from this shapelessness by the shape and learning of doctrine, as a sign of this, purification after the loss of seed has been ordered.” Trans. 38.

Augustine here interprets *semen* as a sign of the ‘shapeless ignorance’ of those without revelation or doctrine; the body formed from this seed, then, signifies the possession of knowledge and doctrine, that which is necessary for ‘form.’ That from which bodies are formed may be shapeless and ignorant, undisciplined and indecent, but the body itself signifies the rectification of this state and cannot as such be interpreted as connoting a negative value. According to Augustine, this problem of formlessness similarly accounts for the prescriptions for women’s purification after their menstrual cycles. (AVG. Bon. coniug. 217.22 - 218.5.) Where semen signifies a shapeless and unlearned life, menses represents a similar need for the control and formation of the mind.

and as the ever-virgin consecrated to God. The association of Eve with sexuality and the Fall, together with the Virgin Mary's redemptive and virginal roles help cement, in Jerome's mind, the connection between sexuality, virginity and women. He even goes so far as to say that in the days of the Old Testament "the virtue of continence was found only in men: Eve still continued to travail with children,"¹⁶⁴ as if, under the dominion of the Law, women must ever reproduce physically, rehearsing perpetually God's curse upon Eve.¹⁶⁵ Thus Jerome tells Eustochium that "Death came through Eve, but life has come through Mary. And thus the gift of virginity has been bestowed more richly upon women, seeing that it has had its beginning from a woman."¹⁶⁶ If nothing else, these lines of Jerome's tie spiritual life and death to virginity and childbearing respectively. Through the contrast between Eve's sin and sexuality with Mary's purity and virginity, Jerome magnifies the attention upon the female body and the sexual nature of that body. But it is less apparent whether the problematic nature of the physical body translates, for Jerome, into a condemnatory union of women and the body, or into an equating of virginity with the asexualization of the troublesome body.¹⁶⁷ The degree to which the Fathers associated women with the body, sexual or not, is not self-evident in these texts. The physical body is an inevitable topic where virginity is under discussion. The body is indisputably uncertain and perilous--as the following investigation of the terms *corpus* and *caro* will illustrate--but admonitions and condemnations are not the same thing.

B. Distinctions between *Corpus* and *Caro*

1. The Pauline Distinction between *Sarx* and *Soma*

Although we have seen that it is debatable whether or not (in these texts) the Fathers invested greater significance in the body's relation to the female virgin versus the male, the body, as the locus of purity, obviously plays an essential role in the virginal life. It is interesting that

¹⁶⁴ HIER.Epist.XXII. 173.1-3. "...in viris tantum hoc continentiae bonum et in doloribus iugiter Eva pariebat." Trans. 30.

¹⁶⁵ Gn 2: 16.

¹⁶⁶ HIER.Epist.XXII. 173.5-6. "*Mors per Evam, vita per Mariam. ideoque et ditius virginitatis donum fluxit in feminas, quia capit a femina.*" Trans. 30.

¹⁶⁷ The correlative theme which often accompanies discussions of virginity and gender is that of virginity as 'masculinizing.' In her introduction to *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist*, Barbara Newman proposes that two primary models were transmitted for women's religious formation. The first is the "*femina virilis* or *virago*" model and the second is based in *imitatio Christi*. (Philadelphia: U of PA Press, 1995, 3-6.) Her ensuing chapters explore various examples and developments of these two models. Although Jerome discusses women 'becoming men' as the noble effect of the virginal life ("*Commentariorum in epistolam ad ephesios*" cited above), and Ambrose comments upon women losing "gender of body," the topos of the virile woman does not occur in the texts here concerned. In the "Ad Eustochium," Jerome focuses upon the virgin's need to protect herself from possible defilement by circumspect behavior. Indeed, rather than encourage 'virility' Jerome actually criticizes women who attempt to eradicate all appearance of their gender and try to make themselves look like eunuchs.

when we turn to Ælfric both his discursive works on chastity and his translations of the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints display a comparative lack of concern for the physical body. The tradition of the Fathers needs, nevertheless, to be noted, for Ælfric deliberately excises portions of the Latin *passiones* which reflect the patristic unease with the body. The nature of the physical body's role in the virginal life can be seen in the development and semantic distinctions in the Fathers' use of *corpus* and *caro*. The differentiation between the words *corpus* and *caro* follows St Paul's discrimination between the 'body' (*soma*) and the 'flesh' (*sarx*). Like their Greek antecedents, the Latin words *corpus* and *caro* can each denote the physical, tangible part of the individual ('body,' and 'body' or 'flesh' respectively). Frequently, however, the significations and values underlying their surface denotation reflect more widely upon the essence of the person, and the nature of purity for those "in the body."

Very briefly, by *soma* St Paul denotes the whole person, rather than the mere corporeal substance.¹⁶⁸ This is not to say that St Paul does not occasionally use *soma* to refer to the physical body alone, as it clearly does in I Corinthians 15:44, where he assures the church that, although absent from them in body, he is present with them in spirit.¹⁶⁹ In general, however, St Paul's development of *soma* remains one of his "most important anthropological concepts."¹⁷⁰ Within the signifier of *soma*-- which stands in distinction to both the earthly nature associated with the 'flesh,' or *sarx*, and the 'soul,' or *psyche*, which referred to "man as a living being, a person"--St Paul includes "the whole person, the self, 'I,'" not simply the corporeal body. This inclusion of the more cognitive 'self' within the signifier for 'body' prevents any glib dismissal of the human body as negative material substance.¹⁷¹ It is to this that St Paul refers when he encourages believers with promises that the *soma* will be raised to eternal life and renewed, and rails against those who despise the physical body.¹⁷² In resurrection these mutable earthly bodies will be more than

¹⁶⁸ See Robert H. Gundry's discussion in *Soma in Biblical Theology* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1976) 3-8.

¹⁶⁹ Colin Brown et al. ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* vol. 1 (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1975) 235. See I Cor 5:3. Where I quote biblical passages with reference to *sarx* and *soma*, I have included Latin translations in order to demonstrate the correlation between *sarx* and *caro*, *soma* and *corpus*.

¹⁷⁰ "Man," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* vol. 2 (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1976) 566-7. Phil 1:20, 3:21, I Cor 15:44.

¹⁷¹ "Man" 566-67. Gundry qualifies St Paul's use of *soma*: "The *soma* may represent the whole person simply because the *soma* lives in union with the soul/spirit. But *soma* does not mean 'whole person,' because its use is designed to call attention to the physical object which is the body of the person rather than to the whole personality." (80)

¹⁷² "Man" 566. I Cor 15:35ff.

transformed and conformed to Christ's glory.¹⁷³ Far from dismissing the physical body St Paul promises the physical body a role in eternity. Moreover, by describing the body as "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (the image the Fathers used to such great effect with respect to the virgin), St Paul calls Christians to honour their bodies as the instruments of God's service.¹⁷⁴

While *sarx* occurs as a synonym for *soma*, it more frequently stands for that which is fleeting and subject to decay. Where *soma* has the promise of resurrection, *sarx* shares no part in eternal life. Thus, St Paul's prayer that Christ will be visible in the "mortal flesh" of believers refers specifically to the grace of God manifesting itself in the corruptible body which will pass away and decay.¹⁷⁵ Likewise when he rejoices in the sufferings that he endures in the 'flesh' for the sake of Christ's 'body' (the Church), these trials take their toll upon the perishable flesh, as Christ's crucifixion did upon his, not the body which will be renewed for glory.¹⁷⁶ It is to this mortal and perishable nature of the body that St Paul also refers when he uses *sarx* in the context of the Incarnation. Christ came in the likeness of sinful flesh (*sarkos hamartias*),¹⁷⁷ though he himself knew no sin.

Although *sarx* can denote the transient, mortal body, as it does with reference to the Incarnation, its most important role in the Pauline anthropology is as a signifier of the fallen human nature which contends against the will of the Spirit. Placing life before conversion under the jurisdiction of the 'flesh' St Paul writes, "For when we were in the flesh, the passions of sins, that were by the Law, did work in our members to fructify unto death."¹⁷⁸ In this manner he repeatedly advises his readers of the outright hostility between the flesh and the Spirit: "For they that are according to the flesh are affected to the things that are of the flesh: but they that are according to the spirit, are affected to the things that are of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death: but the wisdom of the spirit, life and peace."¹⁷⁹ For the Christian there can be no compromising

¹⁷³ Phil 3:21. "*Qui reformabit corpus humilitatis nostræ configuratum corpori claritatis suæ secundum operationem qua possit etiam subicere sibi omnia.*" ("He will transform the body of our humiliation that it may be conformed to the body of his glory, by the power that also enables him to make all things subject to himself.") Phil 3:21.

¹⁷⁴ "Man" 566. I Cor 6:19.

¹⁷⁵ II Cor 4:11. "*Semper enim nos qui vivimus in mortem tradimur propter Iesum et vita Iesu manifestetur in carne nostra mortali.*"

¹⁷⁶ Col 1:24. "*Qui nunc gaudeo in passionibus pro vobis et adimpleo ea quæ desunt passionum Christi in carne mea pro corpore eius quod est ecclesia.*" "I am now rejoicing in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am completing what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the Church."

¹⁷⁷ "Man" 504, 525. [Rom 8:3; Heb 2:14]

¹⁷⁸ Rom 7:5. "*Cum enim essemus in carne, passionibus peccatorum quæ per legem erant operabantur in membris nostris ut fructificarent morti.*"

¹⁷⁹ Rom 8:5-6. "*Qui enim secundum carnem sunt quæ carnis sunt sapiunt, qui vero secundum Spiritum quæ Spiritus sentiunt, nam prudentia carnis mors, prudentia autem Spiritus vita et pax.*"

between flesh and spirit. The two are so incompatible that the flesh not only perishes physically, but imperils the soul eternally.

2. The Nature of *Corpus* in the Fathers

For the most part, the Fathers employ *corpus* as St Paul does *soma*, to denote the physical 'body' free of any implicit condemnation of that body or its materiality. Without actively opposing the spiritual pursuit, the *corpus* nevertheless constrains it. The body, Ambrose explains, complicates the consideration of things heavenly, but it is not intrinsically contrary to it. Rather, the life on this earth (which finds its most obvious signification in the physical body) is at odds with the spiritual impulse.¹⁸⁰ The body is not essentially corrupting in the same manner as the defilements of "the flesh and of the world" from which the virgin must keep herself apart.¹⁸¹ The virginal life ought to reflect the imperishability of heaven wherein secular and carnal cares have no place. The heavenly-minded virgin struggles against the flesh, its fallen nature and inclinations, but not her physical body.

Unlike Augustine, Jerome and Aldhelm, for all of whom the Pauline distinction between *corpus* and *caro* generally holds true, Ambrose tends to rely upon *corpus* to serve the dual purpose of denoting both the physical body and the fleshly nature which strives with the spirit. Without the guidance of the soul the *corpus* is wild and uncontrollable. The body, Ambrose writes, "seeks a driver just as a team of snorting horses seeks a director for itself."¹⁸² At times the unruly body is almost too much for the virgin. It strains at the spiritual bit of her soul and assaults her with passions that would overwhelm her were it not for the Lord's intervention: "For the corruptible body weighs down the soul... until the above-mentioned passions of the body calm down by the power of the Word."¹⁸³ In Ambrose's thought, conflict defines the relationship between body and spirit. Unless mastered by the soul, the willfulness of the *corpus mortale* continually rebels against the virgin's resolve, until it is finally brought under control.

Although Jerome, like Ambrose, discusses *corpus* within the context of guarding or mastering the body, he locates the inclination to err in *caro*. On the one hand he advises

¹⁸⁰ AMBR.Virgin. 39.9-12. "*Sed quia hoc impossibile erat in hoc corporis velut clauistro reclusis, et quia defunctis corporibus, anima fertur ad superiora revolare, alligata dum vivimus quadam nostrae lege naturæ...*" "But because this is impossible in this body, for those shut up as if in an enclosure; wherefore with the death of the body, it is said the spirit turns to higher things, having been bound while we live by a certain law of our nature."

¹⁸¹ AMBR.Virgin. 38.19-20. "...*corruptela enim abesse debet a castis: itaque carnis et mundi sepelire curam.*" "...for corruption ought to be absent from the chaste; and so bury the care of the flesh and of the world."

¹⁸² AMBR.Virgin. 44.7-8. "...*velut quidam equorum frementium currus rectorem sui quærit aurigam.*"

¹⁸³ AMBR.Virgin. 44.16-21. "*Corruptibile enim corpus animam gravat... donec memoratæ corporis passiones Verbi virtute mitescant.*"

Eustochium to assiduously guard her virginity because he is apprehensive about the sexual potential of the physical body. On the other hand he likens the virginal *corpus* time and again to God's temple or altar. Even if Jerome can construct the virginal *corpus* as good,¹⁸⁴ we shall see that *caro* and its destructive influence upon the body forcefully disturb his peace of mind.

In the three Augustinian works, where *corpus* denotes the human body, it connotes the uncertainty of the physical nature. This fallibility did not result from the Fall, as it has defined the human condition from the beginning. Even in Eden the human *corpus* occupied a precarious position, with its mortality and vulnerability held in check by God's divine preservation.¹⁸⁵ Had Adam and Eve not sinned, Augustine writes, "they would be turned [by God] into something better, not by the death of man, by which the body is deserted by the soul, but by a blessed change from mortality to immortality, from an animal to a spiritual quality."¹⁸⁶ Even in Eden, then, Adam and Eve's bodies were not what they would have been ultimately. With the Fall, the divine preservation of *corpus*, its transformation from mortality into immortality, and its final, spiritual exaltation was lost. While the transformation which Augustine describes is only hypothetical (i.e. it would have happened had Adam and Eve *not* fallen), it nevertheless separates the body's beatification from earthly death. By allowing for the possibility of the physical body's transformation while it yet lives on earth, Augustine denies any condemnation of the material *corpus*, however much he may wrestle with the unruly nature of the body in this present life.

References to *corpus* in Aldhelm's *vitæ* of the saints do not reflect a concern for the body's spiritual transformation, as in Augustine. *Corpus* tends to denote the physical body without drawing in queries regarding the prelapsarian body, or reflecting upon its moral tendencies. On the whole, *De Virginitate* displays a judicious neutrality with regard to the signification of the body; we will see something similar in Ælfric. Aldhelm writes simply that St Athanasius preserved "his body uncorrupted from puberty onward" as he followed his religious calling, with no suggestion that the physical body could affect the ascetic life negatively.¹⁸⁷ Similarly, in the case of St Amos, Aldhelm writes that heavenly miracles were performed in order to protect the saint's modesty and

¹⁸⁴ HIER.Epist.XXII. 175.18. "...templum corporis virginalis.."

¹⁸⁵ AVG.Bon.coniug. 189.12-18. "... illa corpora primi coniugii et mortalia fuisse intellegamus prima conformatione et tamen non moritura, nisi peccassent... quia vulnerabile corpus erat, quod tamen non accidisset, nisi fieret quod ille vetuisset - ita ergo possent etiam per concubitus talium corporum generationes subsistere...." "...the bodies of the first marriage were both mortal at the first formation and yet would not have died, if they had not sinned.... because the body was vulnerable, which, however, would not have happened, unless that was done which He had forbidden...." Trans. 11.

¹⁸⁶ AVG.Bon.coniug. 190.1-6. "...in melius converterentur non morte hominis, qua corpus ab anima deseritur, sed beata commutatione a mortalitate ad immortalitatem, ab animali ad spiritalem qualitatem!" Trans. 11.

¹⁸⁷ ALDH.Pros.virg. 273.23. "...a pubertate incorrupto corpore..." Trans. 93-94.

embarrassment over his body.¹⁸⁸ Amos' discomfort about the impropriety of revealing his body merely demonstrates the fitting modesty of a virgin saint. No burden of shame weighs upon *corpus ipsum*.

3. The Nature of *Caro* in the Fathers

Instead of the physical body denoted by *corpus*, the Fathers place the onus of the fallen nature on the realm of the flesh, signified by *caro*. With the exception of Ambrose, the Fathers generally employ *caro* to denote the impulses and the corruption with which the virgin wrestles. Sinfulness and the sexual urge are both rooted deeply within the flesh. The following discussion of *caro* divides into two sections. The first section examines how Jerome presents *caro* as antagonistic to the life of the spirit. This, in turn, has particular consequences for the second section which concerns the construction of *caro* in opposition to virginity. If Augustine explores the nature and reality of *corpus* most subtly, then Jerome most thoroughly (though perhaps not subtly) expounds upon *caro* and the special pertinence of fleshly corruption for the virgin whose pure physical body *is* incorruption. The perfect purity of the eternal life belongs to the virgin in this life after all:

Where the inheritance is proclaimed incorrupt, and immaculate and unwithering, having been prepared in heaven and reserved for the last time, and [where this inheritance is called] the hope of the eternal life, when they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, there, in other words, the privilege of virginity is described.¹⁸⁹

In spite of his repeated assertions about the perils of bearing the treasure of virginity about in weak vessels, Jerome focuses his attack upon the body's tendencies rather than its essential constitution.¹⁹⁰ The virgin may contend with the flesh at work in her body, but the primary associations with the flesh belong to those who participate actively in the sexual life of the body, and not the virgin who "has died and risen together with the Lord and has crucified the flesh with its vices and desires."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ ALDH.Pros.virg. 286.7-10. "... *quanta vero sit pudicitiae virtus... quod vir Dei, dum Nilotica gurgitis fluentia transire satageret et spoliare se melote et amiculis erubesceret, ne pudibunda corporis nuditas et indecens obscenitas castos offenderet obtutus....*" Trans. 103 "How great is the virtue of chastity shall be more clear from the following (anecdote) - that the man of God, when he was endeavouring to cross the waters of the river Nile, was ashamed to shed his sheepskin cloak and his other clothing lest the shameful nakedness of his body and its improper indecency were to offend chaste eyes."

¹⁸⁹ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 278.32-37. "*Ubi incorrupta praedicatur haereditas, et immaculata et immarcescibilis, et praeparata in caelis, et in tempus novissimum reservata, et spes vitae aeternae, quando non nubent, neque nubentur, ibi aliis verbis virginitatis privilegia describuntur.*"

¹⁹⁰ HIER.Epist.XXII. 204.18 - 205.3. In this chapter Jerome explicitly takes issue with the Manichaean assertion that the devil created the body.

¹⁹¹ HIER.Epist.XXII. 205.11-12. "...*qui conmortuus est Domino suo et conresurrexit et crucifixit carnem cum vitiis et concupiscentiis....*"

The discussion of 'flesh' then begins with Jerome, who employs *caro* to delineate an eternal and cosmic opposition between *caro* and the life of the spirit. He consistently combines the rule of *caro*, the sexual impulse and marriage together with the Old Law, in opposition to the advent of Christ which is for him analogous to the advent of virginity.¹⁹² The Law (and through it marriage) was bound to the wisdom of the flesh which is counter to the revealed wisdom of the Spirit and the virginal life.¹⁹³ Interpreting *caro* anagogically, Jerome argues that just as *caro* was the driving force behind marriage under the Old Law before Christ, so too the 'flesh' belongs to the Christian's life before conversion.¹⁹⁴ Augustine, rather than Jerome, will later distinguish carefully between carnal motivation and carnal acts. Yet even Jerome does not treat the impulse of *caro* and the physical *corpus* as synonymous. The flesh signifies life before Christ and the pull of our being toward those things which are contrary to the knowledge of God. In the freedom from things sexual, humanity's physical substance receives the promise of renewal and of a resurrection glory akin to that of the angels.¹⁹⁵ The flesh which participates in this death has no place in the Christian's new life of the Spirit: most particularly the flesh has no place in the life of a virgin.¹⁹⁶

Jerome firmly underscores the incompatibility of *caro* and the life of *virginitas* in his interpretation of the Pauline opposition of flesh, blood and corruption as against incorruption and the kingdom of God. Interpreting the nexus of corruption as sexual intercourse, Jerome sets the virginal life at odds with marriage and the flesh: "Flesh," he said, "and blood are not able to inherit the kingdom of God, nor corruption incorruption." If corruption pertains to all intercourse, *incorruption, however, is strictly a property of chastity*, and the married cannot inherit the rewards

¹⁹² HIER.Adv.Iovin. 262.19-22, 24-28. "*Peperimus in lege cum Moyse, moriamur in Evangelio cum Christo. Plantavimus in nuptiis, evellamus per pudicitiam quod plantatum est.... Simulque nos commonet, ne legem Evangelio praeferamus; nec puritatem virginis, nuptiis putemus æquandam: Meliora sunt dicens, novissima sermonis, quam initium ejus.*" With Moses we gave birth under the law, let us die in the gospel with Christ. We sowed in marriage, let us through chastity pluck out what was planted.... at the same time he [the writer of *Ecclesiastes*] reminds us that we should not prefer the law to the gospel, nor think that the purity of virginity ought to be equated to marriage, saying 'Better is the end of a speech than its beginning.'

¹⁹³ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 262.34-36. "*In lege enim sapientiam carnis, mors sequebatur occidens; in Evangelio sapientiam spiritus, hæreditas expectat æterna.*" "For under the law failing death followed the wisdom of the flesh; under the gospel an eternal inheritance awaits the wisdom of the Spirit."

¹⁹⁴ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 272.48 - 273.1. "*Qui ergo in Christum credimus, Christi sectemur exempla. Et si noveramus illum juxta carnem, sed jam non novimus eum secundum carnem. Certe in resurrectione eadem erit corporum substantia qua nunc utimur, licet auctior gloria.*" "Therefore let us who believe in Christ follow Christ's example. And if we knew him according to flesh, we do not now know him according to the flesh. Certainly, in the resurrection, the substance of the bodies which we now use will be the same, although of greater glory."

¹⁹⁵ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 273.11 ff.

¹⁹⁶ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 273.27 - 274.32. Jerome's selection and arrangement of biblical references here suggestively, but not explicitly, equates "the fruit of death" with marriage. [Cf. Rom 6: 21-22, 7:4; 8:1-2, 11:14.]

of chastity.”¹⁹⁷ By delimiting incorruption as the proper domain of virginity, Jerome places the formidable burden of ‘carnality’ upon the married.

The inseparable relationship that Jerome perceives between sexual corruption and *caro* means that the sexualized body and all sexual intercourse, even within marriage, are incompatible with the highest spiritual pursuit. Marriage is, for Jerome, a mere preventive measure against fornication, exacting a high toll from the individual’s spiritual life. No believer involved in sexual relations is able to pray; one cannot receive the Eucharist after having sexual intercourse, and likewise sexual activity thwarts the life of prayer.¹⁹⁸ Brown writes that Jerome “contributed more heavily than did any other contemporary Latin writer to the definitive sexualization of Paul’s notion of *the flesh*. An unrelieved sense of sexual danger, lodged deep within the physical person, swallowed up all other meanings of the flesh.”¹⁹⁹ Because of his continual reiteration that virginity equals incorruption of spirit and body, the only model for sexual activity which Jerome provides is one of defilement, despite protestations elsewhere that marriage is a gift.²⁰⁰ Marriage is merely the lesser of two evils and in the end the best that the married can do is to imitate the purity they have lost and cling to what semblance of holiness they can.

Augustine too proposes that those who cannot remain continent and avoid the “tribulation of the flesh” receive the onerous yoke of carnality upon their necks, rather than walking in the

¹⁹⁷ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 275.34-39. “*Caro, inquit, et sanguis regnum Dei possidere non possunt, neque corruptio incorruptionem. Si corruptio ad omnem coitum pertinet, incorruptio autem proprie castitatis est, præmia pudicitiae nuptiæ possidere non possunt.*”

¹⁹⁸ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 268.53 - 269.4. “*Aut permittite sacerdotibus exercere opera nuptiarum, ut idem sint virgines quod mariti; aut si sacerdotibus non licet uxores tangere, in eo sancti sunt, quia imitantur pudicitiam virginalem. Sed et hoc inferendum. Si laicus et quicumque fidelis orare non potest, nisi careat officio conjugali*”; “Either it is permitted to priests to perform the work of marriage, so that virgins are the same as the married; or, if it is not lawful for priests to touch wives, they are holy in it [i.e. marriage] because they imitate virginal purity. But this also must be concluded. The lay and any faithful person cannot pray, unless he abstain from the conjugal office (i.e. sexual intercourse).” 230.24-31. “*Oro te, quale illud bonum est, quod orare prohibet? quod corpus Christi accipere non permittit? Quamdiu impleo mariti officium, non impleo continentis. Jubet idem apostolus in alio loco, ut semper oremus. Si semper orandum est, nunquam ergo conjugio serviendum, quoniam quotiescunque uxori debitum reddo, orare non possum.*” “I pray you, what nature is that good that prohibits one from praying? that does not allow one to receive the body of Christ? As long as I fulfill the office of husband, I do not fulfill that of continence. That same man [St Paul] ordered in another place that we should always pray. If we ought always to pray, we therefore ought not serve marriage, because however often I render the debt [of marriage] to my wife, I cannot pray.”

¹⁹⁹ Brown, *Body and Society* 376-77.

²⁰⁰ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 233.3-8, 26-28. “*Tolle ardorem libidinis, et non dicet ‘melius est nubere.’ Melius enim semper ad comparisonem deterioris respicit, non ad simplicitatem incomparabilis per se boni....Si per se nuptiæ sunt bonæ, noli illas incendio comparare; sed dic simpliciter, bonum est nubere.*” “Do away with the fire of desire, and he will not say ‘it is better to marry.’ For ‘better’ always looks to a comparison with something worse, not to the simplicity of something incomparably good in itself.... If marriage is good in itself, do not compare it to fire; but say simply ‘it is good to marry.’”

freedom of holy virginity.²⁰¹ But, for Augustine, this burden reflects the symbolic role of the flesh rather than a conviction of sexuality's sinfulness: sexuality signifies "an abiding, unhealed fissure in the soul."²⁰² Contrary to Jerome, Augustine does not suggest that the marital state presents a fundamental obstacle to one's moral or spiritual welfare, despite its toilsome nature. Instead the role of temperance is crucial to his teaching on *caro* because the unavoidable pleasure derived from sexual intercourse is, to Augustine, no different from the delight received from other acts such as eating. The act in itself is not sinful. Some acts (like eating) are absolutely necessary, and only become sinful when pleasure in the act leads to excessive indulgence.²⁰³ Augustine carefully discriminates between carnal acts and carnal motivation with the precept that the unwilled pleasure derived from such acts is not sinful so long as that pleasure does not overcome self-control.²⁰⁴ As Brown explains, the sinful incitement of the *caro* has far more to do with the fallen will than the physical *corpus*:

The *concupiscentia carnis*, indeed, was such a peculiarly tragic affliction to Augustine precisely because it had so little to do with the body. It originated in a lasting distortion of the soul itself.... Concupiscence was a dark drive to control, to appropriate, and to turn to one's private ends, all the good things that had been created by God to be accepted with gratitude and shared with others. It lay at the root of the inescapable misery that afflicted mankind.²⁰⁵

Acts such as intercourse must be performed carnally, but the non-carnal orientation of the will in such acts releases the individual from the dominion of the flesh and the condemnation which it might otherwise merit. Augustine's more nuanced treatment of *caro* still requires that the flesh be subdued and attributes greater righteousness to those whom the flesh does not dominate. Greater blessing falls upon the virgin or the widow who strives to bring the flesh under subjection, than upon the married woman who enjoys "felicity of the flesh" and long life with her husband.²⁰⁶ The distinction between carnal acts and motivations does not alter the perilous nature of the flesh nor the necessity of conquering it. The flesh remains--for the virgin, the married or the widowed, the chaste or the profligate--the locus of both sexuality and the errant will together. Augustine,

²⁰¹ AVG.Bon.coniug. 227.22 - 228.1. "*Nec prolem autem carnalem iam hoc tempore quærere ac per hoc ab omni tali opere immunitatem quandam perpetuam retinere atque uni viro Christo spiritaliter subdi melius est utique et sanctius.*" "Yet, not to seek carnal offspring now this time, and on this account to retain a certain perpetual freedom from all such practice and to be spiritually subject to one man, Christ, is better and indeed holier." Trans. 48

²⁰² Brown, *Body and Society* 418.

²⁰³ AVG.Bon.coniug. 210.22-24.

²⁰⁴ AVG.Bon.coniug. 211.20-22. "*Quorum delectatio illa naturalis nequaquam usque ad irrationalem nefariam libidinem... conferenda est.*" "That natural delight was by no means to be given reign to point of unreasoning and lust."

²⁰⁵ Brown, *Body and Society* 418.

²⁰⁶ AVG.Bon.viduit. 323.5-8.

however, refers elsewhere to the surpassing excellence of *integritas carnis*, simply to denote consecrated virginity.³⁰⁷ The use of *caro* to refer not to the ‘carnal will’ or ‘motivation’ but rather to the physically intact body seems to undermine a hard and fast division between *corpus* and *caro*. It does so, however, within the context of a discussion of the virgin’s commitment to God, rather than the Christian’s struggle against sin. I believe that the connotations of *caro* remain: the flesh is willfully inclined, but is, nevertheless, capable of being directed and rightly ordered by the spirit in the service of God.

Aldhelm follows Jerome in setting up a resolute dichotomy between virginity and the carnal. He praises the community at Barking (which consisted of both virgins and those who had left marriage for the monastic life), as “despisers of carnal filth.”³⁰⁸ Throughout *De Virginitate*, Aldhelm reiterates the incompatibility of *caro* and *virginitas*, and the vital importance of avoiding carnal corruption. With occasionally lurid descriptions of the saints resisting offers of marriage and defending their *integritas*, Aldhelm draws attention to the disparity between the glory of virginity and the depravity of the flesh. There is, however, a noteworthy difference between his emphasis upon carnal defilement in the *vitæ* and the tone of the non-exemplary sections of *De Virginitate*. In the latter passages Aldhelm carefully negotiates between the praise of virginity and caveats about its preeminence. He qualifies the praise of virginity with stipulations that its honour does not debase marriage and that virgins cannot take pride in their physical intactness. Yet, in the exempla he unequivocally disparages marriage. The virgin saint faced with the threat of marriage and carnal defilement considers first how she can preserve her virginal ‘integrity.’ In one memorable passage, Aldhelm describes St Cecilia’s adamant rejection of her betrothed: “[She] refused the companionship of a conferred marriage and the betrothal ceremonies of her suitor on the grounds of her chastity, and scorned, despised and rejected them with laudable spiritual fervor, just as the foul excrement of the latrine.”³⁰⁹ (We shall see later that Ælfric does *not* adopt this tone in his translation of the *passio* of St Cecilia.) Aldhelm leaves no doubt that the saint’s “no” indeed means “no.” With these *vitæ* Aldhelm offers his monastic readers models of virginity which portray

³⁰⁷ AVG.San.virgin. 242.6-12. “...quanto magis quantoque honoratius in animi bonis illa continentia numeranda est, qua integritas carnis ipsi creatori animæ et carnis vovetur, consecratur, servatur!” “How much more, and how much the more honourably, is that continence to be numbered among the goods of the soul by which integrity of the flesh is vowed, consecrated, and preserved for the Creator Himself of the soul and of the flesh.” Trans. 151. I have substituted the more literal ‘flesh’ for body, as McQuade translates it.

³⁰⁸ ALDH.Pros.virg. 298.13. “...carnalis spurcitæ contemptores.” Trans. 112.

³⁰⁹ ALDH.Pros.virg. 292.14-16. “...sub prætextu integritatis.” “...indultæ iugalitatis consortia ac pacta proci sponsalia obtentu castitatis refutans velut spurca latrinarum purgamenta laudabili spiritus fervore contempserit, despexerit, respuerit.” Trans. 107.

physical incorruption as the sole signifier of the virgin's spiritual faithfulness. That which is marked in any way by carnality has no part in the life of the virgin and must be rejected lest it invalidate her spiritual integrity.

By way of concluding this discussion of the difference between *corpus* and *caro*, let us note briefly that the distinctions were not hard and fast. Where the two words blur in these texts, *corpus* tends to denote the physical body without any negative moral overtones, rather than *caro* which connotes the fallen will and the urge of the body towards the sexual. This can be seen in Augustine's praise of *integritas carnis* mentioned above. In their adjectival forms, however, both words tend to suggest the "fleshly" nature. Aldhelm's description of Gregory Nazianzus, for example, as "a despiser of bodily [*corporalis*] allurements and passionate lover of chastity" suggestively links temptation to the body rather than the will, just as *carnalis* does in other passages.²¹⁰ Rather than contradict the general differentiation between *caro* and *corpus* as 'fleshly nature or will' and 'physical body,' the cross-over of the adjectives supports it. Courting delights that indulge the physical body impedes the commitment to virginity. The *corpus* itself is not evil, but rather undisciplined. Therefore, to participate in things of a corporeal nature, or give oneself over to the pursuit of things bodily is to subject oneself to *caro* and the fleshly nature rather than to submit to a higher, heavenly-minded will which should rule the virgin's soul and body.

4. *Corpus* as an Image for the Church and the Virgin Mary.

As with *virginitas*, the images denoted by *corpus* reflect upon the value invested in the sign itself. Of the three primary images where *corpus* and *caro* occur, only the first two have relevance for the ideal of virginity. They are *corpus* as a metaphor for the Church and *corpus* in relation to the Virgin Mary's motherhood. Both of these images recur in Ælfric's treatment of the importance of virginity which will be discussed in the following chapter. The last, *caro* in relation to Christ's Incarnation, will not be discussed as it has less relevance to the Fathers' and Ælfric's construction of virginity.²¹¹ Although the other Fathers' works employ *corpus* in references to the Church and Mary's virgin motherhood, these images find their most developed treatment in Augustine's works on the respective grades of chastity, and, as his influence can be clearly seen in Ælfric, the discussion here will be confined to Augustine.

Expounding upon St Paul's depiction of the Church as Christ's body, Augustine proposes

²¹⁰ ALDH.Prov.virg. 262.12-13. "...*corporalis illecebræ contemptor et zelotipus castitatis amator.*" Trans. 86.

²¹¹ The Incarnation does play a role in later developments in the understanding of the virginal life, as seen in the work of Caroline Bynum. But it bears scant relevance for Ælfric. Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: U of CA Press, 1984); *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991).

that the virgin's body serves as an effective representation and reflection of the Church.²¹² While encompassing persons of all three grades of chastity, the holiness and purity of the Church is most truly reflected by the lives and bodies of virgins who preserve virginity of body and soul together. Like Jerome's representation of the virgin as the typological fulfillment of the Old Testament figures of the temple and Holy of Holies, Augustine's image of the virgin as the "incarnation" of the Church endows the virgin with a larger, iconic role that may actually give other (non-virginal) members of the Church a way of viewing, and indeed sharing in, the powerful image of the virgin. Augustine places importance, not upon the honour which the allegorical relation to the Church bestows upon the virgin in particular, but upon the signifying potential of the virgin for the whole community of the faithful.

Augustine's treatment of the relation between Mary's pure *corpus* and the virgin is less iconic than the relation between the virginal *corpus* and the Church, *corpus Christi*. The parallel between Mary's archetypal virginal body and the individual virginal body is for the virgin's personal, spiritual benefit. Augustine constructs a metaphoric apposition where virgins enter into Mary's experience of bearing Christ, despite the fact that physical motherhood has no place in their personal experience. Thus, the comparison between earthly virgins and the Virgin Mary elevates Mary's spiritual relationship to Christ over her physical one.²¹³ Perhaps because he, like Jerome and Aldhelm, generally uses *caro* in contexts of marriage and procreation, and Christ's Incarnation, Augustine denotes the Virgin's motherhood with *corpus* rather than *caro*, the latter of which he employs to refer to common mortal motherhood.²¹⁴ For Augustine, Mary's exemplary role holds greater importance for the virgin than for the married. Here, Mary's fertility and motherhood pertain specifically to virgins. But perhaps his most critical emphasis here rests upon Mary's voluntary choice of virginity, as he encourages his reader to imitate Mary by freely offering her virginity in love to God.²¹⁵ The Virgin's corporeal, virginal motherhood remains unique, and can no more be imitated by any virgin or wife than the sinless, uncarnal nature of her child can be

²¹² AVG.San.virgin. 236.22-25. "*Proinde, cum ecclesia universa sit sancta et corpore et spiritu, nec tamen universa sit corpore virgo, sed spiritu, quanto sanctior est in his membris, ubi virgo est et corpore et spiritu!*" "Therefore, since the whole Church is holy, both in body and in spirit, yet is not exclusively a virgin in body, but only in spirit, how much more holy is [the Church] in those members where she is virgin both in body and in spirit." Trans. 145.

²¹³ AVG.San.virgin. 239.18-20. "*Maria ergo faciens voluntatem Dei corporaliter Christi tantummodo mater est, spiritualiter autem et soror et mater.*" "Mary, therefore, in fulfilling the will of God, is merely the Mother of Christ in the body, but both Sister and Mother in the spirit." Trans. 148.

²¹⁴ AVG.San.virgin. 239.21-22. "*...non solum spiritu, verum etiam corpore et mater et virgo.*" "both Mother and Virgin, not only in spirit, but also in body." Again, he writes, "*corpore vero ipsius capitis mater.*" "Indeed, she is Mother of the Head Himself in the body." (240.6, trans. 149.)

²¹⁵ AVG.San.virgin. 238.13-19.

imitated or reproduced by human procreation. Virgins who remain *integra* can, nevertheless, imitate Mary's spiritual motherhood and unique relationship to Christ in a manner which corporeal mothers cannot. Although this figural relationship between virgins and the Virgin features prominently in Augustine, and also in Ælfric's homily *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*, in the *passiones* we see a different emphasis. In the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, Mary serves as the female saint's patron, just as Christ does for the male saint.

C. Ultimate Nature of the Virgin's Relationship to her Body

Because of all that is invested in virginity's power as a sign, the virginal body becomes the focus of much scrutiny. To varying degrees the Fathers each construct a conflict between the physical body (particularly the sexual nature of that body) and the spiritual pursuit of the virgin. This conflict leaves their virginal readers, seeking to pursue the life of the spirit, in a quandary. Jerome preaches that the hostility between flesh and spirit is so complete that the salvation of the virginal spirit may require "the destruction of the flesh."²¹⁶ The accusation against Jerome that excessive asceticism led to a young Roman woman's death suggests that some women took these teachings about repudiating the body quite literally.²¹⁷ Even in Augustine, who carefully posits the role of the will in sin, the body is never wholly innocent. Its errant inclinations symbolize the deeper rift between divine and human will.²¹⁸ How, then, do the Fathers wish the virgin to understand the relationship between the soul that she is and the body in which she dwells? Can the *corpus* act as a positive partner in the pursuit of righteousness? Or is the physical body so driven by the fleshly nature that the two merely coexist, with no hope of reconciliation until the final resurrection? Is the body merely to be tolerated as the mortal coffer of her self and soul?

While Ambrose does not link the body to sin, a discomfort with it still pervades his *De virginitate* and *De virginibus*. In one passage Ambrose depicts the soul as distressed within its corporeal home: "The soul is still disturbed; she yet feels her way along the walls of her home; still she seeks the front door where Christ is; she yet loosens the *bonds of the flesh* and the *barrier of the body*; Christ yet beats upon the doors."²¹⁹ Here neither *corpus* nor *caro* shares positively in the virgin's life. Both impede the soul that would seek Christ. As a solution to this conflict, Ambrose divides the external and internal 'body' of the virgin. Warning against 'corporeal' desires

²¹⁶ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 231.43-44. "*in interitum carnis, ut spiritus salvus fieret.*" Trans. 351.

²¹⁷ HIER.Epist.XXXIX. 306-7-14. In his letter of consolation to Paula on the death of her widowed daughter, Blesilla, Jerome himself mentions the accusations that the young woman died from her rigorous asceticism.

²¹⁸ Brown, *Body and Society* 433, 442.

²¹⁹ AMBR.Virgin. 29.1-4. "*Adhuc anima turbatur, adhuc parietes domus suæ palpat, adhuc ostium quærit ubi Christus est, adhuc solvit vinculum carnis, et corporis claustra, adhuc Christus foris pulsatur.*" [Song 5:5.]

and actions, he exhorts his reader to die to things of the body that she may flourish in her relationship with Christ.²²⁰ By treating bodily concerns and passions as external to the virgin, Ambrose constructs the true virginal life as an internal undertaking, within, yet separate from, her physical body. "Learn, therefore," he urges, "in this world to be above the world; and if you bear a body, may your interior bird fly. He who bears God in his body is above the world."²²¹ A principle of purposeful dislocation ought to direct the virgin. With an explication of a vision from Ezekiel, Ambrose attempts to explain the virgin's earthly life:

For that wheel upon the earth is the life of the body adapted to the power of the soul, and formed on a consistent course according to the evangelical rule; the wheel, however, in the middle of the wheel is just like a life within a life. That is, the life of the saints is not dissonant with itself, but such as it was in a previous time, such it is indeed in those following; indeed as far as the custom of eternal life revolves in this life of the body.²²²

The outer wheel which touches upon the ground is the virgin's body, and the inner wheel is her soul which pursues on earth the same life that it will lead in eternity. Since she cannot escape being a physical being, she must learn to ascend within herself toward things heavenly and to adapt the corporeal to the spiritual, the body to the soul. Despite their intimate connection, body and spirit need not interfere with one another. True virginity does not require a rejection of the body, but rather conscious self-discipline amidst the many worldly snares which can entangle and distract the virgin. Dominion of the soul rather than fear of the body rules the virgin's earthly pursuit of faith.

While Ambrose's interpretation of Ezekiel here does not establish an antagonistic relation between soul and body, elsewhere he attributes to the corporeal nature a tendency to excess and wantonness.²²³ In the face of such dangers, his emphasis upon the interiority of the virgin's life is a strategic deflection. He expands upon the internal nature of virginity with an image of the body as a sepulchre. Playing upon the notion of death, he commands his reader: "Be buried together

²²⁰ AMBR.Virgin. 51.19-23. "...*foris cupiditates corporis, quæ templum Dei maculare non debent. Et ideo quoniam templum Dei sumus, materiales a nobis sollicitudines abdicemus.*" "...the passions of the body, which ought not to stain the temple of God, are *from without*. And therefore, because we are the temple of God, let us reject material anxieties from ourselves."

²²¹ AMBR.Virgin. 50.17-20. "*Discite ergo in hoc mundo supra mundum esse, et si corpus geritis, volitet in vobis ales interior. Supra mundum est ille, qui tollit Deum in corpore suo.*"

²²² AMBR.Virgin. 55.11-17. "*Rota enim super terram vita est corporis ad animæ aptata virtutem, et ad evangelicum cohærenti cursu formata præceptum: rota autem in medio rotæ, veluti vita intra vitam; quod Sanctorum sibi vita non dissonet sed, qualis fuerit superioris ætatis, talis sit et sequentis, vel quod in hac vita corporis vitæ volvatur usus æternæ.*" [Ez 1:15 ff.]

²²³ AMBR.Virgin. 21.5-8. "*Et nos igitur si salvi esse desideramus, vel si iam meremur sanitatem, procul a luxuria, procul a lascivia; tanquam in arido vitæ istius et ieiuno solo, quadam siti corporis fugitantem deliciarum Christum sequamur.*" "And, therefore, if we long to be saved, or if we have merited health, let us follow Christ, avoiding allurements, far from excess, far from wantonness as if on the dry and fasting land of this life with a certain thirst of the body."

with Christ in yourself. Indeed, close your vessel, so that the unguent [of faith] may not pour forth. Close it with the key of virginity, with reserve of speaking, and with abstention from boasting.”²²⁴ The body acts as the receptacle of faith and the tomb in which the virgin buries herself. Salisbury identifies images like this one of the body as sepulchre as “images of closure,” which she proposes the Fathers used to contrast the stereotypical “patristic” view of “women’s open sexuality” with “closed” virginity.²²⁵ Her juxtaposition of closed virginity with “open sexuality” is provocative,²²⁶ but it seems as likely that Ambrose would employ the metaphor of the sepulchre here in order to remind the virgin that she is dead to the world to which her mortal body belongs. By instructing the virgin to think of her body as a vessel, he reiterates the disjunction between the virgin, her corporeal person and the world around her. Rather than the body being part of her self and her virginal life, she merely occupies her body. In so far as the body holds the spirit it is important and must be guarded. The essence and rule remains the soul.

Whereas Ambrose separates the interior life of the virgin from the exterior temptations of the bodily nature (but not the body per se), Jerome unrelentingly locates the force of sin in the physical body. The virginal life becomes one of continuous struggle. The virgin must wrestle within herself against the incitements to vice and the flames of desire.²²⁷ The body is the home of a thousand treacheries, for in it lurks the power of the devil himself, according to Jerome, who writes that the devil’s “strength is in the loins, and his force is in the navel.” In other words all the force of temptation and the power of evil reside in “the reproductive organs of the two sexes.”²²⁸ Control over the body and the repudiation of sexual desire become one, righteousness uniting together with virginity. According to Jerome, the very sexual nature of the body serves the devil. The body must be disciplined, and even broken not because of some divinely ordained masochism, but because the body threatens the treasure borne within. If the virgin wants to secure heavenly joys and glory for herself, she must struggle valiantly against the body which would betray her into compromise.

More than this, Jerome implicates the mere knowledge of sexual difference between men and women, as much as the sexual act, in the descent into sin. Such knowledge can consume like

²²⁴ AMBR. Virgin. 31.7-9. “...consepeli in te Christum. Claude integritatis clave, loquendi verecundia, abstinentia gloriandi.”

²²⁵ Salisbury 29-30.

²²⁶ Salisbury 31.

²²⁷ HIER. Epist. XXII. 47.11-12.

²²⁸ HIER. Epist. XXII. 158.12-15. “...virtus eius in lumbis et potestas eius in umbilico....viri mulierisque genitalia....” Trans. 26. [Job 40: 16.]

a fire, and sin spark from mere touch.²²⁹ Perpetual chastity is a perilous struggle offering little security during this life. The taint of the physical realm renders even the concern for material needs suspect. Concern for one's spiritual well-being should supplant all else, and the sustenance of the soul take precedence over that of the body.²³⁰ The focus of a virgin's attentions indicates the quality of her virginity. Concern for the flesh and its upkeep indicates a purity of questionable repute. Jerome draws a fine line for the virgin to walk,²³¹ for the virgin's spirit, thoughts and mind are as dangerous to virginity as the untrustworthy body. Intactness signifies little, if the heart is corrupt: virginity can be lost simply through impure thoughts.²³² The virgin is beset on all sides, most particularly by her own dangerously sexual body. To Jerome, this body, like the carnal realm, is nothing but a source, or at least a signifier, of danger. Animosity typifies the relationship between the virgin's body and her spirit. Given half a chance, the body will distract, waylay and destroy the virgin.

Rather than constructing virginity as internal strife, Augustine follows Ambrose's delineation of virginity as an interior life, by envisaging the virgin as occupying a different plane. Inviolability raises her from the fallen realm of the flesh to the kingdom of the soul. This, more than any construction of the other Fathers, resonates with the lives and sufferings of the married-virgins saints, particularly St Cecilia and her husband Valerian. Augustine still allows that the flesh will assault the virgin and tear her from her fortress, if possible, but for the virgin the primary danger of the flesh is the sin of pride. Augustine's instructions on humility remove the virgin from the realm of carnal influence and defilement.

²²⁹ On the dangers of 'touch, Jerome interprets St Paul's statement that "it is good for a man not to touch a woman" as a command that it is therefore *bad* to touch a woman: "*Si bonum est mulierem non tangere, malum est ergo tangere: nihil enim bono contrarium est nisi malum. Si autem malum est, et ignoscitur, ideo conceditur, ne malo quid deterius fiat.... Non dixit, bonum est uxorem non habere; sed 'bonum est mulierem non tangere': quasi et in tactu periculum sit; quasi qui illam tetigerit, non evadat, 'quæ virorum pretiosas animas rapit,' quæ facit adolescentium evolare corda.... Quomodo igitur qui ignem tetigerit, statim adurit; ita viri tactus et feminæ sentit naturam suam, et diversitatem sexus intelligit.*" ("If it is good not to touch a woman, then it is bad to touch one: for nothing is opposite to goodness except badness. If, however, it is bad and it is pardoned, then it is allowed so that something worse may not happen.... [St Paul] did not say it is good not to have a wife: but, 'it is good not to touch a woman,' as if danger was in the touch itself: as if he who touched her would not escape from her who 'hunteth for the precious life,' causeth the young man's understanding to fly away.... As then he who touches fire is instantly burned, so by the mere touch the peculiar nature of man and woman is perceived, and the difference of sex is understood." HIER.Adv.Iovin. 229.10-17, 29-33, 36-39. [I Cor 7:1; Prv 6:26-28.]

²³⁰ HIER.Epist.XXII. 201.18 - 202.1. "... *nec prius corpusculum requiescat, quam anima pascatur.*" "... and let not the little body rest before the soul is fed."

²³¹ HIER.Epist.XXII. 202.18 - 203.2, 6-11.

²³² HIER.Epist.XXII. 148.3-6. "*Quamdiu hoc fragili corpusculo continemur, quamdiu habemus thesaurum istum in vasis fictilibus et concupiscit spiritus adversus carnem et caro adversus spiritum, nulla est certa victoria.*" "...as long as we are held fast by this fragile little body, as long as we have this treasure in earthen vessels; and the spirit desires in opposition to the flesh, and the flesh in opposition to the spirit, no victory is certain."

I do not send you, O holy and chaste soul, who have not yielded to carnal instinct even to the extent of lawful marriage, who have not indulged your mortal flesh even for the propagation of a descendant, who have constrained your weak earthly members to the heavenly way of life, I do not send you to the publicans and sinners that you may learn humility - although they enter the kingdom of heaven before the proud. I do not send you to these, for these, who have been freed from the abyss of uncleanness, are not worthy that unspotted virginity be sent to imitate them. I send you to the King of heaven....²³³

From the opening address to the reader as *anima*, the virgin's participation in the physical realm is obscured. By virtue of her purity, Augustine disassociates her from the carnal and corporeal which are inseparably associated with appetite and weakness. Before temptations, she behaves as though she dwells in heaven already, unpolluted by any stain. Furthermore, when contrasting her to those who have been freed from the depths of sin, Augustine uses "unspotted virginity" as a metonym for the virgin herself. She is inseparable from her condition of perpetual chastity. Stripped of desires of the flesh and disciplined in her earthly body, the virgin can be taught only by Christ, and presumably humility is the only virtue left for her to learn.

Augustine's view of the virgin's relationship is not as arrogant as the quoted excerpt implies, for every Christian is called to put off carnality and be clothed in the spirit, to be holy both in mind and body.²³⁴ The pursuit of holy virginity is, according to Augustine, but one facet of the Christian pursuit of righteousness. Virgins share the purification of sins with all other Christians whether married, widowed or virgin, so that they dare not say that they are without sin.²³⁵ Notwithstanding the doctrine of original sin, virgins inevitably approach closer to irreproachable holiness than all others. They hold an advantage over non-celibate Christians because their preservation of virginity grants them the highest form of corporeal purity. This purity signifies the sanctification of will. This unity of body and will is, for Augustine, the only reason and justification for the life of virginity: the pure life is undertaken so that the physical body may reflect the chastity of the will, heart and mind. Neither glory in this life (Ambrose's *vita angelica*) nor the desire to escape from worldly tribulation (Ambrose and Jerome's *molestiae nuptiarum*) justifies the choice of virginity.²³⁶ Nor does Augustine's construction of perpetual purity displace

²³³ AVG.San.virgin. 278.17 - 279.3. "Non ego te, anima pia, pudica, quæ adpetitum carnalem nec usque ad concessum coniugium relaxasti, quæ decessurum corpus nec successorì propagando indulgisti, quæ fluitantia membra terrena in cæli consuetudinem suspendisti: non ego te, ut discas humilitatem, ad publicanos et peccatores mitto, qui tamen in regnum cælorum præcedunt superbos, non ad hos mitto; indigni sunt enim, qui ab inmunditiæ voragine liberati sunt, ut ad eos imitandos mittatur inlibata virginitas: ad regem cæli te mitto." Trans. 188.

²³⁴ AVG.San.virgin. 294.5-8.

²³⁵ AVG.San.virgin. 295.4.

²³⁶ AVG.San.virgin. 257.16-21. Ambrose and Jerome both dabble in encouraging virginity on the basis of *molestiae nuptiarum*, or the travails of marriage, which the virgin blessedly escapes. (See AMBR.Virg.Marc. 12-15; HIER. Epist.XXII. 145.15 - 146.10; HIER.Adv.Iovin. 240. 26-34, 260.15-38). For the extensive use of this theme in the Greek tradition, see Castelli's discussion of John Chrysostom, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyprian and Eusebius (68-70).

the virgin from the corporeal world to the same degree Ambrose's does. Rather, in a world driven by carnal instincts and uncleanness, she lives the life of the soul. Nevertheless, the virgin will never be at home in this life, for she preserves within herself a virtue which is at variance with a fallen world.

As with Augustine, Aldhelm's rationale for the importance of humility might appear to be contradicted by his emphasis upon virginity's unique glory. Aldhelm's teachings on humility at first seem mere rhetorical posturing for the further praise of virginity. If pride presents the foremost threat to the pure, it is because "the true and not trivial glory of delicate virginity" is so wondrous that pride is the only sin into which a virgin could possibly fall!²³⁷ Throughout great stretches of *De Virginitate* Aldhelm waxes eloquent on the incompatibility of virginity and the carnal world, inserting an apparently insurmountable division between the glorious life of the virgin and the world wherein she dwells. Other passages of the treatise lay great stress upon pride's fatal impact upon virginity, and it is in these warnings that Aldhelm lays down the ground rules for the virginal life. Virginal *integritas* unaccompanied by the grace of "spiritual purity" is merely "carnal integrity" and, as such, is utterly worthless.²³⁸ Because it lacks any redeeming quality of the spirit, such virginity actually promotes the work of the flesh. The flesh pulls the virgin toward the sin of pride rather than sexual sin, so that, ultimately, pride evinces the virgin's submission to the carnal realm. Drawing upon earlier Fathers' constructions of virginity, Aldhelm interprets the virgin's relationship to her body as one of subjugation and discipline. Allowed any opportunity, the flesh will insolently rebel and usurp the rule of the spirit.²³⁹ Quoting Cyprian Aldhelm distinguishes between the virgin's relationship to *caro* and *corpus*: "'Let them have no concern greater than the struggle against the flesh and the determined strife of conquering and subduing the body.'" ²⁴⁰ The tyrannical flesh rises within the undisciplined *corpus* to draw the individual toward sin, but the body can be disciplined and brought into partnership in the pursuit of righteousness. Unlike the body which, once subdued, can be holy together with the spirit, the flesh remains the bellicose child of sin and never engages the spirit except as an adversary.

This insanity of the flesh is, however, "natural," in comparison to the pursuit of perpetual

²³⁷ ALDH.Pros.virg. 245.4. "...vera et non fribula delicatæ virginitatis gloria." Trans. 72.

²³⁸ ALDH.Pros.virg. 245.19. "...carnalis integritas... spiritualis castimonia." Trans. 72.

²³⁹ ALDH.Pros.virg. 245.25-26. "...corpus meum et servituti redigo,' videlicet ne caro contra spiritum tyrannica potestate contumaciter insolescat..." "'I chastise my body and bring it into subjection,' which is to say, so that the flesh does not contumaciously grow insolent with tyrannical power against the spirit." Trans. 73.

²⁴⁰ ALDH.Pros.virg. 315.5-9. "'Nulla ergo sit illis cura magis quam adversus carnem conluctatio et vincendi corporis ac domandi obstinata certatio!'" Trans. 125.

chastity which Aldhelm points out is a rejection of the very laws of nature.²⁴¹ Virginity transforms its bearer, as Aldhelm writes with a flourish of rhetorical exuberance: “although the tired fragility of the moribund flesh droops and ages with stooping and bent senility as the terminus of death approaches, virginity alone in the manner of happy youth continually flourishes and is constantly growing!”²⁴² Significantly, he denotes the aged and failing physical body with *caro* rather than *corpus*, in a manner which associates the fleshly nature with decay. The mutable body, not the moribund flesh, puts on the incorruption of spiritual grace. Nevertheless, despite any possible union of body and soul in virginal holiness, the mortal body represents the virgin’s imprisonment in the earthly life. In a passage which recalls Ambrose’s description of the soul chaffing at her confinement within the body, Aldhelm portrays the impatience of the virgin towards the body from which she longs to escape.²⁴³ For the virgin who has persevered and preserved herself untainted, and who has stood unwavering in her faith, the body remains a bond for as long as she lives. Divine love and the desire for heaven sow in the virgin a desire to utterly escape from “this fleshly prison of the soul.”²⁴⁴

Ultimately, for all the Fathers, the virgin is unequally yoked to her own body. Her corporeal substance, whether denoted by *corpus* or *caro*, strains against her spiritual desire. The Fathers construct an opposition between *virginitas*--with all the values of physical and spiritual purity embedded in that signification--and the virginal *corpus*. Yet the body is the vital witness of the spiritual renewal and grace at work within the virgin. Physical virginity represents the purification and sanctification which belong to all Christians *spiritually*. The possession of this complete grace--the holiness of body and soul--belongs to the virgin alone, demonstrating the

²⁴¹ ALDH.Pro.s.virg. 247.3-6. “...spretis naturæ legibus individuus angelicæ castitatis comes existere cogatur et, antequam suprema resurrectionis gloria horrendæ mortis imperium in tetra tartara trudatur et ‘corruptibile hoc induat incorruptionem,’ mirum in modum terreni cælibes superni cælites fieri compellantur.” “...if he spurns the laws of nature, [he] is bound to exist as an inseparable fellow of angelic chastity, and, before the dominion of horrendous death is driven back into black hell by the supreme glory of the resurrection and ‘this corruptible (body) puts on incorruptibility,’ earthly celibates are compelled in a wonderful manner to become heavenly citizens.” Trans. 74. [II Cor 4:7]

²⁴² ALDH.Pro.s.virg. 247.9-13. “præclara virginitatis gratia”; “et licet moribundæ carnis fessa fragilitas fatescat et propinquante fati termino cernua curvaque vetustate senescat, hæc sola in modum iocundæ pubertatis usquequaque virescit et iugiter adolescit!” Trans. 74.

²⁴³ ALDH.Pro.s.virg. 243.11-16. “...sine aliquo puritatis offenculo indisrupta pudicitia repagula fine tenus feliciter servare contendunt et tamen ita divinæ dilectionis stimulo compunguntur et scintillante superni ardoris facula inflammantur, ut cotidie de mundi calamitate translato se corporis ergastulo emigrare inhiante gestiant.” “[They] strive blessedly to preserve to the very end the unbreached barriers of their modesty without any disparagement of their purity; and yet they are so goaded by the spur of divine love and inflamed by the blazing torch of heavenly ardor, that every day they eagerly long to depart from the prison of the body.” Trans. 71.

²⁴⁴ ALDH.Pro.s.virg. 321.5. “...carneum animæ ergastulum.” Trans. 130.

work of the Holy Spirit within her.²⁴⁵ It is not a question of whether physical *integritas* signifies spiritual rebirth as well as physical purity, or whether the virginal condition of the soul (within the virginal body) signifies the purification of her flesh. The two are inseparable for the Fathers' idealization of virginity. Bodily virginity cannot complete the spiritual work of rebirth (conversion) and faith. But in its purest spiritual expression, the physical life of virginity provides the most concrete expression of the work of the Spirit. Virginity is, in short, the proof and substance of the Christian life's fullest expression. The Fathers' attention to the internal temptations, and external dangers which threaten the virginal body creates an inevitable tension within the virgin. To a certain degree, discomfort with the precarious physical body is inevitable. It would be a mistake, however, to translate discomfort as unequivocal condemnation. For Jerome, who conflates the physical, the sexual and sin, this condemnation may be the general law of human life. But the other Fathers are not entirely dismissive of the body which bears the multivalent sign of virginity. In their works wariness of the body mingles in equal parts with unabashed acknowledgment of virginal privilege and concern lest the awareness of that privilege preempt the cultivation of other virtues.

III. Conclusion

Although these early Latin Fathers each gave preeminence to different features and aspects of virginity and each constructed the virgin's relationship to her body differently, their differences are somewhat muted by the smorgasbord fashion in which later writers like Aldhelm, for instance, take them up. Aldhelm freely mixes Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine together with Greek fathers like Cyprian. But certain tenets are consistent throughout the various texts. Again and again the Fathers assert and support the centrality of virginity to the spiritual life. The choice of consecrated virginity reveals the most complete response to faith, and it is this perception which underlies the choice of virginity by the married-virgin saints whom we shall discuss in succeeding chapters. The *vitæ* of the saints included by Aldhelm in *De Virginitate* repeatedly attest to the glorious union of virginity and fully realized faith. For this reason, saints like Constantina, "a heroine of most intact virtue," preach as one gospel the messages of Christ and virginity. They convert their listeners to both, so that body and soul can be joined in holiness.²⁴⁶ Virginity is not only a response to Christ, however, nor simply an imitation of the angelic, heavenly life promised to all Christians eventually. Perhaps even more importantly, virginity serves an instructive, even prophetic, role for the wider Christian community. By continually referring back to Christ

²⁴⁵ AVG.San.virgin. 280.5-9.

²⁴⁶ ALDH.Pros.virg. 302.19. "...integerrimæ virtutis virago." Trans. 115.

(himself the “herald of virginity”) and the holiness of mother Church, the figure of the virgin embodies a holiness in which all Christians are called to participate on some level.²⁴⁷

The various spiritual levels on which virginity functions as a sign not unexpectedly influence the form and importance of the ideal of perpetual purity. Virginity preserves in the physical body the sign which not only seals the individual against the lure of the flesh, but which points continually to the eternal. ‘Virginity’ is tautologically both the virgin’s desire and the fulfillment of that desire. The commitment to preserve her physical purity substantiates the virgin’s desire for God. At the same time as her virginity acts as the witness to her consecration, it is itself the thing which she desires. On account of her virginal chastity, she already shares in some of the rewards and fulfillment of resurrection life which all Christians await. This eschatological aspect of virginity is one of the most important for the promotion of the virginal ideal. Here on earth virgins already partake of the *vita angelica* through their refusal to enter into marriage or sexual relations. Even in this life, the virgin shares in an intimacy with Christ, and partakes of an inner fellowship of the soul that prefigures the communion promised in Revelation 14. References to insignia of victory promise celestial rewards to those who possess virginity, and invest the eternal in the mortal, virginal body. The eschatological nature of virginity encompasses more than the prophetic representation of that which lies beyond this earthly life. Virginity touches the transcendent. On account of her purity, the virgin savours the life of *anima* while still in her mortal body, and for this reason both virginity and the virgin who retains this glorious purity can function symbolically. Interpretations of the virgin as the temple, Holy of Holies, and compensatory sacrifice, all rely upon the conviction that a physically pure virgin embodies the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies and New Testament teachings. She contains within herself a reflection of the exceptional work and grace of the Incarnation. Despite all the qualifying requirements for holiness of the spirit, purity of mind, and humility, the Fathers’ claims for *corporalis integritas* are remarkable.

In the end, the difficulty of reconciling the reality of the virgin’s physical body with her spiritual desire may not be as stark as it seems, at least not for those looking on the virgin as a sign. Rather than asking how to reconcile the physical nature of virginal intactness with the very non-corporeal emphasis of the virginal life, it might be more appropriate to ask if the Fathers even perceived such a reconciliation as necessary. Clearly the physical nature of the physical body and its sexual susceptibility cause the Fathers discomfort. If, however, the primary claims of the

²⁴⁷ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 248.38. “...virginitatis præco.”

virginal ideal centre upon the spiritual (both in terms of the virgin's symbolic function for others and in terms of how she was to perceive herself and life), the body paradoxically may not be the central emphasis of virginity, despite its indisputable role in that life. Concurrent with the Fathers' remarkable claims for the symbolic nature of the virgin--a construction which highlights the untainted, physical body of the virgin on one level--they focus upon the spiritual nature of virginity in a manner that disembodies the value inherent within the sign of 'virginity.' At once the virginal body visibly represents faith and spiritual rebirth; it serves as both literal and symbolic intermediary. As an ideal it signifies an incorruption, innocence, and the grace accomplished by the work of the Holy Spirit alone. Virginity--the very choice of which removes the virgin from the jurisdiction of the flesh--is most powerful as a sign in its symbolic capacity. Pure chastity does not consist solely of the repudiation of sexual activity, or the carnal and physical natures inextricably bound up in sexuality. By preserving perpetual purity of body and soul in an untainted union, the virginal body becomes the dwelling place for God on earth. Though but a shadow of what is to come, the virginal body serves as symbol and sacrifice for the sanctification and redemption of the virgin herself, and the community of faith.

Chapter 2

*Up, up, my drowsie Soule, where thy new eare
Shall in the Angels songs no discord heare...
Up to those Virgins, who thought that almost
They made joyntenants with the Holy Ghost
If they to any should his Temple give.*

John Donne¹

In his homily for the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* and his “Letter to Sigefyrth,” Ælfric both builds upon and diverges from the earlier patristic portrayal of virginity. He follows the Latin Fathers in treating the virginal life as the highest expression of the Christian life. Ælfric’s consideration of virginity, or *mægðhad*, however, is shaped primarily by considerations of the practical service of God. Themes such as Ambrose’s *vita angelica* and Jerome’s depiction of the virgin as the Holy of Holies find little expression in Ælfric’s “Letter” and *Nativitas* homily, although we will observe their influence on the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints to be examined in the following chapters. In fact, Ælfric’s treatment of virginity in these two works suggests that the importance of physical purity centred upon the relationship with God, and not upon anagogical interpretations of the virginal body as a sign of the eternal life to come, or as a pure intercessor for the sexually defiled.

It is rather surprising that within a milieu defined and shaped by monastic reform, one of the most defining features of the monastic life (namely virginity) should receive no extensive treatment in the literature of the Reform.² A few centuries before, in the early period of English monasticism, Aldhelm addressed the ideal of virginity in his prose *De Virginitate*, the influence of which has been commented on variously by Lapidge and Gretsch, as well as in his *Carmen De Virginitate*.³ A few centuries later, early Middle English works such as *Hali Meidhad*, *Sawles Warde*, and *Ancrene Wisse* treat the subject of the chaste life. But during the late Anglo-Saxon period, although the pastoral letters of the period and Old English translations of the Benedictine rule evince a concern for cenobitic correctness and clerical celibacy, we have no texts that correspond either to the Anglo-Latin *De Virginitate* or the vernacular *Hali Meidhad*. As an essential

¹ John Donne, “Of the Progress of the Soul,” *The Poems of John Donne*, vol. 1, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912) 251-66, ll.339-40, 352-55, at 261.

² Regarding chastity as a fundamental value of the reformers, see Pauline Stafford’s “Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reforming in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England,” *Past and Present* 163 (1999): 3-35, esp. 7-8.

³ See Michael Lapidge’s “The Hermeneutic Style in Tenth-Century Anglo-Latin Literature,” *ASE* 4 (1975): 67-111, esp. 73-76. The most recent work examining Aldhelm’s influence upon the reformers is Mechthild Gretsch’s *The Intellectual Foundations of the English Benedictine Reform* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

characteristic of the consecrated life, virginity, or at least abstinent chastity, would have been a logical emphasis during the period of the English Benedictine Reform, when purity of monastic practice and patristic doctrine were of the utmost importance.⁴ As Ælfric served both as the stylist and transmitter of the core values of the reform movement in the vernacular, it is to his works that we turn for evidence of the construction and treatment of the virginal ideal which was well-established by his time, and yet we find nothing in Ælfric resembling a treatise on virginity of the scale of Ambrose's *De virginitate* or any of the other Latin works treated in the previous chapter.

The absence of a treatise on virginity does not indicate a disregard on Ælfric's part for the value of virginity, for we see in his work a very real concern for sexual purity. Not only does virginity play a prominent role in the narratives of the married-virgin and virgin saints, but Ælfric also treats the subject directly in discursive works like his letter to the layman Sigefyrth and his homily *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*.⁵ Ælfric's treatment of the ideal in this letter and homily may perhaps provide a rationale for his comparative lack of concern for promoting and exalting virginity, for he here focuses upon the didactic rather than the celebratory. He demonstrates less concern for virginal "intactness" as such, than he does for the nature and quality of virginal purity. He promotes virginity as the ideal and preeminent life of faith without ever allowing his reader to lose sight of the principle that virginity is a means to the end of serving God rather than an end in itself.

Both the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* and the "Letter to Sigefyrth" date from around

⁴ See Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) 4-11. Pauline Stafford, "Church and Society in the Age of Ælfric," *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds*, eds. Paul E. Szarmach and Bernard F. Huppé (Albany: SUNY Press, 1978) 11-42.

⁵ Ælfric, "II. Be þære halgan clænnysse" and "III. Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis," *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*. Ed. Bruno Assmann. (Kassel: Georg H. Wigand, 1889), 13-23; 24-48. I will be referring within the text to "II. Be þære halgan clænnysse" as "the Letter to Sigefyrth." Translations of the Old English are mine, unless otherwise noted. Footnote citations to these texts, as to the *Catholic Homilies* and *Lives of Saints* will follow the short titles laid out by the Dictionary of Old English *A Microfiche Concordance to Old English: The List of Tests and Index of Editions* compiled by Antonette diPaolo Healey and Richard Venezky (Toronto, 1980): Ælfric, "II. Be þære halgan clænnysse" = ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth]; "III. Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis," = ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3]. *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The First Series*, ed. Peter Clemoes (Oxford: EETS, 1997) = ÆCHom I; *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The Second Series*, ed. Malcolm Godden (Oxford: EETS, 1979) = ÆCHom II; Ælfric, *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, vols I & II, ed. John C. Pope (Oxford: EETS, 1967-1968) = ÆHom; *Ælfric's Lives of the Saints*, ed. William Skeat, vol. I (Oxford: EETS, 1881) and vol. II (1900) = ÆLS; *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics in altenglischen und lateinischen Fassung*, ed. Bernhard Fehr (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966) = ÆLet (Wulfsize); "De duodecim abusivis," in *Early English Homilies from the Twelfth Century MS Vespasian C. XIV*, ed. Rubie D-N. Warner (New York: EETS, Kraus Reprint, 1971) = ÆAbusWarn.

1005-6, during the period of Ælfric's abbacy at Eynsham.⁶ Ælfric wrote the "Letter" in order to contradict a proposal by an anchorite of Sigefyrth's acquaintance who taught that clerical marriage was acceptable. Although the addressee was a layman, Ælfric provides a carefully constructed apology for the necessity of priestly purity, as well as dealing with virginity and purity in relation to the wider lay community. The *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* was also written as a correction of sorts, but this time for Ælfric's earlier, deliberate omission of a homily for the Feast of the Virgin's Nativity in his collection of the *Catholic Homilies*.⁷ His discomfort with this potentially unorthodox subject manifests itself quickly, and his treatment of Mary's nativity proves short-lived as he quickly turns to an extensive discussion of the purpose and nature of virginity. The *Nativitas* relies in great part on Augustine's *De sancta virginitate* with the reorganization and development characteristic of Ælfric's work.⁸ One historical detail that makes the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* comparable to texts like those of the Fathers is the possibility that Ælfric may have written this homily for a monastic audience just as Ambrose wrote *De virginitate* for his sister; Augustine, his *De sancta virginitate* for a consecrated virgin; Jerome, his letter for the virgin Eustochium, and Aldhelm, his *De Virginitate* for the nuns at Barking. In addition to internal evidence, like the direct address to *eow mædenum*,⁹ and the homily's reliance upon a Latin text originally written for a consecrated virgin, the focus upon virginity and the relationship between purity and the service of God makes it particularly suitable for a monastic audience. As with the preceding chapter's survey of the Latin words *virginitas*, *castitas*, *integritas*, *corpus* and *caro* in the works of the early Fathers, the Old English words *mægðhad*, *clænnnes*, *lichama* and *flæsc* here provide a critical point of entrance into the contemporary *mentalité*. This chapter is not, however, a lexical study, but an ideological one. These signs for purity and body and the values which Ælfric invested in them do

⁶ Mary Clayton, "Ælfric and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Anglia: Zeitschrift für Englische Philologie* 104 (1986): 286-315, 295.

⁷ See Clayton's discussion of the reasons for Ælfric's original refusal to treat the feast and his subsequent "reversal." Clayton 286-295. Peter Clemoes suggests that it was likely part of a reissuing of the *Catholic Homilies I* and would have supplied the need for the feast within that particular context. Clemoes, "The Chronology of Ælfric's Works," *Old English Newsletter* 5 (1980): 23.

⁸ Clayton identifies Augustine's *De bono coniugali*, *Sermo 354*, *Tractatus in Joannis evangelium*, Jerome's *Tractatus in Psalmos*, as well as minor works by Pseudo-Augustine and Caesarius of Arles as other sources from which Ælfric freely reworked and augmented the *De virginitate* (see Clayton, "Ælfric and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary" 313-14). She discusses the relationship between Ælfric's sources and cites James Cross on Ælfric's method of writing: "'Often... Ælfric's memory holds phrases from other sources, even when he is following a main source, so that his 'adaptation' or 'free rendering' is both circumscribed and aided by memory.'" (James Cross, "Mainly on Memory and Creative Method in Two Catholic Homilies," *Studia Neophilologica* 41 (1969): 135-36, cited Clayton, 314.)

⁹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 47.573; Clayton, "Ælfric and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary," *Anglia* 104 (1986): 295, 314. The implications of *mædenum* with regard to women in particular will be discussed towards the end of this chapter.

not merely reflect an orthodox abbot's concerns for clerical and monastic purity. They also shed light upon the role and importance which Ælfric allotted to the virginal ideal during the Benedictine Reform of the tenth century.

This chapter follows a format similar to that of the previous chapter. It is divided into two major sections. The first of these focuses upon the treatment and representation of virginity in the "Letter to Sigefyrth" and the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* homily. After initially surveying the Old English vocabulary of virginity, the discussion turns to Ælfric's treatment of the three grades of chastity and here the pattern diverges somewhat from that of Chapter 1. For, unlike the Fathers' attention to the elite nature of virginity, Ælfric's treatment of virginity as the ideal form of the spiritual life evinces a particular concern for the relationship between purity and holy service. (The exemplary *passiones* of the married-virgin saints all share the Latin texts' attention to virginity's exalted rewards and benefits, even though Ælfric does not discuss them at length in these two texts.) With an exploration of Ælfric's construction of the relation of the physical body to the ideal and pursuit of virginity, we move to the second portion of the chapter and the representation of the physical body in the letter and homily. Though Ælfric follows, as we will briefly note, the Fathers' Pauline distinction between the signification of 'body' and 'flesh,' the concept of 'flesh' rarely arises in these two texts. Where the sign of 'body' occurs, it pertains primarily to the virgin's typological relation to the Virgin and Church. Finally, this section concludes with an examination of the "gendering" of the body as female, and I suggest that Ælfric's rhetorical practice of what I shall call "gender parity" complicates the interpretation that a vision of women as predominantly "corporeal" led to a disproportionate emphasis upon female virginity.¹⁰ In turning to the married-virgin saints in Chapters 3 and 4, we repeatedly see this link between virginity and Ælfric's refusal to confine the importance of virginity to women only.

I. *Mægðhad* and *Clænnas* in Ælfric's "Letter to Sigefyrth" and *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*

A. Terminology

In the "Letter to Sigefyrth" and the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*, the primary signs corresponding to *virginitas* and *castitas* are *mægðhad* and *clænnas*.¹¹ Although Ælfric occasionally employs the adjective *ansund* as a modifier for *mægðhad* in order to denote virginal wholeness or

¹⁰ See, for example, Pauline Stafford's reference to woman as "impure body," in "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen" 9.

¹¹ While the discussion here focuses upon the "Letter to Sigefyrth" and the *Nativitas* homily, I do draw in citations from the wider corpus as necessary.

integritas, the noun *ansundnes* only occurs once in the Ælfrician corpus, and there it describes not virginal “integrity” (whose Latin equivalent *integritas* recurs throughout the Fathers’ treatises),¹² but the condition of material wholeness restored to crushed gemstones.¹³ Even the phrase *ansund mægðhad* is absent from these two works as Ælfric chooses simply to denote virginity with *mægðhad*, *clænnnes*, or some combination thereof. In one instance in the *Catholic Homilies* he uses *onwealhnes*¹⁴ to denote the perfect chastity which the virgin must safeguard, but in the “Letter” and *Nativitas* homily he relies solely upon *mægðhad* and *clænnnes*.¹⁵ Like *castitas*, the Old English signifier *clænnnes* serves a multivalent function as seen in the following passage on the three grades of chastity.

Þry hadas syndon, þe cyðdon gecyðnesse be Criste. Þ[æt] is mægðhad and wydewan had, and riht sinscype... Þas þry hadas sindon Gode gecweme, gif hi rihtlice lybbað. Mægðhad is ægðer ge on wæpmannum ge on wimmannum. Þa habbað rihtne mægðhad, þa ðe fram cyldhade wuniað on clænnysse, and ealle galnyssa on him sylfum forseoð, æigðer ge modes ge lichaman þurh Godes fultum. Þonne habbað hi æt Gode hundfealde mede on þam eȝan life. Wudewan beoð þa ðe æfter heora gemacan on clænnysse wuniað for Godes lufon; hi habbað þonne sixtifealde mede æt Gode hyra geswines. Ða þe rihtlice healdað hyra eawe, and on alyfedum timan for bearnes gestreone hæmað begað, hi habbað þrittifealde mede for hyra gesceadwisnesse.¹⁶

For Ælfric *clænnnes* serves an all-purpose role, akin to that of *castitas*, denoting sexual purity appropriate to one’s marital status. Hence *clænnnes* denotes virginal intactness, fidelity to one’s spouse and the appropriate rendering of the *maritale debitum*, as well as the sexual abstinence of

¹² ALDH.Pros.virg.313.15-16. “...*virginitatis integritas*”; AVG.San.virgin. 242.10. “...*integritas carnis*.”

¹³ ÆCHom I, 4 208.63-64. For an example of *ansund mægðhad*, see Ælfric’s interpretation of the image of the lily as a symbol of “whole virginity” (see ÆCHom I, 30 433.129-30).

¹⁴ Gretscli points out that *onwealhnes* (*anwealhnyss*) was used by glossators of Aldhelm to render *integritas*. (*The Intellectual Foundations* 279.)

¹⁵ ÆCHom II, 44 328.40-44. This passage is particularly interesting because it allows for the soul of any Christian who keeps her- or himself pure to be called by the name *mæden*. “*Ælc ðæra manna ðe hine forhæfð fram unalyfedlicere gesihðe, fram unalyfedlicere heorcnyge, fram unalyfedlicum swæcce, fram unalyfedlicum stence, fram unalyfedlicere hrepunge, se hæfð mædenes naman for ðære anwalhnyss*.” (“Everyone of those who refrain from unlawful sight, from unlawful hearing, from unlawful tasting, from unlawful smelling, from unlawful touching, has the name of virgin for his purity.”)

¹⁶ ÆCHom I, 9 255.198-99, 203-13. “There are three states which bear witness to Christ. That is, virginity, and widowhood and lawful marriage.... The three states are pleasing to God, if they [people in these states] live rightly. Virginity is both in men and in women. They have true virginity who dwell in chastity from childhood, and renounce all lust in themselves, both of mind and body, through God’s help. Then they shall have the hundred-fold reward from God in the eternal life. Widows are those who dwell in chastity for the love of God after their spouse [has died]. They shall have the sixty-fold reward from God for their labour. Those who righteously fulfill their marriage vow and engage in cohabitation at the lawful times for the procreation of children, they shall have the thirty-fold reward for their discretion.”

widows. *Mægðhad*, on the other hand, always and only denotes virginity. Given the clarity of *mægðhad*, it is noteworthy that in his “Letter to Sigefyrth” Ælfric shows a marked preference for *clænnēs* and its cognates to denote purity even in contexts where there can be no doubt that he intends virginal intactness to be understood.¹⁷ For example, as Ælfric weaves together physical purity and the service of God, a theme which will be discussed at length below, he refers to Christ’s *clænnēs* or the standard of purity required of those who would serve Him.¹⁸ We do not, however, find the same preference for *clænnēs* over *mægðhad* in *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*, where both words signify virginal purity synonymously in similar contexts and the general ratio of *clænnēs* to *mægðhad* is fairly even.¹⁹

A brief survey of Ælfric’s use of *clænnēs* illustrates that, although he sometimes employs *clænnēs* to denote a more general purity than sexual chastity (virginal or otherwise), he uses it predominantly as a synonym for *mægðhad*. In one passage in the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*, the context makes it clear that *clænnēs* denotes a purity that is necessary to righteous virginity, but neither defined by nor inherent in the physical condition of intactness. So, Ælfric lays down the qualifying conditions that render the offering of *mægðhad* pleasing to God, praising that gift which is pledged to the Saviour *þurh halige drohtnunge* ‘holy conduct’ and endured *þurh his lifes clænnysse* ‘through purity of his life’ (ll. 235-36). Holiness and purity characterize the gift of virginity which is offered; they do not stand as parallel synonyms for it. True virginity possesses these qualities, but does not itself produce them. Nevertheless, *clænnēs* in most instances refers, like *mægðhad*, to virginal purity. It is either the object of the virgin’s pledge to God or that to which the virgin is pledged.²⁰ In the former case, virginity is the offering and token of one’s commitment. In the latter case, it constitutes a primary focus of the service of Christ. As a rule Ælfric rarely uses *clænnēs* to denote strict intactness, with the exception of a passage wherein he teaches that obedient wives surpass proud virgins in righteousness. Here, using

¹⁷ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth]. Occurrences of *clænnēs* where it refers to virginal purity only: 13.14; 14.17, 19, 27; 15.53; 16.61, 63; 125.130, 125; 20.160, 164; 21.172; 22.195, 204; *modes clænnēs*: 19.137; 21.184; 23.220; Occurrences of *mægðhad* 14.23, 24, 30, 31; 19.125, 138; 20.160; 21.183. (*clænnēs* 14: *mægðhad* 8)

¹⁸ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 14.16-17; 16.61 ff.

¹⁹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3]. Occurrences of *clænnēs* as above: 32.206, 213; 33.236; 34.243, 257; 40.403; 42.445; 47.563. Occurrences of *mægðhad*: 30.154; 33.224, 232; 37.324; 41.424; 42.455; 43.473; 44.499, 500, 503. (*clænnēs* 8: *mægðhad* 10)

²⁰ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 34.243, 258.

clænnas to specify what can only be physical virginity, Ælfric teaches that the virgin who is proud falls short of the true purity that unites the spiritual to the physical.²¹ In sum, while *clænnas* can denote various kinds of purity, non-sexual as well as sexual, as a general rule *clænnas* might be defined as “spiritually motivated physical purity.”

B. The Three Grades of Chastity

Rather than as an end in itself, the establishment of virginity’s preeminence among the three grades of chastity is, for Ælfric, intimately joined to the connection between purity and service alluded to in the brief survey of *mægðhad* and *clænnas*. Throughout both the “Letter to Sigefyrth” and the *Nativitas*, Ælfric reiterates this link between purity and God’s service. As we shall see later in this chapter, this connection surfaces most explicitly in the frequent collocation of *clæn*-words with words related to ‘service’ and ‘servant’ words (both *þeow*- and *þegn*-).²² This union of purity and service lies at the root of Ælfric’s insistence upon priestly celibacy in the “Letter,” but his argument has ramifications for the nature of godly service beyond that of priests to that of virgins in general. We shall see how this union of service and purity shapes not only the ideal of virginity in these two texts, but, in the chapters to follow, how it influences his translations of the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints. Here, Ælfric lays the initial foundation for his argument by tracing the supplanting of the married priestly order of the Old Testament by the virginal order established by Christ in the New Testament. After next examining the portrayal of virginity in Ælfric’s treatment of the three grades proper, this section closes with reference to the depiction of virginal rewards in Apocalypse 14.

Like the Latin Fathers, it is in the relationship between the three grades of chastity, and most particularly in the comparison between marriage and virginity, that Ælfric lays the foundation for virginity’s particular relationship to God. He follows the patristic tradition in creating a parallel disjunction between marriage and virginity, and the Old and New Testaments. Although the underlying rationale--that virginity has supplanted marriage--remains constant in both the “Letter” and the *Nativitas* homily, Ælfric presents the past role of marriage and the present usurpation of it by virginity differently in the two texts. Each representation reflects his concern for the qualities and protection of righteous service pertaining to the particular audience at hand.

²¹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 40.403.

²² Throughout the following discussion I use “*þeow*- and *þegn*-” to refer to a range of Old English words pertaining to ‘service,’ both the agent nouns (both the masculine *þeow*, *þeowa*, *þegn*, and the feminine *þinen*) and related verbs (*þeowian* and *þegnian*).

Thus, in the *Nativitas*, which was probably directed to a consecrated audience, Ælfric focuses upon the dangers of pride arising from the disparity between the lives of virgin and married. He warns virgins against pride specifically with respect to their mothers, admonishing them not to forsake their mothers who chose to marry and forfeited their virginity: *Nu ne sceolon þa mædenu heora moddru forseon,/ of ðam ðe hi comon, þeah ðe hi clæne beon/ on mægðhade lybbende and heora moddru beon wif.*²³ Ælfric then proceeds to defend marriage by reminding his audience of the righteous examples of the Old Testament patriarchs and their wives. Along with Abraham and Sarah, and Jacob and Rachel, he even cites Zechariah and Elizabeth in order to provide an example of holy marriage in the New Testament. Marriage may be the lowest of the three grades, but Ælfric leaves his readers in no doubt that its goodness is unqualified. We find in the *Nativitas* homily no indication that the patriarchs knew no better than to marry, or that they would have lived virginally were it not for the necessity of fulfilling God's redemptive plan. Instead, Ælfric reminds his audience of the validity of marriage before moving on to discuss the relationship between the three grades of chastity and their respective rewards.

When Ælfric later returns to the subject of pride in the *Nativitas*, he, like Augustine, compares the respective virtues and vices of the proud virgin and obedient wife.²⁴ Of the wife, Ælfric writes, *heo hæfð twa ðing untæle for Gode,/ sinscipe and eadmodnysse on æpelum þeawum.* Of the proud virgin he writes, *heo hæfð twa ðing,/ clænnysse and modignysse, micel god and micel yfel, / þe ne magon beon geþwære on nanre þeawfæstnysse.*²⁵ His assertion that the humble and obedient wife possesses a greater good than the proud virgin who harbours within herself great evil as well as great good serves warning to the consecrated that virginity alone does not, indeed *cannot*, constitute righteousness.²⁶ As an explanation of why the humble, obedient wife is better than the proud and pure virgin, Ælfric interprets the physical dissimilarity of Zacchaeus and Goliath as figures of the lesser and greater goods of marriage and virginity:

Swa is eac on lichaman	se læssa man betere,
swa swa Zacheus wæs,	mid gesundfulnysse,

²³ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 37.322-324. "Now virgins should not renounce their mothers, from whom they came, although they are pure, living in virginity, and their mothers are wives."

²⁴ See AVG.San.virgin. 289.10-18.

²⁵ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 40.398b-400, 402b-403. "[S]he retains two things blameless before God, marriage and humility in noble virtues"; "she has two things, purity and pride, a great good and great evil, which cannot be united in any obedience...."

²⁶ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 40.395-99.

þonne se unhala beo and hæbbe on his wæstmē
 Golian mycelnysse, þæs gramlican entes.²⁷

Intertwining the literal and metaphoric, Ælfric points out that Zacchaeus' diminutive physical stature (representing the lesser good of marriage) does not reflect upon his spiritual health. He possesses a righteousness that Goliath--for all his awesome strength (i.e. virginity)--lacks. The literally superior virginal body does not automatically translate into a superior spirituality. That virginity is a great good is undeniable, but Ælfric refuses to let its glory be compromised by a false reliance upon intactness. Virtues such as the wife's humility provide an ever-present measure with which virgin and non-virgin alike have to reckon.

Given Ælfric's fear lest virgins fall into the sin of pride, it is perhaps not surprising that he should reserve his strongest expressions of virginity's preeminence for a text addressed to a layman unconvinced by the claims of abstinent chastity. In the "Letter to Sigefyrth," Ælfric sets forth an uncompromising discontinuity between holy living after the coming of Christ, and holy living in Old Testament times which looked favorably on bigamy and the marriage of priests. Unlike Augustine who so thoughtfully develops the justification and causes for marriage under the law, whereby carnal propagation in the Old Testament served a spiritual purpose,²⁸ Ælfric diminishes the role of marriage in the present by linking it to the Old Testament and identifying it as an indulgence of the law:

Under Moyses lage men moston lybban
 on maran softnysse and on geswæsum lustum,
 swiþor þonne nu on þisum niwum dagum
 æfter Cristes acennednysse, þe þa clænnysse astealde,
 ge þurh hine sylfne, ge þurh his halgan þegenas,
 ge wæpmenn, ge wimmenn, þe wunedon on clænnysse....²⁹

Despite the fact that Ælfric employs *softnysse* to describe marriage as a luxury or indulgence, his purpose is not to denigrate marriage, but to justify the requirement of purity for God's service in general and for the priesthood in particular. To this end Ælfric draws connections consistently between *clænnys* (whether chaste or virginal) and references to God's servants. Those who would

²⁷ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 40.409-12. "So also is the lesser men better in the body, just as Zacchaeus was, with health, than the sick man is and he who has in his stature that might of Goliath, the wrathful giant."

²⁸ AVG.Bon.coniug. 212.24 - 213.5.

²⁹ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 15.58 - 16.61. "Under the law of Moses men could live in more softness and in intimate lusts, than [they can] now in these recent days following the birth of Christ, who established chastity both through himself, and through his holy servants, both men and women who dwelt in purity...." Regarding the use of *lagu* here as a reflection of the shift between *æ* and *lagu* to denote religious law over the course of Ælfric's career, see Godden's article, "Ælfric's Changing Vocabulary." (*English Studies* 61 [1980]: 206-23, at 214-17.)

serve Christ must imitate him in the practice of *clænum* virtues.³⁰ In a passage treating the rewards of virgins described in Apocalypse 14, Ælfric places before those who would serve God a choice between their own lust and pure service:

Hi sindon mægðhade gehealdenre clænnysse.
 Hi folgiað Criste, swa hwider swa he gæð.
 Ac þa Godes þeowas, þe Gode sceolon þenian,
 gyf hi licgað nu on heora lustum her,
 þonne ne magon hi singan þone heofonlican sang,
 ne Criste folgian on his fægerum wununge,
 þe þa clænnysse lufað on his clænum þeowdome.³¹

The various reiterations of *clænnys* with *þeow*- and *þegn*- in these lines illustrate how virginal purity sets the standard for those who would serve God. Ælfric contrasts the *clænnys* which God's servants ought to preserve with the lusts which must always be incompatible with the pure service of God. Those who choose to indulge their own desires rather than serve God in purity forfeit the ultimate rewards of virgins: the privilege of following the Lamb wherever he goes and of singing the heavenly song. In this way, Ælfric explains to Sigefyrth that an unequivocal choice lies between purity of life in God's service and self-indulgence which leads to the eternal loss of the greatest of heavenly rewards.

Because Ælfric does not treat marriage as a "softness" of any sort in the *Nativitas* homily, he appears less approving of marriage in his letter to Sigefyrth than in his homily addressed to virgins. Rather than deprecate the marital state in the homily, Ælfric instead proffers examples of the patriarchs as models for the imitation of the married. Connecting the Old Testament covenant of marriage with the contemporary dedication of child-oblates, Ælfric cites Abraham's faithfulness in offering Isaac, and Hannah's dedication of Samuel as examples of holy living without any suggestion that the honour once accorded to marriage has been usurped by virginity.³² Rather than relying upon juxtapositions of marriage and virginity which continually hammer at the "deficiencies" of marriage or enumerate unceasingly the glories and rewards of virginity, Ælfric lays out the biblical precedents according to his purpose in the *Nativitas*, and recounts for his consecrated audience the place of marriage within the Christian paradigm.

³⁰ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 18.108-109. "Se þe Criste þenað, he sceal him eac folgian/ æfre on clænum þeawum...." ("He who serves Christ, he shall also follow him always in pure virtues.")

³¹ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 19.125-131. "They are in the virginity of inviolate chastity. They follow Christ wherever he goes. But the servants of God who should serve God, if they remain now in their lusts here, then they cannot sing the heavenly song, nor follow Christ, in his fair dwelling, who loves chastity in his pure service."

³² ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 34.258-61.

Ælfric's treatment of the three grades of chastity reflects the tradition of the early Latin Fathers, assigning each grade of chastity its respective reward. The thirty-fold reward belongs to those who dwell *on sinscipe* with discretion and without adultery; those who dwell in widowhood for Christ receive the sixty-fold reward. Lastly, the hundred-fold reward is reserved for those who preserve themselves whole in body and pure in mind: *þa þe on mægðhade and on modes clænnysse/ fram cildhade wuniað on Cristes þeowdome*.³³ With regard to the second grade of chastity, it is clear that Ælfric has chosen not to follow the adaptation of his Anglo-Saxon predecessor, Aldhelm, who proposes that those who repudiate their marriage bonds for the abstinent life receive the sixty-fold reward.³⁴ Oddly, it is not the hierarchy of the three grades, nor a sense of the elite nature of virginity that distinguishes Ælfric's treatment of the topos. Instead, through his restricted use of *clænnysse* only with reference to the grades of widowhood and virginity, and his further particularization of these two grades in relationship to God, Ælfric's portrayal of the topos reinforces the spiritual value that must be joined to physical purity. Thus, of the *þry hadas* 'three grades' which are pleasing to God, Ælfric writes: *þæra is ærest riht sinscipe and syþþan wudewanhad/ and þonne mægðhad mid þæs modes clænnysse*.³⁵ A few lines later he expands upon the nature of righteous widowhood as *þæt man wunige on clænnysse/ for Godes lufon*,³⁶ and stipulates that virginal purity belongs to those who have dwelt *on clænnysse* from childhood.³⁷ Ælfric refrains from using *clænnysse* with respect to marriage, although he still delineates the character of *riht sinscipe* for Sigefyrth.³⁸ His emphasis upon the role of *clænnysse* with respect to virginity and widowhood has two results. It restricts *clænnysse* to the sexually abstinent, and it unites the practice of sexual abstinence to the service of God, effectively reinforcing the link between sexual and spiritual purity, and the service of God.

As with his discussion of the three grades, Ælfric's treatment of Apocalypse 14 both relies upon and honours the significance of virginity as the preeminent standard of physical and spiritual purity, and simultaneously shifts the focus away from the earthly virgin. Here Ælfric attends more

³³ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 21.183-84. "...those who remain in virginity and in purity of mind from childhood in Christ's service."

³⁴ ALDH.Pros.virg. 249.2-5.

³⁵ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 19.136-37. "The first is right marriage, and next widowhood, and then virginity with purity of heart."

³⁶ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 20.153-54a. "...that one dwells in chastity out of love for God."

³⁷ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 20.163-64.

³⁸ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 19.134, 138.

to the function which *mægðhad* and *clænnēs* serve before Christ than to the praise of virginity per se. In the Fathers' writings on virginity we saw this pure life frequently portrayed as a spiritual grace. Ælfric draws upon that notion as he describes the rewards of Apocalypse 14 such that virginity's glory refers back to its origin, as the gift of God:

And ða ðe þær singað ne swincað on þam sange,
 ac mid softnysse butan geswince
 hi heriað mid þam sange þone hælend on blisse,
 þe hi to þam wurðmynte and to ðam wuldre gebrohte,
 forðan ðe mægðhad is micel Godes gifu
 swa swa martyrdom, ðe ðurh his mihte becymð.³⁹

Far from unabashedly exalting virginity as deserving honours beyond the lot of common mortals or praising virgins for keeping themselves pure, Ælfric emphasizes that virginity's eternal rewards arise from God's generosity. In eternity virgins will rejoice without labour or toil. Finally released from the travails of this world, they will sing in praise to God for the honour he has bestowed upon them. As the gift of God, their *mægðhad* bears witness to the power of God working in their lives as he did in the martyrs of old. Virginity and the glory reserved for it come about through God's might. The virginal life is a response to God, in heaven as on earth.

C. *Clænnēs, Mægðhad* and Service

The relationship between virginal purity and holy service alluded to throughout the preceding discussion of the three grades is one of the most significant themes in both the *Nativitas* and the "Letter." Sometimes Ælfric directly addresses the inseparability of virginity and service, as in the opening passage of his "Letter," where he recounts how Christ chose a virgin for his mother (l. 15); how a virgin was chosen to baptize him (ll. 20-25); how Christ loved John the Beloved for his *clænnēs* (ll. 26-31); and how the disciples left their wives and families to follow Christ (ll. 33-41). Similarly, in the *Nativitas* homily, Ælfric raises the connection between purity and God's service as he shifts from a recitation of Old Testament holy couples to the new standard of holy service exemplified in those widows who live abstinely in order to serve God. Moving from the model of Old Testament marriage to New Testament abstinence, Ælfric promotes the monastic and virginal life as the preeminent life of holy service (ll. 379-82). Other times Ælfric simply reinforces this connection through the vocabulary of service. Ælfric, like other prose writers, does not share

³⁹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 43.469-74. "And those who sing there do not labour in a song, but with softness, without toil, in bliss they praise with song the Saviour who brought them to honour and to glory, because virginity is God's great gift, like martyrdom which comes to pass through his might."

the Old English poets' discomfort with the negative connotations of *þeow-* (both the agent noun and the verb).⁴⁰ For Ælfric the *þeow-* words function synonymously with their *þegn-* counterparts. Together *þeow-* and *þegn-* offer a language rich with metaphoric connotations, and with which Ælfric can exhort his readers to holy service: a language that encompasses the biblical and patristic tradition of the slaves and servants of God, as well as engaging the culturally specific Anglo-Saxon concept of loyal, honoured retainers.⁴¹

Throughout the "Letter" and *Nativitas* homily, *þegnian*, *þeowian*, and *þeowdom* recur with great frequency, the agent nouns *þeow*, *þeowa*, *þegn*, and *þinen* less frequently. In the discussion that follows I will use "*þeow-/þegn-*" to denote this whole group of words. *Clænnas* occurs far more frequently in conjunction with *þeow-* and *þegn-* than does *mægðhad* in Ælfric's discussions of the purity of Christ's servants. Nevertheless, it is the signification of virginal purity denoted by *mægðhad*, rather than simply spiritual purity, which defines the highest form of service offered to God. To illustrate this we shall first examine the three passages where *mægðhad* occurs alongside *þeow-* and *þegn-*. Next, we will explore the conjunction of *clænnas* and the *þeow-/þegn-* group, which reinforces the requirement of purity for Christ's service.

Beginning first with the intersections of *mægðhad* and *þeow-/þegn-*, we find that all three instances occur in discussions of the three grades of chastity. In the first instance in the "Letter to

⁴⁰ Hugh Magennis, "Godes *þeow* and Related Expressions in Old English: Contexts and Uses of a Traditional Literary Figure," *Anglia* 116.2 (1998): 154, 159. In addition to Magennis' article, there are interesting discussions of the evolution of the agent nouns *þeow*, *þegn* and *þinen* in: H. R. Loyn's "Gesiths and Thengs in Anglo-Saxon England and the Seventh to Tenth Century," *English Historical Review* 70 (1955): 529-49; Elizabeth Stevens Girsch, "Metaphorical Usage, Sexual Exploitation, and Divergence in Old English Terminology for Male and Female Slaves," *The Work of Work: Servitude, Slavery and labour in Medieval England*, eds. Allen J. Frantzen and Douglas Moffat. (Glasgow: Cruithne Press, 1994): 30-54; See Magennis' discussion of Ælfric's translation of St Eugenia for evidence that Ælfric was aware of the "real-life connotations" of *þeow* in contrast to *þegn* (159-62). Girsch and Magennis both examine the denotative and connotative evolution of the agent nouns *þeow* and *þegn*, and the rather independent implications of *þinen*. For his part Magennis traces the biblical and patristic precedents for the image of the "slave of God." He presents an interpretation of the Anglo-Saxon concept which combines the figures of the *servus Christi* and the *miles Christi* in the notion of *Godes þeow* (148-51). For the sexual implications of the terminology for female slaves, see Girsch 44-50, Magennis 166-69. For discussion of the Anglo-Saxon evolution of the notion of *servus Christi* as revealed by the evolution of the words *þeow* and *þegn*, see Girsch 38-44; Magennis 154-59, and regarding Ælfric in particular 159-60. See also, David A. E. Pelteret's *Slavery in Early Mediæval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk: 1995). For his survey of the vocabulary, see 41-49; for his discussion of the literary uses of imagery of servitude and the historical implications of the theme, see 50-79.

⁴¹ For the evolution of these terms, see Loyn 540-49, Girsch 36-44, Magennis 148-54 (in Old English poetry), 154-59 (in Old English prose generally).

Sigefyrth,” Ælfric ascribes the hundred-fold reward to those who preserve their virginity and purity in the service of Christ:

... and þa þe on mægðhade and on modes clænnysse
fram cildhade wuniað on Cristes þeowdome,
mid eadmodnysse him æfre þeowigende,
þa habbað hundfealde mede....⁴²

Ælfric here sets forth the parameters of the character and purpose of virginity which earn for it the highest eternal honours. True *mægðhad* combines physical virginity and purity of mind with humility in the service of God. Twice within these lines Ælfric cites Christ's service as the purpose behind the preservation of virginity. The second instance of *mægðhad* similarly asserts the honours due to virginity arise from its godly servanthood: *Se hehsta stæpe is on mægðhades mannum, þa þe fram cildhade clænlice Gode þeowigende ealle middaneardlice gælsan forhogiað.*⁴³

In the third and final conjunction of *mægðhad* and *þeow-/þegn-* in his discussion of the three grades in the *Nativitas* homily, Ælfric describes how the saints shine according to their respective merits:

Maran wurðscipe habbað þa ðe þas woruld forsawon
and þa syndrian æhta mid ealle forleton
and hi sylfe geþywdon on Godes þeowdome
and þær to eacan wæron wuldorfulle on mægðhade,
þonne þa habban magon, þe heoldon heora mægðhad
and heora æhta ne forleton...
Ne nan mægðhad ne bið witodlice herigendlic
buton se ðe for Criste þa clænnysse lufað.⁴⁴

The clarification which Ælfric makes at the end of this passage--that virginity is not praiseworthy unless it loves purity for Christ's sake--may perhaps account for Ælfric's general preference for *clænnys* over *mægðhad* when referring to the service of God. Clearly the first two passages demonstrate that *mægðhad* receives honour because of the virgin's perpetual servanthood. But the

⁴² ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 21.183-186a. "... and those who dwell in virginity and in purity of mind from childhood in Christ's service, serving him ever with humility, they have the hundred-fold reward...."

⁴³ ÆCHom II, 4 39.303-305. "The highest grade is in virgins [lit. persons of virginity], those who, serving God purely from childhood, despise all worldly luxuries."

⁴⁴ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 44.496-501a, 503-504. "Greater honour have those who scorned this world and completely forsook private possessions, and gave themselves over into God's service, and then, moreover, were glorious in virginity, than those can have who preserved their virginity and did not forsake their goods.... Virginity will certainly not be praiseworthy, unless it loves purity for Christ's sake."

weight of evidence suggests Ælfric's fear that the physical condition of virginity might be misconstrued as the substance of the purity which is essential to righteous service. In other words, *clænnēs* denotes the fundamental value upon which the significance of physical *mægðhad* depends. In passages like this, Ælfric prescribes a *clænnēs* defined not by physical chastity but by a Christocentric desire for purity. For this reason, although through its association with *mægðhad* the signifier *clænnēs* tends to connote 'sexual abstinence,' its value extends far beyond physical purity. Thus, even in contexts where *clænnēs* pertains simply to physical chastity, the governing impulse is that of intentional, spiritual purity. The presence of this more inclusive purity finally determines the superiority of virginal service. Its absence reveals a *mægðhad* whose coin is debased, for it refers back only to itself rather than to its Lord and Maker.

Through the whole Ælfrician corpus as well as in the "Letter" and the *Nativitas*, numerous references to the *clænnēs* of Christ and his servants can be found. Hence, one passage describes how *clænnēs* constitutes one of the pivotal differences between Christian priests who can consecrate the host, and priests who offered animal sacrifices under the Old Testament law:

Ne husel næs gehalgod ærþam ðe se hælend com,
and þa niwan gecyðnyse mid Cristendome arærde,
and geceas þa clænan to his clænum þeowdome,
na to nytena offrunge ac to his agenum lichaman.⁴⁵

Ælfric throws this attribute of *clænnēs* into high relief as he forges a clear link between purity and the Eucharist, when he explains the importance of celibate priests: *ac seo halige gelaðung lufað þa clænan, and Crist wile habban þa þe him clænlice þeniað/ æt þam liflicum lacum his lichaman and blodes.*⁴⁶ Ælfric does not restrict the injunction to *clænnēs* to those serving at the altar. *Clænnēs* was established by Christ and is required of all who would serve him, whether priests, monks, nuns, or saints. As Ælfric asserts in a letter written for Wulfstan: *Nu is us geswutelad soðlice mid þam, ge on þære ealdan æ, ge eac on þære niwan, þæt God wile habban on his gastlican þeowdome halige þenas and halige pinena, þaþe mid clænnysse lichaman and modes þæt halige husel him*

⁴⁵ ÆLS (Peter's Chair) 234.224-27. "Neither was the host consecrated before Jesus came and instituted the new covenant with the Christian people, and chose the chaste for his pure service, not for the offering of beasts but for His own body."

⁴⁶ ÆLS (Peter's Chair) 234.229-31. "...but the holy church loves the chaste, and Christ will have those that serve Him in chastity at the living sacrifice of His body and blood."

*geoffrian, swaswa he sylf getæhte ær his prowunge.*⁴⁷ Although in this passage *clænnēs* need not denote a purity that is strictly virginal, several elements indicate that virginity serves as the ideal measure for abstinent chastity.⁴⁸ The divide between the Old Law and the New, married priests and priests who follow Christ, himself the giver of virginity, points insistently to virginity. Those who would serve are to be pure in both mind and body: such purity is best represented by virgins who have scorned the world and all temporal possessions in order to give themselves wholly into God's service. Behind Ælfric's exhortations to abstinent chastity in God's servants, virginity hovers in the background as the ideal sign of spiritual purity.

Even if the *mægðhad* preserved by virgins from childhood is lost, unconsecrated men and women can, Ælfric explains to Sigefyrth, imitate the consecrated by vowing themselves to *clænnēs*.⁴⁹ *Clænnēs* here signifies 'abstinence.' The men and women to whom Ælfric refers here have subdued their desires and vowed themselves to Christ just like the monks and nuns whose self-discipline and purity they imitate. The implication that these individuals are abstinent or continent rather than merely living in a chastity appropriate to their marital state (i.e. faithful to their spouses and rendering the *maritale debitum* in a timely fashion) is supported by Ælfric's assertion that they honour Christ with a greater love and are dearer to him than those who satisfy and act upon their lusts. Far from disrupting the honour due to virginity, the availability of the abstinent life to all who would imitate the purity of monks and nuns depends upon virginity as the pattern of purity dedicated to the service of God.⁵⁰

In addition to his references to the importance of *mægðhad* and *clænnēs* to holy service, and in addition to instructions on how the laity too may dedicate themselves to Christ in a purity, Ælfric binds together the concepts of purity and God's service in his instructions regarding child oblates in the *Nativitas* homily. He writes that *hi heora bearnteam gebringon to Criste/... þa moton*

⁴⁷ ÆLet 2 (Wulfstan 1) 84.26-86.5. "Now, with this it is truly manifested to us, both in the Old Law and also in the New, that God wishes to have in his spiritual service holy male and holy female servants, those who with purity of body and of mind offer that holy Eucharist to him, just as he himself taught before his passion." And again, 122.22-26: "*Nu is seo ealde æ eall awend on oper to gastlican þingum, and Godes þenas sceolon healdan hyra clænnysse, swa swa Crist hit astealde.*" (Now the Old Law is wholly exchanged for spiritual things, and God's servants should preserve their purity just as Christ established it.)"

⁴⁸ Ælfric also prescribes the need for objects related to Christ's service to be "pure" or "clean," as in his letter to Wulfsig (ÆLet 1 [WulfsigT] 14.5-10). Here he instructs priests: *Beo his calic eac of clænum antimbre geworht, unforrotigendlic and eallswa se disc and clæne corporale, swaswa to Cristes þenungum gebyrað.* ("Let his chalice also be made of clean material, incorruptible and likewise the dish and corporal just as befits Christ's service.")

⁴⁹ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 20-21.162-71.

⁵⁰ ÆHom 26.1, 756.17-18. "...þa gehadodan Godes þeowas þe nu Gode mid clænnysse þeowiap"; "...the consecrated servants of God who now serve God now with chastity...."

*geoffrian heora cild Gode/ to þære clænnysse and Cristes þeowdome.*⁵¹ The dedication of children illustrates the uniting of virginal purity and Christ's holy service into one inseparable value. Amid all the forms of service rendered to God, virginal purity, such as that of child oblates, sets the standard of *clænnys* against which all other practices of purity are measured. Yet, when Ælfric credits the purity of widows (consecrated to the service of God) with a higher degree of honour than chaste (faithful) wives,⁵² is it the imitation of virginal purity which determines the value of widowed purity, or is it the dedication of that purity to the service of God? In anticipation of what we shall see in Ælfric's translations of the married-virgin saints' *passiones*, I would suggest it is the latter. Virginal purity may raise the proverbial bar, but it is holy service that ultimately defines the spiritual value of physical purity. Holy service, then, earns the widow's *clænnys* a greater glory than the circumstance of sexual abstinence.

D. The Sacramental and Sacrificial Aspects of Virginity

In the first chapter I noted the potential for misreading the metaphoric role of virginity, and this is perhaps nowhere more evident than when the Fathers employ sacramental and sacrificial language with reference to the virgin. Despite the significance of such imagery to the Fathers' construction of virginity, and despite Ælfric's own concern for priestly purity and the relationship between *clæn* service and the celebration of the Eucharist, there are, in the "Letter" and the *Nativitas* homily, only two passages which allude to the sacramental implications of virginity. In the Latin tradition, the Fathers depict the virgin as a redemptive figure through their figural portrayal of the virgin as altar and temple, as well as their explicit references to the sacrifice of the virgin as propitiatory. For his part, Ælfric handles the theme of virginity as an offering or sacrifice fleetingly, almost obliquely. Like the Fathers, he too sees the offering of virginity as a sacrifice, both by the virgin and, in the case of child oblates, by their parents. Compared to the development of such imagery in Jerome, for instance, Ælfric uses sacramental imagery in these texts very sparingly. In light of the definitive role which the sacramental plays in the Old English *passiones* of Sts Chrysanthus and Daria, and Cecilia (to be discussed in Chapter 4), as well as in the Fathers' treatment of virginity, Ælfric's use of sacramental and sacrificial imagery requires some comment.

⁵¹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 34.254-56. "...they bring their offspring to Christ... when they are able to offer their child to God for purity and Christ's service...."

⁵² ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 39.363-70. "*Synd swa þeah þa wudewan, ðe wuniað on clænnysse/ to nunnan gehadode for ðæs hælendes lufon,/ on marum gepincðum, gif hi Gode þeowiað,/ and on marum gepincðum þurh heora clænnysse,/ þonne þa wif beoð, þe wuniað on sinscipe.*" "Nevertheless those widows who dwell in purity, as consecrated nuns out of love for the Saviour, are in greater dignity, if they serve God, and in greater dignity because of their purity, than are the wives who dwell in marriage."

To this end I briefly survey how Ælfric employs the words *templ*, *weofod* ‘altar,’ and *lac* ‘sacrifice’ in relation to virgins.

Images of the virgin as temple or altar occur rarely in the Ælfrician corpus and never in either the “Letter” or *Nativitas* homily. Most examples of *weofod*, and *templ* for that matter, denote architectural structures rather than figures for the Christian or virgin. Occasionally Ælfric refers to Christians as the temple of the Holy Spirit,⁵³ as in his rendering of St Paul’s exhortation to Christians that “*ge sind gebohte mid miclum wurde; wuldriað for ði; 7 berað God on eowrum lichaman; God we berað on urum lichaman; for ðan þe we beoð tempel; 7 fætels þæs halgan gastes.*”⁵⁴ The one point at which Ælfric describes a virginal body as the temple of the Holy Spirit occurs in the *passio* of St Lucy. The saint, mocked by her persecutor for her claim that the Holy Spirit dwells in her, fearlessly responds, *Se apostol behet þam ðe healdað clænnysse, / þæt hi synd Godes templ and þæs halgan gastes wunung.*⁵⁵ Even here, although Lucy herself is a virgin, the *clænnys* to which she refers need not specify virginal purity. Were it not for St Agatha’s earlier promise that Lucy would be renowned for her virginal life, this might simply be a reassertion of the Pauline teaching.⁵⁶ However productive the Latin Fathers find temple imagery for the representation of the virginal body, Ælfric nowhere employs this language in either the “Letter” or the *Nativitas*. Passages elsewhere in his corpus demonstrate that he is certainly aware of the rhetorical possibilities of such imagery. In these passages he admonishes that the antithesis of *clænnys* (i.e. fornication) can transform a body into a dwelling place for demons: *Se is gehaten fornicatio, & he befylð þone mann, & macað of Cristes lymen myltestrena lymen, and of Godes temple gramena wununge.*⁵⁷ Within the “Letter” and the homily, the absence of imagery representing the virgin as God’s temple probably reflects Ælfric’s reluctance to restrict a concept that applies to the whole body of Christ to the virgin alone. That is certainly the case in his

⁵³ See for example, ÆCHom I, 19 327.65-67, ÆCHom II, 45 338.100-4.

⁵⁴ ÆCHom I, 14.1 293.104-7. “‘You are bought with a great price, therefore glorify and bear God in your bodies.’ We bear God in our bodies because we are the temple and vessel of the Holy Spirit.” (I Cor 6:19.) For another passage where Ælfric applies this image to Christians in general, see: ÆCHom I, 28 416.184-86. “*Anes gehwylces geleaffulles mannes mod is Godes hus; swa swa se apostol cwæð; Godes tempel is halig. þæt ge sind.*” (“The heart of every faithful person is God’s house. Just as the apostle said, ‘God’s temple is holy. That you are.’”)

⁵⁵ ÆLS (Lucy) 214.79-80. “The apostle promises those who preserve their purity that they are God’s temple and the dwelling of the Holy Spirit.”

⁵⁶ ÆLS (Lucy) 212.32-34.

⁵⁷ ÆAbusWarn, 17.1-3. “It is called fornication and it befouls the man and makes of Christ’s limbs the limbs of prostitutes, and of God’s temple the dwelling of demons.”

treatment of the virgin as a type of the Church (treated in the discussion of ‘body’ below). As we shall see, Ælfric repeatedly draws attention to the inclusion of all Christians--lay, monastic, married, and virgin--in the Holy Church, the Body of Christ, that finds figural expression in the virgin.

As mentioned above, *weofod* generally denotes the physical structure of an altar, whether pagan, Jewish, or Christian, although Ælfric occasionally refers to the heart as an altar, as in the following lines: *Hwæt is ænig lac wið ðisum willan; þonne seo sawul hi sylfe Gode geoffrað on weofode hyre heortan.*⁵⁸ He never, however, applies *weofod* specifically to the virgin. On the contrary, Ælfric develops his teaching on the Christian’s heart as an altar upon which we offer up spiritual gifts:

Stor we him bring gif we ure geþohtas þurh gecnyrdnyse haligra gebeda on weofode ure heortan onælað; þæt we magon hwæthwega wynsumlice þurh heofonlice gewilnunge stincan.... Ac gif we þa mirran Gode gastlice geoffriað, þonne bið ure deadlica lichama fram galnyse stencum þurh forhæfdnyse gehealden.⁵⁹

The potential and responsibility of good works, and the opportunity and means of pleasing God lie before every Christian. This emphasis upon the pure and pleasing offering of good works and prayers recalls the focus upon pure service, rather than proposing that virginal intactness make the heart into God’s dwelling or altar. Thus, Ælfric refuses to restrict the evocative image of the altar to virgins alone, even within the context of addresses to virgins or on the celibacy of priests.

That said, virginity itself is, for Ælfric as for the Church Fathers, a sacrifice, or *lac*, most pleasing before the Lord.⁶⁰ In the Latin Fathers, the motif of virginity as sacrifice contains several layers of interpretation. The virgin is the redemptive offering of her parents at the same time that her *integritas* forms the substance of her gift to God. Ælfric too uses *lac* to denote a gift or

⁵⁸ ÆCHom I, 38 511.123-25. “What is any offering in comparison with this desire, when the soul offers itself to God on the altar of its heart?”

⁵⁹ ÆCHom I, 7 239.235-38, 244-46. “We bring him incense, if we inspire our thoughts through the zeal of holy prayers on the altar of our hearts; so that we may through heavenly longing be pleasantly fragrant.... Moreover, if we offer spiritual myrrh to God, then our mortal bodies will be preserved from the stench of lust through self-restraint.”

⁶⁰ Ælfric occasionally uses *onsægednes* as well to refer to sacrifice. In comparison to *lac*, however, which we find in the Ælfrician corpus over 220 times, *onsægednes* occurs relatively infrequently: only 25 times. It offers a similar range to *lac*: as spiritual sacrifice (ÆCHom I 29, 418.14-17; ÆCHom I, 489.95-96); as Old Testament sacrifices ordained by God and types of Christ (ÆCHom II, 12.1 120.344-47); and sacrifices to pagan gods (ÆLS [Cecilia] 332-33).

offering in the metaphorical sense of “spiritual sacrifice.”⁶¹ Thus in a passage from the *Catholic Homilies* cited above, Ælfric interprets *urum lacum* as *godum weorcum*.⁶² In the *Nativitas* homily (such imagery is absent from the “Letter”), Ælfric introduces the topos of virginity as sacrifice, seen in the previous chapter on the Church Fathers. Although Ælfric attributes a potentially mediatory role to the virgin on the basis of virginity as a sacrifice, his overwhelming concern rests upon the manner in which that sacrifice is offered. Two aspects of his representation of virginity as *lac* illustrate this concern. Firstly, Ælfric demands that the sacrifice of virginity be voluntary. Secondly, he emphasizes the manner in which this gift is given in such a way as to delineate the nature of the gift itself. Ælfric’s teaching on child oblates, in particular, sheds light upon this relation between the manner and nature of virginity as sacrifice.

Ælfric first of all frames the concept of consecrating one’s virginity by citing Mary’s example. He explains that *Heo behet Gode hyre mægðhad æt fruman, / þæt heo lybban wolde hyre lif on mægðhade / sylfwilles for Gode, na for neadunge*.⁶³ Before describing *mægðhad* as a *lac*, Ælfric refers twice more to the voluntary nature of Mary’s vow, proposing her as a model for all those who wish likewise to remain *on clænnysse* for the love of Christ.⁶⁴ He then further sketches the proper character of virginity by listing the virtues needed to make the offering of *mægðhad* pleasing before God. Counseling *modes godnysse*, *halige drohtmunge*, and *lifes clænnysse*, Ælfric informs his readers that God is better pleased with the *mægðhad* which *Gode beon geoffrod be his agenum cyre, / þæt seo lac beo leofre þam lyfigendan hælende... þonne he wære, gif he undances wære*.⁶⁵ Whether *lac* signifies ‘gift’ or ‘sacrifice’ in this passage ultimately matters very

⁶¹ For an example of *lac* denoting ‘gift,’ see ÆCHom II, 45 341.181-82. “*Seo cwen com to Salomone mid micclum lacum. on golde. and on deorwurdum gymstanum. and wyrtrædum....*” (“The queen came to Solomon with many gifts in gold, and in precious gem stones, and in perfumes.”) Later in the same homily Ælfric uses *lac* to refer to the analogous spiritual gifts which Christians bring to Christ (342.222). Under *lac* in Bosworth-Toller and Toller’s Supplement the spiritualization of the theme of sacrifice is readily attested by the citations provided in the dictionaries (e.g. “*Id de laces lof lustum secge tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis*,” Ps. Th. 115:7). *Lac* as spiritual sacrifice obviously blurs somewhat with *lac* as ‘gift,’ which can be similarly spiritualized. Cf. senses II and III in J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford UP, 1898), and T.N. Toller, *Supplement to An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Clarendon Press, 1921).

⁶² ÆCHom II, 4 39.288.

⁶³ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 31-32.189-91. “She pledged her virginity to God at the beginning, as she wanted to live her life in virginity for God of her own free will, not out of necessity.”

⁶⁴ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 32.196-97, 200-6.

⁶⁵ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 33.232-37. “...the goodwill of the heart,” “holy conduct,” and “purity of one’s life”; “...is offered to God by one’s own choice; that gift will be dearer to the living Saviour...than it would be if he [the giver] were unwilling.”

little, for Ælfric intends here not a figural portrayal of virginity, but a representation of the virtues and practices which inform true *mægðhad*, virginity defined by *clænnēs*. Without the wholehearted conformance of the will together with holy conduct, without the union of spiritual and physical purity, the value of physical virginity diminishes. It is then neither gift, nor sacrifice, but mere intactness.

If Ælfric's treatment of *lac* in the above passage leaves some ambiguity about whether he intends his readers to view the consecration of virginity as a gift or sacrifice, elsewhere he more clearly combines the two meanings, so that virginity may be understood as their sacrificial gift:

Micel geoffrað Gode þe hine sylfne geoffrað.
 þa synd ða mæstan lac, þe man mæg geoffrian,
 þæt he holocaustum beo, þæt is eall Godes lac,
 swa swa þa clænan doð þe dæghwamlice campiað
 wið ða ungesewenlican and ða swicolan fynd
 and wið unlustas, gelærede ðurh Crist.
 Hi beoð Cristes martyras þurh ða munuclican drohtnunge,
 na æne gemartirode, ac oft digollice....⁶⁶

Without reference to virginity per se, the context clarifies that Ælfric here refers to the *lac* of the virginally *clæn*. As well as aligning the *clæn* with the martyrs, a status reserved for the virginal, Ælfric also contrasts those who offer themselves thus to God with the married, who bring a certain gift to God, but do not give themselves sacrificially: *hi bringað sume lac þam leofan Drihtne./ ac hi ne beoð na eallunga his holocaustum./ þæt is eall his lac....*⁶⁷ *Holocaustum* 'burnt offering' occurs nowhere else in the Old English Ælfrician corpus except in these two lines, though it is not an unknown synonym for *lac*.⁶⁸ Aside from occasional references to *mægðhad* as *seo clæne lac*, Ælfric does not employ *lac* frequently in conjunction with virginal *clænnēs* or *mægðhad*. The use of *lac* to denote other sacrifices offered to God or the pagan gods, or to denote the Eucharist, is

⁶⁶ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 35-36.288-295. "He offers much to God who offers himself. These are the greatest gifts which a man can offer, that he should be a sacrificial offering - that is entirely God's gift - just as the pure do, who daily strive against the invisible and deceitful fiend and against evil desires, guided by Christ. They are Christ's martyrs through monastic conduct, not martyred at any one time, but rather often in secret...."

⁶⁷ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3], 36.300-2a. "... they bring a certain gift to the dear Lord, but they are not entirely his sacrificial offering, that is completely his gift...."

⁶⁸ Cf. *lac* in Bosworth-Toller and Toller's Supplement, where other examples (outside Ælfric) can be found of *lac* and *holocaustum* as synonyms. Clayton cites an instance of *holocaustum* in Ælfric's *First Latin Letter for Wulfstan* ("Ælfric and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary" 307).

much more common in Ælfric.⁶⁹ Therefore, it appears that Ælfric specifically employs *holocaustum* in order to circumscribe unambiguously *lac* as a sacrificial offering. The portrayal of virginity as *lac* evokes the theme of sacrifice so central to the Fathers. Ælfric, however, forgoes the symbolic and sacramental implications which underlie the Fathers' work in order to accentuate the volitional nature of this sacrifice. Hence, where Ælfric elsewhere in his homilies refers to *mægðhad* as a gift and sacrifice, he asserts the voluntary nature of the offering: *Nu is Criste leofre þæt se man be his [agenre] gecorennysse þa clænnysse geceose þe he sylf astealde, þonne he ealle menn bebunde mid þam anum bebode. And seo clæne lac, þæt is mægðhad, sceal beon Gode mid [glæd]nysse geoffrod, na mid neadunge ænigre hæse.*⁷⁰

When he turns to the subject of child-oblates, we might expect more overt reference to the notion of virgins as the sacrifice of their parents, such as we find in Jerome and Augustine. But Ælfric does not treat the *lac* of one's children to the consecrated life in a manner reflective of the critical Latin motif of the virgin as intercessory *sacrificium*. Instead he instructs his readers on the inner disposition that should motivate the offering. Criticizing parents who would offer God *heora laðostan cild* 'their most hated child,' Ælfric admonishes that in presenting less than their best and beloved, these parents do not imitate the example of Abraham, *þe his leofran sunu to lace geoffrode/ Gode Ælmihtigum uppan his weofode.*⁷¹ The allusion to Abraham clarifies that the sacrifice desired is not one of expiation, but of obedience. With the sacrifice of Isaac, Ælfric provides parents who want to dedicate their children with a model that coincides with his teaching on the just and righteous manner of offering one's own virginity to God. Obedience figures more prominently here than the theme of virgins as the redemptive-offering of their parents.⁷² God commended Abraham, after all, for his obedience in offering up the child for whom he had so

⁶⁹ For an example of *lac* as an offering to pagan gods, see ÆHom 21. 643.51. For *lac* referring to the Eucharist, see ÆLS (Peter's Chair), 234.230.

⁷⁰ ÆHom 20 624.48-52. "Now it is dearer to Christ that a man by his own choice choose chastity which he [Christ] himself established, than that he should bind all men with a single command. And the clean gift, that is virginity, shall be offered to God with gladness, not with the compulsion of any vow." (Matthew 19:9-12.)

⁷¹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3], 35.267-68. "...who offered his dear son as a sacrifice to God Almighty upon his altar...."

⁷² AMB.Virg.Marc. 16.20 - 17.2. "*Virgo Dei donum est, munus parentis, sacerdotium castitatis. Virgo matris hostia est, cuius cotidiano sacrificio vis divina placatur. Virgo individuum pignus parentum, quæ non dote sollicitet, non emigratione destituat, non offendat iniuria.*" ("A virgin is the gift of God, the offering of her parents, the priesthood of chastity. A virgin is the sacrifice of her mother, by whose daily sacrifice the divine might is placated. The virgin is the inseparable pledge of her parents, who does not trouble them for a dowry, nor leave them destitute by her departure, nor offend them with injury.")

longed and waited.⁷³ In the end, Ælfric's instructions regarding child oblates do not recall the Fathers' treatment of the virgin and her virginity as sacrifice. Instead Ælfric's commendations reflect the concern we see elsewhere in his instructions on obedience and purity of heart.

Ælfric's use of *lac* and imagery for the altar and temple ultimately bears less resemblance to the patristic tradition than might be expected. For Jerome, Old Testament sacrificial structures prefigured the physical body which the virgin offers to God. For all the Fathers, the language of sacrifice not only carried implications regarding the virgin's particular relationship to God, but also carried sacramental signification for the larger community around the virgin. Ælfric, on the other hand, employs the terminology of sacrifice almost exclusively in teachings that pertain to the dedication of virginity to God. Both in his instructions regarding the commitment of children to the consecrated life and in his exhortations to those who have chosen this life for themselves, Ælfric concentrates upon virginity as a freely given and excellent offering, rather than upon its sacrificial and expiatory possibilities. Even in passages that present a perfect opportunity for developing the notion of virginity as a sacrifice, Ælfric chooses to dwell upon issues pertaining to faithfulness in consecration. For example, in "The Chair of St Peter" in the *Lives of Saints*, when the virginal Felicula rejects the pagan Flaccus' command that she either marry him or sacrifice to his gods, Felicula keeps the two threats distinct. She can never be his wife because of her voluntary consecration to God. Neither can she *hæpenum godum/ lac ne geoffrige* on account of her faith in Christ.⁷⁴ One can hardly imagine Jerome allowing an opportunity like this to pass without developing the notion that by consecrating herself to virginity, the virgin offers a sacrifice which belongs to God alone. For Jerome, the two are practically indistinguishable. Ælfric, however, makes no such connection, and he leaves undeveloped all overtones of virginity as a sacrifice. Where he discusses the choice of virginity or the dedication of children to the virginal life, his concern is for obedience. In this way, Ælfric attaches as much consequence to the manner and quality of the heart in offering the sacrifice of virginity to God as to physical virginity itself.

II. *Lichama* and *Flæsc*

The prominence of obedience and disposition, combined with a relative disregard for the matter of 'intactness,' may account for the paucity of references to the body in the "Letter" and the *Nativitas*, both of which are deeply concerned with virginal purity. In these texts Ælfric makes reference to the physical body, *lichama*, in discussions of the Incarnation, the Virgin Mary, and the

⁷³ Gn 22: 12-18.

⁷⁴ 'ÆLS (Peter's Chair) 236.278-79. "...sacrifice to heathen gods."

Church, and throughout the wider Ælfrician corpus there are discussions of the relationship between the mind and body in the preservation of purity.⁷⁵ Despite the fact that virginity is necessarily a physical “virtue,” the virginal body is most noteworthy in its absence from the “Letter” and the *Nativitas* homily. Multiple references to *lichama* and *flæsc* exist in the greater Ælfrician corpus, but not within these two texts. Throughout the *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric expands upon the need for subduing the vices and desires that rage in the flesh. In a passage reminiscent of Jerome’s warning that Satan’s strength is “in the loins” and human reproduction,⁷⁶ Ælfric locates lust in the loins: *On lendenum is seo galnys ðæs lichaman and se ðe wile þæt husel ðicgan he sceal gewriðan þa galnysse and mid clænnysse ða halgan ðigene onfon.*⁷⁷ Elsewhere, while exhorting his readers to subdue the fleshly nature, Ælfric interprets Peter’s and the other disciples’ leaving their wives and children as an abandonment of *flæsclicera lusta and dæda* in order to follow Christ.⁷⁸ Within the “Letter” and *Nativitas*, the few examples of *lichama* and *flæsc* which occur with reference to the Virgin Mary, the Church, or Christ’s Incarnation may provide a glimpse at how Ælfric construed the physical in iconic persons or moments, but one must approach the subject almost obliquely in order to construct his perception of the body’s relationship to the faithful virginal life. Despite Ælfric’s comparative lack of attention to the physical body and threats to virginal purity, his admonitions regarding lapsed virgins of both sexes leave no doubt as to the importance of physical purity. Our examination of how Ælfric constructs the relationship between the virgin and her physical body begins first with a general survey of the ways in which Ælfric uses *lichama* and *flæsc* in these two texts. Next, Ælfric’s treatment of the resurrection body and his use of the metaphor of Christ’s body effectively forestalls the attribution of negative connotations to the *lichama*. The third aspect to be examined concerns one of Ælfric’s general rhetorical practices which elides distinctions between the sexes, throughout the *Nativitas* in particular. Again and again Ælfric refers to men and women in parallel, as in his discussions of the faithful service of monks and nuns. In contrast to this pervasive assertion of gender parity, his treatment of lapsed virgins implies a disjunction between the importance of physical purity for

⁷⁵ See, for example, St Lucy’s argument that unwanted physical violation has no effect upon purity’s preservation in ÆLS (Lucy) 214.84-91. See also Ælfric’s teaching that both *mod* and *lichama* participate equally in true virginity. ÆCHom I, 9 255.205-7.

⁷⁶ HIER.Epist.XXII. 158.12-15.

⁷⁷ ÆCHom II, 15 159.303-6. “The lust of the body is in the loins; and he who wants to receive the host must check lust and receive the holy food with purity.”

⁷⁸ ÆCHom II, 6 57.158-160. Ælfric also contrasts God’s creation of humanity “*mid gaste and mid lichaman*” with His creation of animals “*on flæsce buton sawle*” (ÆCHom I, 20 335.13-14).

women and for their male counterparts. But, I suggest--and believe that this will be borne out by the examination in later chapters of the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints--that the distinctions drawn here hold less consequence for connecting women to the physical body than these passages at first imply.

A. The Nature of *Lichama* and *Flæsc*

Ælfric's general use of *flæsc* and *lichama* follows a distinction similar to that of the Fathers. *Lichama* frequently denotes the human physical body which, though subject to both mortal and spiritual decay, is equally capable of redemption and eternal resurrection.⁷⁹ While *flæsc* can merely denote the physical body, it is frequently found in collocation with *lust* 'desire,' or in opposition to *gast* 'spirit.' Ælfric's use of *lichama* as a gloss for *corpus*, not only in his Grammar, but also in the *passio* of St Cecilia (when the saint prays for the protection of her heart and physical body) reflects the perishable and transitory nature of the physical body.⁸⁰ Ælfric uses *flæsc* as a gloss for *caro*.⁸¹ The Fathers' distinction between the contents of 'flesh' and 'body' can be seen in the following passage where Ælfric attaches spiritual death to mortal flesh, as a result of the pernicious abuse of the mortal body: *deade flæsc leahtorlice, þonne se deadlic lichama þeowað þære flowendan galnysse*.⁸²

As the bearer of the signifier of virginity, the virgin's physical body functions on a range of levels from the anagogical where it represents the spiritual purity of the Church, to the symbolic level where its purity materially constitutes the oath of service to God. Ælfric avoids burdening the physical body with negative associations. For this reason, although the "Letter to Sigefyrth" deals with the necessity of priests remaining celibate and pure, and the *Nativitas* deals with the nature

⁷⁹ The following citations merely provide a list which is representative of the breadth of *lichama*'s contexts and connotations: regarding the mortal body and human physicality (ÆCHom I, 32 458.208-13); in collocation with *mod*, reflecting the twofold nature of humanity, the physical and the spiritual/mental (ÆCHom I, 8 247.180-82); on the relationship between soul and body, in which the body must submit to the soul, the inseparability of the two, and how the body's relationship to the soul parallels that of the soul to God (ÆAdmon 1 3.18, ÆCHom II, 45 343.272, ÆCHom I, 10 262.121-28); of the Eucharist (ÆCHom II, 15154.153, 156.225, 157.234); of Christ's incarnate body (ÆCHom I, 16 308.29-33). As a gloss for *corpus*, see ÆGram 16.16, 59.4, 233.1.

⁸⁰ ÆLS (Cecilia) 356.25-24.

⁸¹ The occurrences of *lichama* are so much more numerous than those of *flæsc* that there are very few contexts in which *flæsc* occurs that *lichama* does not. Nevertheless, given its rate of incidence, the number of times in which *flæsc* occurs in collocation with *lust* (e.g. ÆCHom II, 26: 215.72), or in opposition to the spirit (e.g. ÆLS [Auguries] 6) is proportionately higher. While both words occur in discussions of Christ's incarnation, *flæsc* is Ælfric's word of choice when translating the Johannine passage "the word became flesh" (e.g. ÆCHom I, 2 196.173-74, ÆHom I 51.403). See ÆHom I 404 for Ælfric's distinction between *flæsc* and *lichama* regarding Christ's incarnation. As a gloss for *caro*, see ÆGI 298.11, 316.5.

⁸² ÆCHom I, 7 239.241-42. "... the mortal flesh rots foully, when the mortal body serves overflowing wantonness...."

and importance of virginity for the consecrated, neither text betrays a conspicuous concern for constructing *flæsc* or *lichama* as the locus of temptation, or as an untrustworthy receptacle for the treasure of virginity. The “Letter,” in fact, does not contain even one occurrence of *flæsc*, and only three of *lichama*, one of which refers to the body of Christ in the Eucharist rather than to the earthly body of priest or virgin.⁴³ Even the two references which concern purity or sexual danger do not construct the body as an essential threat to the virgin, but rather attribute such dangers to the desires located within the body.

Ælfric first refers to *lichama* in the “Letter” when tracing the parameters of purity through the example of John the Baptist who preserved his purity for God *on mode and on lichaman* ‘in mind and in body’ (l. 22). The collocation of *lichama* and *mod* occurs numerous times throughout the Ælfrician corpus in passages intertwining the need for the body to be purified together with the mind and committed in *clænnes* to God. While the body is lower than the mind and must be ruled by it, the two nevertheless can participate together in the holy life. They are inextricably joined either in righteousness and eternal bliss, or in sin and eternal damnation.⁴⁴ Yet while the two are united in the *clæn* life and the phrase *modes clænnysse* recurs occasionally in the “Letter,” Ælfric never employs a reciprocal phrase like *lichaman clænnes*, as one might expect in discussions of virginal purity.⁴⁵ Even in the final occurrence of *lichama* in the “Letter” where Ælfric warns against the sin of lust, the physical body is not his primary concern. Exhorting priests to guard themselves against bodily pollution, so that they can celebrate the Eucharist purely, Ælfric commands them: *Beon eowre lendena ymbgyrde* ‘gird up your loins’ (l. 95). He then explains this verse by way of the patristic tradition.

Lareowas us secgað þæt on þam lendenum
is þæs lichaman galnyss, and God bebed for þi,
þæt we sceolan gewriðan and gewyldan þa galnyss,
we þe him þeniað on þære halgan mæssan.⁴⁶

Although he situates lust in the body, and in a very particular part of the body (such as we have seen in Jerome), where Ælfric talks of subjugation it is lust and not the body which needs to be

⁴³ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 17.90.

⁴⁴ In his homily for Christ’s Nativity, Ælfric recites the hierarchy of earthly creation and allegorically interprets man’s physical body as a reminder of the right ordering of human life. The body is below the mind and ought never to rule over it (ÆLS [Christmas] 52-61). Elsewhere he teaches that, from their union in the womb, body and soul are knit together throughout this life and the next (ÆCHom II, 12.1 118.293-94; ÆCHom I, 20 344.270-275).

⁴⁵ For examples of ‘*modes clænnes*’ in ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth], see 19.137; 21.183; 23.220.

⁴⁶ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 17.97-100. “Teachers tell us that the lust of the body is in the loins, and God commanded therefore, that we who serve him in the holy mass should bind and subdue lust.” (Lk 12:35.)

subdued.⁸⁷ The Christian will struggle with the lust of the body, but it remains the same body created by God together with the soul, and capable of participating wholly in a purity pleasing to God.

Contrary to any sense of the body as an encumbrance or trap, Ælfric leaves the readers of the *Nativitas* homily in no doubt that the body and soul together are God's good creation. He makes this point forcibly when addressing the question of whether illegitimate children are God's creation. In response to this question, Ælfric writes that *nan cild ne bið buton þa ðe God gescypð/ on sawle and on lichaman swa swa he gesceop Adam*.⁸⁸ Just as stolen wheat is not defiled because of the sower's theft, so too children are innocent of any sin attached to their conception.⁸⁹ Guilt and innocence alike attach to human volition. The body, like the illegitimate child, cannot be condemned out of hand: *And ælc sawul bið gesceapen þurh God/ and ælces mannes lichama, þe on life bið cucu,/ and se ðe elles gelyfð, he gelyfð gedwylde*.⁹⁰ What we see in Ælfric's teaching on the purity of the physical body affirms the concerns identified earlier in his treatment of virginity, namely the condition of the heart and mind, obedience and the voluntary commitment to pure service.

While the Latin Fathers never deprecate the intrinsic goodness of the earthly body as God's creation, certain aspects of their portrayals of virginity--like Ambrose's depiction of the virginal life as a prefiguration of the angelic, eternal life to come, or Jerome's treatment of the virginal body as regaining the purity forfeited by the Fall--could be interpreted as implicitly devaluing the earthly body. For his part, Ælfric takes overt steps to explain that the discontinuity between earthly and heavenly experience results not from the nature of the physical body itself, but from the circumstances of earthly existence. The new bodies bestowed upon the faithful in resurrection in no way debase their earthly bodies. In the *Nativitas* he describes the resurrection of all Christians justified by faith:

...hi ealle habbon heofonan rice
him gemænelice, him sylfum to mede,
and wynsumne lichaman, on to wunigenne a,
unbrosnigendlicne, butan eallum wommum

⁸⁷ HIER.Epist.XXII. 158.12-15.

⁸⁸ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3], 36.308-9. "... no child is except it is created by God in soul and body, just as He created Adam."

⁸⁹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3], 37.314-17.

⁹⁰ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3], 37.319-21. "And every soul is created through God, and every body which is living in life, and he who believes anything else believes heresy."

and butan awyrðnysse a to worulde syððan.⁹¹

Ælfric underscores the permanence and perfection of the new body. The most negative feature of the earthly *lichama* which the heavenly transformation corrects is the irresistible nature of external circumstances affecting the body. The new body, no longer subject to such events, will be *unbroſnigendlic*, or ‘incorruptible.’ Where *broſniendlic* modifies *lichama* in Ælfric’s writings, it frequently refers to the transitory nature of the body and its susceptibility to physical decay rather than the spiritual corruptibility of the body.⁹² Thus, the physical body stands uncondemned by any general accusation of wholesale defilement. The earthly body may be marked by *wommum* and subject to *awyrðnysse*, but Ælfric never dismisses the body as the source of such afflictions. Elsewhere in the *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric likens the transitory and corruptible nature of the body to the fragile flower of a plant, writing that *se lichama sind broſniendlice, swa swa ðæra wyrta blostm*.⁹³ Decay, corruption, blemishes, and defilements prey upon and stain the Christian’s transitory *lichama*. Yet Ælfric does not, for this reason, condemn the physical body as pernicious, or even as a hindrance to faithful Christian living. Certainly the body’s susceptibility to decay complicates and can potentially compromise the Christian life. It is, however, the expectation of freedom rather than lamentation, incriminations, or corrective admonitions which characterizes Ælfric’s reference to the body’s transformation into incorruptibility. While he laments the forces of this life which batter the Christian’s body and rejoices in the future liberation from these trials, Ælfric invests little energy in depicting the earthly *lichama* as a source of danger or reservoir of errant tendencies at odds with the virginal life. In Chapter 3, when we compare Ælfric’s treatment of Sts Julian and Basilissa’s monastic-evangelism with that of his potential source, we will see how carefully Ælfric avoids negative depictions of the physical body and the non-virginal life of that body.

B. *Lichama* as an Image for the Church and the Virgin Mary

Because *flæsc* occurs in neither the “Letter” nor the *Nativitas* homily it would appear that Ælfric is less concerned with those temptations which might be termed ‘fleshly.’ Elsewhere in the

⁹¹ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3], 45.518-22. “...they all have the heavenly kingdom in common for themselves as a reward, and a pleasant body to dwell in forever, incorruptible, without any blemishes and without any defilement forever after.”

⁹² See, for example, Ælfric’s discussion of the eternal resurrection as our *þridde accennednys* wherein *beoð ure lichaman geedcynnede to unbrosniendlicum lichaman*. (ÆCHom I, 27 405.163-64. “...our bodies are regenerated as incorruptible bodies.”)

⁹³ ÆCHom II, 36.1 270.83-84. “...the body is corruptible just as the blossom of plants.”

corpus of his works, we find evidence that Ælfric perceives an opposition between the spiritual and the fleshly. He writes that it was to redeem humanity from this nature that Christ put on the *gelicnysse synfulles flæsc* ‘likeness of sinful flesh’ so that through *urum flæsclicum gecynde* ‘our fleshly nature’ he might dispose of sin forever.⁹⁴ Again, he teaches that the disciples followed Jesus in delivering humanity *fram flæsclicum lustum and fram woruldlicum gedwyldum to stapolfæstnysse*.⁹⁵ Negative spiritual connotations do not weigh upon every instance of *flæsc*. In some cases it simply occurs as a synonym for *lichama* to denote the condition of being in human flesh (be it Christ’s or humanity’s incarnation).⁹⁶ There are, of course, many other facets of *flæsc*, but as Ælfric managed to write both the “Letter” and the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* without recourse to this term, it seems evident that he did not consider the flesh the ultimate threat against the virginal or faithful priestly life. On the contrary, in the “Letter” he admonishes those who serve at the altar to put away, to conquer, and to subdue *lichaman galnyss* ‘lust of the body’ (l. 97). Thus it appears that Ælfric’s concern revolves around the discipline rather than the condemnation or fear of the physical body.

Augustine, to whose *De sancta virginitate* Ælfric turns when he shifts the focus of the *Nativitas* homily from its ostensible subject to the ideal of virginity, figurally develops the virginal body as a signifier of the virginity of the church, and of the Virgin Mary. In his typical manner, Ælfric reorders and combines *De sancta virginitate* so freely with other sources that it is sometimes difficult to determine correspondences.⁹⁷ Taking up Augustine’s notion of the figural relationship between the virgin and the Church, and Mary, Ælfric emphasizes how these typological relations depend upon a virginal holiness that encompasses body and mind.

The comparison between the virginity of the Church and the Virgin Mary reinforces the relationship between holiness and virginity. Obviously one of the primary points of comparison between Mary and the Church--the miracle of virginity united to fertility--is beyond the practical experience and knowledge of the mortal virgin. But the frequent reference which Ælfric makes to holiness of body and spirit, *lichama* and *gast*, encourages virgins, who are pure in both, to “join” in the exalted life of the Church and Virgin Mother:

On ægþrum is mægðhad and eac swylce bearnteam,
and se bearnteam ne wanode, ne ne awyrde þone mægðhad

⁹⁴ ÆCHom II, 12.1 120.353-54.

⁹⁵ ÆCHom I, 38 507.20-21. “...from fleshly desires and worldly heresies to steadfastness....”

⁹⁶ ÆCHom I, 7 239.222-23.

⁹⁷ For an exploration of Ælfric’s homily and its relation to its various sources, see Clayton’s “*Nativitas*.”

naþor ne on Marian, ne on Godes gelaðunge.
 Seo gelaðung is halig on lichaman and on gaste,
 ac heo nis na eall mæden swa þeah on lichaman,
 ac heo is swa þeah mæden soðlice on gaste,
 and heo is eall halig for þam halgan geleafan
 and heo is swiðor halig on þam halgum mannum,
 þe on mægðhade wuniað on lichaman and on gaste. ⁹⁸

Interestingly, within the context of this comparison, where the Church, unlike the Virgin, is not entirely a virgin, Ælfric specifically employs the wholly unambiguous *mægðhad* rather than *clænnnes* to translate Augustine's *virginitas*.⁹⁹ Technical as well as spiritual virginity is vital to the concept of the Church's relationship to Christ. The fact that all the members of the Church are not virginal does not alter the Church's virginal status. The presence of married members has no effect upon the Church's holiness either *on lichaman* or *on gaste*. Those members who possess virginity of both body and spirit, who preserve their virginity whole, emulate more truly the unique relationship between Christ and the Church. Paradoxically, although this allegorical relationship between the virgin and the Church distinguishes the elite nature of the virgin, it may also reinforce the virgin's metaphoric "accessibility" to the community: for her relationship to Christ and the Church is the most exalted expression of typology in which all Christians are invited to participate. In this way, the virginal body signifies a unique and intimate spiritual union with Christ, and offers to the Christian community around a figure, or icon, of its own union with Christ.

In his depiction of the Church, Ælfric unites virginity to orthodoxy of faith. Although he glosses the abandonment of faith as adultery, a rhetorical gesture which is also found in the Fathers, Ælfric shows no particular interest in portraying threats to faith and orthodoxy in either literal or metaphoric sexual terms.¹⁰⁰ This may perhaps be a reflection of the Anglo-Saxon "sexual pessimism" discussed by Magennis in his article "No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons," or it may simply reflect Ælfric's own prioritization of the spiritual over the physical in the signifying role that

⁹⁸ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3], 31.165-73. "Virginity is in both, and also the procreation of children, and this procreation has not diminished, nor has it spoiled virginity, neither in Mary nor in God's Church. The Church is holy in body and in spirit, but she is not, however, entirely a virgin in body, but she is nevertheless truly a virgin in spirit. And she is completely holy because of the holy faith, and she is more holy in holy persons who dwell in virginity in body and in spirit."

⁹⁹ AVG.San.virgin. 238.20.

¹⁰⁰ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 29.126-29. Virginia Burrus explores how various Church Fathers, including Ambrose and Jerome, strategically employ the rhetoric of the virgin's physical integrity to depict the Church's integrity of faith, conflating threats to orthodoxy with harlotry. See "Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity." *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 10 (1994): 27-51.

he seeks to establish for the virgin.¹⁰¹ He asserts simply that the Church's status as virgin is predicated on the purity of her faith: *and heo is mæden gehaten for þam micclan geleafan/ and for þam soðan truwan, þe heo symle hæfð to Gode,/... on clænnysse wunigende swa swa Cristes bryd.*¹⁰² She is wedded to Christ as a *mæden* 'virgin' through her *æfre ungewemmed* 'ever undefiled' faith (ll. 94-95). Where he follows Augustine by quoting St Paul's explanation that he, Paul, has espoused the young Church as a virgin to Christ, Ælfric translates the passage with the emphasis on spiritual purity as the signifier of faith.

Ic beweddode eow anum clænum were,
 þæt ge an clæne mæden gearcion Criste.
 Her ge gehyrað, hu he het eall folc,
 þæt is seo gelaðung, ðe on God gelyfð,
 an clæne mæden Cristes sylfes bryd,
 na on galnysse ac on gastlicere clænnysse.¹⁰³

Everyone who participates in the Church through true faith participates in the virginity of the Church. As members of the *halige gelaðung*, all Christians are *clæne*. Ælfric places the priority here upon pure faith, by opposing *gastlic clæennes* to *galnes*, or 'wantonness.' The metaphoric connection between perfidy of belief with sexual sin or excess refers back to a metaphor with a long biblical as well as patristic tradition.¹⁰⁴ It is as ancient as the Old Testament prophets and need not reflect an equation between spiritual and virginal purity.

That said, the holiness of non-virginal Christians is always surpassed by those whose possession of virginity establishes their physical bodies as living representations or figures of inner holiness. They are earthly, tangible figures for the Church and, to a degree, for Mary also. For this reason Ælfric writes:

Nu syndon ða men swiðe wurðfulle,
 ðe on mægðhade wuniað sylfwilles for Gode,
 þe healdað on lichaman þæt þæt eall seo gelaðung
 þurh geleafan hylt. And heo swa geefenlæcð

¹⁰¹ Hugh Magennis, "No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons: Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 26 (1995): 7-10, 14-16.

¹⁰² ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 29.124-25, 130. "And she is called virgin because of the great belief and because of the true faith which she always has in God... dwelling in purity as Christ's bride."

¹⁰³ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 30.139-44. "'I have betrothed you to a pure man, so that you are prepared as a pure virgin for Christ.' Here you hear how he calls all people who believe in God, that is the Church, a pure virgin, the bride of Christ himself, not in wantonness but in spiritual chastity." (II Cor 11:2.)

¹⁰⁴ Ez 16: 1-52; Hos 1-3; AMBR.Virg.Marc. 27.17 - 28.1.

hire weres meder, þe wunede on mægðhad....¹⁰⁵

The physical preservation of virginity functions as an existential signifier of the Christian faith that is lived in a united body and soul. Although Ælfric takes pains to balance the honours of *mægðhad* with a call to righteousness and faithful living in order to avoid a false attribution of the value of holiness to mere physical “intactness,” this passage presents the means for the transformation of *mægðhad*’s value from the metaphoric to a more literal, strictly physiological level. The assertion of this value of true faith within the sign of *mægðhad* allows the signifier to blur with the literal meaning, or signification, of the sign. Such a blending undermines the metaphoric value which previously gave the sign of virginal intactness its potency. If this happens, then *mægðhad* becomes a self-referential signifier. Its importance is determined by and composed of itself alone. I do not believe that this is at all what Ælfric intends, nor what this passage communicates. But one can see how a reading which passes over *mægðhad*’s metaphoric role could give rise to a misinterpretation that equates bodily virginity with the purity which it signifies, so that physical virginity can then be interpreted as part and parcel of holiness.

C. Gender and *Lichama*

Rather than instructions on disciplining the body, or admonitions regarding the dangerous nature of the flesh, Ælfric’s recurring, almost thematic, reassertion of gender parity provides the most substantial material for exploring his perception of the relationship between virginity and the body. Throughout the *Nativitas* and the “Letter” Ælfric makes repeated reference to both sexes. These passages fall into two main categories, the first of which pertains to the participation of men and women alike in the virginal life and its rewards. The second concerns the requirement of sexual purity for men and women alike. Ælfric’s rhetorical practice of referring to both genders allows us to evaluate the consequence of his apparent emphasis upon women’s sexual purity in his instructions to lapsed virgins.

The most obvious aspect of the “Letter” which suggests gender parity is the recurrence of variations on the phrase “both men and women.” For example, Ælfric, following his description of John the Baptist as *mægðhades man* ‘a man of virginity,’ explains to Sigefyrth that virginity is *ge on wæpmannum, ge on wimmannum* ‘both in men and in women’ (ll. 23-24). Other

¹⁰⁵ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 30.154-157. “Now those people are very worthy who remain in virginity of their own free will for God, who preserve in their bodies all that the Church preserves through faith. And thus she imitates the mother of the man (i.e. Christ), who remained in virginity....”

examples emphasizing parity within the consecrated life include Ælfric's reference to God's *clænum þegenum* and his *clænum þinenum* or *þa godas munecas* and *mynecena* who follow the regular life.¹⁰⁶ The element of alliteration in all three of these examples might explain the motif were it not for passages such as Ælfric's explanation that *cnihtas* and *mædenu* may preserve their virginity and live for the love of Christ just as the consecrated do.

Se mægðhad is gemæne ægþrum, cnihtum and mædenum,
þe clænlice lybbað æfre fram cildhade
oð ende heora lifes for Cristes lufon,
swa swa clænan munecas doð and ða clænan mynecena
on mynstrum gehwær wide geond þas woruld....¹⁰⁷

As with his explanation of *mægðhades man* in the "Letter," Ælfric encourages his audience here that virginity may be practised by both sexes and is being done all over the world.¹⁰⁸ By preserving their *mægðhad*, Anglo-Saxon men and women participate in a monastic institution which runs throughout the lands of the Church. In this light, the choice of virginal life is perhaps better understood, for both men and women, not as a choice to abstain from sexual intercourse, but as a choice to enter into a global, yet elite, community of the faithful.

As with the invitation to the monastic life, Ælfric employs reiterative parallels to include both sexes in his treatment of the eternal rewards of virgins. Often when discussing the heavenly blessings reserved for virgins, the Latin Fathers refer to virgins as male only. Given that the New Testament text cited for these rewards specifies men who have not defiled themselves with women, this is completely understandable: *Hi sunt qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati, virgines enim sunt.*¹⁰⁹ Augustine avoids this problem in *De sancta virginitate* by directly addressing his female reader and enjoining her to pursue the Lamb of God wherever He goes.¹¹⁰ In Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*, on the other hand, the grammatical endings delimit the state of blessedness as the province of men even though the *Adversus* concerns the virginity of women every bit as much as

¹⁰⁶ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 22.191. "...chaste thegns and his chaste maid-servants..."; 21.170-71. "...good monks and nuns..."; and again "...muneca and mynecena..." 23.218-20.

¹⁰⁷ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 33.224-28. "Virginity is common to both young men and maidens, who live purely from childhood continually until the end of their lives out of love of Christ, just as chaste monks and chaste nuns do in monasteries everywhere throughout the world...."

¹⁰⁸ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 21.183-86a.

¹⁰⁹ Apc 14:4.

¹¹⁰ See AVG.San.virgin. 264.1-2. Earlier in this same passage Augustine exhorts men and women of all ages and grades of chastity to develop their love for God, including the larger body of believers even within a text addressed to virgins. (AVG.San.virgin. 263.7-9.)

that of men.¹¹¹ Female virgins are, of course, understood to participate in the eternal bliss, but they are not explicitly included. In his translation of the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa (to be discussed in the following chapter), Ælfric inserts a description of the Virgin Mary as leading female virgins in a manner that directly parallels Christ's relationship to male virgins. In his treatment of Apocalypse 14 in the *Nativitas* homily, Ælfric forestalls any potential exclusion by explicitly including both men and women in his portrait of virginal rewards, and relating how in heaven *wuniað þa mædenu/ and ða mægðhades men on þam mærostum wunungum/ and folgiað þam hælende, swa hwider swa he gæð.*¹¹² A few lines later he repeats this idea.

... [þa] him wynsumlice singað
 þone niwan lofsang, þe nan singan ne mæg
 buton þam clænum anum, þe ne comon neah wife,
 and þam halgum mædenum, þe ðone hælend gecuron
 him to brydguman to ecere blisse.¹¹³

Ælfric's rhetorical construction here suggests an equivalence between women's choice of Christ as bridegroom and the men's choice not to defile themselves with women. This juxtaposition presumes that women's purity depends upon the restructuring of male-female relations (e.g. Christ is here substituted for the human male), while men's purity is predicated on the repudiation of the female. Despite Ælfric's occasional use of the motif of the virgin as the bride of Christ in his *passiones* of female virgin saints, Ælfric here emphasizes the Church rather than the individual virgin as the bride of Christ.¹¹⁴ He describes the Church as Christ's bride, unfolding for his audience how the Church brings forth *gastlic bearnteam*, while dwelling in *clænnes*, but he refrains from extensively developing this typology in relation to the earthly virgin.¹¹⁵ Far from expounding

¹¹¹ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 281.12ff.

¹¹² ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 42.454b-56. "... the virgins and men of virginity dwell in the greatest dwellings and follow the Saviour whithersoever he goes...."

¹¹³ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 42. 460b-64. "[They] sing joyfully to him the new hymn which none can sing except the pure ones, who did not come near a woman, and the holy virgins, who chose the Saviour for themselves as a bridegroom for eternal bliss."

¹¹⁴ The virgin Basilla, and Sts Basilissa, Agnes, and Daria all speak of Christ as their bridegroom. ÆLS (Eugenia) 46.352; (Julian and Basilissa) 92.48; (Agnes) 174.80; (Chrysanthus and Daria) 382.95. In the *Catholic Homilies*, Ælfric writes of Mary's virginity as the exemplar for all virgins, and describes the virgin as the bride of Christ. (ÆCHom I, 36 490.127-35.)

¹¹⁵ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 29.129-30. Even here, however, Ælfric frames his reference to the Church as bride with allusions to the greater community of believers: "*Nu syndon ealle cristene men anum naman gehatene/ ge weras, ge wif and ða unwittigan cild/ seo halige gelaðung.*" (29.121-22. "Now all Christian men are called by one name, both men and women and unknowing children - the holy Church...."); and again, he cites how St Paul "*het eall folc/ þæt is seo gelaðung...an clæne mæden, Cristes bryd....*" (30.142-44. "...[he] calls all people, that is the Church, a pure virgin, Christ's bride.")

on the exclusive relationship female virgins have with Christ as their bridegroom, Ælfric actually employs the image for the opposite, more inclusive, effect:

He geceas þa him sylfum, swa swa us secgað bec,
 þa halgan gelaðunge him sylfum to bryde,
 þæt is eall Godes folc, þe on God nu gelyfð
 mid soðum geleafan, ge læwede ge gehadode,
 ge wæpmen ge wimmen, cnihtas and mædenu:
 ealle hi synd gehatene on halgum bocum
 Godes sylfes gelaþung, forðan ðe we synd gelaðode
 þurh þone leofan hælend to his heofonlican rice
 þurh his halwendan tocyme.¹¹⁶

Ælfric's decision to focus upon the image of the Church as *bryd* still has consequences for the idealization and signification of the virgin, in a manner that hearkens back to the allegorical development of the Latin Fathers--not in content, but in effect. By shifting the emphasis to the Church's union with Christ, Ælfric gently reinforces the fact that this is a metaphor. He draws in all Christians into this union with Christ: men, women, lay and the consecrated alike. The gesture here reflects not so much a concern for gender parity, but the symbolic potential of the virgin as seen in the early Church Fathers. It invests the virgin with a spiritual signification for the larger Christian community. Accordingly, after Ælfric has emphasized the Church as Christ's *bryd*, when the virgin is portrayed as the bride of Christ, she simultaneously signifies the larger community's union with Christ, as well as her own. Interestingly, Ælfric employs the bridal imagery in a manner which actually de-emphasizes rather than reinforces the specific link between women and virginity. By highlighting the Church as the bride of Christ, he stresses the communal nature of the figure. Rather than attaching an elite status to the virgin's union with Christ, Ælfric's treatment shifts the motif into a more purely symbolic mode.

In addition to the variations on a theme in "both men and women," Ælfric maintains this sense of gender parity through his admonitions regarding sexual activity and chastity. At critical moments in these two works, Ælfric pointedly applies the same standards of purity to men and women, both before marriage and after widowhood. To this end he exhorts Sigefyrth that *se cniht heolde hine sylfne clæne, / oð þæt he wifode, swa swa he wyle habban / clæne mæden, þonne hi*

¹¹⁶ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 27.69-76. "He himself then chose--just as books tell us-- the holy Church as a bride for himself, that is all God's people who now believe in God with true faith, both the lay and consecrated, men and women, youths and maidens: in the holy books all are called God's own Church because we are invited through the dear Saviour to his heavenly kingdom by means of his salutary advent."

cumað togæderes.¹¹⁷ The *swa swa* construction requires that young men practice the same premarital purity which they desire in their brides-to-be, thereby distributing equally between the sexes the responsibility for remaining chaste before marriage. Following this injunction, Ælfric proposes a definition of widowhood that invites men as well as women to the ideal of serving God in abstinence after the death of their spouse.

Wudewanhad is, þæt man wunige on clænnysse
for Godes lufon, swa swa þæt godspell segð,
æfter his gemacan mid anrædnysse,
ægðer ge weras ge wif æfter Godes wissunge.¹¹⁸

Admitting no possibility of remarriage in his definition of *wudewanhad*, Ælfric commends the widowed state as a return to chaste abstinence, entered into for the love of God just like the consecration of *mægðhad*. This is the first of two passages in the “Letter” and *Nativitas* in which Ælfric treats the subject of sexual purity in a manner that draws attention specifically to women’s physical purity. Here Ælfric treats the purity of widows, in the second lapsed virgins. Here, despite the fact that Ælfric teaches that abstinent chastity applies to all widows, a distinction between the sexes arises when he addresses the subject of remarriage. Among those who would remarry after having passed their procreative years, he lays the heaviest charge of wrongdoing against widows, and berates them for remarrying when they can no longer bear children: *Hit byð swyþe sceandlic, þæt eald wif sceole/ ceorles brucan þonne heo forwerod byð/ and teames ætealdod, ungehealsumlice....*¹¹⁹ While Ælfric obviously disapproves of remarriage, his criticism of widows here cannot be interpreted as a condemnation that sexual desire is more reprehensible in women. Despite the denunciation of their remarriage as shameful and unchaste, Ælfric’s concentration upon widows rather than widowers may reflect the fact that the cessation of fertility is more easily marked in women than men. His exhortations need not stress disproportionately chastity’s importance for women, because, after the procreative years have passed, all Christians should turn their attention to living out their love for God in a manner befitting that reality. They must live in abstinent chastity.

¹¹⁷ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 20.148-50. “... a young man should keep himself chaste until he is married, just as he would want to have a chaste maiden when they come together.”

¹¹⁸ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 20.153-56. “Widowhood is that a person should dwell in chastity/purity for the love of God, just as the gospel says, with constancy after [the death of] his spouse—both men and women according to God’s regulation.”

¹¹⁹ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth], 20.157-59. “It is very shameful that an old woman should unchastely enjoy a husband when she’s worn out and too old for childbearing....”

In the preceding chapter, we saw that the works of the Early Church Fathers provide less evidence of the proposed connection between women and the physical body than some contemporary criticism might lead us to expect. Thus far in Ælfric's "Letter to Sigefyrth" and *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*, we have seen a fairly even distribution of both the sign and value of physical, virginal purity to men and women alike. But, although Ælfric requires sexual purity of both sexes before marriage, where the loss of physical purity is concerned (as with the scandalous remarriage of widows who cannot bear children), parity fades from focus. In general, Ælfric demonstrates a singular lack of interest in exhorting virgins to protect their virginity. Perhaps it is symptomatic of his moderation: he neither expends great energy praising virginity for its own sake, nor denigrating marriage for failing to attain the glory of virginity. As we turn to the married-virgin saints' *passiones*, particularly that of Sts Julian and Basilissa, we will see Ælfric's moderation in both these areas quite distinctly.

Moderation and parity notwithstanding, when Ælfric finally turns to the loss of virginity among the consecrated, the parity between the two sexes ends and he pursues two very different lines of correction. On the only occasion in either the "Letter" or the *Nativitas* homily where he treats the subject of lapsed virgins, Ælfric invests a different signification in women's as opposed to men's virginity.

Ac se ðe æne behet þam hælende his clænnysse
 and þæt syðþan awægð he bið scyldig wið God
 þæs clænan behates, þe he Gode behet,
 forþan þe God ne bið næfre bepæht.
 Gif gehadod mæden hi sylfe forligð,
 heo mæg to Gode gecyrran mid soðre dædbote,
 ac heo ne wyrð næfre eft syððan mæden,
 ne heo næfð þone wurðmynt þæs hundfealdan wæstmes,
 mæg swa þeah ætwindan þam hellicum witum
 mid soðre behreowsunge and geswicennysse.¹²⁰

Where he discusses the man's lapse, Ælfric gives prominence to God's knowledge above all else. The fact that God cannot be deceived stands foremost in relation to the man's sin. By constructing the essence of the man's (sexual) sin as the violation of an oath to God, Ælfric may be calling upon the *comitatus* theme. That he perceived monks as an order parallel to the worldly warriors can be

¹²⁰ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 34.243-52. "But he who once pledged his purity to the Saviour and afterward annuls that, will be guilty before God for that chaste vow, which he pledged to God, because God is never deceived. If a consecrated maiden lapses, she may turn to God with true penitence, but she can never again become a virgin, nor will she have the honour of the hundred-fold abundance. Nevertheless, she can escape from the hellish torments with true repentance and abstention."

seen in a discussion of the three orders of society in the *Lives of Saints*. In his narrative on the Maccabees, he explains that *oratores* or *Godes þeowas* strive in battle and are bound by the same laws of honour and duty as their secular counterparts, the *bellatores* or *woruld-cempa*, except that they wage a spiritual battle and they serve a heavenly king.¹²¹ With the reiteration of *behet* and *behates* in the *Nativitas* passage, we see that pledges and vows function as the principal signs of the man's relationship with God. The man's forfeiture of *clænnes* (whether virginal or abstinent) incurs guilt because he previously vowed that *clænnes* to God alone. His guilt resides in his attempt to deceive God, presumably by masquerading as a virginal or continent man. By concentrating upon *clænnes* as a pledge and its loss as an unlawful abjuration, Ælfric frames for the monk a relationship with God of a vertical nature, one that resonates with the older poetic theme of the relationship between lord and sworn retainer. The monk's bodily purity is the material substance of a contract to serve God. As much importance bears upon the vow and its fulfillment as upon the monk's purity.

In the case of the female consecrated virgin, Ælfric emphasizes the permanence of her loss and her need for repentance rather than the gravity of broken vows. For the woman, the sexual and physical realities of her lapse are all-important. Ælfric's description of the woman as *gehadod*, or 'consecrated,' indicates that she too has made a pledge; by using the past participial form of *hadian* to modify *mæden*, Ælfric reduces the relationship involved in the making of vows to an objective status which is then applied to the woman. She is, or rather was, consecrated to a life of virginity. The active, volitional nature of pledging one's *clænnes* to God still defines the man's relationship to God, so that the forfeiture of his vow means that he cannot honourably fulfill his pledge. The continuous requirement of fidelity establishes the magnitude of his violation. For the woman, that active relationship of taking and fulfilling the vows of consecration which make her lapse a damnable offense is completely in the past. Her guilt and crime are determined by a former event rather than an ongoing relationship. When Ælfric establishes guilt for the lapsed male, he does so in spiritual and relational, rather than sexual terms. The man *bið scyldig wið God*. The woman, on the other hand, is guilty of *forlicgan*, the meaning of which ranges from sexual sins such as "to defile by illicit intercourse," or "to commit fornication," to the more general "to lie unnoticed, to be neglected."¹²² Even if one interprets *forligð* in its more general sense of neglect or failure, the

¹²¹ From *ÆLS* (Maccabees), cited by Timothy E. Powell in "The 'Three Orders' of Society in Anglo-Saxon England," *ASE* 23 (1994): 111.

¹²² See *forlicgan* in Bosworth-Toller, and Toller's Supplement.

subsequent warning that virginity once lost can never be regained clarifies that *forligð* denotes a sexual sin. The condition of the women's purity defines her consecration and guilt alike, whereas for the man, purity is the token, not the substance, of his good faith and vow to God.

In addition to the focus upon the sexual nature of the woman's sin, the prominent role given to the woman's need for repentance also underscores the particular importance of virginity for women. To the eyes of the modern reader, the absence of any mention of repentance for the man contrasts sharply with Ælfric's insistent call for the lapsed woman to repent. Three times Ælfric asserts her need to repent, warning her in the first instance that, while a woman can turn *mid soðre dædbote*, her forfeited virginity is gone forever. The second and third passages require that she turn with *soðre behreowsunge and geswicennysse*. This can either be translated 'true repentance and abstention,' or else 'true repentance and [yet more] repentance.' If she hopes to escape the torments of hell, the virgin must leave no penitential stone unturned and return to abstinence.

Without a doubt, a contemporary audience would have understood that repentance was as necessary for the lapsed monk as for the nun. Furthermore, within the Anglo-Saxon context the implications of breaking vows to one's lord would have carried a cultural weight as heavy with notions of loyalty, duty, responsibility, and faithfulness, as any vow possibly could. Girsch's argument for the shifting meaning of *þegn* (and by association *þeow*), through its association with both the service of God and the *comitatus* theme, illustrates the strength of such cultural connotations.¹²³ If historical and cultural qualifications mitigate the apparently unequal distribution of guilt, they still do not alter the fact that physical virginity receives disproportionate attention vis-à-vis sexuality in the case of the consecrated female. She, not her male counterpart, is warned multiple times of her need for repentance. She, not he, receives warning of the eternal punishment which such a sin will bring upon her. The idea of judgment is, nonetheless, implicit in the lines addressed to the man, since the verse in Galatians to which Ælfric alludes with the phrase *God ne bið næfre bepæht*, finishes "God is not mocked, for what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap."¹²⁴ As the passage in Galatians continues, St Paul contrasts the rewards of sowing to the flesh with those of sowing to the Spirit, explaining how the former earns only corruption, and the latter life everlasting. A monastic and scripturally literate audience would probably have finished

¹²³ Girsch 41, 43.

¹²⁴ Galatians 6:7.

the quotation for themselves, and with the consequences of “sowing unto the flesh” in mind, they would have attached the same requirement of physical purity to the man with as much conviction as Ælfric does in writing to the woman. As these lines stand by themselves in the *Nativitas*, however, the relationship between the man and his *clænnes*, and that of the *mæden* and her virginal purity, though perhaps equal in spirit, remain asymmetrical in regard to the “letter of the law.” We will encounter a similar tension in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria, where the narrative explicitly ties women to sexual temptation in a manner resonant with allusions to the Fall. The representation of sexuality throughout this *passio* as a whole, however, complicates any simplistic uniting of women to the sexual body on the basis of momentarily heightened attention to women as sexual temptresses. In anticipation of what we will see in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria, I suggest, that, despite the apparent asymmetry of Ælfric’s injunctions here regarding lapsed virgins, his distinct attention to women’s sexual purity and to men’s fidelity to their vows represents, in the end, two sides of the same coin: in both cases virginity acts as a signifier of the oath to God, in neither does it constitute the signification.

There is a second passage in the *Nativitas* that suggests a more intimate link between women’s physical purity and spiritual well-being. In a brief, almost passing, reference to the need for humility referred to above, Ælfric exhorts *mædenu* to be wary of pride and not to renounce their *moddru*.¹²⁵ His specification of *mædenu* might imply a conviction that matters of virginity were more essential to women’s spiritual constitution than to men’s, or that women are particularly subject to the sin with respect to their sexual purity. To caution female virgins against pride is not, however, original to Ælfric. All the Fathers discussed in the previous chapter, particularly Augustine and Aldhelm, exhort virgins to exercise humility. This tradition of texts specifically addressed to women on the subject of virginity, and exhorting them to humility, may explain why Ælfric addresses these lines to female readers. Rather than the specification of *mædenu* and *moddru* here belying the gender parity throughout the “Letter” and *Nativitas* homily, Ælfric’s attention to virgins and their mothers may simply derive from this long-standing textual tradition. Moreover, Clayton interprets the phrase *eow mædenum* toward the homily’s end as an indication only that the audience was celibate, not that Ælfric composed the text for *mynecena* alone.¹²⁶ He uses *mæden* elsewhere to refer to both sexes, as in the passage where he applies the term to

¹²⁵ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 37.322-24. “Virgins should not renounce their mothers, from whom they come, although they are pure living in virginity and their mothers are wives....”

¹²⁶ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 47.573. Clayton 314.

anyone who preserves their *onwealhnes*, or ‘chastity.’¹²⁷ Nevertheless, within the *Nativitas*, Ælfric generally uses *mædenu* in opposition to *cnihtas* and not for both sexes. In short, we are left with a disjunction. Ælfric here makes no overt attempt to reinforce the mutuality of his teachings, contrary to his practice in numerous other passages, where references to *ge wæpmenn*, *ge wimmenn*, or *þa munecas and mynecena* assert an equivalence here absent.¹²⁸ This may simply, as proposed above, reflect the established tradition of treatises addressed to female virgins enjoining them to exercise humility. It may also--if *eow mædenum* refers to a female audience, rather than a consecrated audience of both sexes--provide additional evidence as to the nature of Ælfric’s audience. In either case, the injunction to humility in the *Nativitas*, even in combination with the earlier teaching on the importance of repentance for lapsed virgins, offers insufficient proof of an assumption on Ælfric’s part that virginal purity carries more consequence for consecrated women, or that the importance of virginity for women reflects a fundamental, ontological connection between women and the physical body.

III. Conclusion

In conclusion, while Ælfric’s exhortations to purity in the “Letter to Sigefyrth” and in *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* rely in part upon the Latin tradition concerning virginity, these texts evince a shift in emphasis and concern. His debt to Augustine in the content of the *Nativitas* is obvious, but his development of these concerns owes as much to the general concerns of the Benedictine Reform as to the longstanding tradition of treatises on virginity. Ælfric’s comparative disregard for the physical body in which the virginal life must needs be pursued is the most obvious example of this departure from the Fathers. Nowhere in these texts does one find the extremes of Jerome with his repeated warnings to Eustochium against the “fragile vessel of the body,” “pricks of the flesh,” and “tickling lust.”¹²⁹ Nor does one encounter the superfluous praise of Aldhelm for “the lofty pinnacle of virginity,” or the martyrs’ desire to escape the “prison of the body,” or their scorn for things sexual as “the yellow-brown reeking scum of the sewer.”¹³⁰

Ælfric’s decision not to discuss the body or the flesh in any great detail, much less with florid

¹²⁷ For a separate discussion of the differences between the terms *mynecena* and *nunnan* in terms of determining the audience, see, Clayton’s “Ælfric’s ‘Judith’: manipulative or manipulated?” ASE 23 (1994): 225-227. ÆCHom, II, 44 328.40-44. A book which came out to late for my use, but provides excellent analysis of the material history of Anglo-Saxon women religious is Sarah Foot’s *Veiled Women* [2 vols, Studies in Early Medieval Britain, general ed. Nicholas Brooks. (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate Publishing, 2000)].

¹²⁸ ÆLet 5 [Sigefyrth] 21.167, 170-71.

¹²⁹ HIER.Epist.XXII. 148.3-6, “*fragili corpusculo*” (trans. 23); 149.12, “*carnis aculeos*” (trans. 24); 151.16-7, “*libido titillauerit*” (trans. 24).

¹³⁰ ALDH.Prosvirg. 242.17, “*virginitatis fastigio sublimati*” (trans. 70); 243.16 “*corporis ergastulo*” (trans. 71); 298.16-17 “*lurida fetentes cloacæ volutabra*” (trans. 112).

negativity, promotes a more neutral relationship between the signs of *clænnēs*, *mægðhad*, and virgins' physical bodies. To argue a positive relationship between body and virginity based upon the absence of the body from the text would be misleading. Nevertheless, we clearly see in the "Letter" and the *Nativitas* homily that Ælfric's concern does not lie in the construction of the body as the untrustworthy coffer of the precious treasure of virginity. For Ælfric the body is neither a threat nor a necessary but regrettable ally. It is barely even part of the discussion of *clænnēs*, upon which Ælfric places such importance. This lack of attention to the body which Ælfric demonstrates in texts specifically concerned with virginal purity ultimately reflects the nature of his view of *mægðhad*.

In both the letter and homily, Ælfric's concern revolves around the concept of purity as it pertains to the service of God. The signification of *clænnēs* as the defining quality of *mægðhad* so dominates both these texts that Ælfric never even bothers to include the caveat (ubiquitous in the works of Jerome and Aldhelm) that "true virginity" comprises more than mere intactness. The consecration of virginity functions as a sign of the gift of oneself, not as the value of that sign. That is reserved for spiritual purity, virtuous conduct, and intention. Although he leaves no doubt as to the value and importance of physical purity through his teachings on lapsed virgins, Ælfric's application of the motif of virginity as sacrifice or gift reveals a guiding concern for the intention which determines the choice of virginity. Virginity may be the supreme virtue and gift that can be given to God, but its inability to "speak" for itself requires that other signs, such as holy conduct, "speak" for it. Rather than being the ultimate sign, wherein *mægðhad* represents the pinnacle of virtues, Ælfric places such a high premium upon *clæn* conduct and service that consecrated *mægðhad* instead becomes the beginning signifier in a chain of holy signification. Like the right conduct which attests to its preservation, *mægðhad* serves as an indicator or sign pointing to a more important virtue and discipline—obedience.

While Ælfric may never address the subject directly, obedience is manifestly the guiding virtue behind the secular clergy's adherence to the practice of abstinence. Obedience is the virtue which motivates and directs the righteous service of God, the proper offering of oneself or one's children. True obedience comprises both intent and the will in a way which subsumes the debate between spiritual and physical purity. Through the focus upon God's service, Ælfric obviates the risk of virginity's becoming its own value as well as the outward sign of one's commitment to

God. At least this is true for male virgins. The attention to intactness as the basis and token of their consecration leaves room for this usurpation in the case of female virgins, and this will next be explored in the portrayal of virginity as it relates to the men and women in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* who maintained the virginal life within the confines of marriage.

Ultimately Ælfric's treatment of the theme of virginity in these two texts has as much in common with the greater project of the Benedictine Reform as it does with the Latin treatises glorifying virginity. The "Letter" and *Nativitas* may not overtly identify themselves with all the concerns which permeated Reform documents, but certain themes clearly tie into the wider ideology.¹³¹ Ælfric's fairly even-handed, explicit application of virginal ideals to both sexes, despite a Latin tradition which concentrates upon women's pursuit of the virginal life, may well result from a renewed focus upon monastic chastity by the Reformers in general. As a reflection of this, Stafford proposes that through their attention to chastity as a fundamental qualification for men and women who would serve God, the Reformers asserted a division between clerical and lay persons. This division promoted the preeminence of monasticism in a manner that effectively "uncoupled the religious and gender hierarchies... and reemphasized the possibilities of equality always inherent in the Christian ideal of virginity."¹³² Ælfric's manifest concern for the inclusion of both genders in this pure life of service is, furthermore, reminiscent of his teacher Æthelwold's own practice in one of the primary documents of the Reform. As the very title of the work suggests, Æthelwold compiled the *Regularis Concordia Anglicæ Nationis Monachorum Sanctimonialiumque* for the edification of both male and female houses, and throughout the work he demonstrates an explicit concern for the role of the king and queen as protectors and mentors of the monasteries and nunneries respectively.¹³³

The distinction between Ælfric's representation of the ideal of virginity and that of the Fathers speaks of the historical context in which he wrote. In the seventh century when Aldhelm addressed the *De virginitate* to the nuns at Barking, the monastic climate was secure. A treatise expounding the glories of virginity, with very clear warnings against pride couched amid such praise, reflects the flourishing monastic system of that time. Earlier treatises like Ambrose's *De virginibus* and *De virginitate*, set forth the virginal project, justifying and defending it. At that time

¹³¹ Stafford, "Church and Society in the Age of Ælfric" 20-21.

¹³² Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen" 11.

¹³³ Mechthild Gretsch, "The Benedictine Rule in Old English: A Document of Bishop Æthelwold's Reform Politics," *Word, Texts, and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. Michael Korhammer, with Karl Reichl and Hans Sauer. (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992) 145.

representations of virginity's preeminence were essential for establishing the rationale and fortifying its idyllic and iconic roles. But in the tenth century, the state of the monasteries and the need for clerical and monastic reforms alike laid different claims upon its teachers. For Ælfric, the service which virgins render to God, and not their iconic potential, held preeminence. The claims of purity upon individuals and its importance extended beyond the virgin to the wider community. The late tenth century was perhaps not the time for laudatory treatises on virginity. *Mægðhad* would always be the ideal, but *clænnas*, with all that it entails, was the order of the day and it was to this purity that Ælfric called his readers, extending it even beyond the consecrated monks, nuns, and secular clergy, for whom it was the rule, to the laity of both sexes.

Chapter 3

*Stimmen, Stimmen. Höre, mein Herz, wie sonst nur
Heilige hörten: daß si der riesige Ruf
aufhob vom Boden; sie aber knieten,
Unmögliche, weiter und achtetens nicht:
So waren sie hörend.*

Rainer Maria Rilke¹

The singular honour and position accorded to virgins in Ælfric's *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* and in the earlier treatises of the Latin Fathers finds its most popular expression in the *vitæ* and *passiones* of the virgin saints which were passed down in proliferating redactions over the course of the Middle Ages. The narratives of the saints bespoke an uncompromising separation between realms, the holy men and women of these legends exemplifying Christian scorn for the present, transitory world in favour of the approaching heavenly kingdom. The early saints' choice of martyrdom for the name of Christ in the first centuries, and the *passiones* that handed down their stories to ensuing generations, pointed forcefully to the slight and fleeting value of this present world. With the Apostle Paul, they counted the world as naught and fixed their eyes on the kingdom to come.² Although the Church, of course, celebrated saints, martyrs and confessors who were not virgins, the virginal life came to the fore as the ideal of the Christian life with the passing of the age of martyrs and the expansion of the ascetic life as the normative ideal. This division between worlds in which every Christian was caught becomes visibly manifested in the figure of the virgin who repudiates all social and sexual demands made upon him/her. By standing apart from such ties and obligations, the virgin embodied a paradigmatic shift fundamental to Christianity, and lived in perpetual anticipation of life eternal. The "series of potent antitheses" which Peter Brown identifies in the thought of Ambrose can also be seen in the portrait of the holy virgin, as these narratives vividly and memorably reenact the conflict between "Christian and pagan, Catholic and heretic, Bible truth and 'worldly' guesswork, Church and *sæculum*, soul and body."³ Because of its thorough repudiation of this world's transitory pleasures, and because of its heavenly nature and focus, one of the most powerful functions of virginal life is its incarnation of that division between realms. Virginité encapsulates not merely the choice of physical purity but the whole range of antitheses cited by Brown. With the passing of the martyrial age, the virginal

¹ From Rainer Maria Rilke, "Die Erste Elegie," *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke*, ed. and trans. Stephen Mitchell (NY: Vintage International, 1989) 152-53. "Voices. Voices. Listen, my heart, as only/ saints have listened: until the gigantic call lifted them/ off the ground; yet they kept on, impossibly,/ kneeling and didn't notice at all:/ so complete was their listening."

² Phil 3:7-11, II Cor 12:10.

³ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 347.

life alone was left--both as a viable, contemporary option as well as potent icon and ideal--to carry the day with the popular imagination. From the pages of *vitæ* and *passiones* the virgin acts as a beacon of eternity, and as a warning of the fleeting nature of this world.

In holy *legenda* this division between realms underlies the virgin's rejection of the world, so that the choice of perpetual chastity indicates the repudiation of a whole range of secular values in favour of a life wholly given over to the love and worship of Christ. We find in the "average" life or passion of the virgin saint a characteristic opposition: on the one side, there stands the virgin saint, heavenly-minded, pure, charismatic, untouched and untouchable; on the other stands the pagan persecutor, secular, frequently sexually impure, cruel, and endowed with worldly--but ultimately impotent--power. As Hugh Magennis has noted, the virgin saint's body is the locus of a dramatic struggle with the destructive, sexualized secular powers of the pagan ruler opposing the "asexual," spiritual saint.⁴ Given the ideological and theological battleground upon which the saint and persecutor meet, virginity's astounding claims lie not in its exaltation of the virgin saint's physical purity, but in its signification of a whole paradigm. Sainthood virginity, with its inseparable combination of physical and spiritual purity, is indivisible from the wider range of values at conflict in these narratives.

With this sense of the paradigmatic significance of virginity in mind, we turn to the first of three married-virgin saints' narratives included by Ælfric among his collection *Lives of Saints* written between 992 and 1002.⁵ Unlike the lives of Ælfric's female virgin saints, which have received some excellent treatment, those of the married-virgin saints have not yet been examined as they might.⁶ Although Dyan Elliott's *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* examines wedded chastity, her interest lies in the implications of such arrangements for medieval marriage.⁷ Aside from a survey of St Cecilia, her in-depth studies of hagiographical texts focus upon Continental narratives after the time of Ælfric. Moreover, I believe that one of Elliott's primary propositions requires some qualification. At one point she argues that "the emphasis on chastity [in narratives of wedded virginity] should not eclipse the fact that these stories are

⁴ Hugh Magennis, "'No Sex Please, We're Anglo-Saxons': Attitudes to Sexuality in Old English Prose and Poetry," *Leeds Studies in English* 26 (1995): 3.

⁵ Joyce Hill, "The Dissemination of Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) 236.

⁶ See for example: Paul E. Szarmach, "Ælfric's Women Saints: Eugenia," *Readings on Women in Old English Literature*, eds. Helen Damico and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 146-157; and "St Euphrosyne: Holy Transvestite," *Holy Men and Holy Women*, 353-65.

⁷ Dyan Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage: Sexual Abstinence in Medieval Wedlock* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993)

primarily about marriage.”⁸ Although I agree that, with respect to the Continental saints’ lives which she discusses later in the book, one can certainly see and examine the intersection of contemporary culture’s expectations of marriage, gender relations, and the deployment of images of sanctity, I would contend that exactly the opposite is true of the early lives such as those of Sts Julian and Basilissa, Cecilia and Valerian, and Chrysanthus and Daria. Certainly there is room for examining how cultural expectations and estimations of marriage play out in these lives, but it would be a great error to give precedence to concerns for marriage over those of virginity when virginal chastity is in every way the goal of the saints in these texts. In these narratives, I believe that marriage is as much a conflict topos, establishing the saint’s purity and commitment to God, as any sort of reference to marital realities or issues.

The narratives of the married-virgin saints provide a unique opportunity for examining the portrayal and idealization of virginity with respect to both men and women. Within these chaste unions, men and women embodied on earth the heavenly life of which, the Church Fathers taught, all Christians ought to live in expectation. Virginally chaste husbands and wives join in marriage only to renounce the consummation of their marriage and sexual union in favour of a spiritual union which presages the resurrection life where there will be neither giving nor receiving in marriage. They live the life of monk and nun with no thought for sexual difference, so that they might devote themselves to the cultivation of their spiritual lives and the spread of the gospels of Christ and virginity. The pure husband provides an earthly type of Christ, the bride’s heavenly bridegroom. The bride, meanwhile, represents a type of the Virgin Mary, a stainless handmaiden of God. Together, the couple prefigures the chaste union of Christ and the Church. Although the role and importance of physical virginity may not be as consistently central to the lives of the married-virgin saints as it is in the case of the (single) female virgin saints, these lives present a very distinct benefit: they offer representations of men and women living out, side-by-side, their commitment to the virginal ideal. For this reason, these *passiones* provide a fruitful means of examining the comparative importance of virginity for female and male saints, and the implications thereof for the relationship between physical purity and holiness.

Among his *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric translated the *passiones* of three such married-virgin couples: Julian and Basilissa, Cecilia and Valerian, and Chrysanthus and Daria. In this chapter I propose to examine how Ælfric’s translation of the legend of Julian and Basilissa relies upon physical virginity as a signifier of the “disembodied” value of eternity, and how virginity

⁸ Elliott 67.

represents a whole set of paradigmatic values.⁹ With this *passio*, Ælfric lays before his readers a choice between realms: the eternal and the temporal, the heavenly and worldly, the spiritual and secular. Virginity serves not merely as a token of uncompromising and undistracted Christian devotion; it bears the full weight and glory of eternity. After the essential meaning of *mægðhad* in this *passio* has been examined, the particular importance of virginity for the female saint can be reevaluated. In the end, perhaps not unexpectedly, when the essential value of virginity is so completely asexualized, the respective implications of virginity for the female as opposed to the male saint diminish in direct relation to spiritualization of the ideal of virginity.

In some ways the choice of Ælfric's *passio* of Julian and Basilissa may appear an odd narrative to select for a discussion of virginity.¹⁰ Although virginity plays an indisputably central role at the beginning, it fades to seeming insignificance with the death of the female saint after a mere one hundred lines. With Basilissa's death, the conflict between Christ's servant, Julian, and the pagan judge, Martianus, takes center stage. Ælfric mentions virginity, *mægðhad*, one last time in the *passio*, and this passage reads abruptly, almost as if it had been dropped into the text to remind the reader that this *is* a virgin saint's life. That is, the reference seems abrupt unless the emblematic nature of virginity, its power as a signifier of a larger set of values beyond that of "intactness," is taken into consideration. In order to explore this aspect of virginity, I would like to examine three particular moments in this text which illustrate the nature and depth of virginity as a paradigmatic sign. The first of these passages concerns Julian and Basilissa's respective declarations of virginity (ll. 1-52); in it, their expressions of desire for *clæn lufu* 'pure love,' *clænnnes* 'chastity,' and *ansund mægðhad* 'whole virginity,' are woven through with longing for the eternal. In the second passage, Ælfric highlights the eternal nature of virginity by describing how a heavenly host, led by Christ and the Virgin Mary, descends to pronounce benedictions upon Julian and Basilissa's virginal union (ll. 53-74). For a few brief moments the temporal world is transformed in anticipation of the world to come. The third passage, which recounts the couple's brief monastic life, differs from the first two passages (ll. 75-89). Ælfric here consciously avoids attaching any paradigmatic value to cenobitic chastity, despite the fact that the monastic setting

⁹ Clare Lees has noted the "paradox" found in Anglo-Saxon saints' lives, where the physical nature of the body is passed over, and yet made the locus of cultural (and, I would insert, spiritual) meaning. She proposes that, at the same time as these writings ignore the body's physicality, they also "[insist] on both its cultural significance and its materiality." Clare A. Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire: Sex, Knowledge and Christian Identity in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 27:1 (1997): 39.

¹⁰ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 90-115. I have throughout the following two chapters taken the liberty of modernizing Skeat's translations.

would seem a natural place for the celebration of virginity. I close the discussion of these three passages with an examination of the final reference to the power of Julian's *clæn mægðhad* 'pure virginity' (ll. 268-82), a reference which illustrates how the glory and power attributed to *mægðhad* in this *passio* depend upon virginity's role as a signifier of the eternal. *Mægðhad*'s paradigmatic signification requires that assumptions concerning the relationship between the women and virginity (a relationship which married-virgin couples destabilize, as we shall see) be reexamined. So, the chapter concludes with an examination of Ælfric's construction of male and female virginity with reference to the depiction of physicality in the *passio*. After reviewing the nature of Basilissa's conversion (ll. 32-38) and the treatment of men's and women's physical suffering (ll. 96-100, 396-98), an examination of his adaptation of Basilissa's role in the narrative will illustrate how Ælfric's lack of interest in emphasizing female virginity complements the general disembodiment of virginity in the *passio*.

Before turning to the role of virginity in Ælfric's *Passion of St Julian and his Wife Basilissa*, a few observations about the married-virgin saints' lives in general will clarify some of their unique aspects vis-à-vis the virgin saints' lives. First, in the lives of Ælfric's single saints, the preservation of virginity or chastity holds a prominence in the female saint's life of faith which it generally does not in the male saints' lives. On the basis of this disparity in the saints' *imitatio Christi*, Clare Lees writes that, "The transformation of sexuality is the prime component of the female saint's life. Women have sexuality where men don't, and women who become saints redirect it toward God."¹¹ The lives of the married-virgin saints do not, however, neatly conform to this pattern. It is not that narratives like that of Julian and Basilissa disrupt the central importance assigned to the female saint's virginity. Rather, they focus upon the man's virginity to a degree which unsettles the disproportionate importance placed upon women's physical chastity elsewhere. In these *passiones*, where we see Ælfric distributing the importance of virginity between men and women alike (although not necessarily equally), the symbolic, culturally mediated nature of virginity may be read more clearly.

Secondly, by recalling the unfallen innocence of Adam and Eve, these couples reiterate

¹¹ Lees, "Engendering Religious Desire" 32.

what Magennis has called the “sexual pessimism” of certain Church Fathers.¹² Married-virgin saints live like monk and nun (an image which may have had particular resonance for an Anglo-Saxon monastic audience since the double monasteries had been such a fundamental part of English monastic history prior to the ninth century).¹³ After the initial threat of defilement passes and the couple’s consecration to the virginal life is complete, sexual difference between husband and wife essentially vanishes. The persecutors may attempt to take advantage of the female saint’s virginity, but neither the female nor the male saint’s sexuality endangers their holy union. While the role and importance of physical virginity may not be as consistently central to the lives of Ælfric’s married-virgin saints as it is in the lives of the (single) female virgin saints, these couples’ lives provide a unique opportunity for examining men and women pursuing perpetual chastity together. The importance placed upon male virginity in these texts requires that the sign of virginity be examined from another angle than as the determining feature of female sanctity.

Thirdly, the lives of married-virgin saints follow a somewhat different formula from that found in the lives of the single virgin saints. In the discussion that follows I refer to the spouse who is most central to the events of the life as the ‘primary saint.’ Without exception the ‘primary saint’ is the first one to declare his or her intention to lead a virginal life. The ‘secondary saint’ is not only led to a ‘confession’ of virginity by the primary saint, but also dies first. Allowing for some degree of variance in detail and order, the married-virgin saints’ lives generally proceed as follows:

1. The primary saint converts to Christianity, if he or she is not already a Christian.
2. The primary saint receives pressure from family and friends to marry.
3. The primary saint declares his or her desire to remain a virgin.
4. The primary saint marries.
5. The secondary saint converts to Christianity and to virginity.

¹² Magennis, “No Sex Please” 14. In their renunciation of the sexual, the virginal couple’s chastity recalls the prelapsarian asexuality celebrated by Jerome, rather than Augustine’s view of Adam and Eve’s union. For Augustine the vexatious nature of sexuality was its relationship to the will, its mockery of human attempts at self-control and submission to God. Unlike Jerome, Augustine and other Latin writers, such as Avitus, did not deny the place of sexual union in Eden. Where Jerome laments the advent of sexuality in the Fall, Augustine mourns for the fallen will which now taints human sexuality. For a succinct discussion of Augustine’s later views of this inner ‘rift,’ see Peter Brown, “Augustine and Sexuality,” Protocol of the Forty-Sixth Colloquy, May 22, 1983 (Berkeley: The Center for Hermeneutical Studies, 1983), 1-13, especially 4-6, and 10-11). For Jerome’s argument for prelapsarian asexuality, see *HIER.Adv.Iovin.* 244-46.15-16. George Rigg called my attention to the passage in Avitus’ *De Spiritualis Historiæ Gestis Liber II*. (Avitus: *De Spiritualis Historiæ Gestis Libri I-III*, ed. Daniel J. Nodds. [Toronto: PIMS, 1985].) *De Spiritualis* is particularly interesting with reference to English treatments of the Fall as scholars have suggested its influence upon both the Old English *Genesis B* and Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

¹³ For the “backward looking” tendencies of Anglo-Saxon monasticism, see Antonia Gransden, “Traditionalism and Continuity During the Last Century of Anglo-Saxon Monasticism,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 40.2 (1989): 161-64. On the double monastery, see Mary Bateson, “The Origin and Early History of Double Monasteries,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (1899): 137-198; John Godfrey, “The Double Monastery in Early English History,” *Ampleforth Journal* 79 (1974): 19-32.

6. The two saints receive a miraculous confirmation of their chaste union.
7. Both before and after their sufferings, the couple's marriage is instrumental for converting others to Christianity and/or chastity.
8. Persecution of the couple begins, during the course of which the secondary saint dies first.
9. Upon the primary saint's death, the persecutor (sometimes) receives his divine come-uppance.

As this pattern plays out in both Ælfric's and the CCL's versions of the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa a series of conflicts unfold. In the beginning, virginity plays the pivotal (though unspoken) role in the conflict between Julian and his parents (ll. 5-10). The second conflict--between Basilissa, her nuns and the impending threat of persecution and defilement--again focuses upon virginity (ll. 90-102). With the onset of Julian's sufferings, conflict spreads outward from the saint. The struggle between the saint and the pagan ruler, Martianus, soon engulfs other members of Martianus' household and public office. One after another, Martianus' son (ll. 202-8), his guards (ll. 216-22), and finally his wife (ll. 356-62) transfer their allegiance to Julian's God. Each of these contests forms but one facet of a greater, indeed cosmic, struggle. As Julian's resurrection of a dead man attests (ll. 276-78), this strife between God's servant-saints and the servants of this world--mere pawns of an impotent secular authority--is a microcosm of the greater battle between spiritual life and death, God and the devil.

Throughout this chapter I refer to and compare Ælfric's *passio* with the version found in the Cotton-Corpus Legendary (hereafter CCL) which Patrick Zettel examined so thoroughly in his 1979 thesis "Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in B. L. MS Cotton Nero E.i. + CCCC MS 9 and Other Manuscripts."¹⁴ In his thesis, Zettel sought to

¹⁴ Patrick Zettel, "Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in B. L. MS Cotton Nero E.i. + CCCC MS 9 and Other Manuscripts" (Diss. Oxford University, 1979) 10-11, 15. The *Passio Sanctorum Martyrum Iuliane et Basilisse* to which I refer is found in MS Cotton Nero E.i., 77v-85v, (BHL 4532). In the transcriptions from the MS I have silently expanded all abbreviations, transcribed 'v' for 'u,' and punctuated according to modern convention. Translations from MS Cotton Nero E.i. are my own, though I owe many thanks to Pauline Thompson and George Rigg for their corrections and suggestions.

demonstrate that the CCL provides a legendary descended from Ælfric's hagiographic exemplar.¹⁵ In his comparison of Ælfric's *vitæ* and *passiones* against versions found in CCL, *Acta Sanctorum* (hereafter ASS) and other printed editions like that of Mombritius, Zettel refines upon earlier source studies, like those of Förster and Ott.¹⁶ Zettel's hypothesis regarding the relationship between CCL and Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* has not gone unchallenged. Gordon Whatley has raised several objections to Zettel's methods and conclusions, advising some caution in assuming a close relationship between Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* and the CCL.¹⁷ In spite of such caution, however, most scholars agree that the CCL provides a valid point of comparison with Ælfric's *Lives of Saints* for particular lives. In the case of Julian and Basilissa's *passio* the resemblances both in abbreviation and error between the Ælfrician and CCL versions are striking when the two versions

¹⁵ Although the exact provenance of the legendary is unknown, Zettel proposes that "the high proportion of French and Flemish saints which it represents suggests that it was probably compiled somewhere in the north of France," and not before 863 (Zettel 9). Despite its original Continental origins, the five extant copies of the legendary, originally identified by W. Levison, are "all of English origin" (Zettel 10). Of these five manuscripts, only those manuscripts which contain versions of the lives of the married-virgin saints will be noted here. The legendary receives its name from the following manuscripts, which at one time formed a single legendary: London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero E.i., parts 1 and 2; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 9. Of their relationship, Zettel writes: "These three manuscripts together formed the earliest and most complete copy of the collection now extant. They were written at Worcester c. 1060 in two unequal parts, the first running from the 1 January to 30 September..., the second containing lives for October, November, and December" (Zettel 10). Accordingly a version of the life of Julian and Basilissa, whose feast traditionally falls on January 9, is found in the first part of the manuscript (MS Cotton Nero E.i., 77v-85v). Versions of the lives of Sts Chrysanthus and Daria, and of St Cecilia, whose feasts are traditionally celebrated on October 25 and November 22 respectively, are found in the second part of the legendary (CCCC MS 9, Cecilia, 323-336; Chrysanthus and Daria, 379-389). Other manuscript versions of the married-virgin saints' lives related to the Cotton-Corpus legendary include: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fell 4, now Salisbury 221, (s. xi ex) (Julian and Basilissa, 34r-47v); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 354 (s. xii²) (Cecilia, 108r-116v; Chrysanthus and Daria, 136r-143r); Hereford, Hereford Cathedral, MS P. 7 vi (s. xii med) (Cecilia, 73v-80r; Chrysanthus and Daria 119r-124v) [Zettel 31-32, 257-258].

¹⁶ Max Förster, "Altenglische Predigtquellen, I," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 116 (1906): 308-10; "Über die Quellen von Ælfrics exegetischen *Homiliæ Catholicæ*," *Anglia* 16 (1894): 1-61; "Über die Quellen von Ælfrics exegetischen *Homiliæ Catholicæ*: I Legenden." (Diss. Berlin, 1892); J. H. Ott, *Die Quellen der Heiligenleben in Ælfrics Lives of Saints I* (Halle: C.A. Kämmerer & Co., 1892)

¹⁷ E. G. Whatley, "Late Old English Hagiography, ca. 950-1150," *Hagiographies* vol. 2, Corpus Christianorum, ed. Guy Philippart (Brepols: Turnhout, 1996) 472-82. See also Whatley's "An Introduction to the Study of Old English Prose Hagiography: Sources and Resources," *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996) 3-32, esp. 9-15.

are compared against the significantly longer version found in ASS.¹⁸

Before turning to the examination of virginity as a signifier of eternal and heavenly values in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, Ælfric's practice of abbreviation throughout the *passio* requires some comment. The numerous passages which are present in CCL as well as ASS, but omitted by Ælfric, appear to reflect a consistent rationale and shed light upon what Ælfric considered vital in this *passio*. Although we must content ourselves with some degree of uncertainty (aside from not knowing what exemplar he had before him, we cannot presume to reproduce Ælfric's mind in translating these lives), we can, nevertheless, postulate certain generalities about his translations. For here in the *Passion of St Julian and his Wife Basilissa*, as throughout *Lives of Saints* and his other works, Ælfric's "pastoral concern... dictates the choice of *brevitas* and the concomitant choice of simple, clear words."¹⁹ One of his basic tactics of

¹⁸ *Acta Sanctorum Ian.*, t. I, ed. Joannes Bollandus et al. (Paris, 1863), 575-87. (BHL 4529.) Ott 14-17. B. Mombricitus, *Sanctuarium seu Vitæ Sanctorum* vol. 2 (New York: Georg Olms Verlag, 1978) 86-87. For a discussion of the resemblances between Ælfric's text and the CCL in contrast to the ASS version, see Zettel, "Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources" 201-8. In what follows, I (like Zettel) have only compared Ælfric's text and the CCL against the printed versions of ASS and Mombricitus—I am not trying to determine Ælfric's exact exemplar, but rather "just cause" for comparison. Another printed edition of the Julian and Basilissa legend which is closer to the Ælfrician version than that found in Mombricitus can be found in A. F. Grau, *Pasionario Hispánico II* (Madrid-Barcelona, 1955) 118-44. I owe this reference to Pauline Thompson. See also Whatley's "Introduction to the Study of Old English Prose Hagiography" 9-15 and accompanying footnotes, which provides a wealth of information on printed editions and hagiographic resources for this particular legend.

While Zettel notes that some passages in the Old English *passio* are translated and abbreviated with such freedom that "it is impossible to choose between divergent Latin readings," he proposes that the CCL offers a "sufficiently large number of passages" of which Ælfric's narrative appears to be a fairly faithful translation; on the basis of this evidence he suggests that "Such evaluation shows that although the CCL does not correspond perfectly to the Ælfrician exemplar, it is nevertheless much more closely related than the Bollandists' text cited by Ott" (202). Zettel's reference to the agreement between the CCL and Ælfrician text in a passage where Ott concluded (from a comparison against ASS) that Ælfric had mistranslated the Latin is an excellent example of this correspondence (Zettel 203-4). For a full discussion see Zettel, 202-08.

While Zettel is correct that Ælfric's version of *Julian and Basilissa* corresponds more closely to the version found in CCL (he cites their mutual lack of the preface and concluding chapter found in ASS, in addition to the dating of the *passio* and the phrasing of particular passages), there are discrepancies for which he does not account. For example, in one of the instances where Ælfric includes a Latin quotation within the Old English text, his excerpt agrees with ASS rather than the CCL. In this passage, ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) contains: *Confirma hoc Deus quod operatus es in nobis* (l. 50). The CCL, however, omits the verb of the relative clause (*Confirma hoc Deus quod in nobis*) (Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. a, l. 27), whereas ASS contains *operatus es*, and thus provides a reading closer to Ælfric's (ASS XI c. II, §6, p. 577). There is a second discrepancy in a later Latin quotation, where ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) contains the following version of Psalm 61:12: *Transivimus per ignem et aquam et eduxisti nos in refrigerium* (l. 339). At this point, however, both ASS and CCL have *induxisti* rather than *eduxisti*. (Cotton Nero E.i., pt i, f. 83v, col. a, ll. 33-35; ASS 584a, §45. The variant CCL MS, Salisbury 221, 44r, l. 1, also has *induxisti*.) These are, of course, very minor differences which could be explained in several ways. If we try to preserve the hypothesis that Ælfric was following a CCL-related manuscript (which seems highly probable for the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa), there are two possible explanations of these discrepancies. Either Ælfric's exemplar provided a reading that diverges on such occasions from the Cotton Nero manuscript; or he emended the Latin as he felt necessary, for in both cases the Latin readings found in the Old English text are of plainer, more explicit, Latin.

¹⁹ Ann Eljenholm Nichols, "Ælfric and the Brief Style," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 70 (1971): 2-3.

abbreviating is his practice of transforming direct into indirect discourse.²⁰ This practice allows him to eliminate great stretches of speech, excising the interruptions and promptings of other characters, reducing the major character's speech to its elemental kernel. In addition to these "rhetorical" abbreviations, other passages are wholly eliminated because they play a less significant role in the portrayal of the saints and the progression of the narrative. Throughout the *passio*, Ælfric ruthlessly edits minor (even major) characters, refining the narrative down to the essentials which pertain to the fulfillment of God's promises to his saints. In the case of Julian and Basilissa, it is evident from Ælfric's occasional references to the length of the narrative that he considered his exemplar rather excessive. One indication of this is that just as he begins to relate the account of Julian's persecutions, he observes *þeos race is swiðe langsum fullice to gereccenne, ac we hit sæcgað eow on þa scortostan wisan*.²¹ Similarly, at another point where he eliminates a conversation between the persecutor Martianus and his son Celsus (a conversation of almost 40 lines in the Latin²²), Ælfric merely writes that *æfter langsumre spræce* 'after a long conversation' Martianus agrees to his son's request (l. 342). If Ælfric's exemplar resembled that of the CCL, as seems likely, then he has wholly cut several speeches of this nature, in addition to very deftly abbreviating others.

Two of these excisions shape the character and consequence of the *passio*, but as they will be accounted for fully in the concluding portion of this chapter, I shall only mention them here. The first of these concerns Ælfric's treatment of the character of Basilissa, for, despite her admitted status as the secondary saint, she plays a less substantial role in the Old English version than she does in the Latin. Ælfric drastically reduces her miraculous visions, her speeches and her prayers. Such abbreviations cannot but affect the significance and character of the female saint's role in her own *passio*. Ultimately, Ælfric's excisions are such that, after her dramatic conversion, Basilissa appears to be a peripheral, rather than secondary, saint.

The second major excision pertains to the portrayal of what is one of the major themes of the Latin *passio*. That is, the representation of the Christian life as the renunciation of all worldly, social ties. While this theme still runs throughout the Old English version, Ælfric chooses instead to concentrate the power and force of this choice between loyalties in the saints' choice of virginity.

²⁰ See the discussion in Ruth Waterhouse, "Ælfric's Use of Discourse in Some Saints' Lives," *ASE* 5 (1976): 83-103.

²¹ *ÆLS* (Julian and Basilissa) 139-40. "This story is very tedious, to tell it all, but we tell it to you in the briefest way."

²² Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 83v, col. a, l. 40 - col. b, l. 34.

In the CCL, on the other hand, as the narrative unfolds, one character after another turns against the pagan ruler and repudiates all obligations to him, swearing allegiance to the Christian God and his servant Julian. In the CCL and ASS far greater emphasis is placed upon Christianity as the renunciation of interpersonal social obligations, whether political or familial. This can be seen, for example, at the beginning of the Latin *passio*, where Julian's parents lecture him that it's time he married. Their exhortations and rationale are laden with references to his societal responsibilities, and claim divine law as the basis of their authority in telling him to marry.²³ Warning him not to use his youth as a pretext for not marrying, his parents inform him in no uncertain terms that they want him to be a husband and father, and to carry on the family line.²⁴ As we shall see, such obligations pale before the heavenly call of virginity and a life whose meaning arises from love for and devotion to God. Like the attention to Julian's repudiation of such mundane claims, the Latin portrays the rejection of the pagan Martianus's lordship by other new Christians as a figure of the converted shaking off the false and sinful bonds of this world. For this reason, the altercations between Martianus and his newly-converted son Celsus make similar and repeated reference to Celsus' obligations as the only son of his parents.²⁵ The various encounters between Martianus, his wife, his son, and his guards all emphasize the pagan ruler's expectations of loyalty and adherence to social and cultural norms, and illustrate how these expectations dissolve before the authority of Christ.

While the Old English clearly portrays this renunciation of ties, the manner in which Ælfric cuts dialogue and direct-speech debates between Martianus and his household eliminates the thematic reassertion of this conflict as it occurs in the Latin. Further, although he retains the conversions of characters like Celsus and his mother, and depicts in very general terms their consequent rejection of Martianus' demands, Ælfric develops the choice of virginity as the foremost signifier of this theme of repudiation. If the Old English *passio* lacks some of the rhetorical power of the Latin, it is far tighter structurally, as Ælfric allows nothing to distract from the saints' journey towards martyrdom and glory. The rejection of family ties, political allegiances and loyalties surfaces in the Old English, but Ælfric treats these moments with understatement and never lets "minor" conversions distract from the primary saint. By focusing the narrative more precisely upon Julian, virginity takes precedence as the signifier of this choice between world

²³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 77v, col. b, ll. 6-8. "We do not encourage you to consent to us for this reason only, but also so that you may be regarded as obedient to divine law." "*Pro qua re non solum ut nobis consentias hortamur sed tantum ut <legi> divine obediens esse videaris.*" <legi> = MS *legis*

²⁴ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 77v, col. b, ll. 12-15.

²⁵ For Celsus' very public renunciation of his parents, see: Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 81v, col. b, ll. 14-18.

views and loyalty to the heavenly kingdom.

I. Virginité as the Signifier of a Disembodied Value

A. The Choice of Virginité (ll. 1-52)

With this we turn to the first of three passages in the *Passion of St Julian and his Wife Basilissa* which illustrate the value of eternity implicit in virginité as a paradigmatic sign. The *passio* begins with a description of Julian's Christian devotion rather than his conversion, and unlike the Latin version found in the CCL which emphasizes the breadth of Julian's secular as well as his spiritual knowledge,²⁶ Ælfric focuses solely upon Julian's education *on Cristes lare* 'in Christ's teaching' (l. 4). In this way, the Old English establishes Julian as single-minded in his commitment to the Saviour from the beginning. Although Ælfric does not develop the theme of Christianity as the renunciation of social, particularly familial, obligations to the extent found in the CCL (he omits, for example, the exhortations of Julian's parents regarding filial duty²⁷), the focus upon virginal faith as a rejection of worldly ties, nevertheless, surfaces consistently throughout the Old English. The choice of virginité signifies the saint's willingness to repudiate all else for the love of Christ.

In both the Old English and Latin, Julian petitions the Lord, rather than his parents, *þæt he his clænnysse geheolde*.²⁸ References elsewhere to Julian's *ansund mægðhad* 'whole virginité' (l. 43), and *clæn mægðhad* 'pure virginité' (l. 281), clarify that *clænnysse* here must denote 'virginal purity.' When the Lord appears to comfort the saint, he foretells the *spiritual* fruitfulness of Julian's marriage. Marriage will not alter Julian's consecration, nor his bride separate him *fram his clænan lufe þe he gecoren hæfde*.²⁹ The Lord guarantees not only the obliteration of *ealle ontendnysse* 'all desire' within Julian, but also promises a similar transformation in the saint's bride (ll.17-18). As the vision concludes, the Lord prophesies that he will manifest himself through the

²⁶ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. i, 77v, col. a, ll. 23-26. "*Omni doctrina et omni scientia eum imbuerunt, non dialecticam non rethoricorum fugiebat ingenium; omnium auctorum mundi sapientia eum imbuerant.*" "They educated him with every instruction and all knowledge; he fled no dialectic art, nor skill of the rhetoricians. They had imbued him with the wisdom of every secular author."

²⁷ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 77v, col. b, 12-17. "*Nolumus ut de tempore causeris; volumus enim te unius mulieris esse virum, et concessa procreatione letari <posse> cum pater fueris.*" *Agebant enim parentes quomodo aut qualiter eorum semen resuscitaretur.*" "We do not want you to plead your age as a pretext, for we want you to be the husband of one wife, and with procreation granted you will be able to rejoice when you are a father." For his parents were doing their utmost to ensure the survival of their seed."

²⁸ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 9-10. "...that He would preserve his chastity."

²⁹ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 15 "...from the pure love which he had chosen."

couple's chaste union. Their marriage will be exemplary and evangelical for the cause of virginity, so that through them the chastity of many others will be sanctified to God.³⁰

Ælfric constructs Julian's commitment to purity as a combination of positive action and renunciation, beneath which renunciation lies the assumption of a fundamental incompatibility between devotion to God and things sexual. The Lord's promise both to quench desire in Julian and transform his future bride, refers to this opposition between the love of God and human sexual love. Ælfric, however, avoids developing this antagonism to the degree found in the CCL, where the fear of violation is intrinsic to Julian's desire for virginity.³¹ *Clæn lufu* motivates the Old English Julian, rather than, as in the Latin, a conviction that "by polluting" him a wife will compromise his union with God.³² Virginity serves as the token of commitment to God in both versions, but the Ælfrician text lacks the CCL's depiction of the loss of virginity as pollution and its personification of desire as an "enemy."³³ Ælfric certainly notes the threats to Julian's *clæn lufu* (the possible passion of his wife, on the one hand, and his own sexual desire, on the other), and he later portrays Julian's dedication to virginity as a victory over both desire and the devil (ll. 57-58). Nevertheless, he initially chooses to portray virginity as a choice made for love of God, rather than out of fear for the virginal body or anxiety about defilement.

Bolstered by the Lord's assurances, Julian agrees to his parents' design and a marriage with the *ædelboren* 'noble-born' Basilissa is arranged (l. 25). The Old English here diverges significantly from the Latin, where Julian's reactions to the wedding ceremony foreshadow the indomitable resolution characterizing his later martyrial sufferings. The Latin Julian faces his wedding day as all others, "like a good athlete, with his desire subdued."³⁴ For his part, Ælfric bypasses all description of the wedding, merely summarizing that the marriage was prepared *æfter gewunan* 'according to custom,' before hurrying the couple into the fateful bridal chamber (l. 27).

³⁰ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 20-21.

³¹ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 77v, col. b, ll. 27-29. "... *die noctuque in orationibus pervigilans postulabat a Domino ne virginitatem promissam qualibet occasione violaret.*" "...keeping watch day and night in prayers he sought from the Lord that he might not violate his promised virginity at any time."

³² Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 77v, col. b, ll. 36-39. "*Accipies enim virginem quæ non polluendo te a me separet, sed per te virgo perseveret et te et ipsam in cælis virgines recipiam.*" "So then, you will take a virgin who will not separate you from me by polluting you; rather through you that virgin will persevere, and I shall receive you and her into heaven as virgins."

³³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 77v, col. b, l. 39 - 78r, col. a, l. 2. "*Multorum enim mihi per vos castitas dedicabitur. Adero tibi ut omnes voluptates carnis et hostis, libidinis, conterantur et ipsam quæ tibi fuerit iuncta convertam in meum amorem tuamque sequi pedam faciam ibique me in cubiculum preparatum videbitis.*" "'Through you the chastity of many will be dedicated to me. I will be near to you so that all desires of the flesh and of the enemy, lust, may be crushed, and I shall convert her, who will have been joined to you, to my love, and cause her to follow in your footsteps, and you will both see me there in the bedroom made ready [for you].'"

³⁴ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. a, ll. 16-17. "...*quasi bonus athleta, devicta libidine....*"

The Old English Julian begins his wedding night with zealous requests for protection:

and hi butu coman on anum bedde tosomne.
 Hwæt ða Iulianus hine georne gebæd
 to ðam hælende Criste þæt he hine geheolde
 wið ealla ontendnysse and yfele costnunga.³⁵

Without elaborating upon the dangers of the boudoir, Ælfric subtly communicates Julian's danger and utter dependence upon the Lord to protect him by framing the dual adjective *butu* and the adverb *tosomne* around the single *anum bedde*. The Old English saint, praying *georne* for his promised deliverance, contrasts strongly with impervious Julian of the CCL who is so unmoved by the young women with their curled hair and sweet voices, that the Latin claims that it is "as if the man were of iron."³⁶ Having hidden his heart and entrusted himself to the promises of his Lord, the CCL's Julian rejoices, confident in his salvation.³⁷ The CCL makes explicit the spiritual conflict between the virgin and desire with its reference to "the most ancient serpent" arousing desire, an obvious allusion to the temptation in Eden. (We will see this image again in the CCL version of the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria.) In this way, Julian's wedding night offers a glimpse into the larger, cosmic battle in which the virgin participates. His apparently intrepid entrance into the bridal chamber is not reckless, holy bravado, but rather a fulfillment of Christ's earlier injunction to him to "act manfully."³⁸ Victory belongs to him already. In Ælfric's translation, however, the saint (who also has been promised victory) is more alive to the precariousness of his situation. Where the Latin saint flexes his spiritual muscles, the Old English saint falls on his knees fully aware of his need for God's deliverance. Although the Old English Julian is no more likely to stumble into sin than his Latin counterpart, Ælfric colours this crucial moment with a slightly darker shade of 'pessimism.'

In both the Old English and Latin versions, divine protection covers Julian as the Lord manifests his holy grace in the couple's *brydbed* 'bride-bed' (l. 19). Suddenly, heedless of the winter season, the scent of roses and lilies floods the bedroom overcoming the new bride with

³⁵ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 28-31. "...and they two came into one bed together. Well, then! Julian eagerly prayed to Jesus Christ, that He would preserve him against all desire and evil temptation."

³⁶ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. a, l. 22. "...si homo ferreus esset."

³⁷ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. a, ll. 26-28. "*In corde suo psallebat Domino dicens: ure renes meos et cor meum, ne in me antiquissimus serpens libidinis <suscitet> bellum.*" "He praised God in his heart, saying, 'Consume my loins and my heart, lest the most ancient serpent arouse in me the battle of his lust.'" <suscitet> = MS *suscitat*

³⁸ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. a, ll. 3-4. "*Viriliter age....*" This command to "act manfully" again thunders from the heavens when Julian and his fellow Christians are imprisoned and facing martyrdom. (84r, col. b, ll. 27-28.

amazement: *Ða wearð þæt bryd-bed mid bræðe afylled/ swylce þær lægon lilie and rose.*³⁹ While the Latin portrays the same moment,⁴⁰ it lacks the evocative and prophetic quality of Ælfric's image of the rose and lily lying on the bed, prefiguring the couple's present and future. Louis Réau in his massive study of Christian iconography identifies both the rose and the lily as symbolic of the Virgin Mary and thus of purity; but where the lily signifies primarily "immaculate purity," the rose can symbolize Christ as well.⁴¹ Its redness recalls the blood of Christ and in the context of a saint's passion carries martyrial foreshadowing. The iconographic links between the lily and the Virgin, the rose and Christ, underlie the associations between the Virgin and Basilissa, Christ and Julian, which arise later in the narrative. The rose and the lily "lying" on the bed represent the newlywed couple: Julian, the rose, will die a martyr, while Basilissa, the lily, will die an undefiled virgin. Although this image is passing, and in many ways almost incidental, it illustrates Ælfric's skill in rendering his concise adaptations both allusive and beautiful.

The divine fragrance awakens in Basilissa a transforming desire, and she informs her very thankful bridegroom of the miracle wrought within her:

'Hit is wintertid nu and ic wundrie þearle
hwanon þes wyrtræð þus wynsumlice steme;
and me nu ne lyst nanes synscipes
ac þæs hælendes geþeodnysse mid gehealdenre clennesse.'⁴²

Like Julian, who committed his *clæn lufu* to Christ and who wants to avoid *ontendnes*, Basilissa now desires to be free of *sinscipe*.⁴³ Longing for Christ's companionship displaces all desire for

³⁹ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 32-33. "Then the bride-bed was filled with fragrance just as though a lily and a rose were lying there."

⁴⁰ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. a, ll. 33-35. "... *ut videretur virgini locus in quo solent lilia et rosæ vernantes tempore suo suauitatem propinare.*" "...so that it seemed to the virgin to be a place in which blooming lilies and roses are accustomed to give off a sweetness in their own time."

⁴¹ Louis Réau, *Iconographie de l'art Chrétien* vol I (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1955) 133.

⁴² ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 35-38. "'It is now winter time, and I greatly wonder from what place this fragrance of flowers thus pleasantly rises; and now I have no desire for any marriage, but only for the companionship of the Saviour, with my chastity intact.'"

⁴³ Skeat mistranslates *synscipes* as 'sinfulness' here, where it must denote 'marriage' or 'marital intercourse.' While Basilissa could be expressing a general desire for purification from sin, within the specific context of the bridal chamber it is more likely that she is instead renouncing the longing for sexual-marital relations. More importantly, the root is not *synn-* but *sin-*. Under *sinscipe* Clark Hall lists only 'cohabitation,' 'marriage,' and 'married couple.' See, J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th edn. with a Supplement by H.D. Meritt (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1960). In Toller's *Supplement*, the distinctions 'of lawful wedlock' and 'of illicit intercourse' are added to the original sense of 'marriage,' and 'wedlock'; nowhere do any of these dictionaries cite 'sinfulness' as a denotation for *sinscipe*. See J. Bosworth and T.N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Oxford UP, 1898); T.N. Toller, *Supplement to An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (London: Clarendon Press, 1921). There is no additional entry in A. Campbell's *Enlarged Addenda and Corrigenda to the Supplement to An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

her husband. In the CCL Basilissa similarly commits herself to physical chastity so that she might possess eternal life and gain the Saviour as her spouse.⁴⁴ Thus, in both versions and for both saints, it holds true that sexual relations, even with another Christian, are incompatible with the degree of intimacy they desire with the Saviour. The preservation of *clænnēs* 'virginal purity,' constitutes the first and fundamental element of their spiritual ambitions.

In his discussion of this *passio*, Zettel writes that Basilissa was originally a pagan (neither the Old English nor the CCL address this explicitly).⁴⁵ This does not seem wholly consistent with Ælfric's later comment that the parents of Julian and Basilissa *wæron gefyrn cristene* 'had been Christians long before' (l. 78). Nevertheless, Basilissa undergoes a "conversion" of sorts in the transference of her desire from husband to Lord, though this is as much a conversion to chastity as to Christ as Saviour, so that her prenuptial faith is ultimately of little consequence. What is crucial is the role of virginity in the reordering of human and spiritual relations as seen in Basilissa's conversion to Christ as her *brydguma* (l. 48). The *bræð* which so allures her not only comes from Christ, but itself presents a figure of Christ, for this fragrance knows neither beginning nor end:

'Þes wynsuman bræð þe ðu wundrast þearle
næfð nan angin ne eac nænne ænde.
Þes bræð is of Criste, seðe is clænnysse lufigend;
gif wit þurhwuniað on ansundum [v. anwealgum] mægðhade
and hine clænlice lufiað þonne cume wit to his rice
and wit ne beoð totwæmede ac a to worulde blyssiað.' ⁴⁶

Julian's interpretation of the miraculous *bræð* holds forth a completely different paradigm for union from that of traditional marriage. On one level Julian, the *clæn brydguma* (l. 34), serves as a figure of Christ: as her earthly bridegroom he will love her chastely as Christ, her heavenly bridegroom, loves her. Alternately, Christ's beloved is not only the virginal Basilissa, but the *clænnēs* which she and Julian together offer through their mutual commitment to chaste marriage. This inversion of the traditional formulation of marriage has two effects.⁴⁷ First, the couple's choice of chastity

⁴⁴ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. b, ll. 14-18. "*Quid melius nisi virginitatem custodiendo vitam æternam adipisci? Quod credendo ita esse ut protestaris, opto tibi consentiens esse, ut possideam æternum sponsum Dominum Iesum Christum.*" "What could be better than to attain eternal life by preserving chastity? Believing it to be as you state, I wish to be in agreement with you, so that I may have the Lord Jesus Christ as my eternal spouse."

⁴⁵ Zettel 207.

⁴⁶ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 41-45. "This pleasant fragrance, at which you greatly wonder, has no beginning, nor also any end. This fragrance is from Christ, who is a lover of purity; if we two continue in unbroken chastity and purely love Him, then we shall come to His kingdom, and we two shall never be severed, but shall rejoice for ever."

⁴⁷ John G. Gager, "Body-Symbols and Social Reality: Resurrection, Incarnation and Asceticism in Early Christianity," *Religion* 12 (1982): 347.

affirms the precedence of spirit over flesh, and secondly, it proffers a new model for marital union. Supplanting traditional, sexual union with a transcendent ideal, Ælfric moves virginity into the “extra-virginal” territory of marriage (an arena where virginity would seem least likely to flourish) in order to reaffirm the singular importance of physical purity for intimacy with Christ.

A paradoxical emphasis upon his marital union with Basilissa runs through Julian’s exhortations, whereby Ælfric effectively binds the new couple together, even as he binds their virginity to Christ. Throughout these lines Ælfric repeatedly employs the dual pronoun *wit*: if they together preserve their virginal integrity, and if their love for Christ is pure, then together the two of them shall gain heaven together. On the face of it, Julian’s assurances to Basilissa that the two of them will not be separated in heaven appears to grant their earthly marriage an eternal value, which is surprising since there is no marriage in heaven.⁴⁸ To interpret Julian’s exhortations as placing priority upon their earthly marriage would be reading importance into the means rather than the end, putting the proverbial cart before the horse, for pure companionship with Christ is in every way the purpose and focus of their union. Julian’s interpretation of the heavenly fragrance gathers together an odd amalgamation of promises—union with Christ, virginal union with each other, undefiled virginity, unending bliss—but the various details ultimately coalesce. What appears to be a multi-faceted reconstruction of marriage falls into place when viewed through the perspective of eternity. In a rather tautological cycle of signification, it is the eternal which invests meaning in virginity and it is eternity to which virginity as a signifier continually refers.

Moved by Julian’s promises, Basilissa professes her desire to continue in *clænum mægðhade* (l. 46). As her desire for Christ evolves, Ælfric plays upon the *sponsa Christi* motif with Julian as a figure of the heavenly bridegroom. His use of the topos of Christ as heavenly bridegroom in this passage is oppositional and characterized by “rhetorical contrast,” rather than delineating Basilissa’s desire for the Saviour as affective.⁴⁹ By representing *mægðhad* and *clænnas* as the reorientation and purification of preexistent loves and longings, Ælfric avoids depicting Basilissa’s declaration for virginity as baldly “contractual.” At the same time, he refrains from emphasizing the emotional or sexual aspect of both her earlier desire for *sinscipe* and her present

⁴⁸ Mt 22:30.

⁴⁹ Hugh Magennis, “Occurrences of Nuptial Imagery in Old English Hagiographical Texts,” *English Language Notes* 33.4 (1996): 2. Magennis makes this distinction between the rhetorical and affective specifically with regard to St Agnes, whose praise of Christ as her bridegroom contains what appears to be intense, emotional, even erotic language. This hymn, Magennis reminds the reader, must be read for what it is: the virgin saint’s very public expression of defiance and her repudiation of an earthly husband (5).

adoration of Christ as *sponsa*. Her decision to love the Saviour in *clæn mægðhad*, like her earlier renunciation of *sinscipe*, simply indicates her reorientation towards a heavenly paradigm.

B. The Confirmation of the Saints' Virginal-Marriage (ll. 53-74)

From Basilissa's newborn desire for the heavenly bridegroom, we turn to the second pivotal representation of virginity in the Old English text: the divine confirmation of the couple's chaste union. Here Christ, accompanied by the Virgin Mary and a host of virgins, appears in answer to Julian and Basilissa's prayer for a sign (l. 50). When Christ pronounces his benediction upon Julian, and the Virgin's celestial train similarly blesses Basilissa, the praise bestowed upon each saint clearly distinguishes them on the basis of their sex. Julian first receives commendation for his victorious service, as Christ praises the *clænan cnihte* 'pure youth' for having *oferswiðod/ woruldlice gælsan and þone gramlican feond*.⁵⁰ The praise offered by the virginal host to Basilissa begins in a manner reminiscent of the Annunciation and focuses upon the submissive and repudiating nature of Basilissa's choice.⁵¹

Eadig eart þu, Basilissa, forþan þe þu gebygdest
 þin mod to halwendum mynegungum
 and middaneardlice swæsnyse mid ealle forsiht
 and þe sylfe gearcost to wuldre.”

Unlike Julian who, by spurning worldly wantonness, vanquished not only desire, but the great fiend himself, Basilissa has “learned.” Where Julian conquered, Basilissa has inclined or submitted herself to her husband's admonitions. Although for both of them the renunciation of the sexual is an internal, spiritual turning, as well as an external commitment to physical chastity, Ælfric's translation preserves a distinction between the active victorious nature of male chastity and the passive, renunciatory nature of female chastity. The Old English here almost directly parallels the Latin as it is found in the CCL, except at the point where the heavenly host celebrates the victory over desire. Here the Latin commends *both* Julian and Basilissa as victors in this battle, for

⁵⁰ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 57-58. “...overcome worldly wantonness and the angry fiend.”

⁵¹ Lk 1:28.

⁵² ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 60-63. ““Blessed are you, Basilissa, because you have inclined your mind to salutary admonitions, and wholly despised worldly delight, and prepared yourself for glory.””

they are both addressed by Christ's hosts with the invocation "my soldiers."⁵³ Ælfric's translation does not grant Basilissa the same status as a soldier of Christ, but instead reserves this honour and its concomitant responsibilities for Julian alone.

The heavenly celebration of the couple continues with the appearance of two angels bearing the book of life. The lines which they command Julian to read clearly allude to Apocalypse 14:4, a verse which surfaces almost inevitably in texts on virginity (as the treatises of the Church Fathers illustrate). Ælfric's treatment of this verse departs from the Latin in his careful, even distribution of the eschatological promises between the new bride and groom. The first half of the Old English passage concerns men who, like Julian, have forsaken the world out of love for Christ. Of such as these, Julian reads, *he bið soðlice geteald to þam unbesmitenum halgum/ þe næran on heora life besmitene mid wifum*.⁵⁴ These lines distill the male saint's rejection of the world down to freedom from sexual defilement. Ælfric's biblical allusion here is precisely what a reader of hagiography would expect, and mirrors the CCL almost exactly.⁵⁵ The ensuing promises to Basilissa, however, evince a particular concern for the distribution of separate heavenly rewards to each spouse. For Basilissa, Ælfric specifically adapts the promise of Apocalypse 14:4 that virgins will "follow the Lamb wheresoever he goes" to read that the young woman will be reckoned among the virgins *þe Marian folgiað þæs hælendes meder* 'who follow Mary, the Saviour's mother' (l. 72). Although the CCL records that Basilissa will be counted "in the number of virgins among whom the Lord's Virgin Mother holds preeminence,"⁵⁶ the Latin does not have an equivalent for the Old English *folgiað* which clearly refers to the Apocalypse image of following the Lamb.

A similar concern for addressing men and women equally with respect to virginity can be seen in Ælfric's "Letter to Sigefyrth" and the homily *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis*, discussed in

⁵³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. b, ll. 30-38. "*A parte regis clamabatur, 'Vicisti, Iuliane. Vicisti.' A parte reginæ clamabant, 'Beata es, Basilissa, quæ sic consensisti salutaribus monitis et fallacis blandimenta mundi respuens ad eternam gloriam preparasti. Iterum a parte regis clamabant, 'Milites mei, qui vicerunt antiqui serpentis libidinem, de pavimento levantur.'"* "From the king's side it was cried out, 'You have conquered, Julian. You have conquered.' From the queen's side they cried, 'Blessed are you, Basilissa, who have thus agreed to salutary admonitions, and rejecting the blandishments of the false world have prepared yourself for eternal glory. Again from the king's side they cried, 'Let my soldiers, who have conquered the lust of the ancient serpent, be raised up from the ground.'"

⁵⁴ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 69-70. "...he truly shall be counted among the unsullied saints that never in their lives were polluted with women."

⁵⁵ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78v, col. a, ll. 21-23. "*Qui pro amore mundum contempsit deputetur in eorum numerum qui cum mulieribus non sunt coinquinati.*" "Let him who despises the world for the love [of me] be reckoned among the number of those who have not been defiled with women."

⁵⁶ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78v, col. a, ll. 23-25. "*...in numerum virginum quibus virgo mater Domini principatum tenet.*"

the preceding chapter. Throughout these two works Ælfric makes repeated reference to the requirements of sexual purity for men and women alike, and to the participation of both men and women in the virginal life and its rewards.⁵⁷ In the *Nativitas* homily in particular, Ælfric treats a range of issues pertaining to chastity--premarital sex, the consecration of one's virginity to God, and lapsed virgins--with a marked concern for what might be called gender parity. Although the implications of physical purity ultimately differ for men and women in Ælfric's construction, he has a rhetorical habit of referring to the two sexes together.⁵⁸ This attention to both sexes, the division of heavenly blessing and the specific adaptation of the promises of Apocalypse 14:4 to Julian and Basilissa in a gender specific manner, then, is consistent with a practice seen elsewhere in Ælfric's pastoral and homiletic writing. Julian will be numbered among the host of virgins who have not defiled themselves with women, and Basilissa will follow the Saviour's Mother, rather than the Saviour, as Apocalypse 14:4 says. Paradoxically, by dividing the heavenly rewards of virgins between the saints with reference to their gender, Ælfric's confirmation and blessing of Julian and Basilissa's chaste union both depends upon and reaffirms the sexual difference which they are renouncing in favour of the virginal life.

C. Marriage and the Monastery (ll. 75-103)

With the heavenly host's ascension, we turn to the third passage that concerns virginity in Julian and Basilissa's *passio*. Their marriage only lasts a short time before they enter the monastic life, but during this period the *clænnes* which the saints vowed to the Saviour defines their marriage in every way. When Ælfric writes that Julian and his bride *wæron geðeodde mid soðre clænnysse/ gastlice þeonde*,⁵⁹ he uses the grammatical dependence of the participial clause, and the alliteration between *geðeodde* and *þeonde* to reiterate the link between sexual purity and spiritual prosperity. Like the CCL which describes Julian and Basilissa as joined in spirit rather than flesh,⁶⁰ Ælfric places all the weight of distinction between flesh and spirit, defilement and purity, this world and the next, upon the couple's choice of virginally chaste marriage over sexual union.

⁵⁷ See for example, ÆLet 5 (Sigefyrth) 13-23; ÆHomM 8 (Ass 3) 24-48.

⁵⁸ ÆHomM 8 (Ass 3) 73. *ge wæpmen ge wimmen*, 'both men and women'; *cnihtum and mædenum*, 'youths and maidens' (224); *clænan munecas and clænan mynecena*, 'chaste monks and pure nuns' (227); ÆLet 5 (Sigefyrth) 156. *ge weras ge wif*, 'both men and women'.

⁵⁹ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 76-77, "...were joined in true chastity, prospering spiritually."

⁶⁰ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78v, col. a, ll. 40-43. "*Ceperunt spiritu esse coniuncti non carne fructificantes et ita mysterium divine gratiæ in se conlatum occultabant <ut> a Domino Christo et sanctis angelis sciretur quod agebant.*" "Bearing fruit they began to be joined in spirit not in the flesh; and thus they hid the mystery of divine grace conferred upon them, so that what they were doing might be known [only] by the Lord Christ and his holy angels."

As their monastic life unfolds, this conflict between flesh and spirit plays a significantly smaller role in Ælfric's text than it does in the CCL. After a passing reference to the distribution of their inherited wealth upon their parents' death, Ælfric describes the couples' commencement upon the monastic life. Julian becomes the "father of many monks" and Basilissa the "mother of many nuns" (ll. 84-85). Of their common life, he writes *hi þa gastlican werod under Gode gewyssodon/ on dæghwamlicre lare to heora dryhtnes wyllan/ op þæt se reðe æhtnysse on Egypta lande becom.*⁶¹ Commenting only on the regime of learning and instruction inside the monasteries, Ælfric foregoes any mention of what kind of persons entered into these monasteries, the reasons for their entrance, or the world they left behind, all of which figure prominently in the CCL version. In the Old English, both Julian and Basilissa (the pronoun here is plural) instruct their communities on a daily, regular basis by the power and authority of God, and this, for Ælfric, sufficiently summarizes their communal life.

The Latin version, on the contrary, invests Julian and Basilissa's monastic ministry with a specifically salvific purpose. Here the voice of the Lord calls out the invitation "Come to me all you who labour."⁶² More than simply a reprieve from a toilsome world, the monastic life offers an escape from worldly trials and torments.⁶³ To gain this peace men leave women, children their parents, husbands their wives, and wives their husbands. Throughout the Latin passage, biblical allusions blur the distinction between faithful Christian living and the practice of virginal, or at least abstinent, chastity. Hence the monastic life is referred to as "the narrow way," and Julian's monks are praised for putting their hands to the plough and not looking back.⁶⁴ The effect is such that chastity becomes indistinguishable from salvation and indispensable to it. Building upon the image of the monastic life as generally salvific or as an escape from worldly tribulation, the CCL portrays the chaste life as specifically liberating women from squalor. Of Basilissa, we read that she "freed

⁶¹ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 87-89. "...they, under God, instructed the spiritual host in daily teaching according to Lord's will, until the cruel persecution came upon the land of Egypt."

⁶² Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78v, col. b, ll. 11-14. "*Dividuntur domicilia, et undique vox illa suavis Domini per os eorum omnes invitabant dicens: venite ad me omnes qui laboratis et onerati estis et ego vos reficiam.*" "Their houses were divided and everywhere through their mouths the sweet voice of the Lord invited all saying, 'Come to me all you labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you'" [Mt 11:28].

⁶³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78v, col. b, ll. 14-16. "*Instituunt sancta monasteria in quæ <messes animarum> sæculi penis et tribulorum suffocatione rapiebant.*" "They built holy monasteries to which they snatched away the harvest of souls from the torments of the world and the suffocation of tribulations."

⁶⁴ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78v, col. b, ll. 18-19. "...*viam angustam*" [Mt 7:14]; 78v, col. b, ll. 19-20. "...*nec quisquam eorum, manu in aratro posita, respiciebat retro.*" "...nor did any of them, having placed their hand on the plough, look back" [Lk 9:62].

a host of virgins and women from filth; she sent forth their most chaste souls to heaven.”⁶⁵ A whole range of values thus attaches to the world in opposition to the monastery. Deprivation, slavery, sexuality, tribulation, and filth all connect to the secular. Within the walls of the monastery, on the other hand, the blessed may breathe the pure air of heavenly salvation, life, and faithfulness to Christ. Through chastity they are utterly freed from worldly bondage.

Despite the initial importance of virginity for Julian and Basilissa’s pursuit of the Lord, Ælfric shows no interest in interweaving monastic chastity and salvation as the antithesis of the secular world. Rather than celebrating the large numbers that flock into Julian’s monastery or the palms of victory belonging to Basilissa’s nuns, the Old English text mentions only the state of learning within the monastery—a detail not found in the CCL. Ælfric’s version contains no indication that the world outside the monastery is one of squalid misery. While it is possible that Ælfric’s discipline of brevity constrained him from including biblical allusions which would conflate virginity or chastity with salvation, he was obviously capable of inserting concise, effective scriptural references (as the earlier discussion of *folgiað* and Apocalypse 14:4 indicates). For this reason, Ælfric’s omission of a negative portrait of the non-monastic world appears to be a matter of priority rather than abbreviation. The two saints, after all, are committed to the virginal life as the means of living out their love for God in its highest form. Though unhesitating in his portrayal of the beatitude of virginity, Ælfric shows no inclination here to deprecate the non-monastic life. His portrait of Julian and Basilissa’s monasteries appears instead to be a very clear reference to his own historical context and the high priority that he placed upon the *godspellican lare* ‘gospel learning’ which shaped his life’s work.⁶⁶

D. Virginity’s Final Bow (ll. 271-81)

Before moving on to the last reference to virginity and the closing review of the differences between Ælfric’s representation of male and female virginity in the *passio*, let us first recapitulate the primary values invested in the sign of virginity in these three scenes, each of which illustrates that the sign of *mægðhad* bears values beyond that of physical purity. First, the saints’ “conversions” to virginity arise from a desire that their love for God be undivided and untainted. Moreover, these conversions hinge upon an implicit incompatibility between the spiritual and the sexual. There is for the female saint a secondary theme of unremitting desire which must be

⁶⁵ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78v, col. b, ll. 25-27. “... *agmina virginum et mulierum de squaloribus liberabat; castissimas animas præmittebat ad cælum.*”

⁶⁶ ÆCHom I (Pref) 9. The Preface to Ælfric’s *Grammar* reveals a similar concern for both orthodox *lar* and *lareowas*, ‘teaching’ and ‘teachers’ (ÆGram 3.8).

channeled towards a heavenly rather than an earthly object, but we shall return to this later. In the second passage under discussion, the celestial benediction of the couple illustrates that virginity signifies victory not only on the personal level, but also on the greater, cosmic level. Julian has trod under foot the world, the flesh, and the devil. While Basilissa's victory is considerably less superhuman, her virginity provides evidence of a similarly heaven-centred life, a life of expectation. In the final passage discussed, Julian and Basilissa's entrance into the monastic life indicates a "middle stage." If their chaste marriage was a precursor to their monastic life, so too their monasticism anticipates the eternal life where all Christians, irrespective of sex, will dwell in unity, worshiping God and living in pure fellowship with him and one another. Spiritual values have completely usurped carnal ones. Julian and Basilissa's chaste association, their spiritual prosperity, and the inconsequentiality of everything but godly learning all attest to the complete upheaval of normative social/secular values. Virginity is not the end, but the means. The end is the eternal life of the spirit, for virginity reflects a commitment to spiritual, otherworldly values.

This raises a question: if virginity carries this general signifying importance in the life of Julian and Basilissa, why does it simply drop from the narrative like a stone? Sexuality for the primary saints of all three *passiones*, both male (Julian and Chrysanthus) and female (Cecilia), functions as a conflict topos. Virginity assumes a central role at the beginning of these narratives because the primary saints' virginity is jeopardized in the same way as in the lives of female virgin saints. Only in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria do we see the topos of sexual danger prolonged beyond the preliminary establishment of the primary saint's purity and sanctity. After Basilissa's death and the end of their monastic life, Julian stands alone as the representative of Christ. His virginity is no longer at risk and therefore may fade from discussion. Virginity's ostensible disappearance notwithstanding, the last occurrence of *mægðhad* in the *passio* illustrates that virginity continues to be a powerful signifier in the unfolding conflict between saint and worldly persecutor.

This final reference to virginity occurs in the middle of Julian's persecutions. In both the Old English and Latin versions, the pagan judge Martianus mockingly challenges Julian to raise a dead man as Christ had done (ll. 271-273). When, in answer to Julian's prayer, the dead man rises up, he exclaims: '*Eala hu andfæncge gebed/ and hu clæne mægðhad is on þisum mæran Iuliane.*'⁶⁷ It is, on the face of it, a *non sequitur*. What has *clæne mægðhad* to do with anything at

⁶⁷ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 280-81. "'Lo, how acceptable is the prayer, and what pure virginity is in this noble Julianus!'"

this point? One way of making sense of this abrupt reference to Julian's virginity is to interpret physical purity as the basis of the saint's influence with God, and this possibility would appear to be supported by the "dead" man's account of God demanding his release from hell. In his description of the hereafter, the man says that God specifically names his love for the saint as the reason for this miracle: '*Beo se man ongean gelæd for minum leofan Iuliane;/ nelle ic hine geunrotian on ænigum þincge.*'⁶⁸ On the other hand, Julian has been subjected to numerous torments and miraculously delivered several times by this point. He has converted twenty-some persons to Christ and even demons have acknowledged the saint's authority, and in none of these circumstances has his physical purity been mentioned.

The same absence can be noted in the CCL. What the Latin version does contain, however, is a more extensive treatment of this resurrection miracle, the elements of which build a context for the sudden acclamation of virginity. Julian's prayer in the Latin is quite dramatic. Staring off into the heavens for an hour, the saint is literally transfigured as he prays for the man's resurrection.⁶⁹ Despite its primarily credal content, Julian's prayer offers some reasons why the sudden reference to virginity is not out of place.⁷⁰ His invocation may not explicitly refer to a relationship between virginity and life, but it depends upon such a connection. In the same way that the Son of God brought life to the spiritually dead when he took flesh from a virgin, Julian now requests Christ to demonstrate again his singular relationship to life by giving this dead man new life. The virgin saint is the instrument through which the gospel's claims not only to life eternal, but to life in this world as well, are reiterated. Whittemore makes a fundamental mistake when he says that "the martyrs have power, earthly power. Did it matter that the power was from the Lord? Practically,

⁶⁸ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 294-95. "Let the man be led back, for my dear Julian's sake; I will not cause him displeasure on any account."

⁶⁹ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 82v, col. b, ll. 38-41. "*Statim autem Iulianus oculos in cælum defigens per unius hore spatium, facies eius mutata est et facta est sicut nix et... coram omnibus videntibus fudit orationem ad Dominum.*" "Julian immediately, fixing his eyes on the heavens for the space of an hour, his face was transformed and became like snow; and before all those looking on he poured out his prayer to the Lord."

⁷⁰ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 82v, col. b, l. 41 - 83r, col. a, l. 7. "*Domine Iesu Christo, qui es verus filius Dei vivi, qui in principio natus es de patre et in novissimo mundi carnem de virgine adsumpsisti sine semine, aspice de summitate cælorum et ad confusionem inimicorum tuorum, <et> ad corroborandam fidem credentium in te; et quæ operatus es positus in terris, exaudi nunc in cælis, et suscita hunc mortuum, ut vivi non moriantur sed mortui reviviscant.*" "Lord Jesus Christ, you who are the true son of the living God, who were born of the Father in the beginning and in the last days of the world took up flesh from the virgin, without seed, look from the height of heaven both for the confusion of your enemies and the strengthening of the faith of those who believe in you; and you who, when on earth, worked [miracles], hear now in heaven, and raise this dead man so that the living may not die but the dead live again."

not a bit.”⁷¹ He misses the point that the saints are ambassadors of divine power. So wholly given over to the things of God are saints like Julian, that they act with heavenly power, in accordance with the will of heaven. Readers of hagiography erase the figurative at their peril. As the resurrection of Lazarus was a manifestation of Christ’s authority over this world, so too Julian’s resurrection of the dead man exemplifies true, divine power.⁷² This is not a battle between a thaumaturge whose power lies in his virginity, and an impious judge who repeatedly attempts and fails to exert his authority over the saint. The resurrected man’s exclamation of “O, acceptable prayer and immaculate virginity,” is a pronouncement that depends not on the glory of Julian’s bodily purity, but on the subversion of the traditional order.⁷³ From the beginning, Julian’s choice of virginity has been emblematic of this subversion by indicating his rejection of the secular, social order of his parents. The context included in the Latin text makes more explicit what holds true, but must be inferred, in the Old English: virginity signifies a renewed world order and loyalty to the eternal rather than the mundane. Virginity is the life of the heavenly hosts, the earthly life of God’s dearest servants, and a life which renounces all ties but those of heaven. Nowhere is a reference to virginity more fitting than in a miracle which asserts God’s eternal power over mortal death, for virginity is an eternal value.

II. Julian and Basilissa: the Case against “Sexist” Virginity

In his articles on the *vita* of St Alexis which, like the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, depicts married-virginity, Baudouin de Gaiffier discusses male saints’ responses to forced marriage.⁷⁴ There are, he offers, two possible responses for the saint who desires to preserve his virginity. The harassed saint can either convert his/her spouse to the cause of chastity, or flee.⁷⁵ Taking up de Gaiffier’s thesis, Dyan Elliott rather oversimplifies the matter proposing that:

The legends of Cecilia and Alexis are representative of the course of action that each sex is depicted as most inclined to take: women stayed, men fled. The extreme popularity of the Cecilia story is a tacit recognition of a woman’s particular vulnerability in the marriage game. Her socially enforced passivity inclined her to comply in the hope that she could convert her husband to chastity.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Reed Whittemore, “Hagiography and Ælfric,” *Pure Lives: the Early Biographers* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1988) 55.

⁷² Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 83r, col. a, ll. 8–10. “*Tibi dico, terra arida, in ipsius nomine qui quadriduanum Lazarum suscitavit. Ipse tibi imperat, surge super te.*” “I call to you, dry land, in the name of him who raised Lazarus on the fourth day. He himself commands you, ‘Arise!’”

⁷³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 83r, col. a, ll. 11–12. “*O acceptabilis oratio et immaculata virginitas...*”

⁷⁴ De Gaiffier, Baudouin. “Intactam sponsam relinquens: à propos de la vie de S. Alexis,” *AB* 65 (1947): 157–95; and “Source d’un texte relatif au mariage dans la vie de S. Alexis BHL. 289,” *AB* 63 (1945): 48–55.

⁷⁵ De Gaiffier 182.

⁷⁶ Elliott 65.

Given what we see in the *Passion of St Julian and his Wife Basilissa*, and what we will see in the next chapter with the *Passion of Chrysanthus and his Wife Daria*, Elliott's generalization requires qualification. Indeed, the eternal value implicit in the sign of virginity seems to mitigate any intrinsic difference between male and female virginity, or at least to redress a disproportionate emphasis upon female virginity. But what, then, do we make of Ælfric's treatment of Apocalypse 14:4? Does his division of the heavenly reward between Julian and Basilissa equalize, by distributing between husband and wife the rewards due all virgins? Or does the discrimination of male from female necessarily impute a disparity? On the basis of this passage and in surveying the virginal models whom Julian and Basilissa themselves typify, it would appear that--for all the putative erasure of sexual difference for those living the heavenly life on earth--the ideal of virginity not only depended upon, but reaffirmed the separation of the sexes, even those who joined together in chaste matrimony to pursue the virginal life.

Little can be said regarding Ælfric's distinctions between and implications of male and female virginity without reference to more general differences in the portrayal of the two characters. Rather than proceed with a survey of these differences in the narrative, much of which would take us over ground covered in the discussion above, I would like to examine two aspects of the *passio* which, I believe, illustrate the difficulties of drawing generalizations about gender implications. Hazarding a proposal that the discrimination (in the strictest sense) of male from female in this *passio* as regards virginity does not necessarily depend upon a distinction in the greater importance of physical purity to women than to men, I would argue that Ælfric actually reduces the connection between women and the body that can be seen in the CCL. In order to illustrate this change, after treating first the passages which concerns Basilissa's conversion to virginity (ll. 32-38), already touched upon above, and then examining the different representations of physical suffering for men and women in the *passio* (ll. 96-100, 396-98), I will conclude this chapter with a careful examination of the excisions to Basilissa's character and role in the Old English *passio*.

On the wedding night Basilissa's desire for virginity arises when the scent of lilies and roses stirs within her otherworldly longings. It is, so to speak, a sensual conversion that reorients and purifies preexisting desire. Longing for Christ as her spouse transforms Basilissa's desire for her husband, so that the *sponsa Christi* theme here affirms the inescapability of the Fall for all women, even virginal ones. The curse upon Eve was that her desire would be for her husband and

he would rule over her.⁷⁷ Basilissa's desire is not eradicated, as is Julian's, but rather transformed. Desire rules inevitably in woman, although through the purity of a virginal life that desire can be turned to God, and this domination rendered salutary rather than burdensome.⁷⁸

The conversion of the only other significant female character, the wife of the persecutor Martianus, comes about through a similar "sensual" miracle. In both the CCL and the Old English, this woman (identified as Marcionella in the Latin, but unnamed in the Old English) is converted by the *wynsuman bræpes* which suffuses the saints' prison cell for *heo næfre ær naht swilces ne gestunce*.⁷⁹ Despite the resemblances between Basilissa's conversion to the virginal life and Marcionella's conversion to Christianity, the similarities reflect a motif of conversion rather than revealing a presumption of women's sensual susceptibility. Too much emphasis could be placed upon the nature of Basilissa's conversion to virginity, its possible relationship to the *sponsa Christi* topos and female sanctity in general. This motif can be seen in the conversion of the twenty soldiers, after God intercedes for Julian and transforms the darkness and putrid stench of the saint's prison cell quite literally into sweetness and light.⁸⁰ Moreover, as we shall see in the following chapter, the miraculous fragrance of lilies and roses plays a significant role in the conversion of both St Cecilia's dubious husband and brother-in-law. Suggestions of women's sensual nature and their dependence upon such sensory miracles for steps of faith, thus, amount to nothing, for men as well as women are converted by, and are thus dependent upon, sensual verification, signs and wonders.

As with the portrayal of Basilissa's conversion, so too in the depiction of physical suffering--the fact that the female saint, her nuns, and Marcionella all escape any manner of physical suffering, whereas Julian and other male Christians endure persecution and imprisonment

⁷⁷ Gn 3:16.

⁷⁸ In the CCL the typological relationship between Julian and Basilissa with Adam and Eve is more obvious than in the Old English, for the Latin expressly calls upon this typology by praising the couple's commitment to virginity (to prelapsarian purity) as a victory over *antiqui serpentis libidinem* (Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 78r, col. b, l. 37. "...the desire of the ancient serpent.")

⁷⁹ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 348-49. "...pleasant fragrance"; "she never before smelt anything like it." Cf. Cotton Nero E.i., pt.1, 84r, col. a, ll. 11-17. "*Numquam in diebus meis hunc tantum suavissimum odorem sensi. Nam sicut liliorum et rosarum et <croceum> nectar balsami et nardi redundat, his tantis suavissimis odoribus, ita sum refecta. Nec aliquid aliud in corde meo cognosco, nisi ipsum Dominum verum fateor pro quo filius meus agonizatur.*" "Never in my days have I smelled such a sweet scent. For as the golden nectar of lilies and roses, and of balsam and nard pours forth with such very sweet odours that I am thus refreshed. And I do not know anything else in my heart, except that I confess as the true Lord that one for whom my son suffers." <croceum> = MS *croceos*

⁸⁰ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 213-15. "*ƿa foresceawode godes gifu ƿæt ƿær scean mycel leoht/ and se stenc wearð awend to wynsumum bræde/ and eall se unwynsumnysse him wearð to blysse.*" "Then God's grace provided that there shone a great light, and the stench was turned into a pleasant fragrance, and all the unpleasantness turned, for them, into happiness."

for their faith--could easily be misinterpreted as a division based upon gender. If we consider first the deliverance of Basilissa and her nuns, it is evident that, although the version found in the Old English is significantly shorter than that of the CCL, both the Old English and Latin hinge upon the women's prayers and the Lord's answering promise that they will not suffer defilement. Although Ælfric does not include Basilissa's prayer in his narrative, it clearly concerns the fear of sexual pollution, since the Lord assures her in a vision that her prayers will be answered, and her *mædenu* die before the persecutions begin: they *ne beon gewemmede þurh ða woda ehteras*.⁸¹ Later, Ælfric describes Basilissa's undefiled death, and how she departed *on mægðhade* from this world (l. 100). He leaves no doubt that God fulfilled all his promises to the saint, both for the women in her keeping and for herself.

In the second instance where physical danger threatens a woman in the narrative, sexual defilement is not the concern. Here the fear is that the impious Martianus will sweep his wife back into his household and under his authority, thereby coercing her to spiritual darkness and idolatry. In both the Latin and Old English, when Martianus discovers that his son has converted his wife, he orders her forcibly returned to his power: *Pa het Martianus þæt man hi gelæhte/ ac hi wurdon ablende þe þæt bebod begunnon*.⁸² God intervenes to prevent her from being touched by those who would dissuade her from her faith. A further passage in the CCL recounts another example of a female Christian's divine protection from physical harm. When Martianus later orders his own son and Julian scalped, and the eyes of the priest Antonius and the resurrected Anastasius to be gouged out, the men suffer the torments prescribed for them. Of Marcionella, however, the Latin says that "God knew that the holy mother of Celsus could not endure it when it was ordered that barbs be applied to her. If any hand of the servants wished to touch her, it came about that he was blinded."⁸³ In the end, the other saints are healed so that it is as if nothing happened to them, but nothing *ever* happens to Marcionella, just as nothing had happened to Basilissa.⁸⁴ Ælfric's exemplar must have contained something of this nature, for at this point in the Old English narrative he records that Martianus ordered the saints variously tortured: *ac God hi ahredde fram*

⁸¹ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 95. "...will not be polluted by the mad persecutors."

⁸² ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 360-61. "Then Martianus commanded that men seize her, but those who began (to fulfill) his command were blinded." Cf. Cotton Nero E.i., pt.1, 84v, col. a, ll. 5-9.

⁸³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt.1, 85v, col. a, ll. 9-13. "*Sanctam autem matrem Celsi quam Deus sciebat tolerare non posse, cum iuberetur aculeo applicare. Si quis voluisset de ministris ad eam attingere manus, <cæci> <efficiebantur>*." Something is awry with the Latin here: <efficiebantur> = MS *efficiebatur*.

⁸⁴ Cotton Nero E.i., pt.1, 85v, col. a, ll. 13-15.

*þam reðum witum/ and sume eac ablende of þam bysmorfullum þenum.*⁸⁵ Unlike the passage in the CCL where the several male saints endure persecution, and Marcionella receives divine protection, Ælfric writes that God miraculously intercedes for *all* his saints, so that none of them suffers any harm. The blinding of the servants, restricted in the Latin to those attempting to seize Marcionella, is extended by Ælfric as protection for the male prisoners as well. The reader, then, encounters a fortifying picture of God foiling all snares and attempts to harm his servants. God's power as provider and protector of his servants, irrespective of gender, stands foremost in the Old English. The fact that Basilissa and her nuns are snatched from earthly peril must be interpreted in light of the following caveats. First of all, she is the secondary saint and the narrative focuses upon Julian and his passion. Secondly, her death must be compared not only against God's protection of the other important female in the text, Marcionella, but also the protection afforded to both male and female saints in Ælfric's *passio*. Lastly, this "pure" death is the fulfillment of Basilissa's prayer which demonstrates God's divine power. Such faithfulness to his servant-saints forms the very fabric of hagiographic texts. The drastic manner of her protection from physical defilement must be read against the pattern of protection and suffering seen in the lives of the other female, married-virgin saints who do "suffer." St Cecilia, for example, hangs onto life for three days after her executioner botches the job of chopping off her head, and St Daria is thrown into a brothel where her virginity is repeatedly protected from molestation.⁸⁶ The emphasis upon death as the cost and means of Basilissa remaining untouched and undefiled is, then, of less consequence than it first appears, for Ælfric similarly expunges any real torment, such as the Latin describes, from being inflicted upon the male saint and his companions. Basilissa's deliverance, which admittedly focuses upon her sexual purity, must be read in light of the emphasis throughout the *passio* upon God's intervention on behalf of his servants, both male and female, and the fulfillment of his promises to them.

The most effective manner of evaluating the distinctions between Ælfric's portrayal of Julian and Basilissa is to examine the divergences between Basilissa's role in the CCL and Ælfrician versions. The most important of these differences occurs directly before the onset of the persecutions. As mentioned above, in the general outline of the pattern of the married-virgin saints' lives, the secondary saint generally dies first, leaving the primary saint at the centre of the ensuing narrative. In the *Passion of St Julian and his Wife Basilissa* that pattern holds true to such

⁸⁵ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 397-98. "...but God delivered them from the cruel torments, and also blinded some of the shameful servants."

⁸⁶ ÆLS (Cecilia) 353-60; ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 246-49.

a degree that Basilissa does not live past line 100 in a narrative of 434 lines. Moreover, when the Latin version found in the CCL is compared with the Old English translation, it becomes very obvious that, if Ælfric's exemplar at all resembled the version found in CCL, he has severely abbreviated Basilissa's role in the *passio*.

Let us first briefly survey the particular passages in question, before discussing the specifics of the passages, and the effects thereof, and the possible reasons for Ælfric's abbreviations and excisions.

	<u>CCL (Cotton Nero E.i., pt.1)</u>	<u>ÆLS</u>
Prayers of both monastic houses for deliverance from persecution.	78v, l. 80-79r, l. 18. (25 ll.)	l. 90.
Basilissa's heavenly vision.	79r, ll. 21-38.	ll. 92-95.
Basilissa addresses her community.	79r, ll. 40-74.	-----
The vision of the whole community.	79r, l. 75 - 79v, l. 4. (16 ll.)	-----
Basilissa's hymn of exaltation.	79v, ll. 9-25.	-----
The death of the female community.	79v, ll. 27-29.	ll. 96-98.
Basilissa's vision of her nuns.	79v, ll. 30-37.	-----
Basilissa's death.	79v, ll. 40-42.	ll. 99-100.
Basilissa and the other martyrs appear to Julian in a vision.	85r, ll. 70-84.	-----
Julian joins Basilissa and the other martyrs in glory.	-----	ll. 414-20.

In this discussion it may be most effective to deal briefly with the CCL text first.

In the CCL, as in ASS, both Julian's and Basilissa's monastic communities come together to beseech God's mercy when news of the persecutions reaches them. In prayer they request the protection of their *integritas*: the sign of their faith. Asking the Lord to examine their hearts, and to lead them into the land of the living, the communities pray that they may be found whole (*integros*) in the Lord's sight on the day of his return, and that none of them may be lost. At the conclusion of their common prayers, the monks and nuns return to their respective houses.⁸⁷ While it is not at all surprising that Ælfric would omit such a lengthy prayer and summarize the passage with *þa gebædon þa halgan hi to þam hælende*, what is rather surprising is that he not only reduces Basilissa's vision which follows this prayer to almost nothing, but also completely excises her exhortation to the nuns.⁸⁸ It is, of course, possible that Ælfric worked from an exemplar which, unlike the CCL and ASS, did not contain these passages, but, as we shall see, the wording in the Old English description of Basilissa's vision suggests that Ælfric's exemplar contained a more extensive passage than he chose to include.

⁸⁷ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. a, ll. 1-18.

⁸⁸ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 90. "Then the saints prayed to the Saviour...."

In the CCL the Lord appears to Basilissa in a vision in order to assure her that He will protect the *vasa* 'vessels' in her keeping, and that her prayers will be fulfilled so that her nuns will precede her into heaven.⁸⁹ This reference to the nuns as *vasa* recalls the imagery of the early Church Fathers discussed in Chapter 1, particularly that of Jerome who described the virginal body as a precious "vessel" surpassing the holiest of objects in the ancient temple.⁹⁰ As Basilissa's vision continues, this patristic imagery abounds with descriptions of the nuns' impending death as a 'harvest' and as 'incense' to the Lord.⁹¹ In describing the death of the nuns themselves as an odour of sweetness ascending to heaven, the Latin clearly alludes to the tradition of the virgin as *sacrificium*, not in the intercessory sense referred to by Ambrose, but rather in the Hieronimian tradition which views the virgin as both offering and altar, an interpretation which encompasses the representation of the nuns as vessels, harvest, and incense.⁹² The vision concludes with the Lord assuring Basilissa that "Julian indeed will fight as a good athlete and will be victorious, for the one in whom chastity reigns cannot be overcome by anything."⁹³

Rejoicing that their prayers have been heard, Basilissa delivers another speech of considerable length, which the Old English version also lacks.⁹⁴ This speech begins with Basilissa addressing the nuns as the joy and crown of her head, and exhorting them to offer the Lord the sacrifice of praise, the sacrifice of jubilation from a contrite heart.⁹⁵ After enjoining them to examine their hearts, she assures them that the world holds no power over them, and that before

⁸⁹ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. a, ll. 21-25. "*Basilissa, nominis tui digna, quæ orasti <hæc> implere me delectat, ut omnia vasa, quæ commendavi tibi, cum ad huc es in hac vita tu ea præmittas ad cælum.*" "Basilissa--worthy of your name--it pleases me to fulfill those things which you have prayed, that you may send ahead to heaven all the vessels which I committed to you while you are in this life." <hæc>= MS *hoc*.

⁹⁰ HIER.Epist.XXII. §23, l. 17, p. 175 - l. 1, p. 176, ll. 3-4, p. 176.

⁹¹ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. a, ll. 25-30. "*Habebis dimidium temporis spatium quo possis ex omni loco triticum colligere et, recondita messe laboris tui, tu ipsa sequare, claves acceptura, horrei pleni pinguedinem animarum ex quo cotidie odor suavitatis ascendit ad cælum in conspectu sanctorum angelorum.*" "You will have half the space of time in which you may collect wheat from everywhere and having put away the harvest of your labour, you yourself (who are to inherit the keys) will follow the abundance of the full granary of souls from which [abundance] an odour of sweetness daily ascends to heaven in the sight of the holy angels."

⁹² AMBR.Virgin.Marc. I, chapter 7, § 32, ll. 18-20; ll. 20-22, p. 16. HIER.Adv.Iovin. § 12, ll. 16-19, p. 239. "*Grandes fidei est, grandisque virtutis, Dei templum esse purissimum totum se holocaustum offerre Domino; et juxta eundem Apostolum, esse sanctum et corpore et spiritu.*" Trans. p. 356. "It is a mark of great faith and of great virtue to be a pure temple of God, to offer oneself a whole burnt-offering, and according to the same apostle, to be holy both in body and in spirit."

⁹³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. a, ll. 31-33. "*Julianus vero ut bonus athleta pugnabit et vincet, nec aliquando vinci poterit in quo castitas regnat.*"

⁹⁴ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. a, l. 40 - col. b, l. 31.

⁹⁵ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. a, ll. 40-43. "*Vos omnes gaudium et corona capitis mei sancte virgines; Domino nostro vitam reddamus et sacrificium laudis in corde contrito hostiam iubilationis immolemus.*" "You holy virgins, all are my joy and the crown of my head. Let us return life to our Lord and let us immolate the sacrifice of joy, the offering of jubilation, with a contrite heart."

the persecution begins, she will send them pure and untainted to their heavenly spouse.⁹⁶ In the passage which follows, Basilissa's instructions on self-reflection and reconciliation refine upon the nature of true virginity, as she repeatedly reminds the community to consider the condition and purity of their souls.⁹⁷ She commands them to forgive whatever they have against one another so that they might receive the perfect crown of their souls and bodies, having eradicated from their hearts all "ferment of malice" and offered themselves as sacrifices to one another. With a final warning not to trust in physical purity alone, since "virginity of the flesh avails nothing where wrath of heart resides," Basilissa's exhortations draw to a close.⁹⁸

At the conclusion of her speech, a vision appears before the whole community, shaking the place as a column of heavenly light descends over them.⁹⁹ Like the column of light which led the Israelites out of the land of Egypt and their servitude to a foreign enemy, this heavenly beam is the precursor of these exiles' departure from a sinful land. The sign of the Cross shining forth from the column leaves no doubt that Christ himself leads Basilissa's nuns from this life to the next.¹⁰⁰ Having extended its invitation to the nuns that they come to the heavenly rewards prepared for them, the vision reascends to heaven, and Basilissa makes her last speech to the community.¹⁰¹ Exulting that Christ has "conquered carnal battles," Basilissa celebrates the spiritual victory brought about by the chaste life:

I scoff at you, o devil, because you were able by no arts, by no stratagems, to detain those seeking perfect things. You rejoice alone in your own punishment. For you see the plunder snatched from your teeth ascend to the kingdoms of the heavens, whence you fell. Rejoice with me, because the kingdom of virtues reigns in us. Contempt for the world has received the kingdom of heaven; the renunciation of parents has purchased the companionship of angels; a little tribulation for a period of time has earned joy eternal. And thus humility is like the Cedars of Lebanon and the cypresses on the mountains of Hermon.

⁹⁶ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. b, ll. 19-22. "*Hanc enim optinuimus a Domino petitionem ut omnes vos ante persecutionem inimici immaculatas promittam ad regna cælorum, ubi est sponsus castitatis Dominus Iesus Christus.*" "For we possess this petition from the Lord, that before the persecution of the enemy, I may send you all forth immaculate to the kingdom of heaven where the spouse of chastity, the Lord Jesus Christ is."

⁹⁷ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. b, ll. 23-28. "*Pro qua re hortor vos, sancte sorores, ne quid malitiæ fermentum <in corde> remaneat; sed omnes donate vobis invicem, si habet adversus aliam aliquid, ut perfectam coronam animæ et corporis nostri recipiatis.*" "For this reason, I exhort you, holy sisters, lest some ferment of malice remain in your heart. Rather everyone forgive each other, if one has anything against another, so that you may receive the perfect crown of our soul and body." <in corde> = MS *cordis*.

⁹⁸ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. b, ll. 30-31. "*Nihil valet virginitas carnis ubi habitat iracundia cordis.*"

⁹⁹ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. b, ll. 33-34.

¹⁰⁰ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. b, l. 37.

¹⁰¹ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79r, col. b, ll. 41-43.

With desire conquered, chastity alone is fruitfulness.¹⁰²

Basilissa's song of victory contains a distinctly monastic flavor. Through the community's contempt of the world with its false joys and transitory ties, and through the fruitfulness of their chastity, they have vanquished the devil. To them belongs the companionship of angels now that the passing tribulations of this world have purchased for them eternal bliss.

After this hymn of victory, Basilissa's nuns die *en masse*, swiftly and without any other explanation than "they all went to the Lord."¹⁰³ Yet Basilissa's authority over and responsibility for her nuns does not end with their entrance into heaven, for after their death, a multitude of virgins appear to Basilissa in a vision to foretell her approaching death, so that she might present them to Christ.¹⁰⁴ Having apprised Julian of these good tidings, and given thanks, Basilissa too passes on to the eternal kingdom, with all the Lord's promises to her accomplished.

This is a long description of passages which are essentially absent from the Old English, but their absence from Ælfric's text is important and illuminating. The Old English description of Basilissa's vision and the death of the female community is startlingly brief in comparison with the Latin versions found in either the CCL or ASS. Once again, although it is possible that this passage was absent from Ælfric's exemplar, this possibility is very unlikely, since it is represented in various Latin redactions. By the example of his practice in other saints' passions, as well as by his own admission in the preface to the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric abbreviates unapologetically when he sees fit.¹⁰⁵ Further, the concerns which predominate in Basilissa's addresses to her nuns do not resemble those upon which Ælfric concentrates in his translation. Like the Latin, the Old English depicts the promise and fulfillment of Basilissa's prayers, with the Lord appearing to assure the saint that neither she nor her virgins will suffer in the coming persecution, nor *beon gewemmede*

¹⁰² Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79v, col. a, ll. 8-25. "...pugnas carnales vicisti.... Insulto tibi diabole quia perfecta querentes, nullis artibus nullis machinis, valuisti retinere. Tu solus tua poena letare. Vides enim prædam de tuis dentibus ereptam ad cælorum regna ascendere unde tu cecidisti. Gaudete mecum quia regnant in nobis regna virtutum; contemptus mundi regna cælorum accepit. Renunciatio parentum consortium sumsit angelorum. Parva temporis tribulatio æternam meruit letitiam. Et humilitas sicut cedrus libani et sicut cypressus in montibus hermon. Devicta libidine castitas fecunditas sola est."

¹⁰³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79v, col. a, ll. 27-29. "Ita divina providentia adimplevit, ut intra tempus promissum omnes migrarent ad Dominum."

¹⁰⁴ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79v, col. a, ll. 36-37. "Ecce expectamus te, ut tu nos offeras Christo." "Behold, we are waiting for you, so that you may offer as to Christ."

¹⁰⁵ Ælfric, "Præfatio," 4.25-29. "Hoc sciendum etiam quod prolixiores passiones breviamus verbis, non adeo sensu, ne fastidiosis ingeratur tedium si tanta prolixitas erit in propria lingua quanta est latina; et non semper brevitatis sermonem deturpat sed multotiens honestiorem reddit." "It is to be further noted that I abridge the longer narratives of the Passions, not as regards the sense but in the language, in order that no tediousness may be inflicted on the fastidious, as might be the case if as much prolixity were used in our own language as occurs in the Latin; and we know that brevity does not always deprave speech but oftentimes makes it more charming."

þurh ða wodan ehteras.¹⁰⁶ But if Ælfric's exemplar resembled the CCL, these divine promises of protection from persecution and from pollution, and the succinct announcement that *Hit wearð þa gefylled* were the only details that he considered essential to record.¹⁰⁷

The changes surveyed above might, at first glance, appear to indicate a drastic reduction of Basilissa's character. The heavy abbreviation of this part of the Latin original appears to "rob" the female saint of any centrality in the developing narrative, and to consign her to the margins of her own *passio*. Such a reading not only overstates the case, it also fails to account for Ælfric's purpose in translating these and other comparable lives. One has only to consider St Cecilia's various hortatory monologues to see that within the context of the married-virgin saints' lives, Ælfric has no qualms about letting "the wife" speak. Cecilia's speeches, however, differ fundamentally from those of Basilissa in the CCL. Whereas Cecilia's speeches focus upon catechismal issues,¹⁰⁸ and doctrinal content which would be highly suitable for the edification of lay persons such as Æthelweard and Æthelmær to whom Ælfric dedicates the *Lives of Saints*,¹⁰⁹ the nature of Basilissa's exhortations reflects the concerns of her monastic audience, concerns which would be less relevant for a lay audience. Speaking with all the authority of an abbess who commands the obedience of her nuns, Basilissa calls her community to reconciliation. Her instructions that the nuns offer themselves as sacrifices to one another, and purge themselves of *iracundia cordis*, or 'wrath of heart,' together with her insistence upon the necessity of spiritual as well as bodily virginity, even the authoritative tone with which she addresses the community, all these recall forcibly the virtues of obedience and humility that are so essential to a cloistered community. While practices like repentance and reconciliation are hardly confined to the monastery, one need only turn to the discussion of good works in Chapter 4 of the Benedictine Rule to find a list of commands which bears a striking resemblance to Basilissa's injunctions in CCL:

Do not gratify the desires of the flesh. Hate self-will. Obey the abbess in all commands.... Daily fulfill the commands of God in deeds. Love chastity. Hate no one. Do not be jealous or envious. Do not love contentiousness. Flee exaltation and boasting. honour the elders. Love the younger ones. In the love of Christ pray for your enemies. Before the setting of the sun make peace with those with whom you have argued. And never lose

¹⁰⁶ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 93-95. "... be polluted by the mad persecutors."

¹⁰⁷ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 96. "It was the fulfilled...."

¹⁰⁸ Cf. ÆLS (Cecilia) 157-170. In this passage Cecilia instructs her brother-in-law on the right nature and worship of the Trinity. See Chapter 4, p. 178.

¹⁰⁹ ÆLS (Pref) 35-41. The question of Ælfric's audience will be treated more fully in the Conclusion.

hope in the mercy of God.¹¹⁰

Such exhortations clearly would have been appropriate in a version of Julian and Basilissa's *passio* intended for a monastic community and such would have been Ælfric's exemplar, because, as he records in the Old English Preface to *Lives of Saints*, he translated the *vita* and *passiones* from the monastic *sanctorale*.¹¹¹ Whatever the specific origins of his exemplar, Ælfric translates these narratives for the laity,¹¹² and there is a fundamental distinction to be made between the inclusion of God's promises to deliver the female community from *gewemmede* (ll. 92-95), and the exclusion of Basilissa's speeches. Despite the fact that chastity is a fundamental monastic practice and virtue, and that preservation from pollution would be vital to a community of nuns, reference to the deliverance of the nuns' sexual purity must be included in the Old English. This is not so much because it refers back to the original importance of virginity with reference to Julian and Basilissa's consecration to God's love and service, as it is because the protection of their chastity provides the essential proof of God's intervention on behalf of his female servants in response to Basilissa's prayers. Because Basilissa dies without any testing of her faith, the power of her prayers instead provides the necessary verification of her sanctity. Unlike the record of deliverance, the focus of Basilissa's speech in the Latin with its monastic tenor, is ultimately tangential to the Old English text, and Ælfric rarely indulges in tangents. This editorial decision resembles Ælfric's change to the description of Julian and Basilissa's original gathering of their communities. In his translation Ælfric describes only how Julian and Basilissa gather their communities for daily instruction in God's teachings, whereas the CCL celebrates the many virtues of the monastic life, describing at length the lives from which the two saints called their followers. In these instances Ælfric's abbreviating practice effectively diminishes the monastic focus found in CCL. He does not shy away from what is "regular" in the monastic life, but rather what might be described as particularly ascetic and celebratory of monastic seclusion.

Moreover, Ælfric edits one of Julian's speeches to his monks in much the same way that he

¹¹⁰ "IV. Que sunt instrumenta bonorum operum," *Die Winteney-Version der Regula S. Benedicti*, ed. Arnold Schröer (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1978) 24-25. "*Desideria carnis non perficere; voluntatem propriam odire; preceptis abbatissae in omnibus obedire.... precepta Dei factis cotidie adimplere; castitatem amare; nullum hodie; zelum et invidiam non habere; contentionem non amare; elationem et iactantiam fugere; seniores venerari; iuniores diligere; in Christi amore pro inimicis orare; cum discordantibus ante solis occasum in pacem redire. -- Et de Dei misericordia numquam desperare.*"

¹¹¹ ÆLS (Pref) 41-45.

¹¹² Michael Lapidge ("Ælfric's *Sanctorale*" 120-22) specifically comments upon Ælfric's omission of feasts which would have been important to Benedictine houses, like the Translation of St Benedict, and the exclusion of saints like Æthelwold and others celebrated at Winchester. Perhaps the fact that "Ælfric's *sanctorale* departs radically from Winchester use" (122) ties into this excision of monastic oration by Basilissa, so that the two excisions are but sides of the same coin, reflecting Ælfric's overriding concern for a *lay* audience.

edits Basilissa's exhortations. In this passage the CCL records that Julian and his community flourished in the Lord and in harmony, so that virtues abounded, and wrath was absent. Humility was the order of the day, and the brothers, bound together by love, brought joy to their father Julian through their zeal.¹¹³ Here again, we see a focus upon cenobitic-communal virtues and relations, all of which is absent from the Old English. As with his exclusion of Basilissa's second speech to her nuns, or as with his inserted reference to the commitment to learning within the monasteries, Ælfric refines the narrative according to his own didactic purposes. He translates only that Julian prepared the brothers for the coming tribulations rather than dwelling upon the "interior" life and discipline of the community (ll. 102-3). The absence of Basilissa's speeches and participation in the narrative must then be interpreted in light of their relative importance to the *passio*'s progress, and not as reflections upon the importance of her sanctity or role. In these instances where the Old English contains considerably shorter versions of, or no reference at all to, passages found in CCL, we find a consistently monastic aspect, an aspect which plays a minimal role in Ælfric's translation.

The second two-thirds, indeed the heart, of the *passio*, belongs to Julian, whose sufferings, imprisonment and thaumaturgy bring about the conversion of others and manifest the power of God among the unbelieving. Yet this *passio* cannot be read as divided hierarchically upon gender lines between the male and female saints. Rather, this disparity reflects the distinction between primary and secondary saints, as we shall see again in the next chapter. Basilissa was promised by God that she would not suffer and that she and her nuns would remain undefiled. The fulfillment of those promises is essential for the record of God's faithfulness to his servant, and this faithfulness in turn verifies the saint's sanctity. That is the central issue. The rest of the details concerning Basilissa present in the CCL are, in this light, relatively peripheral, and those passages which reflect more wholly monastic concerns have less relevance for Ælfric's translation. With Basilissa's departure *on mægðhade*, God's promises to her have been fulfilled, and the focus of the narrative now refines upon Julian who waits to receive the fulfillment of the promises made to him.¹¹⁴

III. Conclusion

In Ælfric's *Passion of St Julian and his Wife Basilissa*, the importance of virginity lies not in the desperate flight from sexual pollution, but in the fact that the physical reality of virginity,

¹¹³ Cotton Nero E.i., pt. 1, 79v, col. b, ll. 2-9.

¹¹⁴ ÆLS (Julian and Basilissa) 100. "...in virginity."

albeit temporal and fragile, functions as a sign of things eternal and of the saints' otherworldliness. Peter Brown observed that the virgin occupies a "middle ground [that] is abnormal, non-natural, holy."¹¹⁵ The ideal of consecrated virginity depends upon this 'abnormality' and this middle plane is clearly in evidence in the life of Julian and Basilissa, as, for example, when the two saints receive visits from Christ, the Virgin Mary, and a heavenly host. Julian's prayers are always answered by God's miraculous provision, be it a priest to baptize other prisoners, the divine destruction of pagan idols, or the resurrection of a dead man. Probably the most potent image of this "middle plane" is found in the young Celsus' vision of the angels accompanying Julian to his torments (ll. 187-88). For a brief moment, mortal eyes are opened to see the celestial realm wherein Julian already dwells. The saints' mortal feet may be planted on the earth, but they tread a path that leads resolutely toward heaven.

In the end, this value of eternity invested in the sign of virginity together with Ælfric's elimination of those elements which, in the CCL, blur the line between holy virginity and monastic-asceticism effectively reduces the weight of distinction between male and female virginity in the *passio*. The presentation of separate figures of virginity for each spouse, Jesus for Julian and Mary for Basilissa, can be found in the Latin and so cannot be interpreted as Ælfric's own conviction that men and women have specific models of holiness, except to the extent that he sees fit to preserve this distinction in his translation. The Old English *passio*'s treatment of Apocalypse 14:4, on the contrary, with its careful adaptation of certain promises in a manner which maintains the separation of the two sexes, may well be Ælfric's own. His practice of gender parity seen throughout the *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* discussed in Chapter 2, accounts in part for Ælfric's distribution of the promises of eternal blessings between Julian and Basilissa. And yet, rhetorical gesture does not sufficiently explain why this distribution of rewards entails the partitioning of the virginal life for men and women, even in heaven where, presumably, the angelic life of virginity receives its fulfillment and there is no longer male or female. There is, then, an irreconcilable inconsistency between the prophesied segregation (Julian will dwell among the virgins undefiled by women, and Basilissa will follow the Virgin Mary) and Julian's original promise to Basilissa that if she joined him in the virginal life, they would never be separated for all eternity.

Perhaps such a tension is inevitable in a *passio* which separates such a singularly corporeal and sexual virtue as virginity from the physical. Clearly the greater relative importance of female

¹¹⁵ Peter Brown, "The Notion of Virginity in the Early Church," *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, eds. Bernard McGinn, John Meyendorff and Jean Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1985) 432.

versus male virginity does not concern Ælfric in this *passio* as it did in the *Nativitas* homily, where his treatment of lapsed virgins illustrates the importance of intactness to women. In the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, virginity's significance has less to do with sexual purity than one would expect. Virginity underlines the narrative as a whole, not merely the opening passages where Julian sets about converting his new bride to a life of perpetual chastity. By eliminating the Latin's elaborate discussions of later converts' repudiation of secular ties, Ælfric preserves virginity as the primary signifier of the eternal choice between realms. Virginity need not be continually under discussion in order to serve this purpose, as the resurrected man's acclamation reveals. Furthermore, Ælfric's *Passion of St Julian and his Wife Basilissa* illustrates that virginity's importance cannot be consigned merely to the realm of the female virgin saints. The lives of married-virgin saints demonstrate that the choice to preserve one's virginity reflects a repudiation of the carnal nature and mundane world which applies to men and women alike. The power of *clæne mægðhad* works through virginal husbands and wives to destabilize the illusionary authority of this world, and to hold out a paradigm where the eternal continually subverts the worldly, and the miraculous, the expected.

Chapter 4

*"I did not think Thou couldst have spoke so well; ne'er dream'd thou couldst.
Had I brought hither a corrupted mind, Thy speech had alter'd it."*

William Shakespeare¹

In her study of virginity as a metaphor in Late Antiquity, Averil Cameron writes that in a time of doctrinal ferment and theological debate, virginity was associated with "paradoxes at the heart of Christianity."² She proposes that virginity's relationship to such mysteries as the incarnation of divinity and the miracle of the Virgin birth, as well as its own reputation as the path to virtue through the denial of human nature, saves the promotion of virginity from devolving into repressive discourse on women's sexuality, into "mere misogyny."³ If the married-virgin saints' *passiones* illustrate anything, it is that the ideal of virginity does not apply only to women and female saints. The united pursuit of virginity in Ælfric's translations of these narratives undermines any implicit equating of virginity with misogyny. He sets forth male and female saints side-by-side in spotless purity as types of Christ and his perpetually virginal mother, as well as prophetic figures of the resurrection life that lies before all Christians. Virginity snatches up saints of both sexes from the mundane, suspending them between earth and heaven, citizens of the former by birth, and of the latter by virtue of their untainted chastity.

Virginity's role as paradigmatic signifier of the eternal for both the male and female saints in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa represents one facet of the idealized sign of virginity, but does not fully account for the significance given to virginity in Ælfric's other two *passiones* of married-virgin saints. The extremely minor role given to the physical body in Julian and Basilissa's *passio* reflects a figurative 'disembodiment' of virginity, in that consecrated purity ultimately pertains far more to virginity's role as a signifier of eternity than a concern for physical purity. Yet the interweaving of spiritual meaning, individual commitment, and saintly consecration in the sign of virginity need not always effect so tidy or complete an erasure of the physical body. The *Passion of Chrysanthus and His Wife Daria* and the *Passion of Cecilia* appear to contain two different constructions of the ideal of virginity. In the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria, a vivid characterization of sexual dangers offers a specific rationale for the importance of virginity. The portrayal of sexuality in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria constructs a formula pitting virginity

¹ William Shakespeare, *Pericles, The Arden Edition of the Works of William Shakespeare*, ed. F.D. Hæmiger, general eds. Harold Brooks and Harold Jenkins (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1963) 4.6.100-12.

² Averil Cameron, "Virginity As Metaphor: Women and the Rhetoric of Early Christianity," *History As Text: the Writing of Ancient History*, ed. Averil Cameron (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., 1989) 190.

³ Cameron 190. On women's metaphorical status, see Cameron 189.

as the security and preserver of Christian faith against marriage, sexuality, and apostasy. In the *passio* of Cecilia, on the other hand, the focused attention on the body seen in Chrysanthus and Daria's narrative recedes before a celebration of the charisms accompanying the virginal life. While Chrysanthus and Daria's *passio* illustrates the strife that "inevitably" results from confrontation between reasonable, rational, chaste Christians and unnatural, irrational, and sexually-motivated pagans, Cecilia's *passio* lifts the readers' eyes to gaze upon the world that opens before the virgin, a plane between heaven and earth. The tension between the physical reality of the virginal body and the virgin's heavenly orientation receives surprisingly little attention before the narrative moves on to celebrate the descent of the eternal into the mundane.

Although these two *passiones* focus upon different facets of the virginal life, the one upon the conflict between the virgin and the world (a conflict which finds its most powerful expression in the enmity between the saint committed to virginity and sexually predatory pagans), and the other upon the *vita angelica*, the apparent differences in motif and foci can be resolved by interpreting virginity sacramentally. By this I do not intend to suggest that Ælfric proposes virginity as a sacrament per se. Far from it: Ælfric recognizes as sacraments only those *gastlice gerynu* 'spiritual mysteries' necessary for salvation, namely baptism, Eucharist, and penance.⁴ I define as "sacramental" that which depends upon a holy, existential gap between sign and effect to which Augustine refers (in a sermon quoted by Ælfric) when he writes that those things "are called sacraments because one thing is seen in them, [and] another thing understood. What is seen has bodily form; what is understood has spiritual fruit."⁵ Despite the fact that Ælfric would not have employed this terminology with reference to virgins, its application is not unprecedented in the treatment of virginity. The sacramental implications of virginity were discussed in the first chapter of this study, when, for example, Ambrose explicitly compares the virgin to the Eucharist laid out

⁴ In his study of the sacraments in Ælfric's work, J. R. Dunn records that although Ælfric on a few occasions refers to a larger configuration of sacraments he primarily refers to these three which he considers necessary for salvation. (Johnie Ronald Dunn, "An Index and Analysis of Major Themes in Ælfric's Homilies: the Trinity, the Sacraments, Eschatology, Heresy," [Diss. University of Colorado, 1976] 93-94.) Dunn cites Ælfric's reference to six sacraments in ÆCHom I, 4 210.109-13.) Regarding the three true sacraments, Ælfric writes: "*Þreo healice ðing gesette God mannum to clænsunge. An is fulluht, oðer is huselhalgung, þridde is dædbot mid geswicennysse yfelra dæda and mid bigencge godra weorca. þæt fulluht us aþwehð fram eallum synnum. Se huselgang us gehalgað. Seo soðe dædbot gehæloð ure misdæda.*" "God established three profound things as purifying for men. The first is baptism, the second is the Eucharist, the third is penance with repentance of evil deeds and the cultivation of good works. Baptism cleanses us from all sins; the Eucharist sanctifies us; true repentance cures our sin." (ÆCHom II, 3 26.228-32.)

⁵ Augustine, "Sermo 272," *Augustini Opera Omnia*, vol. 5 (PL 38-39) 1247.2-5. "*Ista, fratres, ideo dicuntur Sacramenta, quia in eis aliud videtur, aliud intelligitur. Quod videtur, speciem habet corporalem, quod intelligitur, fructum habet spiritualement.*"

on the altar.⁶ The notion of the sacramental resonates through the imagery used for virgins, as in Jerome's application of the typology of the Holy of Holies and of sacrifice to explain the privilege and importance of virginity.⁷ For Chrysanthus and Daria fighting for the purity of their bodies, as for Cecilia and her husband Valerian enjoying the exalted angelic life, virginity functions as the "outward physical sign" that makes visible (so to speak) in their earthly bodies the heavenly and unseen work of the Spirit. For this reason, although these narratives appear to repudiate the physical bodies on one level by rejecting the sexual nature of the body, and again by denying those bodies any power over their spirits, the physical bodies of the virgin saints are never dismissed as gratuitous incommunities. A sacramental reading of virginity allows us to approach the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints and reconcile the various facets of virginity without resorting to an interpretation of the virginal life which disqualifies all but the pursuit of virginity, or one which requires an unqualified repudiation of the physical body.

Nowhere are virginity's claims to superiority more clearly seen than in the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints, where the desire for virginal purity displaces all the claims and rights of marriage. Rather than overt comparisons between marriage and virginity, these narratives generally assert the precedence of virginity *implicitly* through the usurpation of the honour and privileges of marriage on its own territory. Such is the case in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, and again in the *passio* of Cecilia. This, however, is patently not the case in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria to which we turn in the first half of this chapter. Here, the opening representation of marriage as a tool for subverting a Christian's faith provides an *explicit*, practical justification for virginity's superiority. The attacks upon Chrysanthus and Daria's virginity by those who oppose the saints' faith call attention to virginity's role as signifier of the commitment to Christianity. From the very beginning of the *passio*, with the attempts of Chrysanthus' unsympathetic father to undermine his son's faith by forcing him into marriage, the conflict between sexual abstinence and sexual activity is portrayed in such a way that it emphasizes virginity's signification of faith and conversion as much as it does virginity's superiority over marriage.

The second half of this chapter deals with the *passio* of Cecilia, in which attacks upon the virginal body play little role in the unfolding conflicts of faith. Despite the relative lack of interest in virginal sexuality, it is Cecilia's highly catechetical *passio* that offers a means for reinterpreting

⁶ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 41.18 - 42.2. (Chapter 1, p. 44, fn.120); AMBR.Virg.Marc. 33.9-10. (p. 48, fn. 131).

⁷ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 267.37-39. (Chapter 1, p. 45, fn. 122); HIER.Adv.Iovin. 239.16-19. (p. 49, fn. 133)

the idealization and significance of virginity in a manner that transcends concern for an implicit conflict between the life of the body and the pursuit of faith. In the *passio* of Cecilia, the surprising use of the traditional imagery of the virgin saints and their rewards (crowns, roses, and lilies) to denote figuratively the Eucharist pushes the sacramental value of virginity to the forefront.

As with the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, I refer to the Latin versions of these *passiones* found in the Cotton-Corpus Legendary as a means of assessing Ælfric's concerns and adaptation in translating these legends.⁸ For both *passiones* I have used the Corpus Christi College manuscript as the basis of my comparisons.

I. Virginity as a Paradigmatic Signifier in Ælfric's *Passio Chrisanti et Dariae Sponse Eius*

Of Ælfric's three married-virgin saints' narratives, his *Passio Chrisanti et Dariae Sponse Eius*, provides the most vivid representation of a fundamental incompatibility between faith and sexuality. The *passio* presents virginity as the signifier not only of faith, but of reason and rationality as well. When the saints come under attack, they must defend their faith and virginity together as one thing against irrational sexuality and unnatural behavior. Three themes in the *passio* illustrate this opposition between virginity, faith, reason, and the natural on the one hand, and sexuality, irrationality, and unnaturalness on the other. The first of these concerns the nature and depiction of marriage in the *passio*. The second focuses upon the characterization of sexualized

⁸ For the manuscript information concerning these two *passiones*, see Chapter 3, p. 132, fn. 15. In his "La passion de Chrysanthé et Daria a-t-elle été rédigée en Grec ou en Latin?" Jacques Noret discusses the relationship between the Greek and Latin versions of the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria (AB 90 [1972]: 109-17). He takes up the hypothesis of earlier scholars, Bossue and Floss, that the Greek text was the original (109). Before any such statement can be made definitively, Noret argues that critical editions of both the Greek and Latin must be on hand, but as a step towards resolution Noret examines several Latin and Greek MSS, eventually coming to the conclusion that the Latin was most likely the original version of this *passio*. The Hereford Cathedral manuscript, P.7.VI, related to the Cotton-Corpus family of manuscripts, is among those consulted by Noret.

Noret identifies various problems for the comparison of the Greek and Latin traditions of the narrative, the first being the vague identification of manuscripts in earlier studies, and the multiple errors found in editions of the Greek such as the *Acta Sanctorum* (110). Beside such source difficulties, Noret cites the increasing freedom of the translator, whether working from Latin to Greek or Greek to Latin, as the translation proceeds, and the inconsistent presence of a prologue (see 111-14 for discussion). Noret is not alone in his hypothesis that the Latin version provides the source for the Greek; he refers to scholars such as Albert Siegmund and Hippolyte Delehaye who similarly propose that the original *passio* was translated from Latin into Greek (114-15). Noret specifically cites Siegmund's citation of allusions in the *passio* to Ovid, Martial, and Pliny, with a regretful note that Siegmund does not specify the passages. (*Die Überlieferung der griechischen christlichen Literatur in der lateinischen Kirche bis zum zwölften Jahrhundert* [Munich, 1949] 198.) The reference in Delehaye is to his study on the saints of November and December (Delehaye, *Étude sur le légendier romain* 169). Regarding the presence of classical allusions in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria, É. de Strycker notes a Virgilian reference in the Latin *passio* (*Aeneid* book I, 26-27, corresponding to CCCC 9, p. 384, ll. 5-8). ("Une Citation de Virgile dans le passion de Chrysanthé et Daria," AB 90 [1972]: 336.)

For the relationship between the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria and the *passio* of the African monk Maurus, see John M. McCulloh, "The <*passio* Maruii Afrii> and Hrabanus Maurus' Martyrology," AB 91 (1973): 391-413.

persons in the narrative, specifically Chrysanthus' temptresses, and then Daria herself. The third theme concerns the representation of "unnaturalness" as one of the definitive features of paganism, exemplified by the licentious sexual behavior encouraged by Chrysanthus' father and the Roman gods to whom his father wishes him to return. "Natural" here must be understood clearly as an ethical, moral opposition to what is "unnatural," wherein the right order of human or divine relations is violated by such things as parental cruelty, incest, or rape. This aspect of unnaturalness refines the opposition between sexuality and virginity by engaging the notion of "reason" in the choice of moral purity.

We turn first to the depiction of marriage as a reflection of the antagonism between sexuality and faith. The *passio* begins with the young Chrysanthus's conversion, after which he takes up the task of preaching the gospel so zealously that his father Polemius fears for his own good position and fortune. Wasting no time in gentle remonstrations, Polemius unceremoniously tosses his son into prison in a futile attempt to break the young man's will. Polemius' relatives, however, are wiser, and counsel him that ease and luxury will loosen Chrysanthus from Christ as incarceration and semi-starvation will not. Marriage not trial, they admonish him, presents the greater threat to Christians:

"Gif þu wille þinne sunu geweman fram Criste
þonne most þu him olæcan and eft-mettas beodan
and do þæt he wifige þonne wile he forgitan
siððan he wer bið þæt he wæs cristen.
Þas geswencednyssa and þas sweartan þeostra
þe þu him dest to wite awendaþ þa cristenan
him sylfum to wuldra na to witnunge."⁹

These lines clearly set forth that lawful marriage, not illicit sexual relations, will undermine the Christian's commitment. The Christian who would remain implacable in the face of suffering will presumably become malleable to secular values and concerns under the anesthesia of physical ease, as marital life gently and insidiously muffles the call of faith. Marriage, in the eyes of Chrysanthus' family, constitutes the ultimate guerrilla warfare against the Christian life.

Polemius' attempts to act upon this advice raise the second theme, the characterization of sexualized persons in the *passio*. Although his relatives commend marriage as the most effective form of attack, Polemius fills the bower with maidens, perhaps thinking that if one legitimate wife

⁹ AELS (Chrysanthus) 40-46. "'If you want to entice your son from Christ, then you must flatter him and offer him delicacies, and make him marry; then he will forget, after he is a husband, that he was a Christian. These afflictions and this gloomy darkness, which you give him for punishment, Christians turn to their glory and not to punishment.'"

is good, then five frolicking virgins will be even better. Whatever the reason, Chrysanthus finds himself confronting not legitimate marriage, but sexual dalliance and promiscuity, and the odds are not in his favor. Standing resolute before all temptations, Chrysanthus rejects the rich food and drink and shuns the maidens *swa swa man dep næddran* 'just as a man does serpents' (l. 58).

Ælfric leaves nothing ambiguous in his portrait of sexual temptation here, comparing the *wlitige and rance* 'beautiful and proud' maidens to serpents (l. 52). They shine with beauty that is perfidiously skin-deep as they attempt *mid heora wodlican plegan* 'with their foolish sport' to draw the youth into sin (l. 53, again l. 65). The comparison of the maidens to serpents here recalls the image of the serpent in the garden of Eden who beguiled Eve, and establishes a deliberate association between sexuality and ancient, deceitful sin. The bower-maidens stand in the role of the serpent and their sexuality is the tempting "fruit" of sin. In his abhorrence of these women, Chrysanthus does not merely reject soft persuasion or sweet temptation, but death itself. To dally with sexual sin would be to reenact the consequences of the Fall.

This passage in the Old English contains much that can be interpreted as deeply suspicious of human sexuality, if not specifically misogynistic, and in the Latin version this is indeed a justifiable charge.¹⁰ Ælfric's description of the youth spurning the women as if they were snakes, lying in prayer and refusing their kisses, and Chrysanthus' comparison of himself to Joseph (whose chastity was also imperiled by a rapacious female), and his prayer that the Lord protect his *clænnēs* all derive from the Latin (ll. 58-61). But a comparison between the Old English and Latin

¹⁰ CCCC MS 9, p. 381, col. a, ll. 11-30, col. b, ll. 11-14, 30 - p.382, col. a, l. 2. "Agitur inter hæc ludibria, vir Dei immobilis animo et dilicias quasi stercora contemnebat. Puellas autem virgines quasi viperas perhorrebat. Iacebat autem in oratione immobilis, et amplexus earum et oscula quasi sagittarum ictus, scuto suæ fidei excipiens clamabat ad Dominum dicens, "Exsurge, Domine, in adiutorium mihi. Dic animæ meæ, 'Salus tua ego sum.' Quis enim istam pugnam a diabolo excitatam vincere prevalet, nisi tua pro eo fuerit dextera dimicata? Errat qui se putat castitatem perfectam suis nisibus obtinere. Nisi enim tuo imbre flammæ fuerint corporales extinctæ, non potest animus pergere quo pergit. Libido enim est bestia maligna, que in silva huius sæculi ad devorandas animas per carnem et diabolum incitatur....Libido erat bestia maligna per quam contra eum [Iosephem] diabolus et mulier luctabantur....Et ego, Domine, te confiteor et a te consilium contra istas ut feras deprecor, ut sicut serpentes obdormiscunt ad vocem incantantis, ita et iste obdormiscant in conspectu meo, et nullum in me libidinis excitent bellum, quia te dididci verum Deum qui in hominibus in te credentibus operaris virtutem quæ penitus vinci non possit." "It happened that amid this sport, the man of God was unmoved in mind and spurned the delicacies like dung. Moreover, he was as thoroughly horrified at the virginal maidens as at vipers. He lay immovable in prayer, and withstanding by the shield of faith their embraces and kisses like the wounds of arrows, he called to the Lord, saying, 'Rise, O Lord, to my aid. Say to my soul, "I am your salvation." For who can win that fight brought forth by the devil, except your right hand will have fought for him? He errs who thinks that he can obtain perfect chastity by his own efforts. For except bodily flames will have been extinguished by your rain-showers, the spirit cannot continue in the way it goes. For desire is an evil beast that is roused in the forest of this world through the flesh and the devil for the purpose of devouring souls.... Desire was an evil beast through which the devil and a woman wrestled against [Joseph].... I, O Lord, confess you and I entreat aid from you against these women, as against wild animals. Just as serpents fall asleep at the voice of the singer, thus may these fall asleep in my sight and arouse no war of desire in me, because I have learned that you are the true God who produces in men believing in you a power which cannot be utterly conquered."

versions reveals that Ælfric has actually translated this passage with great restraint. The Old English version lacks Chrysanthus' vituperative tirade against sexual desire as an evil beast (*libido bestia maligna est*)¹¹ and the Latin's references to the perilous state of chastity unless God himself champions the virgin. The passage is operatic in its range of metaphor and passionate expression. The saint denounces sexual desire as a ravenous beast through which the devil and women together seek to corrupt the Christian. He then attributes to the bower-maidens (indeed, to women in general) a role on par with that of the devil in seeking to ruin him through *libido*. The phrase *bestia maligna* recurs variously in the passage, denoting in one instance sexual desire incited by the flesh, in another the devil and women, and elsewhere the wild beast which Joseph's father believed had seized his son.¹² Together these various reiterations weave a portrait of the chaste Christian as beset on all sides, with the Lord as his only salvation from foul and vicious torments. With its lengthy harangue, the Latin text lays the burden of temptation and sin upon the bower-maidens in a manner which heavily underscores the associations between the ancient serpent and women, sexual relations and the fall from grace. In the face of such temptation, offered by serpent-like women, the chaste Chrysanthus stands like a second Adam pleading for his eternal life. For his part, although Ælfric retains the reference to the women as serpents together with the saint's petition for the protection of his chastity, the Old English contains no equivalent recital of the horrors of *galnes* or the twin terrors of the devil and women. This is not to say that women get off without incriminating ties to temptation and debauchery. Rather, Ælfric simply omits the thoroughgoing condemnation found in the Latin.

By excising the Latin's general attack upon women and desire as the inevitable destruction of the Christian man (unless God delivers him), Ælfric ironically ties virginity to the life of faith more closely by making it an indicator of Christian conversion. For this reason, although the relatives' advice to Polemius posits marriage (rather than simply uncontrolled sexual desire or sexual acts outside the confines of lawful marital union) as the great threat to the Christian life, I would argue that this proposed opposition between virginity and marriage reflects virginity's role as a signifier of the saint's initiation into the Christian life rather than a Hieronomian misogamy.

¹¹ "The likening of lust to an evil beast brings to mind Plato's famous image of the dark horse, symbolizing the unruly nature of sexual desire, in the *Phædrus* (see esp. 253d-254e where the badness of this beast is graphically described). But the animal imagery occurs elsewhere in Plato. In *Republic* Book IX, appetites are pictured as a large many-headed beast: 'don't you think that licentiousness has long been condemned for just these reasons, namely, that because of it, that terrible, large, and multi-form beast is let loose more than it should be?' (590a) And at *Timæus* 91b: 'The male genitals are unruly and self-willed, like an animal that will not be subject to reason and, driven crazy by its desires, seeks to overpower everything else.'" Paul Gooch generously provided this information in exchange for a large, chartreuse martini.

¹² Gn. 38:33. CCCC, MS 9, p. 381, col. a, l. 26, 32-33, 33-34, col. b, l. 4, 11-12, 27.

This qualification does not alter the negative, highly sexual, portrayal of the bower maidens which promulgates a view of the spiritual life of faith and the uncontrolled, or promiscuous, sexual life of the body as incompatible. It does, however, moderate the negative connotations that might otherwise attach to the state of marriage.

With the entrance of Daria, the narrative moves to the second event that pertains to the characterization of sexualized persons. Daria's conversion and her consent to join Chrysanthus in chaste marriage simultaneously promote the connection between virginity and the life of faith, and strengthen the association between virginity and Christian initiation. Ælfric's depiction of Daria's sexuality in relationship to her conversion and her imprisonment in the brothel reflect not only upon the conflict between faith and the sexual, but also upon the indivisibility of reason, the rational and virginity.

The inseparability of faith and virginity seen in the temptation of Chrysanthus, and the correlative incompatibility of the sexual and spiritual epitomized by the bower-maidens, finds its clearest expression in the conversion of Daria, the virgin called in by Polemius to "persuade" Chrysanthus after the failure of the maidens. Polemius' intention in admitting Daria to the bower is exactly the same as when he sent in the bower-maidens. He designs to lure his son from Christianity by whatever means necessary. Daria's intention, however, differs somewhat from that of Chrysanthus' earlier temptresses. Where the other maidens hoped to draw the young man into sexual dalliance, Daria aims to lead Chrysanthus to the marriage altar and thus back to the gods, whether through intellectual disputation or through the forgetfulness of marriage. The narrative's progression reveals a chasm between Daria's intellectual, ultimately spiritual, nature and the *wodlic* carnality of the bower-maidens. The battle of wits in which Chrysanthus and Daria engage removes their interaction from the visceral, libido-driven realm of the flesh inhabited by Polemius and the maidens. On one level, Daria's conversion to Christianity with its concomitant commitment to the virginal life reinforces the fundamental oppositions between chastity and sexuality, spiritual life and death, reason and folly upon which the allusion to the sexual bower-maidens as serpents depends. In another light, the opposition between virginity and sexuality can be read as a figure of the conflict between the new Christian and the world which he or she has renounced, rather than as an actual reflection upon either virginity or sexuality.

After the Lord delivers Chrysanthus by casting a deep sleep upon the bower maidens, Polemius' counsellors warn that Chrysanthus has learned *drycraeft* 'sorcery' from the Christians,

and instruct Polemius that he *funde sum mæden/ on cræftum getogen þe cuþe him andwyrde*,¹³ and fight fire with fire, so to speak. Daria is the antithesis of her *bilewitan* ‘innocent’ predecessors. She is as well-educated as Chrysanthus, and a *wundorlice cræftig, æþelborenre mægðe*.¹⁴ Unlike the other women, Daria merits and receives honour and deference from the outset. Where Polemius threatened the bower-maidens that *hi sceoldon/ sylfe hit gebicgan gif hi ne bigdon his mod*,¹⁵ he instead requests Daria’s aid with respect, offering her his son’s hand in marriage, if she can change his mind (ll. 84-87).¹⁶

Her reception by Chrysanthus differs as much from his treatment of the *næddran* as did her treatment by his father. When Daria, who is *wlitig on wæstmæ* ‘fair in form’ as well as *on uðwitegunge snoter* ‘wise in philosophy’ enters in order to entice Chrysanthus back to the gods, he neither shuns nor fears her (l. 83). Though she enters *geglenged mid golde* ‘adorned with gold’ and *scinendum gymstanum* ‘shining gemstones’ (ll. 90-91), and shares the bower-maidens’ objective of drawing Chrysanthus away from Christ, an objective which he instantly recognizes, the youth acknowledges her with respect.¹⁷ Addressing her *mid clænum mode* ‘with a pure mind’ (l. 92), he offers her alternatives to the pagan worldview which she holds and the bridegroom to whom she aspires, and proposes a pattern of life that would unite her well-educated mind to her pure body:

“ac þu mihtest habban þone hælend to brydguman,
gif þu hine lufodest and heolde þe clænlice
on ungewemmedum mægðhade and þu wurde swa wlitig
wiþinnan on mode swa swa þu wiðutan eart.”¹⁸

Ironically, the very intellectual abilities through which Polemius trusts her to prevail where the other women had failed enable his son to receive her as something other than a sexual threat. Her knowledge and wisdom remove her from the solely carnal plane on which her predecessors functioned.

¹³ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 78-79. “...find some maiden educated in the arts who could answer him.”

¹⁴ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 77, 80, 81. “innocent,” “wonderfully skilled,” “of noble parentage.” It may perhaps be best to translate *bilewitan* as innocent or ignorant with respect to learning, since it is contrasted to Daria’s knowledge and wisdom. Thus it is the maidens’ simplicity rather than their purity which is at issue.

¹⁵ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 54-55. “...they themselves should pay for it, if they did not bend his mind.”

¹⁶ CCCC MS 9, p. 382, col. a, ll. 21- 22. The Latin here specifies that Daria is a servant of the goddess Vesta.

¹⁷ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 93-94. “*Swyðe þu geglengdest mid golde þe sylfe/þæt þu mid þinre wlite mine willan aidlige*.” “‘You have adorned yourself greatly with gold, so that with your beauty you might frustrate my will.’”

¹⁸ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 95-98. “‘... but you could have the Saviour as your bridegroom, if you would love Him, and keep yourself pure in undefiled virginity, and you would be as beautiful within, in your heart, as you are without.’”

Given the circumstances and reasons for Daria's visit to Chrysanthus, her response to the young man's offer, that she did not come *for galnysse* 'for wantonness,' appears slightly disingenuous (l. 99). When the Latin and Old English versions are compared, it becomes evident that Ælfric has sanitized the Latin's ambiguity concerning Daria's intentions.¹⁹ The CCL portrays Daria as a far more dangerous sexual threat to Chrysanthus than does the Ælfrician text. In both versions she comes in the guise of one seeking to comfort him, speaking elegantly and intelligently. In the Latin, however, her entrance casts Chrysanthus into inner perturbation, so that "if he had not been harder than iron, he would have been rendered softer by the flame." This is the same flame, the malignant beast of desire, which lurked within the bower-maidens. Whereas the devil shoots arrows of temptation at Chrysanthus through Daria in the Latin version, using her as an instrument of temptation, Ælfric eliminates all reference to Chrysanthus as embattled by desire and nearly singed by passion's flames. These omissions remove any real possibility of sin from both the saint and his temptress. Ælfric thereby purifies Daria's intentions and effaces the sexuality which colours her entrance in the Latin. Although Magennis has commented upon Ælfric's general practice of playing down physical description,²⁰ here we see that Ælfric here does not shy away from describing Daria's appearance. Indeed, he tells us as much about Daria's beauty as does the Latin. He instead refrains from associating indecorous sexual temptations with the future saint.

In both the Old English and Latin, Chrysanthus dismisses Daria's pretense of solicitude, and tells her he knows that she has come to addle his will with her beauty.²¹ Rather remarkably, despite his clear perception of her intent, Chrysanthus neither condemns Daria nor resigns her to her pagan beliefs as he had the bower-maidens whom he prayed into senseless oblivion with no word of the gospel. His willingness to engage Daria in theological debate rests upon the distinction between Daria's "reasonable," rational, intellectual (rather than bodily) character and the temptresses' sensual irrationality. In the Ælfrician version which consigns Daria's temptation of

¹⁹ CCCC MS 9, p. 382, col. a, l. 36 - col. b, l. 7. "*Tunc virgo Veste nomine Daria gemmis et auro radians, repente Chrysantum, quasi sol radians, constanter ingreditur, et quasi sub specie consolationis, tanta eum elegantia sermonis alloquitur, tantaque ingenii arte interserit, ut si <non> esset ferro durior, flamma mollior redderetur. Sed Chrysantus Domini auxilio fretus sagittas diaboli scuto fidei repellebat, et medium inter se atque illam sanctum spiritum postulans....*" "Then the vestal virgin named Daria sedately enters unexpectedly upon Chrysanthus, shining with gems and gold, and shining as the sun; and under the appearance of consolation, she speaks to him with such elegance of speech, and she sows with such skill of wit, that if he were not harder than iron, the flame would have softened him. But Chrysanthus, relying on the aid of the Lord, repelled the devil's arrows with the shield of faith, and calling on the Holy Spirit to stand between himself and her...."

²⁰ Magennis, "No Sex Please" 3-5.

²¹ Quoted in footnote 18 above. CCCC MS 9, p. 382, col. b, ll. 11-12. "*...ut etiam ab intentione proposita animum meum revocare credas.*" "...because you believe that you can recall my spirit from it purposed intention."

Chrysanthus to the realm of the purely hypothetical, the young man remains untouched by any hint of desire and the maiden remains a brilliant, pure, and sexually irreproachable beauty. Establishing the purity of Daria's character is as important to Ælfric as establishing Chrysanthus' purity, for it raises her from the realm of debauchery to one of reason and purity, and demonstrates her readiness to receive the truth of the gospel.

The theme of faith and reason discussed above has its corollary in the motif of pagan irrationality and unnatural behavior, the third and final of the themes pertaining to the opposition between virginity and sexuality in this *passio*. The foremost example of pagan unnaturalness would be Chrysanthus' father, Polemius, whose concern for wealth and position overshadows all natural affection or concern for his son. Polemius weeps for his son as dead, when all his well-laid plans for returning his son to the gods (via the cavorting virgins) amount to nothing (ll. 73-74). Polemius' unnatural behavior as a father--both in throwing his son into jail and then attempting to entrap him through debauchery--finds its parallel in the cruel and unregenerate actions of the gods whom he worships. Such degeneracy receives great attention in Chrysanthus' debate with Daria about the viability of the gods she worships, since Daria, as a rational and 'natural' human being, could be expected to reject debased gods. Chrysanthus recites a brief litany of the gods' less laudatory acts: Saturn's cannibalism of his own children, Jove's incestuous marriage to his sister Juno, and the various murders and suicides committed by the Roman heroes. The list in the CCL is predictably longer, including descriptions of monsters, and references to other mythic incidents which Ælfric chose to omit, such as Jove's seduction of Ganymede.²² For Chrysanthus in the Old English version the crux of the problem hangs upon the Roman gods' utter lack of *godnysse* 'goodness' (l. 104). The just person must balk at serving gods who live so *fullice* 'foully' (l. 118), gods who, like Chrysanthus' own father, act contrary to what is right and just, paternal and filial, gods who act contrary to nature.

In addition to the connection between paganism and unnaturalness, another facet of the association between virginity, the natural and reasonable on one hand, versus sexuality, the unnatural and irrational on the other can be seen in the intermingling of *galnes* 'lust' and unreason. The motif surfaces first with the entrance of the frolicking bower-maidens. Their *wodlican plegan* 'foolish sport' relegates them to a senseless, unreasoned plane of existence (l. 53).²³ By categorizing these women with food, drink, and luxury, all of which Chrysanthus studiously ignores, Ælfric removes them from the realm of the reasonable and reasoning. There is no help for

²² CCCC MS 9, p. 383, col. b, ll. 11-14.

²³ CCCC MS 9, p. 381, col. a, l. 11. "*hæc ludibria*"; "sport" or "play."

them, no salutary message of the gospel: they can only be rendered inert by divine intervention and dragged from the bower so that they may no longer imperil the saint. With their highly sexualized folly, the bower-maidens can only impede the saint, never join him.

This dismissal of “sexual persons” is not universal. In the second passage where *galnes* and unreason join together in battle against spiritual and physical purity, spiritual redemption breaks the grip of unreason. In this passage depicting Daria’s incarceration in a brothel, her sermon to her attacker makes explicit the relation between unreason, lust, and paganism. Warning her attacker that by such acts he subjugates his rational nature to carnal desire, she contrasts him to the lion who has escaped from its pen and run to protect the saint. Like the man, the lion too acts contrary to its nature, by honouring God and defending his servant. “*Efne,*” Daria tells the man, “*þeos reþe leo awurðað nu God/ and þu, gesceadwisa man þe sylfne fordest,/ and þu fægnast earmincg on þinre fulan galnysse.*”²⁴ By giving himself over to lust, the man has tragically reversed the proper order of creation in which man--the rational animal--honours God. With the forfeiture of reason and the right honour of God for the gratification of *fulan galnysse*, man submits himself to bestial inclinations that here offend the irrational lion. After attending to Daria’s sermon from under the inspiring vantage of the lion’s paw, the young man rejects impure intentions and accepts the Christian faith. Leaving Daria untouched he goes out to proclaim the gospel (ll. 275-276).²⁵ Conversion provides the evidence of reason, and faith and purity are together manifested in the rejection of impure folly.

This implicit relation between reason, purity, and faith explains Chrysanthus’ treatment of Daria as a scholar and equal. Aside from his initial remarks where he rather ambiguously criticizes her deceitful intention to “frustrate his will,” Chrysanthus nowhere refers to Daria’s womanhood or any dangers she might present for his commitment to *clænnēs*. This absence accounts for the marked difference between his treatment of Daria and the *næddran* with their wanton embraces and foolish play. In his appeal to Daria’s desire for a beautiful or pure mind, Chrysanthus urges her to consider Christ for her *brydguman* (ll. 95-98). The fact that he offers Daria no alternative form of

²⁴ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 270-72. “Behold! This cruel lion now honours God, and you, a rational man, destroy yourself, and you exult, miserable one, in your foul lust....”

²⁵ Ælfric has here significantly emended the Latin. In all the CCL MSS and the ASS the young man attributes divinity to Daria: CCCC 9, p. 388, col. b, ll. 8-16. “*Tunc ille prosternens se ante eam cepit clamare dicens, ‘Iube me hinc egredi sanum, ut et ego clamem omnibus Dei filium Christum quem colis ipsum solum verum esse Deum’ ... Qui cum fuisset egressus clamare cepit et per totam civitatem currere dicens, ‘Sciatis omnes Dariam deam esse.’*” “Then, prostrating himself before her, he began to exclaim, saying, ‘Order me to leave her whole, so that I may tell everyone that Christ, the son of God, whom you worship is the only true God’.... When he went out, he began to exclaim and run through the whole city saying, ‘Know all that Daria is a goddess.’” (Cf. Hereford Cathedral, P. vii.6, 123v, col. b, ll. 30-39; Bodley 354, 142v, col. a, ll. 22-32. ASS, p. 482, §24.)

the Christian life—she must take Christ as her bridegroom, preserve her chastity or remain in pagan error (l. 121)—illustrates the unequivocal merging of the virginal life and the life of faith.

Daria and Chrysanthus' choice of virginal marriage presents an interpretive challenge. Unlike the other two married-virgin *passiones*, where the husband and wife agree to virginal chastity after having entered into marriage, Chrysanthus and Daria instead enter into the bond of marriage after having chosen virginity. Their decision for married-virginity could be read as an assertion of the inseparability of virginity and faith that rejects the physical union of marriage as spiritually counterproductive. Hence, the socially conformable appearance of their virginal marriage would mask a subversive transformation: chaste marriage liberates both Chrysanthus and Daria from the chains and limitations of their own flesh. This interpretation ignores one particularly salient detail. Let us recapitulate the points of Daria's conversion. First of all Chrysanthus promises Daria the Lord as her bridegroom, if she should choose to preserve herself in purity (ll. 95-96). Secondly, Chrysanthus tells her that if she preserves her virginity undefiled she will be as beautiful within as she already is without (ll. 97-98). The second half of Chrysanthus' promise contains some crucial qualifications for the significance of virginity. If the passage is broken down into an equation, the formula for purity would be as follows: the preservation of virginity will ensure that Daria's inward, spiritual beauty will match her external, physical beauty. Virginity obviously cannot be added; it must be preserved. Daria is a virgin and yet Chrysanthus sees the disparity between the beauty of her mind and body.

Thus virginity alone cannot be read as restoring a lost unity of mind and body. The view of virginity as the path to unity has occasionally led to interpretations, like that of John Bugge in his *Virginity*, of the choice of sexual abstinence as the remedy for perceived gnostic divisions.²⁶ Dichotomies, such as the conceptual opposition of Daria's mind and body, need not, however, entail a gnostic rejection of the body or physical matter. Indeed, I believe the formulation of Chrysanthus' offer to Daria makes it impossible for the material body to be condemned. For if Daria's physical beauty represents the metaphoric standard to which she desires her *mod* to rise, then another explanation for the significance of virginity must be found which does not focus upon the repudiation of the physical body.

In the relationship between Daria's external and internal qualities, virginity functions first of all as a signifier of her commitment to the faith, as we saw earlier in the conflict between Chrysanthus and Polemius. To adapt the terminology of Augustine's explanation of the

²⁶ John Bugge, *Virginity: an Essay in the History of a Medieval Ideal* (Martinus Nijhodd: The Hague, 1975). For Jean Leclercq's review of Bugge's work, see *Medium Ævum* 46 (1977): 129-31.

relationship between the physical sign of the sacrament and the grace accomplished therein, virginity functions as the outward, visible sign of the inward work of the Spirit. If virginity is the external, “visible” sign for Daria’s commitment to Christ and the sign of her inward transformation (i.e. the beautification of her heart and mind), then virginity functions sacramentally in the Augustinian sense. In his study of sacramental theology, P. Pourrat writes that for Augustine, sacraments were sacred signs, images and material elements, which provided the believer with “l’idée d’une chose religieuse dont il est l’image.”²⁷ Throughout the works of Ambrose and Jerome, we see the sacramental represented in images of the virgin as the gift of her parents (signifying their spiritual sacrifice as well as her own), and as the first-fruits of the Church.²⁸ In such imagery the virgin stands as *veritas* ‘truth’ of those things prefigured in the sacrifices of the Old Testament.²⁹ Virginity, like other sacred signs, identifies symbolically the spiritual grace at work in the individual and is, in a manner of speaking, itself a means of sanctification. Through their representation of the holy, signs like virginity connote the sacramental.³⁰

Furthermore, a sacramental interpretation of virginity effectively revokes a reading of the idealization of the virginal life as a negative gesture of hatred for the body. In his study of the sacraments, Paul Palmer argues that an assertion of the goodness of matter, “that material things can act as the ‘vehicle’ of the Spirit in sanctifying man’s spirit,” is “the basic principle underlying the whole sacramental system.”³¹ For Palmer, the goodness of matter is “the immediate corollary of the Incarnation wherein the ‘Word became flesh’.... Christ is in effect the sacrament *par excellence*, embracing in His humanity that fullness of grace.”³² When read in the light of this interpretation of sacrament, the virginal body may function as a “vehicle” of the spirit’s sanctifying work without displacing the Christian life from the earthly body, or implying an unconditional incompatibility of the spiritual and the physical.

Having only touched upon the sacramental interpretation of virginity’s signifying role in Daria’s conversion and choice of chaste marriage, let us, for the moment, move on to the representation of virginity for those whom Chrysanthus and Daria convert to Christ. Like Julian

²⁷ P. Pourrat, *La théologie sacramentaire* 21, quoted in “Sacraments,” *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique*, vol. 14, (Paris: Librairies Letouzey et Ané, 1939), 519.

²⁸ AMBR.Virg.Marc. 33.9-10, 16.18-22. (Chapter 1, p. 48, fn. 131, 132.)

²⁹ HIER.Adv.Iovin. 281.28-34. (Chapter 1, p. 50, fn.136.)

³⁰ AVG.Epist.CXXXVIII, cited in “Sacraments.” “*Signa, cum ad res divinas pertinent, sacramenta appellantur.*” “Signs, when they pertain to divine matters, are called sacraments.”

³¹ Paul F. Palmer, ed. *Sacraments and Worship: Liturgy and Doctrinal Development of Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist* (Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1955) 72.

³² Palmer vii.

and Basilissa, when Chrysanthus and Daria convert others to Christ, they convert them simultaneously to the Christian faith and the chaste life. Their declarations of faith cannot be separated from the choice of virginity or chastity. This does not mean that there is no salvation without virginity. Such an interpretation can be quickly refuted by Chrysanthus' conversion of his torturer Claudius together with his wife, two sons, a number of their kinsmen, and seventy soldiers (ll. 210-15), regarding whose chastity the *passio* says nothing at all. Claudius and his wife, if no others, prove that virginity is not the metaphoric litmus test for entrance into the kingdom of heaven. These later conversions notwithstanding, the early conversions in the *passio* attribute a vital role to virginity as the proof or testament of faith.

Wurdon þa on fyrste fela men gebigde
 þurh heora drohtnunge fram deofles biggengum
 to Cristes geleafan and to cleaunum life
 Cnihtas gecyrdon þurh Crisantes lare
 and mædenu þurh Darian manega to Drihtne
 forlætenum synscipe and geswæsum lustum
 oþþæt sume men astyrodon sace be þysum.³³

These lines describe the strong reaction of the pagan community elicited by the mutual claims of virginity and Christianity upon these new believers. The CCL goes even further and says that "Sedition was stirred up in the city,"³⁴ describing how young men clamored to have their girls returned, and husbands raged over the loss of future sons because their wives had chosen chastity.³⁵ Ælfric omits the Latin's rather heavy-handed depiction of the personally motivated antagonism to Chrysanthus and Daria's evangelical virginity, so that in the Old English virginity functions more clearly as a signifier of the new Christians' rejection of pagan past and future. The renunciation of sexual-social obligations still fans the flames of pagan opposition, but the Old English downplays the interpersonal conflicts created by the converts' choice of virginity, so that the choice of virginity instead provides the public evidence of Christian conversion.

³³ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 127- 33. "Then after a time many men were converted to their manner of life from the worship of devils to faith in Christ and to pure living. The youths were converted through Chrysanthus' teaching, and many maidens through Daria, to the Lord, renouncing marriage and pleasant desires, until some men started a dispute concerning this...."

³⁴ CCCC 9, p. 385, col. b, ll. 2-8. "*Et tam per Crisantum multitudo virorum quam per Dariam femine innumerabiles ad Christi gratiam confluebant. Igitur cum multæ virgines relicto amore sponsorum Christo traderent, nunc iuvenes relicto voluptatum studio et carnali commertio se castimonio manciparent, excitata est in urbe seditio....*" "And through Chrysanthus as great a multitude of men converged towards the grace of Christ as innumerable women through Daria. Therefore when they had relinquished the love of spouses, many virgins surrendered to Christ, now young men, having relinquished the pursuit of pleasures and carnal commerce, delivered themselves to chastity, sedition was stirred up in the city...."

³⁵ CCCC 9, p. 385, col. b, ll. 10-13.

This connection between virginity's signification of conversion may well relate to an early association between sacrament and initiation. One of the early pagan uses of the Latin word *sacramentum* pertained to oaths of initiation in the military tradition of the *sacramentum militiæ*, or the oath taken by soldiers upon entrance into service.³⁶ This notion of sacrament being tied to initiation finds expression in Tertullian who adapts the classical notion of the *sacramentum militiæ* to the individual's initiation into the Christian faith through baptism.³⁷ If, in the context of saintly conversion and conflicts of faith, we interpret virginity as a sacramental sign or symbol of the new Christian's profession of faith and allegiance to God, then this accounts for the young couple's decision to remain virginally chaste within the context of marriage, as well as virginity's centrality in the temptations and persecutions of the saints. Chrysanthus and Daria, and many of those converted by them, identify themselves as believers through their choice of virginity. Consequently, virginity's centrality in this *passio* points to its symbolic role in the saints' profession of faith rather than to salvation's dependence upon the renunciation of sexual intercourse.

Although this ancient notion uniting sacrament to the onset of the Christian life helps to explain the significance of virginity with reference to Chrysanthus, Daria, and the couple's converts, it fails to account fully for the importance given to virginity in the relationship between the union of the Christian's outer and inner life, referred to in Chrysanthus' early injunctions to Daria. For this we must explore more carefully the Augustinian interpretation of sacraments as it relates to the portrayal of virginity. This is best illustrated in the *passio* of Cecilia where the application of the imagery of virgins to the Eucharistic imagery explicitly raises the question of the relationship between virginity and sacrament. After examining that relationship in the *passio* of Cecilia, we will be able to conclude the examination of these two *passiones* with a clearer understanding of the sacramental implications of the sign of virginity, and its role in saintly purity both within and without.

II. Virginity and the Sacramental in *Passio Sanctæ Cecilie Virginis*

Where the temptations of Chrysanthus and the persecution of Daria illustrate the arduous path over which the commitment to virginity sometimes leads, the *passio* of Cecilia instead depicts the transformation of the saint's world once purity of faith and purity of body unite in consecrated virginity. While Cecilia's narrative focuses fleetingly upon the physical body, the primary concern of the virginal life here pertains to the supra-mundane world in which the virgin participates, rather

³⁶ "Sacraments" 488.

³⁷ "Sacraments" 488-89.

than the repudiation of sexuality. As in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, the elite sanctity of the married-virgin saints manifests itself in a variety of blessings and miracles bestowed upon the saints at the beginning of their union, clearly illustrating the intimate link between virginity and heavenly blessing. Although other non-virginal saints' *vitæ* and *passiones* testify to the fact that saints need not be virgins in order to perform miracles or have miracles performed on their behalf, in the case of Cecilia and her husband such charisms depend upon virginity as a prerequisite. Where the story of Chrysanthus and Daria unites faith and virginity, the *passio* of Cecilia inextricably links virginity and the experience of celestial glories in this present world. As with the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria, I shall first examine how Ælfric portrays the life of faith in the context of the saint's choice of virginity. The second aspect of the *passio* to be addressed concerns the charisms attributed to the virginal life. In examining the connection between virginity and spiritual charisms we find not only the Ambrosian theme of the *vita angelica* in the saints' converse with angels, and references to their virginity as a reclamation of prelapsarian purity, but a provocative overlapping of virginal and Eucharistic imagery that raises questions concerning the sacramental implications of virginity. The discussion of the connection between virginity and the sacramental draws upon the historical connection between martyrial and Eucharistic celebrations, as well as Ælfric's general treatment of the sacraments and the Eucharist. In the end, I believe this polyvalence of images in the *passio* of Cecilia reflects the sacramental aspect of virginity which pervades the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria.

The *passio* of Cecilia begins with an expressive portrait of the saint's single-minded devotion to God and her "rule" of life. The regular, or monastic element in this description resonates with the monastic motif seen in the *passiones* of both Julian and Basilissa, and Chrysanthus and Daria, where the holy couples attain the monastic life and evangelical glory after their marriage. The monastic component is explicit in the depiction of Julian and Basilissa's founding of two monasteries (ll. 84-87), and implicit in Chrysanthus and Daria's respective conversions of men and women to the Lord and the renunciation of marriage (ll. 127-32). From the beginning Cecilia's prayer-filled, devout manner of life exhibits 'monastic' disciplines, as she prays both day and night, and studies the word of God:

Peos halige fæmne hæfde on hire breoste
 swa micele lufe to þam ecan life
 þæt heo dæges and nihtes embe Drihtnes godspel
 and embe Godes lare mid geleafan smeade

and on singalum gebedum hi sylfe gebysgode.³⁸

While these lines make no mention of her desire to remain a virgin, such regular practices suggest a singular desire for the Lord. Cecilia expresses her love and devotion through the spiritual disciplines and contemplation, deliberately and passionately separating herself from the life of this world. For Cecilia, as for the primary saints of the other married-virgin *passiones*, the role of virginity in her life becomes explicit only when marriage threatens to jeopardize her physical purity. Unlike Julian, Cecilia receives no divine promises that God will protect her chastity. Nor does she enter into marriage with a prearranged covenant of chastity with her spouse, as does Chrysanthus. Hence Cecilia's wedding night holds terrors and apprehensions unknown to her male counterparts, and significantly it is amidst the saint's preparations for her marriage that a strongly ascetic quality colours the monastic disposition which first characterized her.

In her prayers for protection from defilement, Cecilia responds penitentially to her upcoming marriage. This constitutes one of the fundamental differences between Cecilia and the male primary saints. Whereas male saints like Chrysanthus and Julian fear the sexual temptation into which their own desire might lead them, sexual desire and temptation hold no power over female saints such as Cecilia and Daria. For them, the threat of defilement comes wholly from without. It is instructive to compare Chrysanthus' response to a sexually precarious situation with Cecilia's response to her impending nuptials. When Chrysanthus beseeches God to protect and deliver him, his temptresses are cast into a deep sleep: they are effectively "disabled." Cecilia, on the other hand, clothes herself in a hairshirt, deprives herself of food, and beseeches the hosts of heaven with tears that she might be spared.

Hwæt ða Cecilia hi sylfe gescrydde
 mid hæran to lice and gelome fæste
 biddende mid wope þæt heo wurde gescyld
 wið ælce gewemmednysse oððe weres gemanan.
 Heo clypode to halgum and to heah-englum
 biddende heora fultumes to þam heofonlican Gode,
 þæt heo on clænnysse Criste moste peowian.³⁹

Cecilia's desire for chastity and her fear of defilement may not differ from the desires and fears of

³⁸ *ÆLS* (Cecilia) 5-9. "This holy woman had in her breast so great a love of the eternal life that she, day and night, meditated concerning the Lord's gospel and concerning God's teaching, with faith, and busied herself in continual prayers."

³⁹ *ÆLS* (Cecilia) 13-19. "So then Cecilia clothed herself with a hair shirt on her body and frequently fasted, praying with weeping that she might be shielded from any stain or the company of man. She cried to the saints and the archangels, beseeching their assistance from the heavenly God, that she might serve Christ in chastity." Cf. *CCCC* 9, p. 324, col. b, ll. 29-30. p. 325, col. a, ll. 1-6.

the male saints. The actions accompanying her prayers, however, differ significantly. Is this simply a continuation, or reflection, of the devout monastic character exemplified in the earlier passage describing her daily schedule, explicitly incorporating penitential acts and disciplines into her petitions? If this is the case, then her penitential actions would simply exemplify another aspect of Cecilia's very correct Christian discipline. This, however, leaves us with a paradoxical situation where the female saints, for whom desire is never an issue, react penitentially to a sexually dangerous situation, whereas the male saints - the ones in whom temptation threatens to elicit a corresponding desire - do not respond penitentially, despite the fact that it is the wrongful desire which would presumably require repentance, not fear of defilement.

Cecilia's prayers for protection from defilement resemble Chrysanthus' promise to Daria, by drawing upon the same vision of virginity as uniting body and soul. "*Beo min heorte,*" she prays, "*and min lichama þurh God ungewemmed/ þæt ic ne beo gescynd.*"⁴⁰ Cecilia's song affirms the inseparability of purity of the spirit and the body. The loss of the one inevitably comprehends the pollution of the other. Perhaps even more importantly, her prayers link the service of God with the preservation of chastity, to such a degree that the forfeiture of virginity necessarily entails the diminution of one's service. Chrysanthus, when faced with temptation, asks for the protection of his *clænnēs* (ll. 60-61), Julian likewise (ll. 29-31). Cecilia, on the other hand, constructs her prayer for purity in "negative" terms, weeping for the angels to intercede for her so that she might be protected from guilt and the company of men (ll. 15-16). Admittedly, she asks that she be able to serve God *on clænnysse* (l. 19), but her prayer betrays a greater sense of causality: "May I be protected from defilement and intercourse, lest I be disqualified from serving God." The implication is that service, unless it be *clæn*, is unacceptable. The theme of unity, the indivisibility of *lichama* and *heorte*, initially holds great consequence for Cecilia. Her choice to remain a virgin demonstrates her single-minded devotion to Christ. In keeping with this, Ælfric constructs the protection of Cecilia's virginity as the proof of Valerian's love for his new bride.⁴¹ This heightened attention to the primary saint's virginity lasts only as long as the threat to her virginity.

On the wedding night, when Cecilia confronts her new husband, she convinces him to join her in a life of virginity with promises of angelic converse should he choose to join her in a virginally chaste marriage, or death if he attempts to exercise his marital rights by force. The brief theological exchange between the couple, after Valerian expresses skepticism about Cecilia's angel, has neither the length nor focus of the debate between Chrysanthus and Daria. Ælfric briefly

⁴⁰ ÆLS (Cecilia) 26-27. "'Let my heart and my body be through God unstained that I be not confounded.'"

⁴¹ ÆLS (Cecilia) 35-37. CCCC 9, p. 325, col. a, ll. 19-21.

summarizes the process of Valerian's conversion. After Cecilia introduces her new husband to the Christian faith, he goes to Pope Urban in whose company he sees an angel, and from whom he receives baptism (ll. 49-71). (The whole catechetical process is depicted at much greater length in the conversion of Valerian's brother Tiburtius.) After Valerian's baptism, Cecilia's angel presents the couple with a pair of heavenly crowns that shine resplendently with the glory of virginity and its divine source. Following the Latin, Ælfric brings several virginal motifs together in the presentation of the crowns. The *passio* merges virginal imagery of roses, lilies, and the reward of heavenly crowns with Eucharistic imagery. This layering of imagery creates a triangle of belief, sacrifice, and virginity, each of which connects to and informs the other. Together they reveal a sacramental function at work in the sign of virginity.

Before addressing the imagery of virginal rewards, the representation of virginity in Cecilia's conversion of Valerian must first be treated. Whereas Daria's conversion to chastity depends upon her intellectual conversion, Cecilia draws Valerian to virginity by simultaneously assuring him that she loves him, and creating a situation where he dare not touch her. The Old English translation comprehends the duplicitous sensibility of Cecilia's opening speech to Valerian in the Latin which begins "Oh sweetest and best loved youth."⁴² The reader can vividly imagine Valerian's shock at the words that follow this promising beginning as he listens to his new wife assure him *mid lufe* 'with love' that he must not touch her, lest he be slain by God's angel:

"Ic hæbbe Godes encgel þe gehylt me on [lufe]
and gif þu wylt me gewemman, he went sona to ðe
and mid gramum þe slihð þæt þu sona ne leofast.
Gif þu þonne me lufast and butan laðe gehylst
on clænum mægðhade, Christ þonne lufað þe
and his gife geswutelað þe sylfum swa swa me." ⁴³

Cecilia warns him of God's particular love for virgins, manifested by her angelic body-guard.

⁴² CCCC 9, p. 325, col. a, ll. 9-12, 14-22. "*O dulcissime atque amantissime iuuenis, est mysterium quod tibi confitear, si modo tu iuratus asseras tota te illud observantia custodire... Angelum Dei habeo amatorem qui nimio zelo corpus meum custodit. Hic si vel leviter senserit quod tu polluto amore me contingas, statim circa te suum furorem exagitat; et amittis florem tue gratissimæ iuventutis. Si autem cognoverit quod me sincero animo diligas et virginitatem meam integram illibatamque custodias, ita te quoque diliget, sicut et me, et ostendet tibi gratiam suam.*" "O sweetest and best loved youth, it is a mystery that I confess to you, if only you, having taken an oath, join to guard that [mystery] with complete respect.... I have as a lover an angel of the Lord who zealously guards my body. If he senses a little that you would touch me with polluting love, it will immediately rouse his fury towards you; and you will lose the flower of your most pleasing youth. If, however, he recognizes that you will love me with a sincere spirit and will guard my virginity whole and unimpaired, then he will love you also just as he loves me, and he will show his grace to you."

⁴³ ÆLS (Cecilia) 32-37. "'...I have God's angel who holds me in love and if you desire to defile me, he will quickly turn to you and slay you in anger, so that you will immediately cease to live. If you then love me, and continue without evil in pure virginity, Christ will then love you and manifest his grace to you even as to me.'"

Familiarity with this well-known passage in the *passio* makes it easy to overlook the startling nature of the saint's claims. An angel so loves her (i.e. so loves her purity that is the qualification of her pleasing service of God) that he will slay anyone who attempts to trespass upon the body which belongs to God alone. Here there is no ontological distinction between defilement of body and defilement of spirit such as one finds elsewhere in Ælfric's *passiones* of virgin saints.⁴⁴ Instead, the importance of *ungewemmed mægdhad* reiterates the underlying assumption that, in the service of God, purity of body and heart cannot be divided. Furthermore, Cecilia's message goes beyond a stark threat of "Touch me and you die," by making the extension of God's grace to Valerian contingent upon the new bridegroom's acceptance of virginal marriage. The defilement of her chastity comes at the cost of his earthly life and his eternal soul.

Ælfric does not sustain this focus upon Cecilia's virginity, for even as she encourages and exhorts her husband to assume the virginal life, the physical body paradoxically recedes from the discussion in which it plays such a formative role. Ælfric, moreover, decreases in general the attention given to the body in the Latin *passio*. For, while he conveys a sense of Cecilia's helplessness in the relentless approach of her wedding, he omits any expression of Valerian's feelings for Cecilia which in the Latin contribute to the pressure upon Cecilia to marry, in spite of her desire for virginity.⁴⁵

When Valerian finally agrees to join Cecilia in virginal marriage, the angel extends two crowns to them: *þa cyne-helmas wæron wundorlice scinende,/ on rosan readnysse and on lilian hwitnysse*.⁴⁶ He then commands them:

"Healdað þas cyne-helmas mid clænre heortan,
forþamþe ic hi genam on neorxnewange;
ne hi næfre ne forseariað, ne heora swetnysse ne forleosað,
ne heora wlita ne awent to wyrstan hiwe,

⁴⁴ Cf. ÆLS (Lucy) 84-93.

⁴⁵ CCCC 9, p. 324, col. b, ll. 26-33. "*Hæc Valerianum quendam iuvenem habebat sponsum. Qui iuuenis in amorem virginis perurgens animum diem constituit nuptiarum.*" "She had a certain youth Valerian as a fiancée; this youth, strongly urging his heart to love for the virgin, established the day of the wedding."

⁴⁶ ÆLS (Cecilia) 76-77. "The crowns were shining in a wondrous way, with the rose's redness and the lily's whiteness."

ne hi nan man ne gesihð butan se þe clænysse lufað.”⁴⁷

As in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, the crowns here represent both the treasure of unfading virginity and the privileged honours enjoyed by the chaste in eternity. Unlike Julian and Basilissa’s narrative, where the crowns bear witness to the glory which the couple will enjoy in heaven, Cecilia and Valerian’s crowns testify to their glory in *this* world, albeit secretly. The crowns’ origin in *neorxnawang* summons up further allusions for their chaste marriage; their unfading beauty and sweetness liken Cecilia and Valerian’s virginal union to both the prelapsarian condition lost to Adam and Eve, as well as the angelic, eternal life to come. As a metaphoric veil shrouds the glory and rewards of virginity from common mortal eyes, the earthly life of virgins already takes on the glory prophesied for virgins in Apocalypse 14. Virgins partake of blessings, honours, exaltation, and visions unknown to other Christians.

Thus far the depiction of the eternal crowns simply rearranges the imagery that we saw previously in Julian and Basilissa’s *passio*, but when Tiburtius, Valerian’s brother, visits the new couple and wonders at the inexplicable fragrance of roses and lilies, the explanation given to him departs from anything found in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa. By using the rose and the lily--images of saintly glorification pertaining to the martyr and virgin--to denote the imagery of the sanctifying body and blood of Christ, Cecilia’s *passio* blurs the line between the saintly and the salvific. This juxtaposition raises questions as to the relationship between virginity and sanctification. While the symbolic association between the martyr and the Eucharist is fairly straightforward, the mixture of the virginal and Eucharistic is far less common and presents greater difficulty. Analogues can, of course, be found in Ambrose’s comparison of the young virgin desiring consecration to the holy host on the altar, and Jerome’s discussions of the virgin as sacrifice. But within the context of Ælfric’s lives of the saints this association requires some explanation. If the glory of virginity has Eucharistic implications, then for whom do these obtain? There is something plainly remarkable about the rose and lily whose very scent begins a process of transformation in Tiburtius. He greets the couple, amazed at “*hu nu on wintres dæge/ her lilian*

⁴⁷ ÆLS (Cecilia) 80-84. ““Keep these crowns with a pure heart, because I received them in Paradise; they shall never tarnish nor lose their sweetness, nor shall their beauty turn to a worse hue, nor shall any man see them save the one who loves chastity.”” (CCCC 9, p. 326, col. a, ll. 24-31. “*Istas coronas immaculato corpore custodite, quia de paradiso Dei eas attuli ad vos. Et hoc vobis signum erit: numquam marcidum aspectus sui adhibent florem, numquam sui minuunt suavitatem odoris, nec ab aliis videri poterit nisi ab eis quibus castitas placuerit, sicut et vobis probata est placuisse.*” “Guard these crowns with an immaculate body because I brought them from God’s paradise for you. This will be a sign for you: they never reveal a withered flower in their appearance. Never do they diminish sweetness of their fragrance, and it cannot be seen by any except by those to whom chastity is pleasing, just as it has proved to be pleasing to you.” <aspectus> = MS aspectu.)

*blostm opþe rosan bræð/ swa wynsumlice and swa werodlice stincað.*⁴⁸ Thereupon he exclaims that the very fragrance makes him feel *geedniwod* ‘made anew’ (l. 109). In his explanation of this “transformation,” Valerian merges the traditional imagery of virgin martyr with Eucharistic imagery for the Saviour himself:

“þurh mine bene þe com
 þæs wynsuma bræð to þæt þu wite heonanforð
 hwæs blod readað on rosan gelicnysse,
 and hwæs lichama hwitað on lilian fægernysse.”⁴⁹

As in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, where the fragrance of roses and lilies stirred within Basilissa an immediate, simultaneous desire for purity and for Christ the Saviour, obscuring the line between virginity and salvation, so too in the *passio* of Cecilia the use of virginal iconography to symbolize the body and blood of Christ (the sign of grace and the symbols of salvation) obfuscates distinctions between virgin and Saviour, heavenly reward and earthly sacrifice. The fact that Tiburtius can detect the miraculous fragrance (the reward and sign of Cecilia and Valerian’s chastity) in answer to his brother’s prayers for Tiburtius’ salvation promotes this confusion of virginity with salvation. The iconography of virgins appears to have become the iconography of salvation.

In one way this passage is a very literal rendering of St. Paul’s teaching that Christians are the “aroma of Christ” to a perishing world.⁵⁰ Cecilia and Valerian are the “fragrance” of the stainless eternal life, the “odour” of salvation. Yet the choice to symbolize salvation with the secret rewards of virginity swathes salvation in mystery and hidden knowledge, for only through Valerian’s intercession, by divine dispensation, may Tiburtius smell the heavenly *bræð* of grace.

An alternate interpretation of the relationship between virginity and the Eucharist in this imagery (other than one granting salvific status to virginity or elevating virginity as the summation of secret revelation) can be found in a sacramental understanding of virginity. Two separate issues must be explored in order to understand this imagery of the rose and the lily in the *passio* of

⁴⁸ *ÆLS* (Cecilia) 103-05. “...how now, on a winter’s day, here lily blossom or rose’s breath smells so pleasantly and so sweetly.” CCCC 9, p. 326, col. b, ll. 17-18. “*Confiteor vobis ita sum refectus ut putem me totum subito renovatum.*” “I confess to you that I am so refreshed that I consider myself completely renewed all of a sudden.”

⁴⁹ *ÆLS* (Cecilia) 110-13. ““Through my prayer this pleasant breath has come to you, so that you may understand henceforth whose blood is red in the likeness of the rose, and whose body is white with a lily’s fairness.”” (CCCC 9, p. 326, col. b, ll. 19-23. ““*Odorem iam meruisti me interpellante suscipere; modo te credere promereberis etiam ipsum roseum aspectum gaudere et intellegere, cuius in rosis sanguis florescit, et in liliis corpus albescit.*”” ““You have now deserved to receive this fragrance by my interceding; now you will merit to believe, also to rejoice and understand his rosy countenance whose blood blossoms in the roses and whose body becomes white in the lilies.””)

⁵⁰ II Cor 2:14-15.

Cecilia. The first of these concerns the historical roots of the cult of St. Cecilia and early Eucharistic practice. I believe that the Eucharistic imagery in the *passio* may arise from one of the fundamental and oldest practices related to the cult of the martyrs: that of the celebration of the Eucharist at the martyrs' grave, and the evolution of such martyria into churches. This historical practice does not fully explain or account for how the relationship between virginity and the sacrament of Eucharist would have been understood in Ælfric's time. Nevertheless, the origin of this imagery needs to be understood in order to locate this rather troublesome passage within the context of the theme of martyrdom and the church which runs throughout the whole *passio* of Cecilia. After addressing the relationship between early cultic practice and the *passio* of Cecilia, we then attempt to construct a framework for Ælfric's notion of the sacramental.

One qualification must be made in turning to the first of these two problems. In examining the early history of the evolution of martyrial gravesites as it pertains to the legendary development of St. Cecilia's grave and church, and the historical reality of cultic practices, our concern lies not in Cecilia's historicity, but rather in the constructed connection between the saint's martyrdom and the church which bears her name. In his study of the saints celebrated in November and December, Hippolyte Delehaye explores the tangled history of the cult of St. Cecilia,⁵¹ whose feast was celebrated on November 22nd by the year 545.⁵² The historical evidence for a St Cecilia, based upon a connection between a tomb in the cemetery of Callistus bearing her name and a church designated *titulus Cæciliæ*, is highly problematical given there is no evidence that the Cecilia buried in the cemetery of Callistus was actually a martyr. In addition, the attribution *titulus Cæciliæ* dates considerably after the age of martyrdom, having first borne the designation *titulus Gordiani*. Despite these discrepancies, we know that pilgrims venerated her at the tomb adjoining the papal crypt, and from the fifth century on there was, in the minds of the faithful, no doubt as to the saint's holy "identity."⁵³ Because of the chronological inconsistencies, Delehaye rejects a theory of homonymic substitution whereby a "martyr" named Cecilia was confused, or merged with a church founder named Cecilia, and argues instead that "la voix populaire a décerné à la matrone

⁵¹ Delehaye, *Étude sur le Légendier Romain* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1936) 74. Rather than aiming for a definitive resolution of the origins of the cult, Delehaye focuses upon the three places known to Christian Rome and their relationship to the development of Cecilia's cult. They are: the basilica of Trastevere which was rebuilt by Pope Pascal I in the ninth century, the cemetery of Callistus where pilgrims visited Cecilia's tomb, and the neighboring cemetery of Praetextatus wherein martyrs named Valerian and Tiburtius were buried and with whom Cecilia's history eventually becomes interwoven. For the chronological inconsistencies between the narrative itself and historical realities of early Christian martyrs' graves, see Delehaye's discussion 80- 83.

⁵² Both the Gelasian and Gregorian sacramentaries place Cecilia's feast on November 22nd, while the Leonine sacramentary instead records November 8th and 23rd.

⁵³ Delehaye 83, 86.

Cécile l'auréole du martyr et celle de la virginité.”⁵⁴ Delehaye reasons that the tomb of one buried near the popes and martyrs in a position of honour would naturally attract attention of the faithful, so that it “passa bientôt pour être celle d'une martyre, et que l'hagiographe ne fit qu'exploiter une idée déjà répandue dans les milieux populaires.”⁵⁵ In light of this, it seems probable that the hagiographer writing Cecilia's *passio* would seek to fortify the saint's legend by exploiting the historical connection between martyrs and churches, thereby reinforcing an evolving connection between the church and tomb bearing the name of Cecilia.

In both the Latin version and Ælfric's Old English translation of the *passio*, a strong connection exists between the saints, the recurring theme of martyrdom, and events at the church founded in Cecilia's home. For example, fear of persecution and martyrdom concerns Tiburtius prior to his conversion which takes place in Cecilia's home (ll. 130-36). When the two brothers come under persecution for burying the holy martyrs ignominiously condemned by Rome, they are themselves martyred and Cecilia buries their bodies before she too comes under scrutiny (ll. 200-03, 266-67, 282-84). In her home she converts a multitude of four hundred, all of whom Pope Urban quickly baptizes (ll. 304-07). After three unsuccessful attempts to execute Cecilia in her own home, the saint continues to teach for three days before finally committing both her home and her followers into the Pope's care. Upon her death Urban then consecrates Cecilia's home as a church (ll. 353-60). With these details, the author of the legend locates some of the most important functions and occasions of the church like catechism, baptism and preaching in Cecilia's home. By locating the saint's martyrdom inside her home, the hagiographer (or Delehaye's “la voix populaire”) combines the historical evidence of a Cecilia who “founded” the basilica of Trastevere and the “martyr” honoured at the cemetery of Callistus.⁵⁶

From the motivic interweaving of martyrdom and Cecilia's house-church, we turn to the early practice of the celebration of the Eucharist at martyrial graves in order to understand the *passio*'s imagistic connection of virginal and martyrial imagery with the Eucharist in its original, historical context. Although the *passio* of St. Cecilia postdates the age of martyrs,⁵⁷ and the evolution of martyrial gravesites to martyrial altars, and finally churches, this pattern may well have played a role not only in the narratives of authentic martyrs, but also in those of saints like Cecilia, brought to life by the popular voice and recorded by later hagiographers steeped in the

⁵⁴ Delehaye 85.

⁵⁵ Delehaye 86.

⁵⁶ Delehaye 84. See 84ff. for a fuller discussion of these relations.

⁵⁷ Delehaye writes that November 22 was consecrated to her by the year 545 (74).

tradition of authentic saints whose gravesites testify to this development.

In his book *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist*, G. J. C. Snoek traces the history and practice of honouring of martyrial graves where, Peter Brown has poetically written, heaven met earth.⁵⁸ During this early period, Snoek writes that the celebration of the Eucharist near to the martyrs' graves in commemoration of their sacrificial deaths most perfectly expressed the cult of martyrs.⁵⁹ The quiet discretion which appears to have marked these services in the second and third centuries evaporated with the Edict of Milan in 313. With the new freedom to observe and honour Christian martyrs, these graves transformed, "from hiding place to memorial, [and] the group of private persons visiting the grave turned into massive stream of pilgrims," and the early memorial altars became "commemorative churches" erected near or on the martyrs' graves.⁶⁰

From the earliest times the celebration of the Eucharist played a central role in the commemoration of the martyrs, but the altars and the nature of the commemoration evolved just as had the buildings at the gravesites. Over time "permanent structures more clearly allied to the martyr's grave" took the place of the earlier, temporary gravesite altars employed for celebrations of the Eucharist on the martyr's anniversary.⁶¹ This development suggests a shift from an emphasis upon the commemorative nature of the Eucharist to a growing concern for the physical body of the saint. (Another aspect of this development can be seen in the establishment of analogous "grave spaces" in non-martyrial churches. These altars had relics installed in them and were employed for Eucharistic celebration only.⁶²) One explanation for the importance of these altars can be found in Ambrose who saw martyrial altars as a testament to the parallels between the Lord who suffered for humanity, and his servants who suffered as witnesses to that sacrifice.⁶³ The celebration of Christ's sacrifice then rested physically and ideologically on the bodies of the martyrs. Through the perceived intimacy between Almighty God and the human martyr the role

⁵⁸ G. J. C. Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist: a Process of Mutual Interaction* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1995). Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981) 1. David Rollason writes that a similar practice of founding churches on martyrial sites was not unknown in England (13-14), but the practice was not as common as the installation of relics in English churches (28). See Rollason, *Saints and Relics in Anglo-Saxon England* (NY: Basil Blackwell Press, 1989). As an example of this, Rollason sites the founding of St. Alban's Abbey on the location of the saint's execution. In the pages following, Rollason discusses the Romano-British evidence for the cult of saints in Anglo-Saxon England. See also Rollason's "Lists of Saints' Resting-Places in Anglo-Saxon England," *ASE* 7 (1978): 61-93.

⁵⁹ Snoek 9.

⁶⁰ Snoek 10.

⁶¹ Snoek 10.

⁶² Snoek 10.

⁶³ Snoek 10.

played by the martyr's grave and memory changed, so that in the "structure of relations between God, the dead and living" the saints took their place firmly in the middle.⁶⁴ From Snoek's description of early Eucharistic practice at martyrial graves there emerges a historical connection between the saints and the celebration of Eucharist that provides a framework for understanding the various elements in Cecilia's *passio*. In this light, the interweaving of virginal and martyrial imagery with that of the Eucharist sheds light not only upon the construction of holy virginity, but also upon the perceived role of the saints as intermediary witnesses to the grace and power of Christ's sacrifice.

Before addressing Ælfric's treatment of the Eucharist and the notion of the sacramental as it pertains to virginity, let us return to the specific passage in the *passio* of Cecilia which originally raised the topic of the Eucharist. In the Old English, as in the Latin, the wondrous fragrance of roses and lilies comes from the crowns given to Cecilia and Valerian as the reward of their virginity. Valerian explains this heavenly *bræð* as the divine revelation of the body and blood of the Saviour. From the earliest times martyrial sufferings were interpreted as the embodiment of the Lord's passion and suffering and this typological relation helped substantiate the saint's sanctity. The connection between the lily and rose, the icons of the virgin and martyr, to the body and blood of Christ, can on one level be interpreted as simply asserting the authenticity of Christ's holy servants as his earthly representatives: in their martyrdom and virginity the sufferings and purity of their Lord find tangible expression. In the early tradition of the Church Fathers, after all, the Lord himself was seen as the source, author and lover of virginity as well as the source and author of salvation. Through their choice of perpetual chastity, virgins functioned as living representatives of Christ's establishment of both. Yet even this does not sufficiently explain the application of virginal imagery to a typology that is explicitly Eucharistic. To equate martyrdom and the Eucharist is a natural step building upon the typology of martyrs as figures of Christ himself. To conflate virginity and the Eucharist, however, is not. This passage employs the fragrance of roses and lilies--a fragrance arising from the crowns which are the reward of the virginally chaste, and sensible only to virgins--as the miraculous revelation of Christ's body and blood. By so doing, these lines tangle the themes of holy virginity, sacrament and salvation almost inseparably. Is this co-mingling of imagery just another facet of the saints as types of Christ? Or is there an inherent attribution of sacrifice and intercession, or an intermediary redemptive role to the virgin?

⁶⁴ Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* 6.

The sacramental function and signification of the Eucharist provides a context for understanding the implications of this image in the *passio*. The use of virginal and martyrial imagery to depict salvific imagery here depends upon the understood gap between sacred signs and their spiritual meaning, so that the overlapping imagery refers to a shared notion of the sacramental and not a shared intercessory efficacy. Ælfric's *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Paschae* in the *Catholic Homilies* provides a rich source for his teaching on the meaning and nature of Eucharistic commemoration. In this sermon his discussion of the relations between outward signs and the inward effects of sacraments enables us to look beyond the sacraments proper to a construction of the 'sacramental' which helps define virginity's significance in this passage.⁶⁵

Throughout *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Paschae*, taken almost entirely from Ratramnus' *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini*,⁶⁶ Ælfric juxtaposes the inward efficacy worked by a sacrament against its outward manifestation, giving priority to the inward, *gastlic* work over the outward, *lichamlic* sign. The homily bears the influence of Augustine's theology of the sacraments as outward visible signs of an inward work of the Spirit, as Ælfric follows Ratramnus in emphasizing the Eucharist as symbol against the teaching of the real presence in bread and wine.⁶⁷ At one point in the *Sermo*, Ælfric compares the work of baptism with that of the Eucharist in order to clarify this distinction between outward sign and inward work:

Wiðutan hi beoð gesewene hlaf and win, ægðer ge on hiwe ge on swæcce, ac hi beoð soðlice æfter ðære halgunge Cristes lichama and his blod þurh gastlicere gerynu. Hæðen cild bið gefullod ac hit ne bret na his hiw wiðutan ðeah ðe hit beo wiðinnan awend; Hit bið gebroht synfull þurh Adames forgægednysse to ðam fantfæte, ac hit bið aðwogen fram eallum synnum wiðinnan þeah ðe hit wiðutan his hiw ne awende.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ ÆCHom II, 15.

⁶⁶ See Dunn (113-14) for an extremely brief discussion of the ninth-century Continental controversy over the substance and nature of the Eucharist. The debate appeared to center in Fulda and Corbie, with Paschasius Radbertus, Abbot of Corbie, Hrabanus Maurus, Archbishop of Mainz formally a monk of Fulda, and Ratramnus, a monk of Corbie, as the main participants. Ælfric's use of Ratramnus' *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini* raises many questions concerning Ælfric's reception and adaptation, or perhaps ignorance, of this particular debate.

⁶⁷ Förster, Max. "Über die Quellen von Ælfrics Exegetischen Homiliæ Catholicæ," *Anglia* 16 (1894): 50- 51. Förster identifies Ratramnus as Ælfric's source, but as regards the more provocative Augustinian references (Ratramnus, *De Corpore et Sanguine Domini*, *Omnia Opera Ratramni Corbeiensis Monachi*, PL 121, col. 168. Cf. ÆCHom II, 15 157.227- 33), Förster writes that the Augustinian source is lost, but can be found in Ep. XII of Fulgentius. (See "Epistola XII," *Omnia Opera S. Fulgentii Episcopi Ruspensis*, PL 65, 380-92) While Förster is right that Fulgentius provides the Augustinian text, the source is not lost. It is very much alive and well and can be found in "Sermo CCLXXII," *Augustini Opera Omnia*, vol. 5 (PL 38-39) 1246-48.

⁶⁸ ÆCHom II, 15 153.107-11. "On the outside they appear as bread and wine, both in appearance and taste, but they are truly after the consecration the body of Christ and his blood through the spiritual mysteries. A heathen child is baptized, but it does not transform his appearance outwardly, although it is altered inwardly. Through Adam's transgression the child is brought sinful to the baptismal font, but it is cleansed within from all sins, although its appearance does not change without."

For Ælfric the operative work of the holy sacraments occurs within those partaking of the sacraments in faith. Sanctity and sanctification alike belong to the *gastlican mihte and unsewenlicere fremminge* ‘spiritual power and unseen effect’ (l. 138) rather than the visible, physical symbol through which this efficacy works.

Ælfric incorporates a spiritualizing and deeply personal notion of the sacraments as both symbol and avenue of spiritual grace, when he translates Augustine’s explanation of participation in the Eucharist:

Gif ge willað understandan be Cristes lichaman, gehyrað þone apostol Paulum þus cweðende, ‘ge soðlice sindon Cristes lichama and leomu.’ Nu is eower gerynu geled on Godes mysan and ge underfoð eower gerynu to ðan þe sylfe sind. Beoð þæt þæt ge geseoð on þam weofode and underfoð þæt þæt ge sylfe sind.⁶⁹

Paradoxical though these lines first appear, they clarify the distinction between the sacrament itself and the sacramental, for obviously those partaking in the Eucharist are not literally the sacrifice on the altar. They are not the sacrament. By participating in the corporate body and by partaking of Christ’s body and blood, they enter into the sacrament; they do not themselves become the sacrament. By partaking of that which signifies the work of God they engage in a reciprocity of grace. Through the symbols and signs in which they share, Christians become that which is signified: the body of Christ. The sacrament proper consists of that which is seen and that which is effected; that which may be sensibly known, and the holy thing accomplished only by the Spirit through the sign of the sacrament. There is, thus, “un rapport de similitude” between the sign and the signified, the material and the spiritual.⁷⁰

III. Conclusion

To interpret virginity in a sacramental fashion in the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints is not to say that virginity functions as a sacrament, but rather to lay claim to the gap that exists between the sign and the values which it connotes. This gap allows us to make sense of Chrysanthus’s assertion to Daria that in chaste marriage her body will be as beautiful as her mind,

⁶⁹ ÆCHom II, 15 157.227- 33. “If you wish to understand about the body of Christ, hear the apostle Paul thus saying: ‘You truly are Christ’s body and limbs.’ Now is your mystery laid on the table of God, and you receive your own mystery to the extent that you yourselves [are that mystery]. You are that which you see on the altar, and you receive that which you yourselves are.” (Cf. Augustine’s *Sermo* 272, *Augustini Opera Omnia*, vol. 5 (PL 38-39) 1247.5-10). “*Corpus ergo Christi si vis intelligere, Apostolum audi dicentem fidelibus, ‘Vos autem estis corpus Christi, et membra.’ Si ergo vos estis corpus Christi et membra, mysterium vestrum in mensa Dominica positum est: mysterium vestrum accipitis.*” “Therefore, if you wish to understand the body of Christ, hear the apostle Paul’s speaking to the faithful: ‘You, however, are Christ’s body and members.’ If therefore you are the body of Christ and its members, your mystery is placed on the Lord’s table: receive your mystery.” (Cf. Ratramnus, *De Corpore*, PL 121, 168.18-21, and Fulgentius, *Epist. XII*, PL 65, 392.8-11)

⁷⁰ “Sacraments” 520.

without resorting either to a construction of virginity that depends upon the repudiation of the material, sexual body as degraded or degrading, or to a gnostic dualism where body and spirit fight one another. Put sacramentally, the saint's virginal body testifies to the inward transformation of his or her mind, and the salvation journey from pagan wisdom to holy grace. For what is seen and what is understood in the sign of virginity are not the same: physical purity is "seen," but the understood consists of the grace of a particular, undistracted, and intimate relationship with Christ.

Therefore, the interpretation of the fragrance of the rose and the lily as the body and blood of Christ in the *passio* of Cecilia does not equate virginity or martyrdom, or virgins and martyrs, with the operation of grace or salvation. The analogous bond lies between virginity and Christ, the Eucharist and Christ, so that the significance of these signs (the imagery of virgins and martyrs, the bread and the wine) refers to Christ. Virginity might be said to function sacramentally through its singular relationship to and signification of divine love, surpassing grace, and the eternal life to come without ever attributing a redemptive status to virginity.

While Ælfric's conservative theological nature forbids suggesting that he would have proposed a sacramental interpretation of the sign of virginity in these two *passiones*, he himself leaves the space for such an interpretation in his *Sermo de Sacrificio* referred to above, when he enjoins his readers to hold to the reality of the sacramental symbol. They should concern themselves, he tells them, with work accomplished by the sacrament, rather than the mystery of how it is accomplished. For Ælfric faith and effect, not the symbol itself, stand foremost in spiritual consideration.

Peos gerynu is wedd, and hiw.... Ðis wed we healdað gerynelice, oð þæt we becumon to ðære soðfæstnysse and ðonne bið þis wedd geendod. Soðlice hit is swa swa we ær cwædon Cristes lichama and his blod, na lichamlice, ac gastlice. Ne sceole ge smeagan hu hit gedon sy, ac healdan on eowerum geleafan þæt hit swa gedon sy.⁷¹

For Daria, promised union of spirit and body, and for Tiburtius, drawn to faith in Christ by the symbols of virginal rewards, the mystery behind the sign of virginity refers back to the transformative work of grace, wholeness through faith in Christ.

Whether the sacramental aspect pertains to the preservation of virginity as a signifier of Christian initiation and repudiation of worldly loyalties, or whether it pertains to virginity as a signifier of the recreation of the saint's world into a foretaste of heavenly blessing, this

⁷¹ ÆCHom II, 15 154.153-58. "This mystery is a covenant and form.... We keep this covenant mystically until we shall come to the truth and then this covenant will be finished. Truly it is like we said before of Christ's body and his blood, not bodily, but spiritually. You should not consider how it may be done, but hold fast in your faith that it may thus be done."

interpretation of virginity allows for considerations other than mere physical purity in these two *passiones*. A sacramental perspective of virginity requires a rejection of hypothetical gnostic antipathies between the spirit and of the body: the physical body bears the sign of the work of the Spirit and therefore cannot be rejected. Furthermore, a sacramental view allows for the imitation of virgin martyrs like Chrysanthus and Daria, Cecilia and Valerian in a way that an interpretation of virginity as the idealization of physical purity alone never can. If taken at face-value the miraculous virginal life of these married-virgin saints might simply debase marriage and suggest that the life of faith without virginal chastity can only display a tarnished countenance. If this were the meaning of virginity in these *passiones*, then, offering these narratives (one of which “disparages” marriage as the enemy of the Christian’s faith, the other of which conflates the virginal with the salvific) as emulative *gebysnunga*, or ‘examples,’ leaves devout, but non-virginal, readers faced with a model of holiness whose sanctity grows from a foundation upon which they can never build.⁷²

Reading virginity as a sacramental sign allows for emphases other than physical chastity. The notion of sacrament arises naturally within the *passio* of Cecilia itself and has been argued on the basis of both the early martyrial context in which the legend of Cecilia arose, and on the basis of an Augustinian notion of sacrament found elsewhere in Ælfric’s teaching. Virginity is unmistakably and unavoidably a *bodily* reality, but like bread and wine, it can, within the proper context, signify something beyond the merely physical: initiation and consecration to the life of faith, or the evangelical work of the Spirit through God’s saints. Certainly in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria the virginal body--subject to temptation and defilement alike--has great presence, while the *passio* of Cecilia pays relatively little attention to the virginal body, as the narrative refines instead upon questions of faith and doctrine. Ælfric makes no distinction between the importance of virginity to male and female saints in these *passiones*. When the *passio* of a primary male saint like Chrysanthus is compared with that of a female saint like Cecilia, differences are unavoidable, but they must be weighed carefully, because distinctions need not carry meaningful weight. In each narrative, the presence of sexual possibility requires that virginity’s superiority be demonstrated unequivocally. The preservation of purity seems no more important to Cecilia than to Chrysanthus. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the sexuality of the virginal body plays a far more important role in the *passio* of the male than it does in that of the female primary saint. Furthermore, any accusations of a connection between the promotion of virginity and underlying misogyny in the temptation of Chrysanthus must be examined against the portrayal of Daria who

⁷² ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 344.

matches Chrysanthus intellectually, spiritually, and in physical purity. Juxtaposed against the representation of bower maidens and her attacker, Ælfric's characterization of Daria defuses any charge of female saints being more tied to sexuality and the body than their male counterparts.

Sacramental interpretations of virginity do not account for all the facets of the ideal. The relationship between the virginal, rational and natural, for instance, seen in the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria cannot be explained by this holy gap between sign and signified. In regard to such "inconsistencies" Ælfric's *Sermo de Sacrificio in Die Paschae* provides a reminder that multiple interpretations could stand side by side in such texts. Ælfric, and presumably his readers as well, did not view the polyvalence of signs as problematic, but rewarding. To search for a monolithic and singular signification of virginity in Ælfric's *passiones* of the married-virgin saints is an exercise in wrong thinking. The sign of virginity is as subject to the various kinds of interpretation as other signs. No one interpretation can be expected to account for all possibilities or aspects. Together they allow 'virginity' to signify more richly the spiritual meaning which underlies the choice of the virginal life without in any way diminishing the glory of perpetual physical chastity as the preeminent life of faith.

Conclusion

*We are dust from our birth
But in that dust is wrought*

*A place for visions, a hope
That reaches beyond the stars,
Conjures and pauses the seas,
Dust discovers our own
Proud, torn destinies.
Yes, we are dust to the bone.*

Elizabeth Jennings¹

The early Church Fathers' purposive treatment and promotion of virginity as the preeminent form of the Christian life shifted virginal chastity into a position of central importance as a signifier of faith and service. Like sacramental institutions such as the Eucharist, the virginal life, though itself not a sacrament, 'distills' less sensibly concrete notions of spiritual worship and sacrifice into a physical sign. Like sacraments, the sign of virginity symbolizes a particular spiritual relation between God and the individual (i.e. a relation of grace and sacrifice).² The lack of "distinction between symbol and vehicle" of which Adolph Harnack speaks, in discussing the Eucharistic celebrations of the early Christian Church, might as easily be said of holy virginity.³ The symbolic value of virginity as the sacrificial consecration of body and soul to the life of faith coalesces into the vehicle of the virginal body.

In the writings of Ælfric, following in the tradition of the Fathers, the sign of virginity offers up multiple layers of meaning and plays many roles. Thus, one moment it signifies the Christian's allegiance to things eternal, the next the prophetic *vita angelica*. Where in one passage virginity provides a pattern of life that unites the mind to the body, elsewhere its imagery intermingles with the imagery of the Eucharist in order to signify the work of transformative grace. While each of these significations relies upon a spiritualized interpretation of the sign, there remains in any symbolic sign an inescapable aspect of the self-referential. Due to this, the rich signification of such signs can be easily transformed into a promotion of the thing in itself. This "re-literalization," if you will, of the sign is unavoidable with the ideal of virginity, since the consecrated virginal body is truly a holy domain. Yet, Ælfric's application to a more spiritualized vision of virginity throughout the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints suggests that he deliberately tries to avoid this re-literalization in favor of spiritual and symbolic modes of

¹ From Elizabeth Jennings, "Dust," *Collected Poems* (NY: Carcanet Press Ltd., 1986) 212.

² Adolph Harnack, *The History of Dogma*, vol. 1, trans. Neil Buchanan (NY: Dover Publishing Inc., 1961) 207, 212.

³ Harnack 212.

interpretation.

In his *Nativitas Sanctæ Mariæ Virginis* and the pastoral letter to Sigefyrth, where Ælfric uncompromisingly calls for sexual purity among those who serve God, he affirms *mægðhad*'s preeminence in terms of its determining quality of *clænnes*. In comparison to the tradition of the Fathers in which he writes, a rhetoric of parity distinguishes Ælfric's treatment of virginity in these texts. Whereas the Fathers refer occasionally to the participation of both sexes in the life of virginity, but address their treatises primarily to women and tend to focus upon women's virginity, Ælfric instead emphasizes the inclusion of both men and women in the celebrated life. This inclusion plays out most clearly in the married-virgin saints' *passiones*, where time and again these narratives destabilize the stereotypical dichotomies juxtaposing men and the mind against women and the body. Despite the asymmetry in Ælfric's emphasis upon repentance with respect to lapsed female virgins in the *Nativitas* homily, when examining the exemplary narratives of these saints, we see no clear evidence of a disparate emphasis upon women's sexual purity. There is a second layer to Ælfric's insistent "parity" which concerns not male and female, but virgin and non-virgin. As Ælfric is concerned that Sigefyrth realize from the example of John the Baptist that virginity is in both men and women, so too he is concerned for the inclusion of both virgin and non-virgin in the Church, the body of Christ, which finds its most potent expression in the symbol of the virgin. Accordingly, he prefaces his explanation that the Church is called *Godes sylfes gelapung forðan ðe we synd gelaðode*, with an inclusive list of those who belong to that Church: *ge læwede ge gehadode, ge wæpmen ge wimmen, cnihtas and mædenu*.⁴ The invitation of the Church to participate in the body of Christ extends to all, even if the imagery focuses upon virgins.

In the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, Ælfric employs the sign of *mægðhad* and *clænnes* to symbolize the Christian's allegiance to the eternal kingdom of God. Similarly, in the *passiones* of Cecilia, and of Chrysanthus and Daria, these terms again refer to things of an eternal, spiritual nature. The choice to preserve her/his virginal purity indicates the saint's initiation into the Christian faith, and in this purity, body and mind are united by the transforming work of grace. The choice of virginity refers insistently to the Christian's rejection of the world, an emphasis which is highly fitting in a student and teacher of the Benedictine Reform. And yet, although one cannot ignore the implications of an opposition between the virginal, spiritual, and heavenly against the sexual, worldly and sinful, it is possible to make too much of, to essentialize, the

⁴ ÆHom M 8 [Ass 3] 75. "...the Church [invitation] of God himself, because we are invited"; 73-74. "...both lay and consecrated, both men and women, both youths and maidens."

symbolic association of the sexual and worldly, in opposition to the virginal and the heavenly.

I have emphasized the symbolic role of virginity in part to address the consequences of Ælfric's rhetoric of parity, both the absence of an inordinate emphasis upon female virginity in these texts, and the apparent unconcern for the exaltation of physical virginity per se. The two perhaps go hand in hand. In her article on issues of gender pertaining to the Benedictine Reform, Pauline Stafford proposes that "Woman" symbolized for the Reformers "all that the male cleric was to reject."⁵ She postulates a fundamental opposition between the lay, female, and the physical body on one hand, and the monastic, male, and presumably the spirit on the other. Perceiving in legends such as those of Eugenia and Euphrosyne an implicit distrust of both flesh and female, she argues that "Just as marriage, family and private property were lay, feminine and to be rejected, so holiness and religious status were masculine."⁶ Without disrupting the prioritization of virginity over marriage, or of the communal over the private, Ælfric's married-virgin saints certainly complicate these tidy formulations. By choosing the virginal life within marriage, all these saints transform the union of marriage into a foretaste of heaven, where men and women will dwell together as the angels, without thought for sexual difference. The preference for monasticism over marriage is seen in Julian and Basilissa's founding of monastic houses. Sts Chrysanthus and Daria draw the ire of the pagans by spreading as one the gospels of Christianity and abstinent chastity. A related exaltation of the communal over the private can be seen not only in Julian and Basilissa's monasticism, but more pointedly in the *passio* of Cecilia, when the saint discomfits the pagan ruler by distributing the wealth of her late husband and brother-in-law among the poor. Despite these moments, as regards a distinction of monasticism as male and lay as female, or a further association of women with the flesh or body, these texts simply do not support a clear, definitive opposition. Indeed, in his translation of Julian and Basilissa's *passio*, Ælfric deliberately avoids opposing the monastic and secular as the Latin version does.

Ælfric employs the ideal of virginity in a manner that invites a more symbolic interpretation of the sign of physical purity. Such interpretations derive from a well-established tradition in the Fathers, but in Ælfric's case the symbolic emphasis may well reflect upon the impetus behind his translation of the *Lives of Saints*. As with his homilies, Ælfric intends these *passiones* for the promotion of Christian learning and righteousness. Besides the Old English and Latin prefaces to the *Lives*, where Ælfric explains the edifying nature of the saints' lives and passions, he also

⁵ Pauline Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen: Gender, Religious Status and Reforming in Tenth-and Eleventh-Century England," *Past and Present* 163 (1999): 8.

⁶ Stafford, "Queens, Nunneries and Reforming Churchmen" 13.

provides an explanation of the role and importance of these narratives at the end of his translation of the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria. This “epilogue” bears passing resemblance to the preface with which the CCL version of *Passio SS Chrysanthi et Dariae* begins. Ælfric, however, not only repositions this passage, he also changes its focus almost entirely.⁷ Instead of beginning the *passio* with a justification of the saints’ usefulness, as does the CCL, Ælfric briefly cites the importance of the saints as *gebysnunge* ‘example’ and for *þingrædene* ‘intercession’ before closing the *passio* on a vividly apocalyptic note (ll. 344, 345). In this way, the focus of the Old English epilogue departs not only from its Latin exemplar, but from Ælfric’s own focus in his prefaces to the *Lives of Saints*.⁸

Let us first survey the Latin preface in the Cotton-Corpus Legendary in order to identify

⁷ CCCC 9, p. 379, col. a, l. 1 - col. b, 11.

⁸ Similar apocalyptic concerns surface in ÆCHom I (Pref), where Ælfric describes in greater detail the persecutions and calamities that will accompany the advent of Antichrist. (175.67-176.108)

those features from which Ælfric departs.⁹ The CCL preface asserts edification as the foremost purpose of the “history of earlier saints.” Clarifying specifically that the celebration and recitation of these stories does not serve the saints themselves—who feast on far better delights than mortal praises—the preface urges readers to learn from the example of the saints to rightly, and lightly, esteem the allurements of this present world. By enduring hardships after the example of the saints, the faithful reader is assured of one day sharing in the glory of the saints.¹⁰ Those who

⁹ CCCC 9, p. 379, col. a, l. 1 - col. b, l. 11. “*Incipit passio sanctorum Chrisanti et Dariæ. Historiam priorum sanctorum ad edificationem nostram Deus voluit pervenire, non ut laudibus mortalium pasceret eos, quos immortalitatis dapibus pascit; sed ut nos exemplo eorum doceat presentis sæculi blandimenta contemnere, et <ad inquisitionem> sempiternæ gloriæ labentem ac momentaneam angustiam non timere. Omnis enim dolor aut levis est et sufferri potest, aut gravis est; et finem inponit. Sed si uterque timendus est; ratio est ut ille qui eternus est non contemnatur. <Sic> enim isti dolores qui hodie minantur et cras vacuantur, qui hodie exardescunt et cras refrigescunt, qui hodie oriuntur et cras finiuntur, tam diri tam sævi sunt quam graves erunt illi dolores, qui sic inchoant ut crescant cotidie, sic initium capiunt, ut omnino finiri non possint? Hanc denique imaginem tenent, qui se permittunt aut secari a medicis, aut igniri cauteriis, aut amarissimis potationibus sauciari. Mortis enim timore perterriti et amaritudines appetunt, et ignes non metuunt, et ferrum non perhorrescunt. Si ergo amore huius vitæ quæ fidem servare non novit; amantibus se auro comparantur dolores, ignes et <amaritudines>, gratulandum est gratuitis passionibus, quæ ultro venientes, faciunt nos temporaliter humiles, ut in perpetuo exaltemur. Faciunt nos amaritudines momentaneas incurrere, ut sempiternas dulcedines capiamus. Faciunt nobis ardores fugitivi incendii, ut refrigerii nos faciant participes sempiterni. Hoc intuitu omnes martyres Christi, ut triumphum ex hostibus caperent, omnium passionum genera, ridendo potius quam metuendo perpassi sunt, credentes quod gloriam sempiternam adquirerent temporalem respuendo, et eternum ignem evaderent præsens incendium perferendo. Horum itaque gloria [et] delectatione respuamus mundum cum omnibus delectamentis suis, et sanctorum gesta absque incredulitatis nube serenissima recitemus historiamque Crisanti, tam nobis qui credimus quam omnibus qui credituri sunt profuturam.*” <ad inquisitionem> = MS *adquisitionem*; <Sic> = MS *Si*; <amaritudines> = MS *amaritudinis*; (“Here begins the passion of saints Chrysanthus and Daria. God desired the history of earlier saints to come down to us for our edification, not so that He might feed on the praises of mortals those whom He feeds on the banquets of immortality. But so that by their example He might teach us to esteem lightly the blandishments of this age, and for the acquisition of eternal glory not to fear transitory, but momentary difficulties. For every pain is either light and can be endured, or serious and He places an end [on it]. But if each of these ought to be feared, it is reasonable that that [pain] which is eternal should not be belittled. For, are those pains—which threaten today and vanish tomorrow, which burn today and grow cool tomorrow, which rise today and end tomorrow—as severe and as savage as those pains will be heavy which begin so that they grow daily, which have such a beginning that they cannot be finished ever at all? Finally, they hold this image, who allow themselves to be cut by doctors, to be burned by cauteries, to be wounded by very bitter potions. For, terrified by death, they seek bitterness and have no fear of fires and do not shudder at the iron [blade]. If, therefore, in love of this life (which does not know how to preserve faith), pains, fires and bitterness are purchased with gold by those loving themselves, thanks ought to be given for spontaneous sufferings which, coming of their own accord, humble us for a time, so that we may be exalted in eternity. They make us incur momentary bitterness, so that we may take possession of eternal sweetness. They make in us flames of fleeting fire, so that they may make us partakers of eternal coolness. With this understanding, all the martyrs of Christ suffered all kinds of torments, so that they might seize victory from their enemies, laughing rather than fearing, believing that they might acquire eternal glory by spurning temporal glory, and that they might escape eternal fire by enduring present heat. And thus, with the glory and delight of the saints, let us spurn the world with all its delights, and let us recount, without the veil of incredulity, the brilliant deeds of the saints and the story of Chrysanthus, as useful for us who believe as for all who are going to believe.”)

¹⁰ See Marc Van Uytanghe’s “L’essor du culte des saints et la question de l’ eschatologie” (*Les Fonctions des saints dans le monde occidental, IIIe- XIIIe siècle* [Rome: École Française de Rome, 1991] 91-107) for discussion of the development in the fourth and fifth centuries and changing perceptions of the saints’ intercessory role. Van Uytanghe argues that under the influence of Neo-Platonism in these centuries the saints became necessary intermediaries for the ascension of souls to heaven at death.

essentially torture their bodies in the vain attempt to fend off death provide the rather ironic model of voluntary suffering. Christians, however, willingly embrace sufferings that derive from divine rather than human will. Voluntary, holy suffering prepares Christians for heavenly exaltation by momentarily humbling and purging them. Inverting worldly expectations and reality, the persecuted steal victory from their tormentors, and the promise of future glory erases all desire for worldly delight or exaltation. Finally, the preface concludes with an injunction for readers to put off disbelief. Hence, the Latin proffers two justifications for the importance of saints' *vitæ* and *passiones*. Firstly, by distinguishing between the value of this age and the one to come, these texts teach the faithful to spurn the present world for the next. Secondly, they teach readers to welcome suffering and discomfort which will fix their eyes more firmly upon heaven. It is a highly didactic *raison d'être* and one that accords with Ælfric's desire to bolster the flagging faith of Christians, noted in both the Old English and Latin prefaces to the *Lives of Saints*.

In his Old English translation of the Latin preface, now transformed into an epilogue, Ælfric begins with an explanation of the honour due to saints. We celebrate them for our benefit, not theirs (ll. 343-43). He explains that *us sylfum fremað þæt þæt we secgað be him,/ ærest to gebysnunge þæt we þe beteran beon/ and eft to þingrædene þonne us þearf bið.*¹¹ The mention of the saints' intercessory role is Ælfric's own and recalls his reference in the *Lives'* preface to the intercessory role of the saints.¹² His reference to the exemplary nature of the saints recalls the opening lines of the CCL preface: "God desired the history of the earlier saints to come down to us for our edification... that he might teach us by their example."¹³ Aside from this initial similarity, Ælfric expounds upon the exemplary role of the saints quite differently. The Latin proposes the saints as a model to teach Christians to discern between earthly and heavenly glory, momentary and eternal suffering. Ælfric employs the exemplary role of the saints, particularly the history of martyrs, as the axis upon which to turn the discussion towards the approaching end times. He concentrates upon the disparity between the victories of the martyrs past and the struggles that will befall Christians during the persecutions under Antichrist. If Ælfric's exemplar closely resembled the Cotton-Corpus Legendary, as seems most likely, then he has purposefully foregone a hortatory, didactic message. What we see in the last lines of the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria is no "fair trade" between earthly endurance and heavenly delights, between persecutions and

¹¹ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 344-45. "...but that which we say about them benefits us, first for an example, that we may be better, and secondly, for intercession when we are in need."

¹² ÆLS (Preface) 72.

¹³ CCCC 9, p. 379, col. a, ll. 3-4, 6-7.

glory, but rather a grim portrait of the final persecution of the faithful beside which the ancient persecutions of the martyrs pale. At first glance, this apocalyptic portrait fits rather oddly with the preceding *passio*, for it appears to leave the actual usefulness of such narratives in some doubt.

Let us look at the passage more closely. In the last fifteen lines of the epilogue Ælfric depicts the trials to come. With the appearance of Antichrist the wonders of the saints will fail (ll. 348-49). Wonders and miracles, albeit false and illusory, will belong to the devil (ll. 350-51). The miracles which marked the suffering and *passiones* of the martyrs have no counterpart in the last persecutions. Without sensationalism Ælfric sketches out the approaching hardships:

Mycel angsumnys bið þam arwurðum halgum
 þæt se feondlica ehtere fela tacna wyrce
 and hi sylfe ne moton swa þa martyras dydon
 wundra æteowigenda þam wyrstan timan.¹⁴

Despite these trials, Ælfric promises that the faithful will be preserved *þurh þæs Hælendes mihte* 'through the Saviour's might' (l. 356), and in the end Christ will destroy Antichrist. But how exactly do the saints serve as role models for a time in which the very miracles that substantiate their sanctity fail? Apparently Ælfric intends this *passio*, and presumably others, as more than a model for holy living and brave endurance. Although, on the surface Ælfric appears to have changed the preface/epilogue a great deal, the impetus actually remains the same. Ælfric merely places the ongoing strife between the Christian and the world in its greater eschatological framework, and the approaching conflict between Christ and Antichrist. The struggle between the saints and their persecutors, after all, prefigures that very conflict.

In their respective studies Milton Gatch and Malcolm Godden each address the apocalyptic theme in Ælfric's eschatological pieces. On the one hand, Gatch interprets the emphasis upon judgment as a heroic emphasis typical of the Early Middle Ages.¹⁵ He sees the emphasis upon the end times in Ælfric's work as an indication of the abbot's "belief that his own period was the end of the sixth age of history and that the signs of the last times were to be seen in current history."¹⁶ Godden, on the other hand, suggests that Ælfric wants his readers to understand their contemporary sufferings as part of the cosmic battle between God and the devil, rather than as

¹⁴ ÆLS (Chrysanthus) 352-55. "It will be a great sorrow for the honourable saints that the fiendish persecutor will work many signs and they themselves may not do as the martyrs did, showing forth miracles in the worst times."

¹⁵ Milton McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977) 101.

¹⁶ Gatch 104.

divine judgment or apocalypse.¹⁷ He, therefore, frames the eschatological in more spiritualizing terms as the “age-old conflict” between God and the devil, and between their respective servants.¹⁸ Both perspectives converge in the *passiones*. Ælfric may not allude to apocalyptic concerns in his prefaces to the *Lives of Saints*.¹⁹ Yet the notion of apocalypse is ever implicit in the confrontations between the saints and their persecutors. Time and again God’s servants prove their sanctity in these battles (battles that are frequently fought upon the very bodies of the saints). Each such confrontation prefigures the apocalyptic confrontation between Christ and Antichrist. The saints are simultaneously God’s wonder workers, heroic vanguard, and figures of the triumphant Christ. By closing the *passio* of Chrysanthus and Daria on an apocalyptic note, Ælfric does not reject the CCL’s intention of inculcating in the reader heavenly priorities. Rather, he rhetorically locates his readers in the midst of the heroic conflict between God’s faithful and the Antichrist which they have just seen played out in the *passio* of the saints.

How then does the ideal of virginity--the sign of Christian commitment and of the renunciation of the bonds of the world, and token of heavenly citizenship--fit into this picture? I have argued for a sacramental, symbolic interpretation for the sign of virginity in Ælfric for several reasons. The first of these concerns the relative lack of interest Ælfric shows in the physical body which bears the sign of virginity. The second of these arises from the general popularity of virgin saints, like Cecilia for example, and the ideal of the perpetually chaste life throughout the Middle Ages. I believe that a more spiritualizing, symbolic reading of virginity opens up the significance to the non-virginal. The typological runs throughout the conflicts in these three *passiones* speaking to both the ongoing strife between Christ and Satan in which all Christians participate and to the final conflict for which all Christians must prepare. In the stories of the married-virgin saints, virginity

¹⁷ Malcolm Godden, “Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England,” *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, eds. Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray, and Terry Hoad (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1994) 138. Godden argues his position on the basis of the sentiments seen in the *Lives* and the chronology of the works involved. He places ÆLS (Prayer of Moses) at the early end with its representation of suffering as a result of divine judgment (137); he proposes that ÆLS (Forty Soldiers) repositions these conflicts within the context of a cosmic spiritual battle and this is Ælfric’s later position on the subject (138). He offers Ælfric’s treatment of Judith to substantiate this evolution in Ælfric’s representation of the cause of suffering (140-41).

¹⁸ Godden 138.

¹⁹ A comparable focus upon Antichrist and the dangers of the end times can, however, be found in the preface to the first volume of the *Catholic Homilies*, where Ælfric warns in detail of the approaching period of testing, persecution, false miracles and deception. Ælfric refers to his own period as the *geendung byssere worulde* (ÆCHom I [Pref] 58-59); on the persecutions and false wonders of Antichrist, 67-100. Ælfric’s references to God’s commandment to Ezekiel and Isaiah on preaching the truth and calling the people to repentance lest judgement fall upon the prophets for not warning the people provide a framework for Ælfric’s vision of his own work (110-22). [Ez 3:18-21, 33:8-9; Is 58:1.]

frequently functions as the initial testament to the saint's conversion and loyalty to God, igniting the narrative fuse that eventually leads to the conflict between temporal and heavenly paradigms, the saint's martyrdom and entrance into glory.

What are the various images used of the virgin--the *vita angelica*, the image of the virgin as sacrifice and fulfillment of the Old Law's temple and altar, or the image of the virgin as the 'incarnation' of the Church's holy purity and union with Christ--if not figural representations to which all Christians can look and see their own faith symbolically lived out? The virgin alone may live the *vita angelica* on earth, but she/he foretells the future of all Christians in heaven. The virgin's sacrificial life, her function as a visual sign of that life, and her representation of the body of Christ hold signification for all Christians. Virgins' lives bear witness to the sacrifice of holiness and purity to which each Christian is called as she or he participates in the body of Christ. I am not proposing this as *the* single meaning behind Ælfric's portrayal of the ideal of virginity. I am, however, suggesting that the sacramental allows for a far more positive, indeed accessible, interpretation of virginity than do many of our speculations that attempt to reconstruct the virginal ideal in terms of autonomy and power, repression and asexuality. A symbolic, sacramental interpretation provides a means of perceiving the importance of physical purity without laying the greatest emphasis upon a fear of the sexualized body, or an inverse fear for the virginal body. Instead a sacramental vision of virginity allows for greater attention to the spiritual aspect upon which the virginal life was ideally concentrated.

The fact that Ælfric deliberately diminishes the emphasis upon monastic-ascetic virginity in the *passio* of Julian and Basilissa, together with his excision of the maiden-beset Chrysanthus' tirade against the uncontrollability of sexual desire, suggests that his interest does not lie in the promotion of dichotomies that exalt the monastic and virginal at the expense of the lay and non-virginal. This would not serve the pastoral purpose which runs throughout so much of Ælfric's work, his composition of the *Catholic Homilies*, his letters such as the one to Sigefyrth, or his adaptation of the monastic sanctorale for lay reading. The manner in which Ælfric portrays the ideal of virginity in the *passiones* of these holy married-virgins reflects upon his concern for the spiritual effect and effectiveness of these narratives. Without question, the life of consecrated, sexual purity remains the truest and most illustrious form of the Christian life. In point of fact, its rich polyvalence depends upon the spiritually illustrious nature of the sign, as well as reflecting upon it. While in the "Letter to Sigefyrth" and the *Nativitas* homily, the sexual purity of God's servants deeply concerns Ælfric, in the *passiones* of the married-virgin saints, Ælfric

demonstrates as much, if not greater, concern for the spiritual signification of the sign of virginity. The saints in these *passiones* are as much God's servants as the priests of whom Ælfric writes to Sigefyrth, or the consecrated monks and nuns referred to in the homily on the Virgin's Nativity. Their service necessitates their purity and single-minded devotion to their Lord. Yet here, in these three *passiones* from the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric's adaptation of these three holy narratives from the monastic liturgy for lay edification prefers the spiritualizing role of virginity to a celebratory depiction of sexual chastity. The various significations of virginity add, of course, to the status of the sign, but Ælfric gently ascribes the symbol preeminence over the vehicle.

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Note: Translations consulted have been listed immediately following the Latin edition.

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