

The Third Gender and *Ælfric's Lives of Saints*

Rhonda L. McDaniel



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Chapter Six

Material and Spiritual Rulership

Æthelthryth: Virgo Incorrupta

Of all the female saints that Ælfric includes in his collection Æthelthryth seems to live the least dramatic life, in part because she is not a Roman martyr. All but one of the most important events in her legend take place after her death, the one exception being her remarkable maintenance of her virginity through two marriages and over the course of a combined thirteen years of wedded life.¹ Æthelthryth's story differs remarkably from the stories of the female Roman martyrs in that she has no tense confrontations with figures of authority, engages in no learned disputations with anyone else, faces no threats of corporal torture or death, and overcomes no severe temptations.² Bede reports the attested facts of this queen's *vita* in his *Historia ecclesiastica*, complete with eyewitness testimony given in direct discourse, rather than just narrating the story of her triumphs in virginity. Ælfric does more to set the life as a narrative piece when he translates it, but since he stays very close to the original, most of his narrative improvements lie in putting the story into a chronological form.

When Bede writes about Æthelthryth's two marriages, he seems to indicate that the marriages were thrust upon her rather than actively sought by her: "Accepit autem rex Ecgfrid coniugem nomine Aedilthrydam ... quam et alter ante illum uir habuerat uxorem. ... Sed illo post modicum temporis, ex quo eam accepit, defuncto, data est regi prae-fato" [King Ecgfrith received a wife named Æthelthryth, ... whom another man (Tondberht) before him had had as wife. ... But he (Tondberht) having died after a limited amount of time from when he married her, she was given to the king mentioned before].³ Ælfric maintains this impression of Æthelthryth's marriages in his translation: "Æðeldryð wearð þa for-gifen anum ealdor-mann to wife . / ... and heo wearð forgifen ecfride cunincge" [Æthelthryth was given as a wife to a certain alderman. ... and she was given to king Ecgfrith].⁴ Passive as she seems to have been in her marriages,

Æthelthryth seizes the part of the active agent in preserving her virginity: “perpetua tamen mansit uirginitatis integritate gloriosa” [however, she remained glorious with the lasting integrity of virginity], with Ælfric rendering the feat as “heo ... twelf gear wunode unge-wemmed mæden” [She remained for twelve years an undefiled virgin].⁵ Bede leaves her desire for virginity unexplained at this point, but Ælfric inserts the cause for her behavior before going any farther. She pursued virginity because “Heo lufode þone hælend þe hi heold unwemme” [she loved the Savior who kept her undefiled].⁶ Paradoxically, Ælfric depicts Æthelthryth both as passive and as agent in her own virginity: she loves and chooses while Christ keeps her undefiled. In Ælfric’s translation, Æthelthryth’s love for the Savior moves her to action, to preserve her virginity through thirteen years of marriage to two different men. She may have been a passive participant in the contracted marriages, perhaps even reluctant if Bede and Ælfric attest correctly to her desire to enter into a monastic life, but her love for God motivates her to resist actively any and all attempts by her husbands to consummate the marriages. While Bede’s account implies this difference and takes the audience’s recognition of Æthelthryth’s motivation for granted, Ælfric makes the matter explicit and so sets up the familiar opposition between love for heavenly and earthly bridegrooms found in the *passiones* of Agnes and Lucy.

Bede does address Æthelthryth’s desire for Christ further along in the history. King Ecgrith offers the bishop Wilfrid great wealth if he will persuade Æthelthryth to consummate the marriage, but the queen remains adamant: “Quae multum diu regem postulans, ut saeculi curas relinquere atque in monasterio tantum uero regi Christo seruire permetteretur, ubi uix aliquando impetrauit” [petitioning the king for a long time in order that she might be permitted to leave behind the concerns of the world and to serve only the true king, Christ, in a monastery, where she at last, with effort, obtained her desire]. Ælfric provides a little more color as he translates, “Æðeldryð wolde ða ealle woruld-þincg forlætan . / and bæd georne þone cynincg þæt heo criste moste þeowian . / on mynsterlicre drohtnunge swa hire mod hire to-speon . / Þa lyfde hire se cynincg þeah þe hit embe lang wære / þæs þe heo gewilnode” [Æthelthryth then wanted to leave behind all worldly things and she earnestly asked the king that she be allowed to serve Christ in the monastic way of life, just as her mind drew her. Then the king lived with her, although that which she had desired came about after a long time.]⁷ In both Bede’s account and the Old English *Ecclesiastical History*, Æthelthryth deliv-

ers a kind of back-handed insult to her husband by asking that he permit her to serve the true king, Christ. Ælfric silently omits the implication that a human king is not a true king, telling how the queen, drawn by her mind to a contemplative life, continually entreated the king to let her go so that she might serve Christ. Gwen Griffiths interprets this phrase as a sign of Æthelthryth's powerlessness in Ælfric's translation of the saint's legend, of her inability to gain her own goals without male help and supervision, "Since Æthelthryth ostensibly submits to all male figures, and a male agent must finally expedite her entry to a monastery, male power and intervention in the achievement of God's will are privileged. Yet it can equally be argued that Æthelthryth's virginity demonstrates power in its denial of male power through physical withholding. Ælfric ignores this, as he must, for such denial challenges institutional power—royal, ecclesiastical, societal, or familial."⁸ It may be fair to claim Ælfric's concern about issues of secular and ecclesiastical privileges, especially in the climate of the anti-Reform events of Æthelred II's early reign. As Bede and Ælfric tell this story, however, Æthelthryth chooses virginity not as a means of subverting male power but so that she might love and serve Christ instead. Æthelthryth's choice of virginity and Ecgrith's eventual submission to her will reflect different concerns in which the transcendent kingdom of God receives priority. There may have been political or other factors behind her choice, historically, but within the context of her legend there is only one motivation: Æthelthryth's love for Christ. While the queen's desire for purity interrupts the usual course of establishing royal heirs, Ecgrith does not force her into the marriage bed against her will and finally agrees to her monastic vocation. He appears weak and ineffectual in his own home, unable to secure through Æthelthryth a peaceful succession for the security of his earthly kingdom because of his wife's devotion to a different King. Æthelthryth wants his cooperation in her monastic profession because of the church's teaching against one partner in marriage making a unilateral decision for a monastic vocation without consideration of its effects upon the other partner.⁹ Since both Æthelthryth and Ecgrith are Christians, he grudgingly comes to acknowledge her decision for virginity, and she respects the ethical and moral necessity of his "free" choice in the matter before she leaves the marriage for the monastery. In the process, Æthelthryth accomplishes her greatest living feat—she remains a virgin despite twelve years of Ecgrith's entreaties for sexual union. Both Bede and Ælfric focus upon Æthelthryth's desire and purity of intention to serve Christ through the monastic life and her perseverance in obtaining

that desire as the justification for her denial of the conjugal debt. Ælfric's translation, however, makes the matter much more explicit because he actually speaks of her desire, referring to what she *gewilnode* in the same language that he used to describe the desiring part of the soul in *LS* 1.

Having finally obtained the king's release from the demands of marriage (one gets the sense that she finally wore him down), Æthelthryth immediately takes the veil and enters into monastic life. After a year-long novitiate at Coldingham Abbey, she becomes an abbess herself in the region of Ely in East Anglia, "ubi constructo monasterio uirginum Deo deuotarum perplurium mater uirgo et exemplis uitae caelestis esse coepit et monitis" [where, having constructed a monastery, she began to be the virgin mother, both by her examples of heavenly life and by her admonitions, of many virgins devoted to God].¹⁰ Æthelthryth establishes Ely as a double monastery, as shown by the presence of brothers of the monastery later in the *vita*, but Ælfric translates this passage straightforwardly so that it refers to the *mynecena* "nuns," who may have formed the majority of the monastery's population: "and heo syððan wearð gehadod / eft to abudissan on elig mynstre . / ofer manega mynecena . and heo hi modorlice heold / mid godum gebysnungum to þam gastlican life" [and afterward she was consecrated again as abbess over many nuns at Ely Minster, and she ruled them maternally by means of setting a good example for the spiritual life].¹¹ Ælfric does not emphasize Æthelthryth's fecund virginal motherhood as Bede does, describing her as ruling the women of her abbey "maternally" rather than calling her their mother in virginity. Nor does he hide the fact that Æthelthryth and later her sister, Sexburh, ruled a double monastery and that they governed men as well as women. He states that "þa wæs þær sum læce on ðam geleaffullum heape . / cynefryð gehaten" [At that time there was a certain leech in that faithful company, named Cynefrith], and later describes how Sexburh, Æthelthryth's successor as abbess, "sende þa gebroðra" [sent the brothers] to seek stone for a new coffin for Æthelthryth's remains.¹² Ælfric acknowledges the fact that such houses formerly existed and that they were ruled by women—indeed, it would have been pointless to deny it since Bede's history had been translated into Old English as part of the Alfredian educational agenda. On the other hand, he does not emphasize the female rule of double monasteries in Æthelthryth's *vita* either. For his purposes (which are more pastoral than political) the double monastery at Ely simply exists as the setting in which Æthelthryth prospered in her religious observance and

service. He neither condones nor condemns the institution in the legend of Æthelthryth, nor comments upon it directly at all.

The focus of Ælfric's attention, as with Bede before him, is on Æthelthryth's ascetic life. The strict control that she exercised over her own body through fasting and avoiding baths and her continuing exercise of chastity demonstrates how she "wel drohtnode" [conducted her life well] in temporal matters, a manifestation of the rightly ordered functions of her mind.¹³ The queen-turned-abbess spent the hours between matins and dawn of each day in solitary prayer, a period of extended meditation based in the memory. Æthelthryth prayed alone in the morning hours before dawn, the time of fewest interruptions and of darkness that would help her to lift her thoughts and her soul to God. Her well-conducted life and practice of prayer combine with her persevering love for Christ to illustrate an orderly mind in which Æthelthryth shaped her soul in the image of her Creator. Bede simply describes Æthelthryth's behavior in his *Ecclesiastical History*, but in the context of Ælfric's sermons and legends in Cotton Julius E.vii, this behavior gains meaning beyond its simple performance: it indicates the abbess's active rule over her own life and body, a function of the soul that Ælfric describes in *LS* 1 when he writes:

Ðas fif andgitu gewissed̃ seo sawul to hire wyllan . and hyre gedafnað þæt heo swa swa hlæfdige . geornlice foresceawige hwæt heo gehwylcum lime bebeode to donne . oððe hwæt heo gehwylcum lime gefafige on gewylnunge his gecyndes . þæt þær nan þing unþæslic ne gelympe on nanes limes þenunge .

[The soul directs these five senses in accordance to its will and it befits the soul that, just as a noblewoman, it diligently give forethought to what it commands each limb to do or what it consents to for each limb in the desire of its nature, so that in that respect nothing unbecoming may happen in any limb's service.]¹⁴

Once Æthelthryth's life is placed into the context of early medieval Christian belief, what seems to be a passive life from a modern perspective turns out to be an active life of choice, of agency in the sense outlined by Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe as "an improvisation within conflicting structures."¹⁵ Æthelthryth's improvisation of virginity within her marriages and then her conduct of life and governance in a double monastery reflect the queen's pursuit of the *virum perfectum*, a gendered soul moving towards the metagendered Other in the pursuit of her greatest desire.

Æthelthryth even viewed the tumor that eventually led to her death as a bodily means toward that perfection. In his translation of Bede's work, Ælfric makes the abbess's diagnosis of the cause of her tumor and its function in her life the only passage of direct discourse in his translation:

Heo cwæð ic wat geara þæt ic wel wyrðe eom . / þæt min swura
beo geswenct mid swylcere untrum-nysse . / forðan þe is on iugoðe
frætode minne swuran / mid mænig-fealdum swur-beagum . and
me is nu geþuht / þæt godes arfæstnyss þone gylt aclænsige . / þonne
me nu þis geswel scynð for golde . / and þæs hata bryne for healicum
gymstanum.

[She said, "I know well that I am indeed worthy that my neck be afflicted by such an infirmity because in youth I adorned my neck with many necklaces, and it seems to me now that the grace of God cleanses that offense, wherefore now this swelling shines for me in place of gold, and the burning of this heat in place of noble gemstones."]¹⁶

The pain that came to Æthelthryth by means of her tumor served as a vehicle for grace from her perspective, allowing her to make amends bodily for the mind's vanity in her youth. As the only direct speech in Ælfric's whole *vita*, Æthelthryth's self-diagnosis spotlights the spiritual reality manifested through the physical symptom and places her insight at the center of the reader's attention. In contrast, Ælfric marginalizes the physician Cynefrith. In Bede's history, Cynefrith delivers his testimony about Æthelthryth's illness, the measures he took to cure it, and the discovery of her uncorrupt body with the healed wound on her neck in direct discourse to emphasize its status as eyewitness testimony. His long and dramatic description of events easily overshadows Æthelthryth's speech.¹⁷ Ælfric, however, not only takes Cynefrith's information out of direct discourse, he does not even present it as indirect discourse. The physician's testimony becomes subsumed into Ælfric's narrative arc, impersonal and disengaged from the man himself. The primary witness to the discovery and verification of Æthelthryth's uncorrupt corpse in Bede's account is nudged aside to the margin in Ælfric's so that the miracle and the saint herself always remain foregrounded for the audience.

What, then, is Ælfric's point in translating the story of Æthelthryth, especially since a translation of Bede's legend already existed? Ælfric takes her out of her original context among the earthly kings and queens of early Anglo-Saxon England and in *Lives of Saints* places her in the transcendent

context of the court of saints in the kingdom of God. The translation itself effectively illustrates the spiritual reality and helps his vernacular audience see their own connection to the heavenly kingdom through their native identification with Æthelthryth. As an Anglo-Saxon saint, Æthelthryth brings the possibility of successfully emulating her devotion and holy living much closer to Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon audience because of her cultural familiarity and the sense of kinship Ælfric's readers may have felt.¹⁸ While it poses its own difficulties and complexities in terms of the differences between the historical queen and the queen of hagiographic legend, the life of Æthelthryth instructs its readers in the value of chastity in an almost colorless fashion as it describes the "white (that is, bloodless) martyrdom of the ascetic life."¹⁹ In order to make sure that his readers understand the point of the legend, Ælfric tacks on a brief moral: "Oft woruld-menn eac heoldon swa swa us bec secgað / heora clænnyse on synscipe for cristes lufe / swa swa we mihton reccan gif ge rohton hit to gehyrenne" [Frequently the laity also, just as the books tell us, preserved their purity within marriage out of love for Christ, as we were able tell if you desired to hear it].²⁰ Yet even in this rather ham-handed attempt to encourage his nonmonastic audience towards lives of chastity, Ælfric brings up the matter of desire and why even lay folk ought to live chastely within marriage—they should do so because they love Christ, just as the saints in the books do. Then they, too, might reign in their own souls as queens over the household of the body.

Oswald: *Rex et Famulus*

The first of the royal martyrs of Anglo-Saxon England, Oswald sets an example (according to Bede) of the servant king, a man simultaneously strong and humble, a warrior and a man of prayer, a king of one kingdom and a subject in another kingdom that occupy the same time and space yet both only become visible concurrently in Oswald himself.²¹ In translating Oswald's life, Ælfric follows the same strategy that he used in his version of the life of Æthelthryth, not only condensing Bede's account but also rearranging the parts to provide greater narrative coherence and to foreground Oswald's example of Christian kingship. With its emphasis on humility, Ælfric's *vita* of Oswald portrays a kind of kingship that exercises its secular power only with reluctance in contrast to hegemonic kingship as "an institution of, by, and about power."²² In the *vitae* and *passiones* examined here, the men in high positions of power who have wanted to show

their sanctity have done so by renouncing their secular authority because, as Clare Stancliffe notes, “In the martyrs’ acts, it is normally the secular powers which *persecute* Christians.”²³ Oswald’s *vita* redeems the image of the secular ruler, but paradoxically does so by depicting the king as a servant.

Ælfric sets up this paradox in Oswald’s *vita* early on when he translates Bede’s account of Oswald’s cross and of the battle against Cædwalla. At the end of chapter one, Bede contrasts both Oswald’s small army with Cædwalla’s very large force and Oswald’s dependence upon Christ as opposed to Cædwalla’s pride and confidence in his own strength.²⁴ Ælfric maintains this contrast, but he rearranges it and uses it as a frame around the story of the raising of Oswald’s cross. He sets the scene by describing how cruelly Cædwalla treats the conquered people of Northumbria after defeating and killing Oswald’s predecessors to the throne. Then, Ælfric writes that “Oswald him com to . and him cenlice wiðfeht / mid lytlum werode . ac his geleafa hine getrymde . / and crist him gefylste to his feonda slege” [Oswald came to him and bravely fought against him with a little company. But his belief strengthened him, and Christ helped him for the destruction of his foes].²⁵ Oswald’s dependence upon Christ for victory offsets the “manliness” of his bravery and leadership against the persecutor of the Northumbrian people and suggests that Oswald’s leadership and masculinity may be of a different kind from what one might expect of an earthly king. Ælfric then describes how Oswald raises a cross the day before the battle and calls for his company to prostrate themselves with him in prayer to the Almighty God so that God in his omnipotence would save (*abredde*) them from the enemy.²⁶ Oswald’s prayer emphasizes the contrast between his own military weakness and the power of God to save him, his men, and his kingdom. Ælfric then reports that Oswald and his little band won the battle the next morning, “swa swa se wealdend heom uðe . / for oswoldes geleafan . and alodon heora fynd” [just as the ruler granted to them because of the belief of Oswald, and [God] carried off their foes].²⁷ No doubt remains regarding who won this battle. It is not Oswald, but God who delivers the Northumbrians from the depredations of Cædwalla. Ælfric closes the episode by framing it with Bede’s brief comment about the defeated king, “þone modigan cedwallan . mid his micelan werode . / þe wende þæt him ne mihte nan werod wiðstandan” [that arrogant Cædwalla with his great army, who thought that no host would be able to stand against him].²⁸ The artful contrast that Bede’s narrative implies finds its most telling expression in Ælfric’s rearrangement

of Bede's material so that the humility and weakness of Oswald and his puny army in the opening thought of the episode are neatly balanced at its close against this statement of Cædwalla's pride and the strength of his army. Ælfric even increases the sense of Cædwalla's humiliation, making the statement ironic by placing it immediately after the description of how God carried away all of Oswald's foes and gave the Northumbrian king and his small force the victory.

The David and Goliath parallel implicit in this incident sets the theme of godly kingship in the forefront of Oswald's life, in stark contrast to the focus upon renunciation of worldly power and glory in the legends of the Roman martyrs. Such a departure from hagiographical formula could be justified by an appeal to a more authoritative ideal, none of which could be more compelling than an example from the Bible, and none of the biblical examples speak with more force and clarity than the example of David, warrior, king, and man after God's own heart because of his humility and piety.²⁹ By departing from the themes of renunciation and symbolic emasculation that attempt to describe the process for men of becoming metagendered in the earlier Latin texts, does the *vita* of Oswald set up a conflicting standard of Christian manliness?

In the Latin *vita*, as soon as he has finished narrating some of the miracles of healing attributed to the cross that Oswald had set up before the battle, Bede describes Oswald's concern for the conversion of the people in his kingdom. The new king sends a request to the Irish that they send a bishop who might preach to and convert his people. Oswald's concern parallels the concern shown by various saints for the salvation of others through conversion; it also reflects the view that such conversions should be accomplished through persuasion rather than force. Oswald, even though he is the king, does not command his people to convert, but brings in an Irish missionary to persuade them to the faith. In translating this passage, Ælfric adds details that again draw out the implicit parallel between David and Oswald: in II Samuel 2:1, as soon as the former king of Israel, Saul, died in battle and the way cleared for David to take the throne as king, David "consuluit Dominum" [inquired to the Lord]. In like fashion, Ælfric adds to Bede's account by writing "Hwæt ða oswold on gann . embe godes willan to smeagenne . / sona swa he rices gewæld" [Listen! Then Oswald began to seek after the will of God as soon as he had rulership of the kingdom].³⁰ The addition of this detail moves Oswald closer to David's example and also reminds Ælfric's readers that a king like Oswald keeps in mind that he is subject to God, rather than trying

to be his own independent authority, like God, under nobody.³¹ Oswald's kingship stands in stark contrast to the kinds of rulership demonstrated by the pagan Roman emperors and rulers in the other martyrs' *passiones*, and Ælfric draws attention to the point by enhancing Oswald's similarity to David. This contrast, however, also redefines the kind of royal behavior that a Christian king might portray. In George's *passio*, the emperor Datian sought to make all of his subjects worship his gods by terrifying them into compliance, forcing them on pain of torture and death to renounce Christianity and sacrifice to idols. This sort of hegemonic royal masculinity, forceful, aggressive, coercing compliance when it was not given voluntarily, is consistently depicted in both the female and the male saints' *passiones* as an undesirable characteristic of the devil and of men with disordered minds, and is described by Augustine as a fallen, unclean (gendered) love of self. As such, this "traditional male" behavior uniformly receives the condemnation of the Latin and English hagiographers alike. By contrast, Oswald desires his people to worship God, but approaches the matter of conversion in a different way, wanting his people to come to faith through *gewemunge* (persuasion), just as Sebastian, Eugenia, and others brought many to faith by means of instruction.³²

Unlike these other saints, however, Oswald does not instruct the people in the doctrines of the faith by himself. Instead, he acts as a translator for the Irish bishop, Aidan, never presuming to take upon himself the role of the clergy in instructing others.³³ Ælfric carefully maintains the separation between secular and ecclesiastical powers and responsibilities that Bede illustrates in his account of Oswald's life. Oswald may ask for preachers to be sent to his kingdom, but he does not himself instruct the people in any way other than by translating Aidan's preaching. This action on Oswald's part shows him as a servant of God, receiving his words from another and passing them on to the people. In this role, Oswald plays a relatively passive part in that the instruction and ideas he translates are not his own. Oswald functions here in a subject position, as a servant of the faith rather than as king and ruler. By acting as translator, however, Oswald participates in the instruction and conversion of his people and so he can in some way receive credit for their conversion as a sign of his sanctity.

Both Bede and Ælfric give considerable space in their narratives to Aidan, the Irish missionary, and his involvement in Oswald's kingdom. Aidan fills the role in Oswald's life that prophets such as Samuel and Nathan filled in the life of King David. Aidan balances Oswald's repre-

sensation of secular Christian masculinity by being himself the example of metagender much like that demonstrated by the other male saints after they renounced their earthly dignity and authority. Bede describes Aidan as “*summae mansuetudinis et pietatis ac moderaminis uirum habentemque zelum Dei*” [a man of the greatest gentleness, devotion, moderation, and possessing zeal for God].³⁴ Ælfric does not translate this description, but rather lifts a passage from later in Bede’s life and writes that Aidan “*wæs mæres lifes man on munuclire drohtnunge . / and he ealle woruld-cara awarep fram his heortan / nanes þinges wilnigende butan godes wilan*” [was a man of excellent life in monkish conduct and he cast aside all worldly concerns from his heart, desiring nothing except the will of God].³⁵ Expecting even his nonmonastic audience to know to some extent what the exemplary monastic life entailed, Ælfric apparently felt no need to elaborate the specifics of it, but only notes the way that Aidan completely turned away from worldly concerns and desired only the things of God, thus demonstrating the rightly ordered priorities of a mind restored through belief. The first quality that Ælfric describes in detail (also taken from a later chapter in Bede’s life) is how Aidan immediately gives away to the poor and needy anything in the way of gifts and wealth that were given to him by the king or other rich people: “*Swa hwæt swa him becom of þæs cyninges gifum . / oððe ricra manna þæt he hraðe dælde . / þearfum . and wædlum . mid wellwillendum mode*” [Whatever came to him of the gifts of the king or high-ranking people he quickly distributed with a kindly disposition to the poor and the destitute].³⁶ Aidan, then, balances the religious expression of proper desire within the same *vita* that addresses through Oswald the proper expression of desire within a secular context. The chief quality in the life of this Irish bishop, however, is the attention that he gives to instructing the minds of those who accompany him on his preaching journeys. While instructing the Northumbrian folk as he has opportunity, Aidan is much more structured in the way he educates his followers in the faith:

Bede:

In tantum autem uita illius a nostri temporis segnitia distabat, ut omnes qui cum eo incedebant, siue adtonsi seu laici, meditari deberent, id est aut legendis scripturis aut psalmis discendis operam dare. Hoc erat cotidianum opus illius et omnium qui cum eo erant, ubicumque locorum deuenissent.

[He differed so much, however, in his life from the slothfulness of our time that all who proceeded with him, whether tonsured or of the laity, had to meditate, that is to work either by reading holy writings or by learning the psalms. This was the daily work of him and of all who were with him, whatever place they went.]

Ælfric:

He lufode forhæfednysse . and halige rædinge . / and lunge men
teah georne mid lare . / swa þæt ealle his geferan þe him mid eodon
/ sceoldon sealmas leornian . oððe sume rædinge . / swa hwider swa
hi ferdon . þam folce bodigende .

[He loved self-restraint and holy reading and taught the young men gladly with exhortation so that all his disciples that journeyed with him must study the psalms or some reading wherever they traveled to preach to the people.]³⁷

Again, both Bede and Ælfric emphasize the importance of developing the memory and of knowing God, for one can neither recognize nor love God's goodness if one remains ignorant of it or forgets it after reading about it. As Augustine comments, the first need of the newly restored mind is to be instructed in the faith so that the light of knowledge and recognition of God can continually grow and strengthen the soul back to the health of a loving relationship with God.³⁸ Aidan provides just the kind of instruction needed to strengthen the minds of the new Anglo-Saxon converts and of the king as well.

Both Bede and Ælfric make clear that Oswald occupies a subject position to Aidan when it comes to matters of faith:

Bede:

Huius igitur antistitis doctrina rex Osuald cum ea, cui praeerat,
gente Anglorum institutus, non solum / incognita progenitoribus
suis regna caelorum sperare didicit. ... Quo regni culmine
sublimatus, nihilominus (quod mirum dictu est) pauperibus et
peregrinis semper humilis benignus et largus fuit.

[Then King Oswald, who had been established as ruler over the race of the Angles, together with them learned to hope for the kingdom of heaven unknown by their own predecessors from the teaching of this bishop. ... Having been elevated to the highest office of the

kingdom, he nevertheless was always humble, kind, and bountiful to the lowly and to strangers (which is wonderful to relate).]

Ælfric:

Pa wearð se cynincg oswold swiðe ælmes-georn . / and eadmod on
þeawum . and on eallum þingum cystig . / and man ahrærde cyrcan
on his rice geond eall . / and mynsterlice gesetnyssa mid micelre
geornfulnysse .

[Then King Oswald became very charitable and humble in disposition, and generous in all matters. The man built churches and monastic foundations throughout all of his kingdom with great zeal.]³⁹

Ælfric combines two different passages in his translation here: the comments on Oswald's growth in virtue and humility under Aidan's instruction and the information about his activity in building churches and monasteries. By putting these two ideas together in this fashion at this point in his rendition of Oswald's life, Ælfric again parallels events in the life of King David. Immediately after conquering Jerusalem and establishing himself as king, David brings the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem (paralleled by Oswald bringing the Gospel into his kingdom). As soon as the Ark is established in the royal city, David makes sacrifices and distributes gifts of food to all the people that had assembled for the event.⁴⁰ David then desires to build a temple as the resting place for the ark of the covenant, for up to this time the Ark has remained in a tent. God does not actually permit David to build the temple, because the king has shed blood in war, but rather instructs David to gather the building materials so that his son, Solomon, can build the temple.⁴¹ Similarly, once Oswald has become king and has brought a preacher of the Gospel to his kingdom, he becomes charitable and bountiful to his people, especially in terms of distributing food and alms, and then he sets about building churches and monasteries in a desire parallel to David's desire to build a temple for God. In this last parallel, however, Oswald actually builds as he desires to do even though he is a warrior, whereas David was prevented because he had shed blood as a warrior.

Ælfric expands upon the point he has just made by describing details of Oswald's distribution of food and building of the minster at York, at the same time describing how God then enlarged Oswald's kingdom and united four different peoples under him by way of blessing. The

example that Ælfric translates concerning the distribution of food also involves Aidan in his role as prophet. Briefly, as the king and the bishop observe the Easter feast together, notice comes to Oswald that many poor folk from all over his kingdom have gathered in the streets. The king then orders that the silver dish bearing the royal food be taken, the food distributed to the gathered people, and the dish cut up and distributed likewise. Aidan, rejoicing at the king's generosity, grabs the king's right hand and says "Nunquam inueterescat haec manus" [May this hand never decay].⁴² Both Bede and Ælfric note that, true to the bishop's pronouncement, the right hand of King Oswald continued to exist without the usual process of decay, remaining uncorrupt all the way to Ælfric's day as a sign of the generosity and benevolence of the king.⁴³

Next Ælfric describes how God unites the peoples of the Picts, the Britons, the Scots, and the Angles under Oswald's rule as a sign of the king's merits in God's eyes.⁴⁴ For Ælfric's purposes it does not matter that this "unity" most likely came about by means of conquest (a detail that Bede provides in a brief, passing observation regarding the land of Mercia, but that Ælfric omits), even though it parallels David's subduing of the enemies of Israel. Such unification at any time and place implies peace between the people who acknowledge one common ruler and, in turn, reflects upon the king as a peace-maker. By omitting how Oswald expanded his kingdom through warfare, Ælfric depicts the saint as one who fought only to defend his people and deliver them from a cruel tyrant. The omission reveals Ælfric's attitude towards war, inasmuch as it seems justifiable to him in the case of defending one's people and homeland but that he would not find war justifiable in the case of a king simply wanting to gain more territory for his own enrichment.⁴⁵ In this instance Ælfric deals rather disingenuously (as does Bede) with actual history for the sake of constructing an ideal of Christian royalty that excludes the expansionist ambitions associated with the hegemonic male. In both Bede's and Ælfric's versions of secular Christian masculinity, Oswald again plays a passive role: God unifies the four peoples (presumably through their common faith) as a reward for Oswald's merits in humbling himself before God.⁴⁶

Following immediately after the description of the enlargement and unity of Oswald's kingdom, Ælfric brings to his reader's attention the fact that Oswald completed the *ænlice* "glorious, noble, splendid" minster at York, the episcopal see of Northumbria.⁴⁷ In doing so, Ælfric reminds his learned audience again of Oswald's similarity to David concerning his

desire to construct places for the worship of God while instructing those who did not know the Bible so well in the kind of deeds appropriate to secular Christian piety and imitable by both men and women.

At this point in the Old English life, Oswald takes on the qualities more familiar to a saint. Ælfric skips several chapters of Bede's life and then translates Bede's description of Oswald as a devout man who "*temporalis regni quondam gubernacula tenens magis pro aeterno regno semper laborare ac deprecari solebat*" [formerly possessing the government of a temporal kingdom, was always more accustomed to work and to pray for the eternal kingdom], or as Ælfric succinctly puts it, "swanc for heofonan rice mid singalum gebedum" [labored for the heavenly kingdom with continual prayers].⁴⁸ The paradoxical image of the king as a laborer, more clearly evoked by Ælfric's frank brevity than by Bede's elegance, receives added emphasis in the Old English life because it immediately follows the description of Oswald's completion of the minster at York whereas Bede tags the comment on at the end of the story of a miracle at Oswald's tomb. The effect of Bede's use of *laborare* (to labor) is mitigated by the fact that in the Latin version the mention of the labor follows the statement that Oswald is "*cum Domino regnantis*" [reigning with the Lord], and that his former work (done while he was alive) is never defined—though Oswald worked and prayed, whatever work he did remains undefined and nebulous, an abstract idea rather than a concrete activity.⁴⁹ In Ælfric's translation, however, Oswald *swanc* (labored, worked) in prayer, a labor that any monastic audience especially would recognize as potentially exhausting, a labor at which even Jesus once sweated.⁵⁰ Moreover, Ælfric joins the idea of Oswald's labor in prayer syntactically to his completion of the construction project at York minster, ordering the work of construction as the first logical point and the work at prayer as the second logical point of the same sentence, making Oswald a saint for all the English of every estate in society by identifying the warrior king as one who labors and one who prays. Again, Ælfric not only draws out and refines the thought that he finds implicit or diffused in Bede's account, he actually changes Bede's focus, creating a sharper, clearer image of Oswald as earthly king and heavenly servant, so that the entire sentence reads like this:

He fulworhte on eferwic þæt ænlice mynster / þe his mæg eadwine
ær begunnon hæfde . / and he swanc for heofonan rice mid singalum
gebedum . / swiþor þonne he hogode hu he geheolde on worulde /
þa hwilwendlican gepincðu . þe he hwonlice lufode.

[He completed the splendid minster in York that his kinsman Edwin had begun earlier, and he labored for the heavenly kingdom with continual prayers more than he cared for how he possessed temporal dignities in the world, which he loved little.]⁵¹

Ælfric makes no mention of Oswald ruling with God in heaven; instead he creates an image of Oswald as a servant motivated to labor because of his desire for the heavenly kingdom and his disdain for temporal honors, a familiar motif from the *vitae* and *passiones* of the other male saints. Both Bede and Ælfric then describe Oswald's habit of frequently praying with his palms turned upwards before parting ways again, Bede to describe the tradition of Oswald's dying prayer and Ælfric to narrate the story of the conversion of King Cynegils of Wessex.

The conversion of Cynegils and the West Saxons does not directly add much to the picture of Oswald. Ælfric's version, however, is more notable for what it leaves out than for what it tells. In Bede's account, a missionary sent by Pope Honorius in Rome comes to Wessex and preaches to the West Saxons. After receiving instruction from this missionary, Bishop Birinus, Cynegils converts and receives baptism. The king's sponsor at his baptism, however, is none other than Oswald, who has come to Cynegils's kingdom for an unspecified purpose. Bede makes a point of describing the friendly relationship between the two kings in light of the fact that Oswald would later marry Cynegils's daughter.⁵² Ælfric, however, omits this detail entirely. In fact, throughout the whole of Oswald's life he never mentions the fact that Oswald ever married, but then even Bede only mentions it as a sort of side note in this episode of Cynegils's conversion. Possibly Ælfric declines to call attention to the marriage because Bede treats the matter only this once. Yet Bede points out that the relational bond established between the two kings by the marriage is an important element that reinforces the relational bond formed between the two kings by their mutual faith, and so Ælfric's silence with regard to the marriage may have other implications than just his penchant for condensing and abbreviating his sources. By ignoring the sexual aspect of Oswald's life, Ælfric makes the king seem more like a monk, one who has voluntarily, according to Jerome, become a eunuch for the kingdom of God.⁵³ Only Oswald has not become a eunuch willingly—Ælfric has chosen it for him. The juxtaposition of this omission with the description of Oswald's intense life of prayer may also reveal another aspect of Ælfric's thinking, the connection between sexual abstinence and the life of prayer

that Jerome makes in *Adversus Jovinianum* and Bede repeats in his commentary on I Peter:

Jubet idem Apostolus in alio loco, ut semper oremus. Si semper orandum est, numquam ergo conjugio serviendum, quoniam quotiescumque uxori debitum reddo, orare non possum. ... Ecce eodem sensu ... impediri dicit orationes officio conjugali. ... Si abstinemus nos a coitu, honorem tribuimus uxoribus: si non abstinemus, perspicuum est honori contrariam esse contumeliam.

[The same Apostle in another place commands us to pray always. If we are to pray always, it follows that we must never be in the bondage of wedlock, for as often as I render my wife her due, I cannot pray. ... so [he] now says that prayers are hindered by the performance of marriage duty. ... If we abstain from intercourse, we give honour to our wives: if we do not abstain, it is clear that insult is the opposite of honour.]⁵⁴

The scant attention that Oswald's marriage receives in Bede's work and the way in which Ælfric places the story of Cynegils's baptism next to his description of Oswald in prayer probably both influence Ælfric's decision not to mention the marriage. If so, the omission highlights an interesting aspect of Ælfric's own process of thought in crafting his translations, how ideas that are associated within monastic teachings influence the decisions he makes as translator and redactor of saints' lives. In this case, he apparently cannot reconcile Oswald's continual prayers with married life, and so declines to mention the marriage at all.

Yet if Bede and Ælfric touched only lightly or not at all upon the subject of the king's sexuality, neither one avoided his body altogether. As with his *vita* of Æthelthryth, Bede does not provide a physical description of Oswald, nor does he depict the king engaged in any particularly "masculine" endeavor other than warfare. Instead, Bede shows Oswald building churches and monasteries, just as Æthelthryth did; devoting himself to prayer, as Æthelthryth did; participating in the Christian instruction of his people, as Æthelthryth did; and caring for the people under his rule, as did Æthelthryth. Yet the king's body also receives attention, especially his hands. In Bede's account, before his battle for the throne, the king holds and steadies the cross "utraque manu" [with each hand] while his men secure it in the ground.⁵⁵ Oswald also raises his hands in prayer with Aidan before the Easter feast at which the king provides food and silver for the poor gathered at his gates. In this same scene, Aidan blesses the

king's right hand because of his generosity.⁵⁶ Later, Bede describes how Oswald prays with his hands on his knees, palms turned upward, and how, after being slain in battle, the king's hands were hung on stakes, along with his head, as trophies of battle before being retrieved by Oswald's brother Oswiu.⁵⁷ Most importantly, however, Bede narrates how Oswald's right hand, which had been blessed by Aidan, remains undecayed long after his death as a sign of his sanctity.⁵⁸ The hands actually become the part of the king's body that lives out and undergoes the traditional motifs of the martyr's legend. They pray, give alms, raise places of worship, are violently impaled then exposed to public humiliation by the heathen King Penda, and the right hand remains uncorrupt after death, finally becoming the locus of the saint's cult and the site of miraculous cures. Ælfric does not carry all of the references to Oswald's hands through into his translation, but he retains enough of them to convey the same synecdoche of martyrdom that Bede's *vita* portrays.⁵⁹

Certain aspects of the Roman martyrs' legends do not appear in Oswald's *vita*, however. Like Æthelthryth, Oswald never undergoes any sort of temptation or torture that threatens to undermine his faith or turn him back to the pagan gods. He never debates with anyone concerning Christianity, nor does he act as the effective agent of anyone's conversion. All of Oswald's battles take place in the physical, temporal realm, he faces no demonic foes, nor does he receive protection in the form of an angelic being. The unusual light that plays a part in so many saints' *vitae* graces Oswald only after his death, appearing as a sign of the king's sanctity to recalcitrant Mercian monks when Queen Osthryth translates his bones to Bardney monastery.⁶⁰ Neither Bede nor Ælfric leave any room to doubt Oswald's sanctity, however, for both describe many of the miracles credited to Oswald's relics.

In the *vita* of this saintly king, one finds a secular ruler with the strength and authority to defend his people from their enemies and to enforce peace in a kingdom of diverse people. Yet this secular ruler is simultaneously a servant to another king in a transcendent kingdom, powerless in himself, belonging in life to the common class of believers, and dependent upon the strength and good will of the King of all creation. Oswald prays, gives generous alms, provides for his people's instruction in the Christian faith, and gives his life in defense of his people. In all aspects pertaining to the faith, his activities resonate with those of the Anglo-Saxon holy woman, Æthelthryth, except that Æthelthryth actually instructed her followers in the faith. Oswald can only enact this aspect of

a saint's activities vicariously as he translates for Aidan. As a man of the world and a man of God, this Northumbrian king opens the door to a new kind of masculinity, one that allows for aggression directed toward limited ends (such as defense of one's people) and approves worldly power for the purposes of spreading the Gospel, establishing peace, and aiding the poor.

Edmund: *Rex Memoriae*

Abbo of Fleury recorded the "Passio Sancti Eadmundi Regis et Martyris" from the remembered testimony of King Edmund's sword-bearer, who told his recollections to Dunstan when the future archbishop was a young man. Ælfric indicated in both the Latin and the Old English prefaces to *Lives of Saints* that he wrote these translations "prodesse edificando ad fidem lectione huius narrationis" [to build up in faith those who read these accounts].⁶¹ The Old English preface more specifically states that Ælfric wrote the collection "to langum gemynde and to trymmince þam towerdum mannum" [for a lasting memory and for encouraging future men and women].⁶² Ælfric approaches his translation of the "Passio Sancti Eadmundi" as a writing for the sake of memory, not just passive recall, but of reflective remembrance that will build up and encourage faithful behavior.⁶³ The *passio* as rendered by Ælfric retains Abbo of Fleury's emphasis on memory, centering around the Old English word *gemyndig* (mindful, remembering). Both Abbo and Ælfric provide a historical introduction that connects the audience directly with the events to be related by means of memory: the memory of Edmund's sword-bearer (affirmed by oath), the memory of Archbishop Dunstan, and Dunstan's memory as recorded by Abbo in a Latin book and then a translation by Ælfric. Abbo especially makes a point of how Dunstan laid up the testimony "ut promptuario memoriae" [as in the storehouse of memory].⁶⁴ Ælfric omits this comment on Dunstan's memory and characteristically condenses Abbo's florid Latin prose into concise, direct English, describing King Edmund as:

snotor and wurðfull . and wurðode symble / mid æpelum þeawum
þone ælmihtigan god . / He wæs ead-mod . and gefungen . and swa
an-ræde þurh-wunode / þæt he nolde abugan to bysmorfullum
leahtrum . / ne on næpre healfe he ne ahyldde his þeawas . / ac wæs
symble gemyndig þære soþan lare . / [gif] þu eart to heafod-men
ge-set . ne ahefe þu ðe / ac beo betwux mannum swa swa an man of
him . / He wæs cystig wædlum and wydewum swa swa fæder . / and

mid wel-willendnyse gewissode his folc / symle to riht-wisnyse
and þam reþum styrde .

[wise and honorable, and he always glorified Almighty God by his noble virtues. He was humble-minded and devout, and remained so steadfast that he would not bend to shameful vices; nor did he turn away his conduct to either side, but was always mindful of the true doctrine. “(if) you are placed in the position of a chief man, do not exalt yourself, but be among the people as one of them.” Edmund was generous to the poor and to widows just as a father, and with kindness always instructed his people to belief and restrained the violent.]⁶⁵

These lines emphasize, of course, the humble, wise character of the saint and his virtuous living, but buried in the middle of the passage is the comment that Edmund “wæs symble gemyndig ære soþan lare” [was always mindful of (or always remembering) the true doctrine] about rulers living among their people as one of them.⁶⁶ If virtue and especially prudence are developed through habits of memory, then this passage is a testimony to that process. Edmund is shown to be excellent in virtue, humble, generous, honorable, and kind. He exercises prudence in consistently shunning vices, instructing his people how to live rightly, caring for widows, and restraining the violent. In the context of political events in the mid-990s, the description of Edmund as the ideal Christian Anglo-Saxon king rings with implicit criticism of Æthelred II and his *witan*. Though all of the qualities Ælfric describes are found in Abbo and thus were probably not originally intended as a critique of Æthelred in the Latin version, it is impossible to think that Ælfric did not have the tumultuous factionalism and uncertainties within Æthelred’s *witan* as well as the attacks by Vikings in mind as he translated Edmund’s *passio* for his collection. All of the characteristics and virtues attributed to Edmund befit a Christian and a king, but the king has to choose to build such character in himself—wisdom does not automatically come with the crown. Self-formation, even in kings, has to be deliberately pursued through the application of memory in order to shape behavior. Lucie Doležalová and Tamás Visi comment that, “Remembering the correct patterns of behavior, remembering one’s social position and the rights and duties implied in it, or remembering one’s self in the sense of being faithful to it require a special effort. Memory here is a sort of ethical power.”⁶⁷ That Edmund was *symble gemyndig* of the teachings of his Christian faith indicates not the passive awareness of

such ideas, but a continual, active, reflective engagement on his part with concepts that he had committed to memory for the purpose of eschewing vices and deliberately cultivating the virtuous behavior described in the above lines. Ælfric may have had in mind a process similar to that described by Ambrose in *De bono mortis*.⁶⁸ Edmund's continual mindfulness of Christian teaching shaped his pattern of conduct and his understanding of the duties of his social position to such a degree that he could only be true to himself by being true to virtues that he never allowed himself to forget. Æthelred, on the other hand, seemed to lack a real sense of himself as king if Ælfric's attitude is any guide. In discussing one of Ælfric's earlier works, Mary Clayton observes that "It is one thing to make general comments about a king's responsibility for his country's problems when that country is relatively problem-free, but, in an England under attack and ruled by a king named Æthelred, to blame the misfortunes of a kingdom on the *misræd* of the king seems very deliberate."⁶⁹ It seems neither Æthelred's *witan* nor the king's own mind was equipped to pursue wisdom or the good of the people and exemplified the failure both of Alfred the Great's educational goals and of the relationship between the church and the king idealized in the documents of the Benedictine Reform. The troubles of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom arose because Æthelred failed to make the qualities of his father or of other virtuous kings his own. For this, as Edmund (or, at least, Abbo and Ælfric) apparently knew, was the point of reading or listening to the reading of books. Kurt Danziger remarks that "What medieval advice on reading and remembering stressed was ... the goal of making the text part of oneself. In the words of Gregory the Great: 'We ought to transform what we read into our very selves, so that when our mind is stirred by what it hears, our life may concur by practicing what has been heard.'"⁷⁰ For Ælfric to comment here that Edmund was *symble gemyndig* of Christian doctrine does not just mean that he pondered the mysteries of the Trinity and the incarnation, but that he gave careful consideration through continual reflection to embodying the text by incorporating or practicing in his own life what he heard.⁷¹ Thus Edmund actively used his memory to construct and nurture virtue in himself. Jerome refers to this process as making what he has read part of his nature, or making what is learned his own: "quicquid in nobis longo fuit studio congregatum et meditatione diuturna quasi in naturam uersum, hoc illa libauit, hoc didicit atque possedit" [Whatever I had gathered together by long study, and by constant meditation made part of my nature, (Marcella) tasted, she learned and made her own].⁷² The process entails choice, deliberation,

the intention to shape one's self in a particular way. In Abbo and Ælfric's accounts, Edmund shaped himself into a steadfast, generous king who guided his people in a fatherly way and restrained the violent among them.

Hingwar the murderous Viking interrupts this portrait of godly rulership and embodies not only the hagiographical commonplace of the tyrannous persecutor but also the existential threat that loomed over Ælfric and his Anglo-Saxon audience. Hingwar enters Edmund's realm slaughtering men, women, and children as he advances, devastating Edmund's fighting force. Hingwar then delivers an ultimatum, demanding Edmund surrender his wealth and submit to Hingwar as his overlord in return for his life. Ælfric omits Abbo's extreme portrayal of the Vikings as minions of the antichrist (especially the Danes) and of the Viking messenger's blasphemous description of Hingwar as God, but the ultimatum nonetheless confronts Edmund with the choice of two lords: either Hingwar or Christ. When the bishop Edmund consults advises submission out of fear for Edmund's life, Abbo reports that Edmund was astonished at such advice and thought deeply in silence about what to do.⁷³ Ælfric instead describes how Edmund considers what to do in silence and then answers the bishop *cynelice* (like a king), that "me nu leofre wære / þæt ic on feohte feolle . wið þam þe min folc / moste heora eardes brucan" [it is more agreeable to me that I fall in fight against those who may be able to possess the dwelling places of my people].⁷⁴ Edmund's thoughts go first to fighting in defense of his people. That Ælfric describes this response as *cynelice* in opposition to the bishop's concern to preserve Edmund's life seems to criticize Æthelred and his advisors at the same time. The bishop's advice to submit to Hingwar is unthinkable to Edmund and the king must consult within himself in order to recollect his duty as king and know the way forward. Both Abbo and Ælfric describe the outward signs of this inward consultation by observing how Edmund remains silent for a while and looks at the ground. Carruthers notes that, "it had been observed that people often lower their heads in order to think and raise them when trying to recollect something. This was taken as evidence for the action of the *vermis*, opening as needed for recollection, and closing for concentrated thinking once one had received from memory the material one needed."⁷⁵ The *vermis* served as a sort of valve in the brain between the place in which memories were stored and the place where the action of cogitation or meditation occurred. Lowering the head cut off the ability of random or unregulated memories to intrude upon focused thinking, so the description of Edmund remaining silent and lowering his head by looking at the ground

communicates the serious, deep reflection in which he engages. The result is a kingly response in rejection of the bishop's fear-driven counsel to preserve Edmund's life through submission to Hingwar. The bishop, however, gently reminds the king that his people are already devastated and he, too, shall perish unless he either submits or flees. Edmund responds with a declaration of solidarity with his slain people and with God:

Pæs ic gewilnige and gewisce mid mode . / þæt ic ana ne belife æfter
minum leofum þegnum / þe on heora bedde wurdon mid bearnum .
and wifum . / færllice ofslægene fram þysum flot-mannum . / Næs me
næfre gewunelic þæt ic worhte fleames . / ac ic wolde swiðor sweltan
gif ic þorfte / for minum agenum earde . and se ælmihtiga god wat
/ þæt ic nelle abugan fram his biggengum æfre . / ne fram his soþan
lufe . swelte ic . lybbe ic.

[This I long for and wish with my mind: that I not be left alone after my beloved thanes, who in their beds with their children and wives unexpectedly have been struck down by these boatmen. It has never been habit for me to flee; moreover, I would sooner die if I must for my own homeland. And Almighty God knows that I shall never turn away from his worship, ever, nor from true love of him, whether I live or die.]⁷⁶

Edmund's statement reveals his understanding of his duty as king and as Christian. He identifies with his murdered people and still determines to "be among them as one of them." He does not, like the bishop, consider himself to be so much more valuable as to justify the shame of flight or the treason of submission to Hingwar. Instead, Edmund connects his love for his thanes with his love for God, two loves that death itself cannot overcome. Ælfric brings out this point rather more moderately than Abbo, but the very terseness of Ælfric's language serves to emphasize rather than diminish Edmund's determination.

We see the kind of textual immersion shaping Edmund's behavior when he answers the ultimatum delivered to him by the Viking messenger to hand over his kingdom and its wealth or die. Edmund says, "Witodlice þu wære wyrðe sleges nu . / ac ic nelle afylan on þinum fulum blode / mine clænan handa . forðan-þe ic criste folgie / þe us swa ge-bysnode . and ic bliðelice wille beon / ofslagan þurh eow gif hit swa god fore-sceawað" [Surely you were worthy to be slain now except I will not befoul my clean hands with your vile blood because I follow Christ, who instructed us so by example. And I will gladly be slain by you if God ordains such].⁷⁷ By

constant reflection upon the example of Christ that he had committed to memory, Edmund not only knew how Christ had responded to the prospect of powerlessness in the face of a violent death, but also how Christ had commanded Peter not to resist violently when troops came to arrest him before his crucifixion. Even though Edmund would have been justified in the judicial execution of a murderer of his thanes, he chooses not to do so because of the example of Christ. Ælfric describes the dramatic moment of Edmund's own capture thus: "Hwæt þa eadmund cynincg mid þam þe hingwar com . stod innan his / healle þæs hælendes gemyndig . / and awearp his wæpna wolde geæfen-læcan / cristes gebysnungum . þe for-bead petre / mid wæpnum to winnennne wið þa wælhreowan iudeiscan" [See! When Hingwar came, King Edmund stood within his hall remembering the Savior, and cast aside his weapons, desiring to imitate the example of Christ, who forbade Peter to fight with weapons against the cruel Jews.]⁷⁸ Ælfric depicts Edmund in the act of shaping himself through actively remembering (*gemyndig*). Instead of using the language of memory, Abbo writes that Edmund "ut membrum Christi" [as a member of Christ] has thrown his weapons aside, not indicating any shaping of the action by memory at all. Where Abbo simply compares Edmund to Christ, Ælfric describes the king consciously imitating Christ by reflecting upon and choosing the example that he wished to follow, which he had heard about from reading or hearing the Gospels and had stored away in his memory. Edmund deliberately identifies himself with Christ on two levels: in choosing like Christ to accept death at the hands of hostile men, and in obeying Christ's command to Peter to put away his weapons and not oppose with violence the outcome that Christ had chosen. Edmund remembers the example of Christ from the Gospels, applies it to his own current circumstances, and enacts both Christ's example and instructions in himself. Regardless of whether Edmund actually read the words himself or heard them read, he retained the meaning of the gospel account in his memory and embodied it in his own life. Ælfric's account of Edmund's choice of martyrdom rather than submission to the slayer of his people shows this process in action as Edmund's intentional mindfulness produces an imitation of Christ that itself becomes an object of memory for encouragement and emulation by others.

Abbo and Ælfric do not stop there, however. Also included in the *passio* of St. Edmund is an example of what happens to a person's character when one fails to commit the writings in books to memory or to reflect upon what has been learned so as to shape one's character con-

tinually by remembering. Bishop Theodred in *impremeditatus sententiam* (unprepared judgment) illustrates Ambrose's description of losing virtue and judgment through neglect of study.⁷⁹ Many years after the death of Edmund and the translation of his body to a new church worthy of the saint, several thieves come to rob the church. The saint intervenes to prevent the theft and assure the capture of the culprits. Ælfric tells us,

Hi wurdon þa ge-brohte to þam bisceope ealle . / and he het hi hon on heagum gealgum ealle . / Ac he næs na gemyndig hu se mild-heorta god / clypode þurh his witegan þas word þe her standað . / Eos qui ducuntur ad mortem eruere ne cesses . / Þa þe man læt to deaðe alys hi ut symble . / and eac þa halgan canones gehadodum forbeodað / ge bisceopum ge preostum . to beonne embe þeofas . / for-þan-þe hit ne gebyraþ þam þe beoð gecorene . / gode to þegnigenne þæt hi geþwærlæcan sceolon . / on æniges mannes deaðe.

[Then they were all brought to the bishop and he commanded them all to hang on a high gallows. But he was not mindful how the merciful God spoke through his prophet the words that stand here: "*Eos qui ducuntur ad mortem eruere ne cesses*" "Always release the one who is led to death." And also the holy canons forbid the consecrated, both bishops and priests, to be concerned with thieves because it does not suit those who are chosen for service to God that they should agree with the death of any person.]⁸⁰

Ælfric pointedly takes Bishop Theodred to task for behaving in a manner inconsistent with his office because "he næs na gemyndig" of God's exhortation to show mercy or of the canon law that forbade ordained men to have any part in the deaths of others. Carruthers observes that "a well-supplied memory was necessary for making informed judgments," which is precisely what the bishop failed to do.⁸¹ These failures are moral and ethical in nature and stem from the fact that Theodred has neglected to prepare his judgment in memory as he ought in order to maintain his moral character. Instead he acts out of passion and anger toward the thieves and so diminishes himself and his office through inappropriate behavior. Unlike Edmund, Theodred forgot his place and was led astray into sin because he neglected continually to remember and make his own what he had read in books. Because his reading lacked intention he failed to digest and absorb the precepts into memory and so he acted imprudently and unethically.

Abbo and Ælfric both describe Theodred's repentance, but Ælfric adds the detail that *books* serve to jolt Theodred's memory in a way that shapes the rest of his life. Ælfric writes that "Eft þa ðeodred bisceop sceawode his bec syððan / behreowsode mid geomerunge . þæt he swa reðne dom sette / þam ungesæligum þeofum . and hit besargode æfre / oð his lifes ende." [Later, after he scrutinized his books, Bishop Theodred repented with grief that he had passed such a harsh judgment upon the unhappy thieves, and ever lamented it to the end of his life].⁸² With the memorial aid of books Theodred remembers how he should have behaved—in a sense, like Gregory the Great, he returns to himself—but too late for it to be of any benefit to him in exercising judgment in the case of these hapless thieves. Yet from this terrible experience of forgetting, then being reminded through reading, a new memory forms that molds Bishop Theodred's behavior from then on, for Abbo and Ælfric explain that Theodred laments his severity—his forgetfulness of who he is as a bishop and a consecrated man of God—to the end of his life. Though Ælfric does not use the word *gemyndig* to describe Theodred's activity, the fact that Theodred laments his behavior to the end of his life indicates that he is continually mindful of it, for one cannot lament over what one does not recall. The emotional impact of the memory is palpable, seared into Theodred's soul and incorporated into his actions with the implication that he never forgets and never repeats this particular moral failing ever again.

These examples of remembering and forgetting from the *passio* of St. Edmund clarify the point of relationship between written memorial aids (books), remembering, and forgetting. The memory stores, reflects upon, and "in-habits" the examples of virtue and right behavior held for memory's use in books. Reflection upon such examples in the memory makes them a part of the person who is remembering, so that the memories become the chosen actions and character, deliberately developed, of that person. In the case of Edmund, Ælfric portrays Edmund actively choosing to construct himself as a king, taking as his example the heavenly king who dwelt among fallen humanity as one of them and gave himself up for his people. In the process of translation, he holds up a mirror for King Æthelred and his advisors that does not reflect well upon them. Those who neglect the intentional remembrance of who they are supposed to be forget themselves as well by forgetting the good they should enact through their offices.

In the legends of the three royal Anglo-Saxon saints, Ælfric sets out examples of purity and rulership directed toward the noble and royal men and women of England. Æthelthryth reigns as queen of her own body as well as of a kingdom as she preserves her virginity for more than a decade through two marriages, and Ælfric deploys her *vita* perhaps to assure his patrons, the secular priests—or perhaps their wives—and possibly others in his nonmonastic audience that chaste marriage *is* possible even in Anglo-Saxon England. In a time of contention over clerical marriage this message may not have been well received by many of Ælfric's readers, as Ælfric's own words seem to indicate.⁸³ Oswald's *vita* provides a view of the active life of a good king who builds up the church, protects his people, brings peace to the land, submits himself to God, and dies fighting in defense of his realm. Edmund, on the other hand, reveals the interior, contemplative life of a good king. This interior life does not preclude the kingly duties of defending, instructing, providing, and restraining evil, but draws back the curtain on the activity of the mind and the means of growing in virtue incumbent upon a good king. Part or all of the bodies of the three royal saints remain to Ælfric's day without corruption as divine endorsement of their conduct in timebound life and their reward in the life of eternity.

NOTES

¹ For observations on Bede's and Ælfric's treatment of Æthelthryth, see Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 19–63 and 111–22; Szarmach, “Ælfric and the Problem of Women,” 571–90; Ridyard, *Royal Saints*, 176–210; Peter Jackson, “Purpose of Christian Marriage,” 235–60.

² Gwen Griffiths also notes the lack of hagiographical drama in her article, “Reading Ælfric's Saint Æthelthryth,” 36.

³ Bede, *HE*, 4.19.

⁴ *LS*, 20.8, 14.

⁵ Bede, *HE*, 4.19; *LS*, 20.15.

⁶ *LS*, 20.18.

⁷ Bede, *HE*, 4.19; *LS*, 20.31–35a.

⁸ Griffiths, “Reading Ælfric's Saint Æthelthryth,” 39.

⁹ Elliott, *Spiritual Marriage*, 55–63.

¹⁰ Bede, “St. Æthelthryth,” in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, 4.19.

¹¹ *LS*, 20.36b–49.

¹² *Ibid.*, 61–62a, 75.

¹³ Ibid., 41–48.

¹⁴ *LS*, 1.200–205.

¹⁵ O'Brien O'Keeffe, *Stealing Obedience*, 53.

¹⁶ *LS*, 20.54–60.

¹⁷ Bede, *HE*, 4.19. Cynefrith's speech takes up twenty lines in the Latin text, compared to the five lines of Æthelthryth's speech.

¹⁸ There are also several other factors that may have influenced Ælfric's decision to translate Æthelthryth's *vita*. Bishop Æthelwold, Ælfric's teacher, refounded the monastery at Ely, though this time as a monastery of men, and revived the cult of Æthelthryth in a context of political and social instability. See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, 65–129. Æthelthryth also had a place of prominence in Æthelwold's Benedictional, wherein she is depicted in a full-page painting (the oldest extant representation of Æthelthryth, according to Virginia Blanton-Whetsell, "*Imagines Ætheldredae*," 59) and the blessing for her feast "is in three lengthy sections written in extremely high-flown language." Prescott, "Text of the Benedictional," 133.

¹⁹ Noble and Head, introduction to *Soldiers of Christ*, xxiv.

²⁰ *LS*, 20.120–22. There has been some debate about Ælfric's purpose in adding this tag to Bede's Life of Æthelthryth. See Jackson, "Purpose of Christian Marriage," 235–60, and Szarmach, "Ælfric and the Problem of Women," 571–90.

²¹ The most detailed account of Oswald's Life appears in Bede's *HE*, 3.1–13; Ælfric's *passio* has also been edited by Needham in *Three English Saints*, 43–59. Whatley notes that all of the hagiographical tradition of Oswald is based upon Bede's account (see "Acta Sanctorum," 356). In the analysis that follows I am not so much interested in determining how much of Bede's and Ælfric's portrayals of Oswald might be true to the actual historical Oswald, but rather I am interested in the kind of masculinity that these writers give Oswald and the implications of the mixture of secular and religious ideals in those depictions.

²² Rosenthal, "Historiographical Survey," 83.

²³ Stancliffe, "Oswald," 42.

²⁴ Bede, *HE*, 3.1, 214.

²⁵ *LS*, 26.14–16.

²⁶ Ibid., 20.

²⁷ Ibid., 26b–27.

²⁸ Ibid., 28–29.

²⁹ The references to David as a man after God's own heart may be found in I Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22.

³⁰ *LS*, 26.45–46a.

³¹ Augustine, *De trinitate*, 12.16.

³² *LS*, 26.51.

³³ Bede, *HE*, 3.3, 220; *LS*, 26, 64–69.

³⁴ Bede, *HE*, 3.3, 218.

³⁵ *LS*, 26.54–56.

- ³⁶ *LS*, 26.57–59. Cf. Bede, *HE*, 3.5, 226.
- ³⁷ Bede, *HE*, 3.5, 226; *LS*, 26.75–79.
- ³⁸ Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, 11.2.
- ³⁹ Bede, *HE*, 3.6, 230; *LS*, 26.83–84.
- ⁴⁰ II Samuel 6:1–19.
- ⁴¹ II Samuel 7:1–17.
- ⁴² Bede, *HE*, 3.6.
- ⁴³ *Ibid.*, and *LS*, 26.102–03.
- ⁴⁴ *LS*, 26.104–08. Cf. Bede, *HE*, 3.6, 230.
- ⁴⁵ See Whatley, “Hagiography and Violence,” 219–21.
- ⁴⁶ *LS*, 26.108. Cf. Bede, *HE*, 3.6, 230.
- ⁴⁷ *LS*, 26.109–10. York was the official archepiscopal see established by Gregory the Great during the conversion period, but, during the time of Oswald, Lindisfarne held the episcopal authority in Northumbria. Stancliffe, “Oswald,” 76.
- ⁴⁸ Bede, *HE*, 3.12, 250; *LS*, 26.111.
- ⁴⁹ Bede, *HE*, 3.12, 250.
- ⁵⁰ Luke 22:44.
- ⁵¹ *LS*, 26.109–13.
- ⁵² Bede, *HE*, 3.7, 232.
- ⁵³ Jerome, “Epistula 14, Ad Heliodorum Monachum,” in *Epistulae, Pars I*, ed. Hilberg, §6; Jerome, “Letter 14, To Heliodorus,” in *Select Letters of St. Jerome*, ed. Wright, 41.
- ⁵⁴ Jerome, *Adversus Jovinianum* (*PL* 23.220B–220C). Cf. Bede, “In Epistolas VII,” in *Opera, Pars II*, ed. Jones, 244; Jerome, “Against Jovinian,” in *St. Jerome: Letters and Selected Works*, 1.7.
- ⁵⁵ Bede, *HE*, 3.2, 214.
- ⁵⁶ Bede, *HE*, 3.6, 230.
- ⁵⁷ Bede, *HE*, 3.12, 250–52.
- ⁵⁸ Bede, *HE*, 3.6, 230.
- ⁵⁹ *LS*, 26.99–103 and 162–68.
- ⁶⁰ Bede, *HE*, 3.11, 246.
- ⁶¹ *Ælfric’s Prefaces*, ed. Wilcox, 5a.2–3.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, 5b.14–15.
- ⁶³ “Passio Sancti Eadmundi,” in *LS* ed. Skeat, 32; *Ælfric’s passio* has also been edited by Needham in *Three English Saints*, 43–59.
- ⁶⁴ Winterbottom, “Life of St. Edmund,” in *Three Lives of English Saints*, Preface.24. All translations from Abbo are mine.
- ⁶⁵ *LS*, 32.13–24. Cf. Winterbottom, “Life of St. Edmund,” 4.1–19.
- ⁶⁶ *LS*, 32.19.
- ⁶⁷ Doležalová, “Revisiting Memory,” 6.
- ⁶⁸ Ambrose, *De Bono Mortis*, 8.36–37.
- ⁶⁹ Clayton, “Ælfric and Æthelred,” 72.
- ⁷⁰ Danziger, *Marking the Mind*, 71.

⁷¹ Cf. Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 4.12–13. Abbo states that Edmund "semper habens prae oculis" [always held before his eyes] this precept.

⁷² Jerome, "Epistula 127, Ad Principiam," §7; Jerome, "Letter 127, To Principia," in Rebenich, *Jerome*, 125.

⁷³ Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 8.5–6.

⁷⁴ *LS*, 32.65b–67a. Cf. Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 8.9–13.

⁷⁵ Carruthers, *Book of Memory*, 68.

⁷⁶ *LS*, 32.74–80a; cf. Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 8.20–32.

⁷⁷ *LS*, 32.85–89; cf. Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 9.

⁷⁸ *LS*, 32.101–05; cf. Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 10.6–11.

⁷⁹ Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 15.34; Ambrose, "De Iacob et uita beata," 1.1.1.

⁸⁰ *LS*, 32.214–224a; cf. Winterbottom, "Life of St. Edmund," 16.

⁸¹ Carruthers, "Mechanisms," 6.

⁸² *LS*, 32.225–28a.

⁸³ *LS*, 20,120–22.