

AN INQUIRY INTO THE POSSIBILITY THAT THE UNKNOWN POET  
OF THE ANGLO-SAXON POEM BEOWULF  
MAY HAVE BEEN INFLUENCED BY THE SCRIPTURES,  
PARTICULARLY VIEWED FROM A TYPOLOGICAL METHOD OF INTERPRETATION

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of English

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by  
Jo Ann Johnson Pevoto  
June, 1967

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## ABSTRACT

In this thesis "An Inquiry into the Possibility That the Unknown Poet of the Anglo-Saxon Poem Beowulf May Have Been Influenced by the Scriptures, Particularly Viewed from a Typological Method of Interpretation," the investigator attempts to reconstruct the religious background of the typical eighth-century Englishman closely enough related to a religious establishment so that he could have had access to a library containing the Classical and Biblical materials which appear to have influenced the writing of the poem. The investigator pays close attention to the possibility that such a poet may have been motivated to insert religious materials into Beowulf, to the particular religious works with which he may have been familiar, and to the manner in which he may have interpreted them if he followed the allegorical and typological method common to the churchmen of his day.

The investigator then turns to the poem itself looking for parallels to the Bible, in which she includes some of the pseudoapocryphal material available to an eighth-century Catholic living in certain sections of England as well as the Canon. Noting that the parallels may form an allegory; that is, the adventure of Beowulf in the first section appears to resemble one adventure of David and the stories of Beowulf in sections two and three seem closely related to the story of Christ, the investigator observes

that part one may deliberately foreshadow some of section two and most of section three. Other possible parallels are also mentioned.

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## CHAPTER I

### ELEMENTS OF BIBLICAL ALLEGORY IN BEOWULF

Sometime between 675 A.D., when Christianity had gained a decisive hold over England,<sup>1</sup> and 850 A.D., when the Danish invasions had reached such intensity that sustained literary activity proved extremely difficult,<sup>2</sup> an Old English scop wrote the poem Beowulf. That poem along with St. Augustine's Soliloquies, The Gospel of Nicodemus, The Life of St. Christopher, Letters of Alexander the Great to Aristotle, "Judith," and a nine-line fragment on Christian martyrs was preserved by West Saxon scribes around the tenth century on a manuscript known as Cotton Vitellus AXV, located at the British Museum.<sup>3</sup> Modern students of Beowulf, through both intrinsic and extrinsic examination of the poem, are narrowing its provenance to an eighth-century date<sup>4</sup> with Northumbria as the

<sup>1</sup>Frank M. Stenton, Anglo-Saxon England (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1947), p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>George K. Anderson, Old and Middle English Literature -- From the Beginnings to 1485: A History of English Literature (New York: Collier Books, 1950), p. 25.

<sup>3</sup>Stanley Rypins, "A Contribution to the Study of the Beowulf Codex," PMLA, XXXVI (1921), 167.

<sup>4</sup>Whitelock, Dorothy, The Audience of Beowulf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 25; Baugh, Albert C., ed., A Literary

likely place of origin.<sup>5</sup>

The poet's identity, however, has not been established and may never be established unless some undiscovered evidence should come to the surface. Research on authorship as a result has centered on the significant question of whether the eighth-century writer served as the mere transmitter of an old heroic lay, interpolating occasional references to God and to the Old Testament, or whether he actually created the poem and in doing so left elements of the Christian religion indelibly permeating it.

In 1879, F. A. Blackburn, representing nineteenth-century judgment of the poem, generalized that critics agree that Beowulf is "a heathen poem . . . drawn from tales composed before the conversion of the Angles and Saxon to Christianity, and that there was a time when these tales were repeated without the Christian reflections and allusions that are found in the poem as it has reached us."<sup>6</sup> Rumbles, however, were heard from critics

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History of England (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1948), p. 43; and Fr. Klaeber, Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg (Boston: D.C. Heath and Company, 1950), vii.

<sup>5</sup>"Beowulf," The Macmillan Everyman's Encyclopedia (4th ed.), II, 162 and Whitelock, op. cit., p. 23. Professor Whitelock cautions that the abundance of evidence concerning that kingdom in the eighth century as compared to other areas, such as Mercia, influences one to favor Northumbria.

<sup>6</sup>"The Christian Coloring in Beowulf," PMLA, XII (1897), 205.

who did not agree. For example, Oliver Emerson, 1906, discounted the theory that the only Judeo-Christian parts are interpolations which could be omitted with the removal of a few lines, by observing that Grendel, who appears to some students of the poem to be evidence of its Germanic background, qualifies as a member of Cain's evil progeny.<sup>7</sup>

In 1912, William Witherle Lawrence modified Blackburn's position with the assertion that although Beowulf had been carried into England in the form of lays; it "was ultimately worked over, with other material into the present epic."<sup>8</sup>

In 1922, Fr. Klaeber, in Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg, lent his authoritative voice to the idea that the eighth-century author acted as "vastly more than an adapter or editor."<sup>9</sup> In one section entitled "The Christian Coloring," Klaeber stated, "The Christian elements are without exception so deeply ingrained in the very fabric of the poem that they cannot be explained away as the work of a reviser or later interpolator ... the main story is thoroughly imbued with the spirit of Christianity."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup>"Legends of Cain, Especially in Old and Middle English," PMLA, XXI (1906), 879.

<sup>8</sup>"The Haunted Mere in Beowulf," PMLA, XXXII (1912), 241.

<sup>9</sup>Klaeber, op. cit., cxvii.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 1. Klaeber's bibliography indicates that he had read Blackburn's article "The Christian Coloring in Beowulf."



Following Klaeber's lead a notable group of scholars have expressed their conviction that Christianity pervades the poem. Margaret Goldsmith believes that the poem represents the Christian viewpoint of the Anglo-Saxon.<sup>11</sup> Marie Padgett Hamilton has written that Beowulf is an attempt to shine Christian philosophy on the Germanic past.<sup>12</sup> Morton Bloomfield suggests that the poet may have equated his characters with Old Testament personages living before the giving of the Law. Such people, he notes on the basis of the third chapter of Paul's Epistle to the Romans, were subjected to a Natural Law, under which a "man like Abraham, who lived before at least the full knowledge of the Mosaic Law, was certainly saved by faith."<sup>13</sup> Along the same vein, Paul Taylor speculates that the line "Heofon rēce swe(a)lg" (Beowulf 3155)<sup>14</sup> indicates heaven's acceptance of Beowulf's soul.<sup>15</sup>

A statement in The Encyclopaedia Britannica provides indirect support for such a view:

<sup>11</sup>"The Christian Perspective in Beowulf, "Comparative Literature, XIV (1962), 71-90, passim.

<sup>12</sup>"The Religious Principle in Beowulf", PMLA, LXI (1946), 309.

<sup>13</sup>"Patristics and the Old English Literature: Notes on Some Poems," Comparative Literature, XIV (1962), 39.

<sup>14</sup>All quotations in Old English from Beowulf are taken from Klaeber's edition of Beowulf,--hereafter cited as Beowulf within the text.

<sup>15</sup>"Heofon Riece Swealg: A Sign of Beowulf's State of Grace," Philological Quarterly, XLII (April, 1963), 258.

Christ and the Saints are often introduced in the guise of northern warriors. Incongruous as this may appear in modern eyes, it is an interesting example of the reaction of inherited national or racial feeling on religious ideas and images sprung from another source.<sup>16</sup>

Albert Baugh has described Beowulf as Christlike since "highminded, gentle, he fights chiefly against the monstrous embodiments of the forces of evil, and in the end lays down his life for his people."<sup>17</sup> Even more boldly, M. B. McNamee has advanced the hypothesis that Beowulf is an allegorical Christ.<sup>18</sup>

Occasionally a dissenting voice is still heard among critics; recently, for instance, Arthur G. Brodeur, although he, like most other twentieth-century students of Beowulf views the poet as a "man of letters,"<sup>19</sup> has cautioned that the poem is Christianized only enough to remove the barrier between the story and the audience.<sup>20</sup> He fears that the Germanic tradition is being undervalued.

Counterpoising Brodeur's warning is Dorothy Whitelock's thesis in The Audience of Beowulf, that the poem was written by a Christian

<sup>16</sup>"The Bible and Old English Literature," Encyclopaedia Britannica (16th ed), III, 535.

<sup>17</sup>Baugh, op. cit., p. 93.

<sup>18</sup>"Beowulf-Allegory of Salvation," Journal of English and German Philology, LIX (1960), 196.

<sup>19</sup>John C. Pope, "A Review of The Art of Beowulf by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur," Speculum, XXXIV (1959), 412.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 415.

poet for a Christian audience. She declares that while it cannot be proved or disproved that a heathen poem Beowulf once existed, it can be demonstrated that if it existed, its form was very different from the Beowulf known today.<sup>21</sup>

Still Germanic source material is believed to be incorporated into the poem. For example, George Anderson calls the Finnsburg incident in Beowulf "well-known Germanic legend" since the story is also employed in the fragment from "The Fight at Finnsburg" and the names of some of the warriors are found in "Widsith."<sup>22</sup> Also available to the Anglo-Saxon were the historic account of Hygelac's raid on the Franks, mentioned in the poem, and the name of Offa, prehistoric king of the Mercian royal lineage.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to finding Germanic and Biblical source material, critics have observed in the poem parallel passages that indicate the Poet's familiarity with classical literature, at least with

<sup>21</sup>Whitelock, op. cit., p.3.

<sup>22</sup>George K. Anderson, The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons (New York: Russell and Russell, Inc., 1962), p. 86; R. W. Chambers, Beowulf: An Introduction to the Study of the Poem with a Discussion of the Stories of Offa and Finn (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), pp. 245-254; and Klaeber, op. cit., xxix.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., xxx and pp. 195-198.

The Aeneid.<sup>24</sup> Source studies such as Bloomfield's "Patristics and the Old English Literature" have demonstrated the resemblance in the point of view behind Beowulf and the philosophy of various Church Fathers. In a Master's thesis "Inquiry into the Possibility That the Christian Poet Prudentius May Have Had Some Influence on the Composition of the Old English Poem Beowulf," presented to the University of Houston in 1966, Helen M. Yarbrough traced some passages in Beowulf to the Latin Christian poet Prudentius.

This multiplicity of possible sources for the poem is not surprising, for it is a creative person's nature to draw on diverse elements in forming new combinations. The creative mind, like all others, stores what it perceives. Its distinguishing mark, according to John Livingston Lowes, who made a study of the creative imagination through tracing source material for two of Coleridge's poems, is that it "with the sudden, incalculable and puissant energy which pours up from the hidden depths ... sees in chaos the potentiality of form."<sup>25</sup>

If the eighth-century writer of Beowulf was more than a mere transmitter of the poem, if indeed he actually created it, or at the very least incorporated lays with other materials into

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, cxviii.

<sup>25</sup>The Road to Xanadu, (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1927), p. 432.

a very different combination than the ones previously existing, one would not be surprised to find traces from several literary traditions in Beowulf. Moreover, one can assume that an eighth-century man who was familiar with all of those traditions must meet three conditions: he must have access to a well-stocked library, he must know how to read at least Latin in addition to Anglo-Saxon, and he must have the leisure requisite to pursue such studies. One may, therefore, seriously entertain the idea that he was a monk or at least that he was closely associated with a religious establishment possessing a library on the order of the one at Wearmouth-Jarrow.

Moreover, the poem appears to have been written by a person with a deep knowledge of the Bible. Not only are there the obvious allusions to Providence, to the creation, and to Cain and Abel, but, if the poem is viewed as an allegory, "a form of extended metaphor in which objects and persons in a narrative... are equated with meanings that lie outside of the poem itself,"<sup>26</sup> one can find a basic dependency of the poem on the Christian Bible in plot as well as in theme and structure.

<sup>26</sup>William Flint Thrall et. al., A Handbook to Literature (New York: Odyssey Press, 1960), p. 7.

Such a possibility is both attractive and feasible. The dual interest, one in events, characters and setting presented, and the other in the ideas they are intended to convey or the significance they bear"<sup>27</sup> enhances the poem, which at times degenerates into bombast viewed solely as a heroic epic, and it provides partial motivation for the writing of Beowulf.

That an eighth-century scholar connected with a religious house should write a tale of fabulous elements, including "a grim demon,"<sup>28</sup> who raids the hall of a once strong but aged king; a hero of the Bear's Son genre,<sup>29</sup> who, casting off youthful sluggishness, performs superhuman feats; a vengeful lady monster living in an underwater cave in the manner of the she-troll of the thirteenth century Grettissaga;<sup>30</sup> and a dragon guarding an ancient and cursed treasure-hoard seems feasible when one considers that Anglo-Saxon clerics were interested in their folk literature and often tried their skill at writing verse in the native meter, that Gregory the Great had set a precedent for adapting the Germanic background

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> David Wright, trans., Beowulf (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1960), p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Klaeber, op. cit., xlii.

<sup>30</sup> Peter Foote, ed, Grettir's Saga, trans. G. A. Hight (London: Dent and Sons, Ltd., 1965), pp. 173, 175-177, passim.

to Christian design, and that sometimes even clergymen still believed in the traditional myths.

Alcuin's reproach of the monks at Lindisfarne for "their fondness of the old lays about heathen kings, who are now lamenting their sins in hell"<sup>31</sup> demonstrates that at least one group of eighth-century clergymen enjoyed a good story. Significantly, he singled out Ingeld, who appears in Beowulf as Hrothgar's son-in-law, for his attack: "For what has Ingeld to do with Christ?"<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, such an interest in the lays did not always indicate frivolity, as Alcuin's famous condemnation would lead one to believe. Aldhelm, the late seventh-century abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne, feared the danger of contamination by heathen poetry as much as Alcuin. In a letter to Wihtfrid, a Saxon friend preparing to depart to study in Ireland, a common practice at that time since the Irish offered free board and tuition, Aldhelm exhorted, "I pray you, study that you may refute the lies of pagan poetry. How foolish to stray through the tangled and winding by-paths of these legends, to turn from the pure waters of Holy Scripture that you may quench your thirst in muddy pools, swarming with a myriad of black toads, noisy with the guttural bark of frogs!"<sup>33</sup> Yet Aldhelm, who had studied metrics at Canterbury under Hadrian and Theodore, was

<sup>31</sup>Jaffe's Monumenta Alcuiniana (Bibliotheca Rer. Germ. VI) Berlin, 1873, p. 357, quoted by Chambers, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>William of Malmesbury, De Gestis Pontificum Anglorum, ed.

skillful at composing verse in the native meter and found that he could entice his country congregation, which often left church immediately after mass, into listening to his serious sermons by standing on the bridge that they passed over on the way to their farms and singing merry verses of his own creation until he had gathered a crowd.<sup>34</sup>

So outstanding was his success with using poetry for religious ends that in discussing Aldhelm's care for his parishioners, King Alfred commented that the bishop was marvelously able to write or sing verses in his native Anglo-Saxon.<sup>35</sup> Furthermore, the hundred Latin riddles of his own making which Aldhelm sent in 685 to Alfrid, the scholar-king of Northumbria, prove that he did not always limit his writing to Biblical subjects, though he was always motivated to proclaim the joy of creation. The riddles deal with legendary figures, such as the Colossus and Scylla, as well as the dove in Noah's ark.<sup>36</sup>

Others, too, wrote poems in the native meter. The best-known Old English poet is of course Caedmon, the stable keeper of Whitby, who according to Bede, received the gift of song from God.

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N.E.S.A. Hamilton, Rolls Series, LII, 1870, 335, cited by Eleanor Shipley Duckett, Anglo-Saxon Saints and Scholars (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1947), p. 39.

<sup>34</sup>Duckett, Saints and Scholars, pp. 41-42.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 54.



Bede remarks that though no one could match Caedmon's cunning, many tried to write religious verse.<sup>37</sup> And Professor Gordon's collection of Anglo-Saxon poetry bears testimony that secular poems, such as "Finnsburg," "Waldhere," "Deor," and "Widsith," were at least taking final form as late as the seventh century.<sup>38</sup>

Even within Beowulf appears a bard skilled in both religious and pagan lays. In lines 89 through 98, Hrothgar's scop sings of creation:

... fær wæs hearþan swēg,  
 swutol sang scopes. Sægde sē þe cūþe  
 frumsceaft fira feorran reccan  
 cwæð þæt se Ælmihtiga eorðan worh(te),  
 gesette sigehreþig sunnan end monan  
 leoman to leohte landbuendum  
 ond gefrætwaðe foldan sceatas  
 leomum ond leafum, lif eac gesceop  
 cynna gehwylcum þara ðe cwice hwyrfaþ.

Then in lines 1063 through 1070, the scop recites a lay about Finn:

... fær wæs sang ond swēg samod ætgædere  
 for Healdenes hildewisan,  
 gomenwudu græted, gid oft wrecen,  
 ðonne healgamen Hroþgares scop  
 æfter medobence mænan scolde,  
 [be] Finnes eaferum, ða hie se fær begeat,  
 hæleð Healf-Dena, Hnæf Scyldinga  
 in Fræswæle feallan scolde.

<sup>37</sup> Baedae, Opera Historica, trans. J. E. King (London: Wm. Kleinemann Ltd., 1954), pp. 140, 142.

<sup>38</sup> R. K. Gordon, trans., Anglo-Saxon Poetry (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1959), v.

That an Anglo-Saxon would have justification for incorporating a Germanic setting into a poem with a Christian meaning is evident when one remembers that Gregory the Great instructed Augustine, England's evangelist, to utilize the materials of pagan worship in the conversion of the Anglo-Saxons:

... fana idolorum destrui in eadem gente minime debeant; sed ipsa quae in eis sunt idola destruantur; aqua benedicta fiat, in eisdem fanis aspergatur ... Nam duris mentibus simul omnia abscidere impossibile esse non dubium est, quia et is qui summum locum ascendere nititur, grandibus vel passibus non autem saltibus elevatur.<sup>39</sup>

That even religious scholars may not have been so divorced from the past that they had all stopped believing in its myths is demonstrated by a record in The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in which a ninth-century monk stated, without disapproving comment, that several Northumbrians had seen fiery flying dragons in 793 A.D. and had later claimed that the sights had portended the Danish invasions.<sup>40</sup> Of course the more than thirty references to dragons (tannoth, tannim, tannin, and drakon) found in the Old and New Testaments<sup>41</sup> may have reinforced the clergyman's acceptance of their existence.

<sup>39</sup> Baedae, op. cit., I, 162.

<sup>40</sup> William Witherle Lawrence, "The Dragon and His Lair in Beowulf," PMLA, XXXIII (1918), 550.

<sup>41</sup> Robert Young, Analytical Concordance to the Bible (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Co., 1964), p. 270.

One final point should be dealt with in deciding if a Christian interpretation of Beowulf is feasible. Blackburn, representing a certain line of reasoning on the poem prevalent in his time, stated that if a cleric had done more than copy the poem and interpolate a few lines, he would not have failed to make direct reference "to Christ, to the cross, to the virgin or the saints, to any doctrine of the church in regard to the Trinity, the atonement, etc."<sup>42</sup> But since the events in the poem may be roughly assigned to the sixth century, the time when Gregory of Tours in his Historia Franconum says that a King Chlochilaichus (linguists identify him as Hygelac) raided Gaul,<sup>43</sup> the poet shows "historial sensitivity"<sup>44</sup> in not directly mentioning New Testament characters and doctrines in connection with a people not yet evangelized.

Though some have questioned that an eighth-century writer would have developed such a modern sense of historic congruence, Stenton points out that Northern English scholars, as opposed to Southern scholars, were keenly interested in history. Between 698 and 705, an unidentified monk at Lindisfarne wrote a work on the life of St. Culbert, in which the narrative "moves stiffly but

<sup>42</sup> Blackburn, op. cit., p. 216

<sup>43</sup> Whitelock, op. cit., pp. 40-42.

<sup>44</sup> Arthur E. DuBois, "The Unity of Beowulf," PMIA, XXXIX (1934), 394.

risers at times to a curious and sinister power."<sup>45</sup> A monk at Whitby attempted a life of Gregory the Great and failed only because Northumbrian resources were too limited. At the request of Tatberht, abbot of Ripon, and Acca, bishop of Hexham, Eddi wrote a life of Wilfrid; and a monk of Bede's group at Wearmouth wrote a sincere biography about his master Ceolfrith without the usual hagiography.

The educated Northumbrians encouraged historical writing. Bede had an audience awaiting the completion of The Ecclesiastical History of the English People, and King Ceolwulf himself read and criticized the draft. Stenton comments that Bede's greatness lay not so much in his scholarship as in his ability to weave fragments of information into a narrative and to formulate a concept of history.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 186.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 186-187.

## CHAPTER II

### AN INQUIRY INTO A MEDIEVAL ENGLISHMAN'S VIEW OF THE BIBLE

Pursuing the hypothesis that the Bible may be deeply woven into the structure, themes, and main events of Beowulf requires the posing of two questions: is it possible that an eighth-century Anglo-Saxon would be so religious that he would be motivated to use even a tale of Germanic adventure as a springboard for Christianity?; is it probable that he would be sufficiently familiar with the Bible and related materials to incorporate them into the poem?

To determine the motivation of an eighth-century man who was closely enough connected with a religious establishment that he spent considerable time in its library, one must take into account the religious fervor of his time so completely alien to the present century with its emphasis on the acquisition of goods, the liberation from old myths, and the glorification of science.

The eighth-century Christian really believed in the urgency of the gōdspell and took delight in sacrificing usual pleasures to bury himself in Christianity and its related corpus of knowledge. One reason for his piety was that unlike his twentieth-century counterpart, he did not expect to live the three score and ten years

allotted by King David, the Psalmist.<sup>1</sup> Fear of sudden death was not an insignificant factor in the religious motivation of the Anglo-Saxon. For example, the two attempts made on the life of King Edwin, who reigned in Northumbria in the seventh century, brought him close to an acceptance of Christianity. That his followers, too, felt the uncertainty of life is verified by the well-known speech of a Northumbrian nobleman counseling Edwin to accept Christianity. The man observed that in "our uncertain times"<sup>2</sup> man, with his brief life-span, is akin to a swallow passing through a warm meadhall; as the bird flies from winter back into winter, so man passes from unknown to unknown. For that reason he encouraged the king to follow the new religion if "it hath brought any better surety...."<sup>3</sup>

"Talis," inquiens, "mihi videtur, rex, vita hominum praesens in terris, ad comparationem eius quod nobis incertum est temporis, quale cum te residente ad coenam cum ducibus ac ministris tuis tempore brumala, .... Unde si haec nova doctrina certius aliquid attulit, merito esse sequenda videtur"<sup>4</sup>

With the death of the strong pagan King Penda, increased stability came to the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms so that a scholarly

<sup>1</sup>C. I. Scofield, ed., The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments: Authorized King James Version (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), Psalms 90.10 --unless another translation is indicated, all Scripture is taken from this text.

<sup>2</sup>Baedae, op. cit., I, 283.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 285.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 282, 284.

community could be created. Nevertheless sporadic internal wars continued to take their tolls in lives.<sup>5</sup> And all over England those who escaped dying by sword were endangered by periodic plagues that sometimes carried off the majority of the population of an area.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, toward the end of the eighth century the Danes began their invasions, which would be climaxed by the destruction of large centers of learning, such as Wearmouth-Jarrow, and would eventually culminate in the submergence of an entire civilization. It is no wonder that Alcuin, in describing the plight of his country, wrote, "Times of tribulation are everywhere in our land."<sup>7</sup>

To these people troubled by uncertainty, Christianity offered hope that there would be another life for which the first was merely preparation. Trevelyan summarizes Christianity's appeal to the Anglo-Saxon: "Christianity spoke of strange matters, ...it taught charity, humility, self-discipline, a concern about spiritual things, an active and uneasy conscience, an emphasis on the distinction between soul and body to the disparagement of the latter, a great fear and a great hope about the next life perpetually governing action in this one."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 177.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>7</sup>Alcuni Epistolae, ed. Dummmler (Mon. Germ. Hist., Epist. Karolini Aevi, ii), p. 179, quoted by Whitelock, op. cit., p. 49.

<sup>8</sup>G. M. Trevelyan, A History of England (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1926), I, 75.

Old English religious poetry strikingly reveals the strength of the Anglo-Saxon's conviction in the afterlife and the consequence of that belief on his behavior. In describing the folly of the reprobate, who fails to prepare for the Judgment, the poet of part iii of "Christ," wrote,

We can mark and forthwith declare and say truly, that he who cares not whether his soul shall be wretched or blessed, when after death it shall be for ever settled, has lost the keeper of his soul, the wisdom of death.<sup>9</sup>

. . . . .

It seems to me perilous that these beings endowed with souls, men in their hearts, will take no heed, when they do sin, what punishment the Lord has set up for them.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, the poet congratulated the faithful on their reward:

Then the faithful shall bear bright adornments before Christ; their glory shall endure in the day of judgment; they shall have the joy of untroubled life with God which is vouchsafed for every saint in the kingdom of heaven.<sup>11</sup>

In "Doomsday," an Old English poem possibly adapted by Bede or Alcuin from De Die Judicii, the poet, after describing the Judgment, asked a penetrating question:

What hardship can there be here in life, if thou wilt speak the truth to him who asks, to compare with that, that thou mayst eternally dwell without charge among that host, and in the blessed seats of those on high enjoy gladness henceforth without end?<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Gordon, op. cit., p. 161.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 288.



Evidently many Anglo-Saxons agreed that the benefits of Christianity outweighed any hardships that following it might entail, for by the beginning of the eighth century, "all of England had been won, nominally, to Christianity."<sup>13</sup> And during that century came a "steady unspectacular advance which brought a deeper knowledge of the faith to the ordinary layfolk all over England."<sup>14</sup>

Numerous Christian kings and noblemen, from the seventh century on, were motivated to give generous presents to the church. One ninth-century Latin poem on the history of Northumbrian monasteries lauds the rich gifts received from royalty.<sup>15</sup> Oswy, for example, established twelve monasteries to celebrate his victory over Penda.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Benedict founded Wearmouth-Jarrow on land grants deeded to him by Egfrith, king of Northumbria.<sup>17</sup> Stenton states that King Aldfrith was responsible for much of the "learning and scholarship of the Northumbrian monasteries in the age of Bede."<sup>18</sup> He provided both financial and academic support for the cloisters. Indeed, so much Northumbrian property was given to the monasteries that Bede feared there would not be enough land left to provide homes for the young

<sup>13</sup> Whitelock, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>16</sup> Edith Bradley, The Story of the English Abbeys: The Northern Counties (London: R. Hale, Ltd., 1938), I, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Stenton, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

men to start families and to take their places as the country's natural defenders.<sup>19</sup>

Moreover, men and women all over England were leaving prominent and comfortable positions to join religious houses or to take pilgrimages to Rome. Sebbi, king of The East Saxons, after entreating his wife for many years to allow him to give up his kingdom for monastic life, received the religious habit from the bishop of London.<sup>20</sup> Cadwalla, king of the West Saxons, left his throne in 688 and travelled to Rome to be baptized.<sup>21</sup> His successor, Ini, after reigning thirty-seven years, surrendered his kingship and made a pilgrimage to Rome.<sup>22</sup> In 704, Ethelred, after a reign of thirty-one years over the Mercians, became a monk. In 709 Cenred forsook the crown of Mercia for monastic life. Offa, heir of the king of the East Saxons, accompanied Cenred on a voyage to Rome and also became a monk.<sup>23</sup>

Many of the abbesses, too, were of high rank. Hild of Whitby was related to Oswy, king of Northumbria, and her successor, Aefflaed, was his daughter. Two sisters of King Ini of Wessex founded Wimborne. Aethelthryth and Seaxburg, daughters of Anna of East Anglia, were prominent in the establishment of Ely.<sup>24</sup> In fact, in 725 A.D., Bede

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

<sup>20</sup>Baedae, op. cit., II, 60, 62.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 225.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 229.

<sup>24</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 162.

reported, "Many of the Northumbrian people, as well noblemen as private persons, laying away their armour are eager to have themselves and their children shoren and enrolled under monastical vows, than to practise the pursuits of warfare."<sup>25</sup>

Furthermore, the Anglo-Saxons were characterized by the evangelizing spirit of both the Benedictine movement, which was brought into the country by Theodore, and the Irish monks. Once England was securely Christianized, her people sent missionaries to the continent.<sup>26</sup> Wilfrid won several converts among the Frisians in the winter of 677; however, twelve years after his visit, the country as a whole was still heathen. At that time, Egbert, a Northumbrian scholar who had spent twelve years studying in an Irish monastery, conceived a plan for converting the Frisians and the Germans. Unable to go himself, he first sent Wihtbecht to Frisia, but the monk's labors were unsuccessful. Egbert then sent twelve monks, including a Northumbrian priest named Willibrord. Willibrord, who converted many Frisians to the new religion, served as their bishop for forty years. Though he travelled into the heart of Frisia and even contacted the Danes, his most notable achievement was the organized church in Frankish Frisia.<sup>27</sup>

A younger contemporary of Willibrord, Boniface of Wessex, journeyed to Frisia in 716. He spent most of his life, however,

<sup>25</sup>Baedae, op. cit., II, 373.

<sup>26</sup>Whitelock, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>27</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 167.

evangelizing Frankish Germany and organizing a church in that area. In a series of letters, some still extant, he sought books and advice from England and occasionally offered admonitions to the Anglo-Saxon church.<sup>28</sup> In 747, for example, he wrote Cuthbert that the English churchmen should refrain from drunkenness; also he suggested that the women should not travel to Rome since many were becoming harlots in foreign cities.<sup>29</sup> In spite of those criticisms, Boniface relied heavily on English men and women to fill positions in his German church and he managed to attract many of them to the continent.

So great was his zeal for Christianity that when Boniface realized his life was drawing to an end, he decided to risk it on a mission rather than pass his final days peacefully in a monastic retirement. Along with some fifty companions, he was massacred by a group of heathens near the Frisian coast.

English interest in foreign missions did not diminish with Boniface's death. Lull and Willibald continued the work in Germany. Willehad, the last of the great eighth-century evangelists, in spite of opposition from the Saxons, proclaimed the gospel as far as the Danish border.<sup>30</sup>

The English religious teacher on the continent whose writings best typify the spirit of the eighth century is Alcuin of Northumbria,

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 171.

<sup>29</sup>Eleanor Shipley Duckett, Alcuin, Friend of Charlemagne (New York: Macmillan Co., 1951), pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup>Stenton, op. cit., pp. 171-176, passim.

who in 771 travelled to France at the invitation of Charlemagne "not to kindle, but to fan into a livelier flare a flame"<sup>31</sup> started by the wandering Irish monks and by the English missionaries.<sup>32</sup> That he actually did fan the flame is attested to in a command issued by Charlemagne in 789: boys were to be taught to read the correct versions of the Psalms and if a copy of the Gospels, a Psalter, or a Missal were missing, skilled men were to write it out with diligence.<sup>33</sup>

A clear statement of Alcuin's religious belief is given in his Rhetoric, in which he records a conversation between himself and Charlemagne, known to his family and friends as King David. Charlemagne commented that since God had led Alcuin back to France, he prayed for time to ask the teacher certain questions.<sup>34</sup> Among other requests, Charlemagne wanted definitions of different virtues. Alcuin responded that prudence involves knowing God and believing in the future judgment, justice is loving God and keeping His commandments, and courage is the characteristic of one who bears the trials of the world and conquers the "ancient enemy."<sup>35</sup> Charlemagne, then, inquired concerning the proper course for the soul. Alcuin stated, "That it love what is higher, that is God; that it rule what is lower, that is, the body;

<sup>31</sup>Duckett, Alcuin, p. 83.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 141-142.

<sup>34</sup>Alcuin, The Rhetoric of Alcuin and Charlemagne, trans. by Wilbur Samuel Howell (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), p. 4.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 151.

and that by its love it nourish and assist its fellow creatures. For the soul, cleansed and exonerated by these devotions will fly back from this troubled and wretched life to eternal peace and will enter into the joy of the Lord."<sup>36</sup>

If, then, the religious point of view of the writer of Beowulf is represented by that of many other Anglo-Saxons during the time in which most scholars place him, it is quite plausible that he would be motivated to insert his religious philosophy into the poem.

Moreover, the Christian aspects of the poem may not have seemed hidden to him or to his audience. Professor Whitelock points out that an understanding of even the direct references to the Bible in the poem requires more than a superficial knowledge of Scriptures, for the poet expects his audience to comprehend his allusions to the Old Testament without an explanation from him of their meaning.<sup>37</sup>

To expect his audience to understand the Old Testament would imply that they were also competent in the New, for converts in the seventh and eighth centuries were first taught about Christ and the New Testament and then the Old Testament with "special emphasis being laid on such events as were held to foreshadow those of the New."<sup>38</sup>

One might still question how well-acquainted with the Scriptures an eighth-century man connected in some way with a religious house may have been. Also pertinent is what materials were at

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 152-153.

<sup>37</sup>Whitelock, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

his disposal that might have affected his interpretation of the Bible. Unfortunately, the Danish invasions swept away almost all traces of the excellent libraries of the seventh and eighth centuries that provided for the kind of learning "which made English scholars the envy of Europe."<sup>39</sup> As a result, the only known library catalogue antedating the invasion is Alcuin's poetic description of the contents of York Library, in which he names authors but not titles of books.<sup>40</sup>

Because of this dearth of information, one must base his estimate of what Biblical and related materials may have been available for the eighth-century scholar's use on the handful of Biblical materials still extant and on writings by Englishmen possibly contemporary to the poet of Beowulf. The latter source includes references to specific works made in the writings and striking parallels in their writings which indicate that the writers had read certain works.

The first English library, according to The Canterbury Chartulary, was founded by Gregory the Great through St. Augustine: "Hae sunt primitiae librorum totius Ecclesioe Anglicanae."<sup>41</sup> The books possibly included the Holy Bible in two volumes, two Psalters, two copies of the Gospels, an apocryphal lives of the apostles, a

<sup>39</sup> Alcuin, op. cit., p. 4, in the introd. by William Samuel Howell.

<sup>40</sup> Alfred Hessel, A History of Libraries, trans. Reuben Piess (Washington: Scarecrow Press, 1950), p. 107.

<sup>41</sup> Edward Edwards, Memoirs of Libraries, Including a Handbook of Library Economy (New York: Burt Franklin, 1965), I, 100.

life of the martyrs, and an exposition of the Gospels and Epistles.<sup>42</sup> Certainly the Romanum, which Jerome prepared in 383 for Pope Damasus, was introduced by St. Augustine on his arrival, for until The Gallican was popularized through the tenth-century Benedictine Reform, the former work "was widely used there."<sup>43</sup> In the eighth century, for instance, Wilfrid of Northumbria, who had read The Gallican Psalter at Lindisfarne, studied the Romanum for the first time at St. Augustine's, Canterbury, as he waited for someone to accompany him on his initial voyage to Rome.<sup>44</sup>

Moreover, David Wright along with several other Anglo-Saxon scholars believes that part two of the extant Vespasian Psalter, consisting of Psalms ii.4-cl, based on the Romanum, and the canticles, including "The Psalm That David Wrote When He Fought with Goliath" and "A Song to the Exodus,"<sup>45</sup> was produced in Canterbury during the eighth century.<sup>46</sup> However, Sherman M. Kuhn, in "From Canterbury to Lichfield" and in The Vespasian Psalter, has presented evidence that both the text and the ninth-century gloss may have been written in Mercia.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Minnie Cate Morrell, A Manual of Old English Biblical Materials (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1965), p. 46.

<sup>44</sup> Duckett, Saints and Scholars, p. 226.

<sup>45</sup> Morrell, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>46</sup> Sherman M. Kuhn, "The Vespasian Psalter and the Old English Charter Hands," Speculum, XVIII (1943), 482.

<sup>47</sup> Morrell, op. cit., p. 53 and Herbert Dean Merritt, "A Review of The Vespasian Psalter, ed. by Sherman Kuhn," Speculum, XLI (1966), 751.



Although the first school in Kent, organized for children who would later enter the church, had the books that Augustine brought to England for texts,<sup>48</sup> not until the arrival of Theodore, who labored at Canterbury from 669 to 690, and Hadrian, who taught there from 670 to 699, did depth in scholarship begin.<sup>49</sup> These two men introduced Greek into England, and the five Greek-speaking Popes from 686 to 730 probably reinforced it through the transmission of the Greek litany.<sup>50</sup> Theodore brought with him "an extensive library,"<sup>51</sup> including a Psalter of David and homilies in Greek as well as several Greek classics.<sup>52</sup> Hadrian also built Canterbury's library.<sup>53</sup> According to Albert Cook, the two men participated in the finest teaching that England had known or was to know for many a day."<sup>54</sup> Aldhelm stated that he learned at Canterbury, among other things, interpretation of Scriptures, music for church services, science for regulating the ecclesiastical year, and metrical rules for religious verse.<sup>55</sup>

<sup>48</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>49</sup>Albert Stanburrough Cook, "Theodore of Tarsus and Gislenus of Athens," Philological Quarterly, II (1923), 1.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>51</sup>Edwards, op. cit., p. 101.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>53</sup>James Westfall Thompson, The Medieval Library (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1939), p. 112.

<sup>54</sup>"Hadrian of Africa, Italy, and England," Philological Quarterly, II (1923), 241.

<sup>55</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 180.

Perhaps the best evidence for the knowledge passed on at Canterbury is a list of its students: Otffor, bishop of Worcester, who had begun a deep study of the Scriptures under Hild of Whitby,<sup>56</sup> an abbess who was considered by some to be the best scholar of her day;<sup>57</sup> Tobias, bishop of Rochester, a man learned in Greek, Latin, and Anglo-Saxon; Aldhelm, bishop of Sherborne; Albinus, successor to Hadrian, who was well-instructed in literary studies and in the Greek, Latin, and English tongues;<sup>58</sup> and Ceolfrid, who may have taught Latin and Greek to Bede.<sup>59</sup> Boniface indicated in one letter that many men and women in Southern England, coming under the influence of Canterbury, possessed intellectual curiosity and knowledge.<sup>60</sup>

Yet, in spite of the labors of Hadrian and Theodore, Canterbury produced little that is outstanding in scholarship with the exceptions of Aldhelm, the first important English writer of Latin; Boniface; and Tatwine, who was archbishop of Canterbury from 731 to 734 and abbot of Breedon in Mercia.<sup>61</sup>

However, in 747, Canterbury still continued to encourage Biblical studies; for in that year Archbishop Cuthbert at a meeting

<sup>56</sup> Cook, "Theodore," p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Edwards, op. cit., p. 108.

<sup>58</sup> Cook, "Theodore," p. 8.

<sup>59</sup> Ruby Davis, "Bede's Early Reading," *Speculum*, VIII (1933), 190.

<sup>60</sup> Stenton, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>61</sup> George Sampson, The Concise Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge: University Press, 1961), p. 11.

attended by all the bishops as well as King Ethelbald of Mercia exhorted that bishops should diligently pursue studies in learned books and that everyone, including monks and nuns not knowing Latin, should daily say "the allotted Psalms."<sup>62</sup>

A small amount of information about Biblical materials in Wessex can be obtained from a study of the Life of Aldhelm, the late-seventh and early-eighth century abbot of Malmesbury and bishop of Sherborne. After a brief period of learning at Canterbury, Aldhelm was forced by illness to return to Malmesbury.<sup>63</sup> Since his first teacher was probably the Irish monk Maildubb, Celtic and Roman scholarship joined in Aldhelm. Stenton states that "as a man of letters he represents the culture of his age in its most highly developed form...."<sup>64</sup> Aldhelm translated the first fifty Psalms into Anglo-Saxon prose and the rest into poetry.<sup>65</sup> His Latin works include a poem "De Laudibus Virginum" and a treatise "De Laudibus Virginitatis," written for Hildelith, abbess of Barking and her nuns.<sup>66</sup> In those two works he utilized apocryphal materials, such as Mellitus' Passio Johannis and Pauli's Apocalypsis; Enarrationes in Psalmis; a work

<sup>62</sup>Duckett, Alcuin, p. 9.

<sup>63</sup>Duckett, Saints and Scholars, p. 41.

<sup>64</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 182.

<sup>65</sup>"How We Got Our English Bible: History of the Evolutionary Process Resulting in the English Authorized Version," The Devotional Alphabetical Indexed Family Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments (Wichita: DeVore Co., 1960), p. 24.

<sup>66</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 18.

possibly written by St. Augustine called Tractationes in Johannis Evangelism; and Jerome's In Isaim. He also wrote De Metris, in which he incorporated material from Praefation ad Job. Other works indicate that he was familiar with Jerome's Quaestione: Hebraicae in Genesin, In Danielelem, and In Jonam.<sup>67</sup>

He corresponded with such notable people as Ethelbald, later a king of Mercia, whom he instructed to study spiritual books;<sup>68</sup> Aldfrith, King of Northumbria, to whom he sent religious material;<sup>69</sup> and Ethelberga, sister of the bishop of London and head of a religious house in Essex, whose nuns were trained in both the Old and New Testaments, Hebrew and Greek, and the writings of the Church Fathers.<sup>70</sup>

At the center of Aldhelm's life was prayer and study, and one of his prized possessions was a manuscript of the entire Old and New Testaments that he obtained from some French sailors. The Bible survived the Danish invasion, and as late as the twelfth century pilgrims visiting Malmesbury could see it.<sup>71</sup>

Other bits of information can be gleaned from the English missionaries in Germany about the state of scholarship in Wessex.

<sup>67</sup> J. D. A. Ogilvy, "Books Known to Anglo-Latin Writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin (670-804)," The Medieval Academy of America Studies and Documents, no. 2 (Cambridge, 1936), pp. 4-88, passim.

<sup>68</sup> Duckett, Saints and Scholars, p. 58.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 59.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

Boniface reported that during the early eighth-century Wessex supplied him with many well-trained men and women. And evidently a good library existed in Winchester, for Boniface asked Bishop Daniel to send him a particular volume of the Book of Prophets once belonging to Abbot Winbert,<sup>72</sup> and later Cyneheard, the bishop, wrote Lul and asked him to send copies of any books that Winchester lacked.<sup>73</sup>

Surprisingly little information remains on Biblical scholarship in Mercia when one considers that it was the leading political power in the eighth century and that Offa, the king, was sufficiently interested in learning to request that Alcuin send him a scholar. It is known that Mercia's religious houses were devoted to scholarship and that the Mercians took an interest in the missions on the continent.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, records show that Lul turned to the bishop of Worcester for a rare book; and a tradition has passed down that Wilfrid presented a manuscript of the Gospels, which he brought back from Rome, to Lichfield Cathedral.<sup>75</sup> Perhaps the strongest evidence of academic accomplishment in Mercia is that King Alfred found at least four scholars there to help him re-educate the English.<sup>76</sup>

Scholars have postulated that various manuscripts may be traced

<sup>72</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>73</sup>Whitelock, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., p. 103.

<sup>75</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>76</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 190.

to the Mercians. Wildhagen, for example, believes that the Urform of the gloss of Eadwine's Canterbury Psalter, even earlier than the ninth-century Vespasian gloss, was produced in northern Mercia. He agrees with Kuhn that the Vespasian gloss may be traced to Mercia.<sup>77</sup> Mercia is receiving more attention from Anglo-Saxon scholars than in the past, and its contributions may be reassessed.

Not much is preserved on the state of knowledge in East Anglia either. Yet scholarship must have flourished there in the eighth century, for Cuthwine, bishop of Dunwich from 716 to 731, collected illuminated manuscripts and King Aelfwald, who died in 749, requested that Felix write the Latin life of St. Guthlac,<sup>78</sup> in which Guthlac addresses his demon water-tormenters as the "seed of Cain."<sup>79</sup>

The Northumbrian monasteries were the ones to give England her literary distinction of the age. As in Aldhelm's Wessex, Irish, classical, and English scholarship met in Northumbria,<sup>80</sup> for Aidan and his Irish assistants were key figures in strengthening the Northumbrian church after the devastating wars of Penda.<sup>81</sup> Even the decision in favor of the Roman Church at the Council of Whitby did not prevent

<sup>77</sup>Morrell, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>78</sup>Whitelock, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>80</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 183.

<sup>81</sup>Davis, op. cit., p. 185.

Celtic erudition from having a lasting influence in the North.<sup>82</sup> Such an influence means that books commonly known by Irish scholars may have been brought into Northumbria. While Albert Keiser points out that the influence of Aidan and his monks has been greatly overrated since his organization was inefficient, his monks craved seclusion, and they could not speak Anglo-Saxon,<sup>83</sup> one remembers that he trudged through Northumbria carrying the gospel,<sup>84</sup> that the king served as his interpreter,<sup>85</sup> and that, at any rate, many Irish books must have remained at Lindisfarne until the monastery was seized by the Danes.

The Irish books possibly included the Itala and Vulgate versions of the Bible; Irish manuscripts of Latin texts; certain books forbidden in the Latin Church since the fifth century, such as The Book of Enoch, The Apocalypse of Moses, The Gospel of Nicodemus, and The Acts of Pilate;<sup>86</sup> writings of Greek Fathers in Latin translation; writings of the Latin Fathers Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great; commentaries and interpretations of Scripture and related homilies; lives of saints and martyrs; hymns; and religious poems. Also included may have been The Wonders of the Sacred Scripture by

<sup>82</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>83</sup>Albert Keiser, "The Influence of Christianity on the Vocabulary of Old English Poetry," University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature, V, no. 1 (February, 1919), 9-10.

<sup>84</sup>Baedae, op. cit., I, 396.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 336.

<sup>86</sup>Duckett, Saints and Scholars, p. 20.

the Irish St. Augustine, his commentary on Catholic Epistles, an allegorical interpretation of Job, The Mystical Interpretation of the Ancestors of the Lord Jesus Christ, St. Patrick's Confessions, several lives of Patrick, a Latin lament On Twelve Evils of the Age, and possibly even Pelagius' commentary on the epistles of St. Paul<sup>87</sup> and the translation and commentary on the Psalter derived from Theodore of Mopsuestia, a member of the Antiochine school.<sup>88</sup>

Even more important, however, are materials carried to northern England from Rome, where book trade flourished in the seventh and eighth centuries.<sup>89</sup> And not insignificant are books produced within the scriptoriums in the monasteries of Northumbria.

The one man who did the most to bring northern learning out of isolation was Benedict Biscop, who devoted all his knowledge, experience, and energy for many years to building in two monasteries which upon his death became one, Wearmouth-Jarrow,<sup>90</sup> a collection of books unparalleled up to that time.<sup>91</sup>

Biscop made four trips to Rome, bringing back numerous books in all areas of sacred learning, some of which were gifts, others of which he bought. Then from a fifth trip, he returned with many paint-

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., pp. 23-24.

<sup>88</sup>Beryl Smalley, The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1964), p. 35.

<sup>89</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>90</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 184.

<sup>91</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p. 205.



ings for men ignorant of letters so that they could at least see darkly through the veil the mysteries of Christianity.<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, the paintings dealt with Christ's life and with the agreement between the Old and New Testaments. For example, a painting of the serpent Moses lifted up in the wilderness was placed beside a painting of the Son of Man lifted up on the cross. And a picture of Isaac carrying the wood on which he was to be slain was next to a picture of Christ carrying his cross.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Biscop brought John the arch-chanter of the church of St. Peter into Northumbria to teach the English the Roman system of singing and of reading aloud throughout the year.<sup>94</sup>

Shortly before Benedict Biscop died, he requested that his rich and noble library be kept whole and carefully nurtured:

Bibliothecam quam de Roma nobilissimam copiosissimamque advexerat, ad instructionem ecclesiae necessariam, sollicitè servari integram, nee per incuriam foedari, aut passim dissipari praecepit.<sup>95</sup>

Biscop's successor Ceolfrid obeyed his wish. Parting with only one book which he sold to King Alfred of Northumbria in exchange for at least 800 acres of land, he not only added to the collection, but he also encouraged the copying of the books in the scriptorium and to

<sup>92</sup> Edwards, op. cit., p. 106.

<sup>93</sup> Baedae, op. cit., II, 412, 414.

<sup>94</sup> Davis, op. cit., p. 181.

<sup>95</sup> Baedae, op. cit., II, 416.

aid in the labors even brought Italian scribes to Northumbria.<sup>96</sup> So high were the textual standards at Wearmouth-Jarrow that Bede received there experience in the critical use of materials in addition to the opportunity to read widely.<sup>97</sup>

Still extant among manuscripts which Ceolfrid may have brought to Wearmouth-Jarrow is Codex Fuldenses, containing Paul's Epistles, the Apocalypse, a harmony of the Gospels, a history of the Apostles, and seven Catholic letters. The manuscript was written for Victor, bishop of Capua, in 546, and it was bound in Northumbria. Finally, the codex was sent from Northumbria to Boniface in Germany.<sup>98</sup>

Also extant is Laud Gr.E.35, now in the Bodleian. It was used by Bede in his commentary on Acts.<sup>99</sup> The most famous manuscript produced by the scriptorium is, however, Codex Amiatinus, one of the best surviving texts of the Vulgate.<sup>100</sup> It is partially based on Codex Grandior, which has since perished. (Grandior was compiled for Cassiodorus from a copy of the Old Italian corrected by the Vulgate. Nine copies of the Scripture were used in the production of that "sumptuous volume."<sup>101</sup>) Codex Amiatinus, which was presented as a

<sup>96</sup> Edwards, op. cit., p. 107.

<sup>97</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>100</sup> Sir Paul Harvey, The Oxford Companion to English Literature (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 85.

<sup>101</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 41.

gift to the Pope in 716,<sup>102</sup> is now located at the Laurentian Library in Florence.<sup>103</sup>

Though no catalogue exists of the books at Wearmouth-Jarrow, their titles are indicated by the writings of Bede, who "knew more books and wrote more than any other man of his time and far more than any other Englishman before the conquest,"<sup>104</sup> yet, according to the record of his travels, never journeyed further than York or Lindisfarne. He was mainly indebted to the collection at Wearmouth-Jarrow for his knowledge plus what few books may have been given him by a correspondent.<sup>105</sup> His writings on the Bible include commentaries of Acts, the Apocalypse, John, the Pauline Epistles, Ezra and Nehemiah, Genesis, the prayer of Habakkuk, Luke, Mark, Proverbs, Samuel, and Song of Songs. He answered thirty questions on I and II Samuel and I and II Kings, and he produced De Tabernaculo, in which he explained chapters in Exodus, and De Templo Solomnis and Tobit. He may also have written a poem on Psalms.<sup>106</sup> To the list The Catholic Encyclopaedia adds a commentary on the Canticles and it indicates that he may possibly have written a commentary on St. Matthew.<sup>107</sup>

<sup>102</sup>Ibid.

<sup>103</sup>Morrell, loc. cit.

<sup>104</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p. 110.

<sup>105</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 185.

<sup>106</sup>M. L. W. Laistner, A Hand-List of Bede's Manuscripts (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1943), pp. 30-158, passim.

<sup>107</sup>"Bede," The Catholic Encyclopaedia (1913), II, 386.

At the time of his death he was rendering the Gospel of St. John into English prose, but the translation is no longer extant.<sup>108</sup>

Scholars studying Bede's writings have concluded that because he used readings on Genesis 1.16 from both texts in Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum, the collection at Wearmouth-Jarrow contained at least one copy of the Old Latin translation of the Bible, probably Codex Grandior, as well as a copy of the Vulgate identical to Codex Amiatinus.<sup>109</sup> (Eleven leaves of this copy have been found and are located in the Middleton Collection at the British Museum.<sup>110</sup>) It also contained a Greek New Testament, which he utilized in Actus Apostolorum, and a Bible belonging to Northelm of Canterbury.<sup>111</sup> In addition the library contained the apocryphal Apostolica Historica, which Bede utilized in De St. Mattheo,<sup>112</sup> and The Book of Enoch, which Bede drew on for Super Catholicas Expositio. The Church Fathers, as well as other religious writers, were also well represented in the library. The following material indicates the names of those writers along with the titles of many of their works known to be in the collection and, in some cases, works of Bede's showing dependency on

<sup>108</sup>"The Bible and English Literature," The Encyclopaedia Britannica, (16th ed.), III, 535.

<sup>109</sup>Thompson, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>110</sup>Ogilvy, loc. cit.

<sup>111</sup>Ogilvy, op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>112</sup>Thompson, loc. cit.

those sources:<sup>113</sup>

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Title of Bede's Work</u>
Adamnan		
Africanus Julius		
Ambrose	<u>Hexameron</u>	<u>Commentary on Genesis</u>
Aponius	<u>Explanatio in Canticum Canticorum</u>	<u>Commentary on Canticles</u>
Arator		
Arnobius Junior	<u>Exposition of Psalms 104</u>	<u>Chronica</u>
Augustine of Hippo	<u>Quaestiones in Genesi</u> <u>Quaestiones in</u> <u>Heptateuchum</u> <u>Sermones</u>	<u>In Genesin</u> <u>De Tabernaculo</u>
Pseudo-Augustinian	<u>De Sermone Domini in Montre</u>	<u>Lucae Evangeliam</u> <u>Exposition</u>
Basil	<u>Hexameron</u>	
Cassian	<u>Collationes in</u> <u>Samuelem Prophetam</u> <u>Allegorica Exposition</u>	
Cassiodorus	<u>Exposition in</u> <u>Psalterium</u>	<u>De Tabernaculo</u>
Clemens Alexandrianus		
Constantius	<u>Life of Germanus</u>	
Cyprian		
Eddis	<u>Wilfrid's Life</u>	
Gildas		

<sup>113</sup> The information is taken from Thompson, op. cit., pp. 111-112, and Ogilvy, op. cit., pp. 6-82, passim.

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Title of Bede's Work</u>
Gregory the Great	Homily on the Gospels Lib ii, Homily 7 <u>Homily on The Prophets</u> <u>Moralium</u> <u>Liber Pastorlis</u> <u>Dialogues</u> Correspondence with Augustine <u>The Synodical Books</u> <u>Cantica Cantocorum</u> <u>Homily on Ezechial</u>	<u>Commentary on Song of Songs</u>
Isidore	<u>Tobia</u>  <u>The Six Ages of the World</u> <u>Quaestiones in Veterum Testamentum</u>	<u>Commentary on Tobias</u>  <u>In Exodum</u>
Jerome	<u>De Nominibus Hebraicis</u> <u>De Situ et Nominibus</u> <u>In Philemonum</u> <u>In Zachariam</u> <u>In Ezechielem</u> <u>In Jonam</u>  <u>In Daniele</u> <u>In Ecclesiastem</u> <u>In Isaim</u> <u>In Mattaeum</u>  <u>In Genesin</u>	<u>De Tabernaculo</u> <u>Super Acts</u> <u>Apostolarum</u> <u>Exposition</u>  <u>De Schematicas</u> <u>In Local Evangel-</u> <u>ium Exposition</u> <u>Quaestiones</u> <u>Hebraicae in</u> <u>Genesin</u>
Julianus Eclanesis	<u>De Amore</u>	<u>In Cantica Canti-</u> <u>corum Allegorica</u> <u>Exposition</u>
Lastingham	<u>Life of St. Chad</u>	
Lucianus	<u>Ep. de Revelatione</u> <u>Corporis Stephani</u> <u>Martyris</u>	

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Title of Bede's Work</u>
Marius Victor	<u>Commentarum in Genesim</u>	<u>Miraculi Sancti Cuthberti</u>
Melrose	<u>The Vision of Drihthelm</u>	
Nola	<u>Life of St. Felix</u>	
Origen	<u>Homily 2 on Genesis</u> <u>Homily 4 on Genesis</u> <u>Homily 7 on Isaiah</u>	<u>In Genesim</u>  <u>Epistle 3</u>
Orosius		
Primasius	<u>Commentarum in Apocalypsim</u>	<u>Commentarum in Apocalypsim</u>
Prudentius		
Theophilus of Alexandria		
Tychonius		

One of Bede's pupils Egbert later became archbishop at York and followed in his master's tradition of superior scholarship. First he taught only his clerks, but when students began travelling from all over England to attend his school, he decided to form a library for his scholars.<sup>114</sup> He and Aelbert, to whom he turned over the lessons of the school, collected books assiduously. Aelbert travelled throughout continental Europe looking for books.<sup>115</sup> Egbert, after a journey to Rome, carefully compared service books used at York with those

<sup>114</sup>Stenton, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>115</sup>Duckett, Alcuin, p. 22.

used in Italy.<sup>116</sup> Together, the two built one of the finest libraries in Western Europe. Not only did it contain an "innumerable quantity of excellent books,"<sup>117</sup> but its scriptorium also provided copies of those texts for other religious houses. Boniface, for example, turned to Egbert asking for all of Bede's commentaries and, if possible, his homilies.<sup>118</sup>

Aelbert's kinsman and pupil was Alcuin, who provided the first catalogue still extant of an English monastic library. After he had become matricularius of the ancient St. Martin of Tours, he lamented the scantiness of its books as compared to York's and begged Charlemagne to send youths to England to bring back some of "the flowers of Britain,"<sup>119</sup> the books in York Library. The poetic catalogue, which includes authors but not titles, indicates that York was strong in Christian poetry and patristic writing:

Tradidit ast alio caras super omnia gazas  
 Liborum nato, Patri qui semper adhaesit,  
 Doctrinae sitiens haurire fluentia suetus;  
 Cujus si curas proprium cognoscere nomen,  
 Fronte sua statim praesentia carmina prodent,  
 His divisit opes diversia sortibus; illi  
 Ecclesiae regimen, thesauros, rura, talenta:  
 Huic sophiae specimen, studium, sedemque, librosque,  
 Undique quos clarus collegerat ante Magister,  
 Egregias condens uno sub culmine gazas.  
 Illic invenies veterum vestigia Patrum,

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>117</sup> Edwards, op. cit., p. 104.

<sup>118</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.



Quidquid habet pro se Latio Romanus in orbe,  
Graecia vel quidquid transmisit clara Latinis:  
Hebraicus vel quod populus bibit imbre superno,  
Africa lucifluo vel quidquid lumine sparsit.  
 Quod Pater Hieronymus, quod sensit Hilarius, atque  
Ambrosius Praesul, simul Augustinus, et ipse  
 Sanctus Athanasius, quod Orosius edit avitus;  
 Quidquid Gregorius summus docet, et Leo Papa;  
Basilius quidquid, Fulgentius atque coruscant,  
Cassiodorus item, Chrysostomus atque Johannes,  
 Quidquid et Athelmus docuit, quid Beda Magister. 120

More specifically, some of the authors and books that Alcuin  
 read along with the works in which he utilized the writings follow:<sup>121</sup>

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Title of Alcuin's Work</u>
Ambrosius Autpertus	<u>In Apocalypsim</u>	<u>Commentary on the Apocalypse</u>
Athanasius	<u>De Incarnatione Dei Verbi Epistola ad Epicetum Epistola ad Pontanium</u>	<u>Adversus Heresim Felicis</u>
Augustine	<u>Enarrationes in Psalmis</u> <u>Tractiones in Johannis Evangelum</u>	<u>Exposition of Psalms</u> <u>De Processiones Spiritus Sancti</u>
Cassiodorus	<u>Exposition in Psalterium</u>	<u>Commentary on Psalms</u>
Chrysostom	<u>Homily on Hebrews</u>	<u>Adversus Felicem</u>
Gregory I	<u>Homiliae in Evangelia</u>	<u>Commentary on St. John</u>

<sup>120</sup> Alcuini De Pontificibus et Sanctis Ecclesiae Eboracensis Poema. Ex MSS. Codd. Remensi et. Sancti Theodorici prope Remos; apud Gale, Historiae Britannicae .... Scriptores XV, iii. 730, quoted in Edwards, op. cit., pp. 104-105.

<sup>121</sup> Ogilvy, op. cit., pp. 6-82, passim.

<u>Author</u>	<u>Title of Work</u>	<u>Title of Alcuin's Work</u>
Hilarius	<u>Pictaviensis Expositio</u> <u>Evangelie Secundum</u> <u>Matth.</u>	<u>Adversus Felicem</u>
Isidore	<u>Quaestiones in</u> <u>Veterum Testamentum</u>	Epistle 126
Jerome	<u>In Local Evangelum</u> <u>Expositio</u> <u>In Ephesion</u> <u>In Isaiam</u> <u>In Philemonem</u>  <u>In Titum</u>	Epistle 110    <u>Commentary on</u> <u>Philemon</u> <u>Commentary on</u> <u>Titus</u>
Pseudo-Jerome	<u>Brevarium in</u> <u>Psalms</u>	<u>Commentary on</u> <u>Psalms</u>
Origen	<u>In Epistulum ad</u> <u>Romanos, VII</u> <u>Adversus Haeresim</u> <u>Felicis</u>	

Since Alcuin received books from many sources, the fact that he had read a work does not necessarily indicate its presence in England.<sup>122</sup> However, he did use England as his first source in forming for Charlemagne at Aachen the largest continental library of its time.<sup>123</sup> No catalogue remains of its contents, but the collection must have been extensive, for Charlemagne freely distributed the books in the collection, allowing Alcuin and others to borrow materials, selling books at a low cost to whoever wanted to buy them, and

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., xix.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, op. cit., p. 56.

often giving volumes away.<sup>124</sup>

Alcuin, whose greatest pleasure was reading the Bible and saints' lives,<sup>125</sup> contributed to Biblical scholarship commentaries on St. John, Genesis, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Songs, Epistles to the Ephesians, Titus, Philemon, and Hebrews. In addition, he reworked the Vulgate, for the original translation had been corrupted by copyists.<sup>126</sup> For sources in making the revision, Alcuin drew on Anglo-Saxon and Irish manuscripts as well as on Italian readings of the Bible. On Christmas in 801 Alcuin presented a copy of the Bible to Charlemagne. While the King's volume is no longer extant, near approaches to the original are found in Codex 75 of Saint Gall, in Codex Vatticellianus, and in The Bamberg Bible.<sup>127</sup>

No account of Northumbrian libraries would be complete without including Lindisfarne. On July 10, 635, Aidan, who had walked throughout the kingdom "bidding his people, monk or lay, to read the Bible and to learn the Psalms"<sup>128</sup> arrived at Lindisfarne and eventually established there a great school for training teachers to preach the gospel.<sup>129</sup> In addition to the Irish books that poured into the

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>125</sup>Duckett, Alcuin, p. 16.

<sup>126</sup>"Vulgate," The Catholic Encyclopaedia (1913), XV, 370.

<sup>127</sup>Duckett, Alcuin, p. 265.

<sup>128</sup>Bradley, op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>129</sup>Duckett, Saints and Scholars, p. 106.

school, continental books came, including a Neopolitan original for The Lindisfarne Gospels, probably brought by Hadrian on a visit.<sup>130</sup> The Lindisfarne Gospels, with their careful and lavish quality, indicate that the monks valued fine books, that they had texts of high quality from which to copy, and that they could produce manuscripts of the first class.<sup>131</sup> The Latin text of the Gospels was written by Eadfrith, bishop of Lindisfarne between 698 and 721; and his successor Aethilwald along with Billfrith, an anchorite, ornamented its binding with metalwork and jewels.<sup>132</sup>

Some extant eighth-century books of the Bible or paraphrases of it have been assigned tentatively to Northumbria. One is The Blickling or Morgan Psalter, which is similar in ornamentation and script to The Lindisfarne Gospels, but is sometimes attributed to Southern England.<sup>133</sup> Another one of the same period is The Salaberga Psalter; however, it has been missing since the fall of Berlin in 1945.<sup>134</sup> It is possible that the Urform of Genesis A, part of the Caedmonian cycle of poems, was composed in Northumbria or in Anglia

<sup>130</sup> Cook, "Hadrian," p. 244.

<sup>131</sup> Bradley, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>132</sup> Morrell, op. cit., p. 210.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., pp. 131-132.

<sup>134</sup> L. W. Jones, "A Review of Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Paleographical Guide to Latin MSS. Prior to the Ninth Century, ed. E. A. Lowe," Speculum, XXXV (1960), 635.

in the late seventh or early eighth century,<sup>135</sup> and that Exodus, which resembles Beowulf stylistically and linguistically, was written by a Northumbrian.<sup>136</sup>

It is, then, established that a knowledgeable eighth-century poet with access to a monastic library would, in all probability, be acquainted with the contents of the Catholic Canon and possibly with pseudo-apocryphal works not accepted by the Roman Church, but read by Irish scholars. Moreover, he would have opportunity to read how the Church Fathers and other scholars, Latin, Greek, and perhaps Irish, had interpreted the Bible. One question remains: what manner of interpretation did the mainstream of Catholic churchmen living in England follow during the time in which Beowulf may have been written?

Beryl Smalley states, "One finds in medieval Biblical interpretation, as did Alice, a country governed by queer laws which the inhabitants regard as rational .... anything in the Scripture may signify any other thing provided that it obeys the rules of an intricate Pseudo-Science, the allegorical interpretation."<sup>137</sup>

The allegorical tradition began with Jesus Christ, who, according to the writers of the Gospels, often hid a spiritual truth in a story. In addition, He frequently proclaimed that Old Testament

<sup>135</sup> Morrell, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>137</sup> Smalley, op. cit., p. 5.

prophecy had been fulfilled in his ministry. Paul of Tarsus blended Christ's parables and treatment of prophecies in his writings in a sense by declaring that events in Old Testament history and even objects in Jewish worship were types of Christ, the Church, and the future kingdom. For example, in Ephesians 2.20 he equated the chief cornerstone of the Jewish Temple to Christ.

Developing that vein of thought, Origen, whose works were read by Bede and Alcuin, also stated that the Old Testament prefigured the New and that in the Old Testament, he could find four types: those of Christ, of the Church and Sacraments, of last things and the kingdom, and of the relationship between God and the individual soul as manifested in God's treatment of Israel. He concluded, on the basis of a typological interpretation of the Bible, that "one could draw spiritual teachings from Exodus or the Canticle."<sup>139</sup>

Supporting that method were St. Augustine of Hippo, who used an anagogic system of Biblical interpretation<sup>140</sup>; St. Jerome, who sometimes chose a literal and sometimes an allegorical view of the Bible<sup>141</sup>; and Cassian, so much the mystic that he considered spiritual purification to be better preparation for understanding the Bible than study. Cassian found four Jerusalems: the historical, the Church,

<sup>138</sup>Ogilvy, op. cit., pp. 6-82, passim.

<sup>139</sup>Ibid., pp. 6-7.

<sup>140</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>141</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

the heavenly city, and the soul.<sup>142</sup> Cassiodorus, of great influence in Western monasticism, also believed in the typological interpretation, but he warned that a man must study to gain understanding.<sup>143</sup>

Gregory the Great, whose books were greatly admired in England in the eighth century, also interpreted the Bible in an allegorical and typological sense; moreover, one passage could suggest a second passage containing a word with a spiritual meaning identical to a word in the first. The second passage could suggest a third "to crown the first" and so on.<sup>144</sup>

Anglo-Saxon scholars of the seventh and eighth centuries were at least aware of and sometimes used this allegorical method of interpretation. At Canterbury the mysteries of the Scriptures were explained deeply so that sometimes the students drew spiritual and ethical lessons from the Bible and sometimes they could build metaphoric and symbolic interpretations.<sup>145</sup> Aldhelm was familiar with methods taught at Canterbury; furthermore, he read Instituta Regularia by Junilius Africanis, a book containing a section on Messianic Psalms.<sup>146</sup> Bede utilized the allegorical method in his commentaries

<sup>142</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>143</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-35.

<sup>145</sup>Duckett, Saints and Scholars, p. 34.

<sup>146</sup>Smalley, op. cit., p. 36.

on Ezra, Nehemiah, and Samuel.<sup>147</sup> In defense of his practice, he wrote, "'If we seek to follow the letter of Scripture only, in the Jewish way, what shall we find to correct our sins.'" <sup>148</sup> Rather humorously he added that a celibate like himself could find no consolation in the blessed Samuel's account of Elecano and his two wives unless he allegorized.<sup>149</sup> Alcuin, too, followed an allegorical interpretation of the Bible, for in the Psalms he found "the Incarnation, the Passion, the Resurrection, and the Ascension of the Word of God."<sup>150</sup>

Thus, if the poet of Beowulf read the theological writers prominent in his day, he may certainly have been versed in the techniques of seeing in Old Testament events a foreshadowing of the New Testament and in seeing in any passage of Scriptures an allegorical meaning transcending its literal sense. Whether he himself would employ this technique in writing, if one grants that the poet may have been familiar with it, is still open to question. Since nothing is known of the poet apart from the one poem Beowulf, the examination must now turn to it to discover if the possibility exists that there are Biblical parallels and that just as parts of section one of the poem appear to foreshadow other sections, so possible parallels may be

<sup>147</sup> Laistner, op. cit., pp. 39, 65.

<sup>148</sup> Smalley, loc. cit.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> Duckett, Alcuin, p. 266.



prophetic of other parallels, deepening the significance of individual lines in the poem and heightening the interest that the poem as a whole may excite in its reader.

### CHAPTER III

#### SECTION ONE OF BEOWULF

The first section of Beowulf begins with the genealogy of Danish kings and ends with the celebration of Heorot subsequent to Grendel's defeat. This section reaches its climax during the Beowulf-Grendel encounter. One strong Biblical parallel, a striking resemblance between that combat and the David-Goliath encounter in I Samuel 17, and several lesser parallels with varying degrees of probability run throughout the section. Not until the reader reaches section three, the events following Beowulf's homecoming, does the prophetic character of the first section fully dawn on him, though the poet prepares him for the final section with the comparison of Beowulf to Sigemund, dragon slayer; the contrast between Beowulf and Heremond, the evil king; and with, if one applies the typological method of seeing New Testament characters revealed in Old Testament types, the identification between the Old Testament deliverer David and the New Testament Deliverer, Jesus Christ.

Significantly, the poem begins with an account of a deliverer Scyld Scefing, founder of the ruling dynasty of Denmark. In several points, Scyld's life coincides with the life of Moses, deliverer of the Hebrews out of the Egyptian captivity.

Both Scyld and Moses had inauspicious beginnings. Scyld, as a child, was cast into the ocean by unknown hands and he traveled in a small ship alone over the water. The reason for his abandonment is not given; but the person abandoning him must have cared what happened to the boy, for the ship carrying him was heaped with costly gifts (Beowulf 4-7, 43-46).

Moses, too, was placed into a small vessel and was cast as an infant into a body of water. The writer of Exodus explains that Moses' mother, after hiding her baby as long as she could, surrendered him, for Pharoah had decreed that all male Hebrew children must be thrown into the river to slow down the increase in population among those captives. Still she, like Scyld's abandoner, made provision for the child. She carefully prepared the watertight ark in which she placed him, and Miriam, his sister, watched from a distance to see what would happen to the baby (Exodus 2.22-34).

Both Scyld and Moses were picked up from the water by friendly hands and received recompense for their former misfortune by later having illustrious careers as leaders of large bodies of people,<sup>1</sup> who had

<sup>1</sup>Merrill F. Unger, Unger's Bible Dictionary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1960), pp. 331-332, 762. According to Unger, the story of a child destined to greatness who is found in a papyrus ark has many parallels in ancient lore, including the familiar tales of Romulus and Remus, Bacchus, Perseus, and Sargon I. Of these personages, Sargon I of Akkad antedates Moses; for that king lived around 2400 B.C. However, the cuneiform legend of his origin was written in the ninth century B.C.; therefore, Moses' story may be the archeo-type for the rest if one places the episode of Moses at roughly 1600 B.C. and the writing of Exodus at approximately 1441 B.C.

formerly been leaderless. Scyld became king of the Danes, who were for many years miserable over lacking a ruler. So powerful and famous was the King that even his overseas neighbors paid tribute to him. And, according to the poet, Scyld made an excellent ruler (Beowulf 4-11, 15, 16).

Moses was placed in such a position that, if he had not chosen at age forty to cast his lot with the Hebrews, he might have become Pharaoh; for Pharaoh's daughter, probably the famous Queen Hatshepsut,<sup>2</sup> drew him out of the water and, having compassion on the Hebrew baby, adopted him as her own son (Exodus 2.10). However, when Moses identified with the Hebrews by killing an Egyptian who was mistreating a Jew, he surrendered all rights to the Egyptian throne.<sup>3</sup> Eventually, though, he became the deliverer and leader of the Hebrews, who, like the Danes, had long been leaderless (Exodus 2.11-15). After a combat of wills with Thutmose III, Moses prevailed and the Egyptians paid the Israelites tribute in gold and silver jewelry and in clothing as the former captives departed from the land (Exodus 12.35-36). Thus, Moses, like Scyld, drew tribute from a foreign

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 760.

<sup>3</sup>That Moses might have, like Scyld, enjoyed the pleasures of royalty and deliberately disengaged himself from this royal connection is emphasized in Hebrews 12.24-26:

<sup>24</sup>By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

<sup>25</sup>Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

<sup>26</sup>Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

nation. Moreover, Moses, as a military leader, gained fame as Scyld did; for many of the powerful Canaanite tribes and the Amorites were overcome by Israel and the reputation of those former captives preceded them so that even the fierce Moabites feared them (Numbers 21-25, passim).

The circumstances surrounding the deaths of the two men also coincide. Scyld died following a long reign while he was still at the peak of his strength. The poet points out that the King's hour had arrived and he departed into God's care.<sup>4</sup> The mourning Danes, as Scyld had commanded, carried his body to the sea and placed it in a ship. They then added precious treasures and the sea carried the ship away, but no man knew where it landed (Beowulf 26-52).

Moses, too, died after a long rule, for he led the Hebrews forty years before his death; yet he, like Scyld, died in the prime of strength. Though he was a hundred and twenty, "his eye was not dim, nor his natural force abated" (Deuteronomy 34.7). Not only did God choose the time of Moses' death, but also He personally buried Moses in a valley of Moab with the result that, like the followers of Scyld, the Hebrews did not know where their leader's body rested. Also, like the Danes, the Hebrews mourned their leader's death deeply (Deuteronomy 34.5-8).

<sup>4</sup>The concept that a man has a certain time to die is upheld throughout the Scriptures. Representative verses in support of the doctrine are Psalms 37.18, "The Lord knoweth the days of the upright..." and Job 14.5, "Seeing his days are determined, the number of his months are with thee, thou hast appointed his bonds that he cannot pass."

Still both Scyld and Moses left able leaders in their places. While a parallel between Beowulf I, successor to Scyld, and Joshua, successor to Moses, is somewhat nebulous, one can note a few similarities in the preparation for rulership of the two men. The poet of Beowulf points out that God sent Scyld's son Beowulf I (not the protagonist of the poem) to be a comfort to the Danes and gave him high honour in his own country as well as everywhere else.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, he deserved this fame for while his father yet lived, the youth conducted himself well, exhibiting goodness and generosity, so that later his companions supported him and his people offered him their loyalty during war. After his father died, he governed his strong country well for many years and he was long famous among other nations (Beowulf 12-25, 53-56).

From almost the beginning of the wanderings, Moses relied on Joshua, his young assistant and successor, and, in so doing, prepared him to become the leader of the Jews. For example, Joshua, on Moses' command, selected men and fought against Amalek. During the experience, Joshua realized that only when Moses' hands were held high did the Israelites prevail over the enemy, which meant that they needed Jehovah's help to be victorious (Exodus 17.12, 14).

<sup>5</sup>To receive fame in one's own country is held in great esteem in the Scriptures; one remembers Christ's words which reproach Israel's treatment of her prophets as well as of Him: "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and in his own house" (Matthew 14.57).

As with Beowulf I, God personally appointed Joshua as the leader, for the Lord commanded Moses after the battle, "...write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua...." (Numbers 17:14) Joshua, like Beowulf I, gained stature in the eyes of the people because of his worthy behavior. For instance, after he and Caleb alone believed that Israel, with God's help, could immediately conquer Canaan forty years before she actually did, Jehovah rewarded the two for their faith by openly stating that they only of all the Israelites who were over twenty at the time of the exodus would enter the Promised Land (Numbers 14, passim).

When the hour came for Moses to die, he asked Jehovah for a successor to provide leadership for the Hebrews lest they be scattered. God replied that Joshua was a man controlled by The Holy Spirit, a statement comparable to the praise that Beowulf I was generous and good.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, He commanded Moses to appoint Joshua leader before

<sup>6</sup>In the Old Testament certain men were enabled by a special temporary control of the Holy Spirit, the third member of the Trinity, to perform difficult tasks. Such men include Joshua (Numbers 27.18 and Deuteronomy 34.9), the various judges (Judges 3.10; 6.34; 11.39; 14.6, 19; 15.14, 19), Saul (1 Samuel 11.6), and David (1 Samuel 16.13). In the New Testament the Holy Spirit plays a more prominent role; and some theologians, on the basis of such verses as John 15.26, Acts 2.16, Romans 8-9, and 2 Corinthians 1.22, believe that the Spirit becomes part of the spiritual makeup of every man who decides to accept Christ as his Deliverer and that the Spirit controls the Christian's life when he has no sin unconfessed to God (1 John 1.9, 1 Thessalonians 5.19, and Ephesians 4.30-32). According to St. Paul in Galatians 5.22, the Holy Spirit in control of a life produces these characteristics: "...love, joy, peace, long-suffering, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance." The apostle contrasts those qualities to the corresponding vices produced either by the absence of the Holy Spirit or by the Christian's failing to allow the Spirit to control his life: "...Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft,

the whole congregation, giving the younger man honour so that the Israelites would be obedient to him. The writer of Dueteronomy 34.9 reports that after Moses died, Joshua was characterized by wisdom so that the people obeyed him. He led the Israelites in their conquest of Canaan and then divided the land among the tribes (Joshua 11.23). After ruling for several years, he, like Beowulf I, died at an advanced age famous among many nations (Joshua 23.1, 29).

After Beowulf I, similarities between the Danish royal house and the initial leaders of Israel cease. Hrothgar, grandson of Beowulf I, however, does remind one in several ways of Solomon, third kind of Israel. A possible parallel between Hrothgar and Solomon may be based on the personality of their fathers and on their own positions in obtaining the throne, on their characters, on their possible shortcomings, on their successors' positions, and even on Hrothgar's and Solomon's main building projects and the outcome of those ventures.

Both men were the sons of militant kings. Healfdene, father of Hrothgar, is described as "guðrēow (Beowulf 58)," rough in battle. David, Solomon's father, was so stained from the blood of battles that Jehovah refused to let him construct the Jewish religious

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hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envying, revellings, and such like" (Galatians 5.19-21). Thus the control of Joshua by the Holy Spirit meant that he exhibited characteristics comparable to the goodness and generosity of Beowulf I; moreover, among those vices mentioned as characteristic of people not filled with the Holy Spirit are idolatry, murder, drunkenness, hatred, sedition, envy, and wrath, condemned in the Danes, in Unferth, in Heremod, and in Modthryth.



temple (1 Chronicles 28.3). In addition, neither Hrothgar nor Solomon was first in line for the throne and each was considered to be a lesser man than the brother who should have been king. Hrothgar freely confessed that Herogar, his dead brother, was a better man than he (Beowulf 469). Solomon came to power only because Absalom, David's favorite son, died in a revolt against his father after David had treated him unwisely (II Samuel 15-18, passim). So handsome was Absalom that the writer of II Samuel 14.25 declares, "But in all Israel there was none to be so praised as Absalom for his beauty...." And his personality was such that he "stole the hearts of the men of Israel" (II Samuel 15.6).

Both Hrothgar and Solomon were quick to utter sententious speeches; yet, at the same time, they were peculiarly vulnerable to the charge of not living according to their own words. For example, Hrothgar counselled Beowulf that since death in the end would overtake him, as it does all men, he should not give place to pride but rather remember that all of his blessings and honour came from God (Beowulf 1724-1768, passim). At the same time, however, Hrothgar's own subjects had been allowed to fall so deeply into idolatry that the writer of Beowulf exclaims, "Ne wistōn hie Drihtēn God" (181). Solomon, among many other maxims, made observations similar to Hrothgar's. He pointed out that a "...throne is established by righteousness," that "pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16.12, 18), and that "he who walketh in uprightness feareth the Lord" (Proverbs 14.2). Throughout his

Ecclesiastes runs the theme that since regardless of the riches and honour a man receives on earth he will eventually die, he should serve his Creator from his youth (12.1). Yet the blemish of Solomon's people was their idolatry, for which, according to the writers of the Old Testament, they were periodically disciplined by God (Judges 3.8, 14; 4.2; 6.1); and Solomon, led by his wives, personally fell into the sin of worshipping Ashtoreth, Chemosh, and Malech in opposition of the command of Jehovah (1 Kings 11.5-9).

Furthermore, both men, partly through lack of discernment in making foreign alliances, failed to leave secure thrones for their heirs. Hrothgar negotiated an unwise marriage between his daughter Freawaru and Ingeld, prince of the Heathobards, hoping in that way to bring peace between the two countries (Beowulf 2020-2096, passim). Heorot itself would eventually be burned as the result of a feud renewed by that marriage (182-185). Furthermore, Wealhtheow's appeal that her nephew Hrothulf care for her two sons if he should outlive his uncle (1180-1185) leaves one wondering if the nephew posed still another threat.

Likewise, Solomon, because of his weakness in permitting his foreign wives, whom he married to form political alliances, lead him into polytheism, could not leave his throne safe for his son. As a discipline to Solomon, the Lord told him that his son Rehoboam would lose all but one tribe of Israel; and even while Solomon lived, the process of the nation's disintegration began (1 Kings 11.1-13).

Finally, both men disbursed lavish sums of money to erect

large buildings famous throughout the world for their beauty and splendor. Yet each building later met with such an astonishing fate that it turned into a reproach to its nation. Though Hrothgar constructed a banquet hall and Solomon, a temple, the two structures have much in common in appearance and history.

To begin with, one notes that the materials for Heorot were gathered from all over the world and then the hall was quickly built (Beowulf 74-77). The edifice towered high (81-82). The exterior as well as the interior and the furnishings were overlaid with gold; the massive entrance was secured by bars and clamps made of iron (714-624, 777). Ivory inlays were used within the hall (780) and golden tapestries hung on the walls (994-995).

Even during King David's lifetime, materials began to be collected for the construction of Solomon's temple, and Solomon sent to Tyre for cedar and cypress and to Lebanon for stone (1 Chronicles 22, 28, 29, passim). Since Solomon controlled the caravan trade from Mesopotamia to Arabia and from Palmyra to the Red Sea, iron and copper flowed into his hands freely; and from Arabia he received a nearly inexhaustible supply of gold, silver, and ivory, which he used in erecting and furnishing the temple.<sup>7</sup>

Solomon's temple was built in a relatively short time for its day; it was completed in seven years (1 Kings 6.38). If II Chronicles 3.4 does not contain a scribal error, the temple indeed

<sup>7</sup> Unger, op. cit., p. 1036.

towered like Heorot, for the porch was one hundred and twenty cubits high as compared to a length of sixty cubits. The entire house, like Heorot, was overlaid with gold (1 Kings 6.22).

One crux in Beowulf involves the "gifestōl" that Grendel could not approach for fear of the Lord (Beowulf 168-169). Klaeber states that the "gifestōl" may have been Hrothgar's throne, which God would not allow Grendel to attack<sup>8</sup> or which Grendel could not approach to receive gifts like an ordinary retainer since he came by night with evil purpose.<sup>9</sup> To the idea of the "gifestōl" being a giftseat, Du Bois adds the concept that it could have been an altar from which Hrothgar served God.<sup>10</sup> Klaeber speculates that the "gifestōl" may have been "a veiled allusion to the throne of God from which the evil doer was barred."<sup>11</sup>

In Solomon's temple was the ark of the covenant, which, if Klaeber's third explanation is correct, could correspond to God's

<sup>8</sup>The idea that God especially protects an individual or a position is often found in Scriptures. For example, when God allowed Satan to test the innocent Job, He made one stipulation: "...Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (Job 2.6). Moreover, the Hebrews believed the king was appointed by God and that to harm him was a religious offense. Even after Saul became totally depraved, David, already anointed by Samuel to be Saul's successor, refused to kill the older man: "I will not put forth my hand against my lord; for he is the Lord's anointed." (1 Samuel 24.10).

<sup>9</sup>Klaeber, op. cit., pp. 134-135.

<sup>10</sup>Arthur DuBois, "Gifestol," Modern Language Notes, LXIX (December, 1954), p. 547.

<sup>11</sup>Klaeber, op. cit., p. 135.

throne, that Grendel as an evil being could not approach. Furthermore, DuBois' idea of the "gífstól" as an altar would relate to that explanation since the ark was used by the high priest as a place from which to serve God. The ark, containing the tables on which the law was written, Aaron's rod that budded, and a pot of manna, all of which symbolized man's sin, was, once it had been placed in the temple, overspread by two cherubs, symbolic of God's righteousness and justice. On the ark was the mercy seat, which was sprinkled each year with blood on the day of atonement, showing that a holy God, through blood sacrifice, could accept sinful man. Paul states that the sacrifice was efficacious because it foreshadowed the redeeming death of the Messiah (Hebrews 9.4, 5; Romans 3.5; and Scofield's footnote to Romans 3.5 in The Holy Bible). The ark was considered to be extremely holy, for it symbolized God's presence to the Jews<sup>12</sup>; and it was carried by the priests in advance of the Israelites during the desert wandering (Exodus 25.10-22, Deuteronomy 31.26, Hebrews 9.4).

So connected with God's holiness was the ark that during David's reign when Uzza, an Israelite not of the priesthood, thrust his hand forward to prevent the ark from falling off a wagon, he died (1 Chronicles 13.9-10). When the temple was finally completed and the ark was laid down by the Levites in the most holy place, a cloud of glory surrounded the ark so that even the priests could no

<sup>12</sup>Unger, op. cit., p. 88.

longer stand before it (I Kings 8.11). Thereafter, the high priest alone could enter the room and then only once a year to offer the blood sacrifice for the sins of Israel (Hebrews 9.7).

With the completion of Heorot and of the temple great celebrations were held and gifts were freely dispensed. At his feast, Hrothgar distributed all that God had given him with the exception of human lives and public lands (80-81). Solomon, before his feast, sacrificed numerous animals and then invited all of Israel to a celebration. His banquet lasted for fourteen days; afterward the people left with joyful hearts, grateful for all that the Lord through King Solomon had done for them (I Kings 8.5, 66).

In spite of such favorable beginnings, however, both Heorot and the temple were destined to fall into disrepute. Even the descriptions of their moments of highest glory are tinged with warnings of the structures' eventual destruction. The poet of Beowulf, after describing the celebration on the completion of Heorot, comments that it would endure terrible flames in the deadly feud between Hrothgar and Ingeld (82-85).

Similarly the writer of II Chronicles records just after his description of Solomon's feast that the Lord appeared to King Solomon and warned him that if the Israelites broke the Commandments and served other gods, "...this house, which is high, shall be an astonishment to every one that passeth by it; so that he shall say, why hath the Lord done thus unto this land, and unto this house?" (II Chronicles 7.21). As with Heorot, the glory began to depart from the temple

almost from its beginning. After the rebellion in the reign of Rehoboam, only Judah recognized the temple as her sanctuary. Subsequently, the temple was raided by various kings, some of whom were described in terms reminding one of Grendel. For example, Nebuchadrezzar, who carried away most of the furnishings of the temple and the king of Assyria, who received many of its treasures, are described as follows, "...first the king of Assyria hath devoured him; and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones" (Jeremiah 50.16). Like Heorot, the first temple was eventually destroyed by fire when Zedekiah, a puppet king, broke an uneasy peace with the Chaldeans (II Kings 25.9).

After this introduction to part one, the action of the poem begins to rise with a description of Grendel, the gigantic, man-eating creature who is called a "fēond on helle" (Beowulf 101), condemned with Cain's family (105-107). In addition to noting the possible resemblance between Grendel and Israel's persecutors, one can find a similarity between the monster and Satan, a link in the manner in which Grendel and fallen angels are described, a resemblance between Grendel and the apostate teachers of Jude, and finally a connection between him and the giants springing from Cain's seed, particularly Goliath, King David's famous opponent.

The resemblance between Grendel and the political enemies of Israel has a four-fold support. To begin with, as previously stated, the attackers of Israel were often described in terms of men-eating creatures stalking prey. Moreover, Isaiah employs an anthropomorphism

in explaining that God punished Israel for idolatry, "...he hath stretched forth his hand against them" (Isaiah 5.25). And in describing Jehovah's method of discipline, the prophet says, "And he will lift up an ensign to the nations from afar, and will hiss unto them from the ends of the earth; and, behold, they shall come with speed swiftly ...Their roaring shall be like a lion.... Yea, they shall roar, and lay hold of the prey, and shall carry it away safe, and none shall deliver it" (Isaiah 5.26, 29). So frequently does this imagery occur that one could call it an Old Testament convention.

Supporting this resemblance is the fact that another symbol of these invading nations is a huge figure of destruction shaped like a man and reminding the reader somewhat of the physical description of Grendel. King Nebuchadnezzar [Nebuchadrezzar is a variant spelling] dreamed of a "great image" with a head of gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, legs of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. In the dream a stone not cut by hands broke the feet and then the image crumbled away. Afterward the stone became a mountain filling the earth (Daniel 2.31-35). Daniel interpreted the dream in terms of great powers capable of world dominion. The gold represented Babylon; the silver fit the description of Media-Persia; the brass, Greece; the iron, Rome; and the clay and iron, ten joint rulers yet to come described in Revelation 17.12-14. The stone represented the Kingdom of Heaven, which "shall break in pieces and consume all other kingdoms, and it will stand forever" (Daniel 2.36-44).



A third support of the link between Grendel and Israel's persecutors is the fact that Grendel is called a fiend and is identified also with Cain, whose possible Satanic origin in the eyes of Medieval man will be explored shortly. According to the Scriptures, it is Satan who controls world political power until the setting up of the Kingdom of God. For example, Satan, in the temptation of Christ, showed Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time" (Luke 4.5). Then, Satan demonstrated that he had authority over them, for he said to Christ, "All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them; for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine" (4.6, 7). Later, Christ called Satan "the prince of this world" (John 14.30). Then Paul said to the Corinthians that the reason why so many refuse to believe in Christ is that "...the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Corinthians 4.4). Finally, in the description preceding the Last Judgment, the role that Satan has in motivating nations is shown, for, according to Revelation 20.8, 9, he "...shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the far quarters of the earth.... And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the Saints about, and the beloved city: [Jerusalem] and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them."

The fourth support may rest on an unfounded speculation; but

the fact that one can see a strong parallel between the giants, and especially Goliath, and Grendel strengthens in a sense the somewhat abstract link between Grendel and Israel's enemies; for it is the habit of a poet in any age to compress the most complex concepts into simple but consistent images, and Goliath represents one political aggressor against Israel.

A direct connection between Grendel and Satan is not clear, though M. B. McNamee argues well that since Satan from the fifth century on was often pictured as a monster, a dragon, or a serpent, the edieval audience would have connected Grendel with the Devil and Beowulf, the deliverer, with Christ and that the audience would have seen as early as section one an allegory of salvation.<sup>13</sup> Although such a link does become probable when one looks back on section one with knowledge gained in section three, the poet leads up to the connection gradually by disguising Grendel with the veil of an Old Testament type.

There is no doubt, however, that Grendel and Satan and his fallen angels are described in similar terms. Grendel was damned and could not know God's love (Beowulf 196, 168-169). Likewise, the fallen angels are separated from God forever, and a portion of them, according to Peter, are already in chains of darkness awaiting the Last Judgment (II Peter 2.4). Satan also, according to John, is to be cast into the lake of fire to suffer everlasting torment subsequent to the Last Judgment (Revelation 20.10). Furthermore, Grendel,

<sup>13</sup> McNamee, "Beowulf--Allegory of Salvation," p. 199.

like the fallen angels, lived in a place of darkness (Beowulf 87); in pseudoapocryphal material to be examined in connection with section two, the resemblance between the dwelling place of Grendel and that of certain fallen angels becomes clearer. Finally, Grendel, like the apostate angels, found religious doctrine so disturbing that he reacted violently to it. After he heard Hrothgar's scop sing the story of creation, a narration echoing the Biblical account of how God separated the sea from the land, how he made the two great lights to divide the night from the day and to mark years and seasons, how he brought forth greenery, and how he created life, reminding one of the story of creation given in Genesis 1.9-27, Grendel was so annoyed that he attacked the Danes (86-101, passim). Similarly, fallen angels or devils were often violent in their response to anything connected with Judeo-Christianity. For example, on one occasion, when Christ commanded a demon to come out of a man, the fiend threw down his victim in the midst of the surrounding crowd (Luke 4.26).

Moreover, in Jude 11-13 apostate Christians are compared to the apostate or fallen angels. The description of the Christians reminds one of Grendel; for Grendel, like those teachers, was identified with Cain's error (Beowulf 101-114) and was greedy (121). He, as they, marred a feast of charity or love (115-116); he feasted wickedly without fear (120-125); in a physical sense, he, too, was twice killed (1588) and in a spiritual sense, the poet observes that once Grendel died physically, his soul would be received by hell (852),

a fate known as the second death (Revelation 20.14).<sup>14</sup> Finally, Grendel ended his life under the lake of water-demons, where terrible waves raged overhead (848-849), thus, returning to the darkness in which he had lived (87). As one reads the following passage, these similarities plus certain turns of phrases describing apostate Christians remind one of Grendel:

- <sup>11</sup>Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.  
<sup>12</sup>These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;  
<sup>13</sup>Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

The resemblance between Grendel and the giants in the Scriptures is perhaps the most striking, for Grendel was of such gigantic stature that he could pounce on thirty thanes in one evening and then devour his victims (Beowulf 120-125). While much is omitted about Grendel's physical appearance the reader is told that the giant could pry open an iron bar with his touch, tear down the entrance to

<sup>14</sup>The second death seems to apply to Grendel in a peculiarly striking way when one considers the phrases in Revelation 20.13, 14:

<sup>13</sup>And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works.

<sup>14</sup>And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

a building, rip apart and consume a man in an instant, and nearly destroy a banquet hall in combat (703-782, passim). As one might expect, Hrothgar's retainers had told him that the monster was in the form of a man, only much larger, and that he was misshapen (1345-1354). Beowulf, in repeating his adventure, told Hygelac that Grendel possessed great strength and that he carried an enormous glove made of dragonskins in which to place his victims (2084-2086).

An identification of Grendel with the giants does not preclude the link between Grendel and Satan or the fallen angels, for supernatural beings are sometimes used in an explanation of the parentage of those creatures. Among Christian and Jewish theologians, some controversy exists on the origin of the giants. According to Rabinnical lore, Satan seduced Eve and the product of that union was Cain,<sup>15</sup> who was considered too evil to be a son of Adam.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, even the Church Fathers spoke of Cain as the son of Satan, though most of them meant it in a metaphorical sense based on John's statement that Cain was the son of the wicked one (1 John 3.12).<sup>17</sup> Tertullian, however, supported the Rabinnical viewpoint in his De Patientia.<sup>18</sup> A common

<sup>15</sup> Oliver Emerson, "Legends of Cain, Especially in Old and Middle English," 835.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 832.

<sup>17</sup> Marie Hamilton, "The Religious Principle in Beowulf," p. 312. Miss Hamilton states that the Medieval man accepted the statement of St. Augustine of Hippo in The City of God, chapter 15, in which he set forth the idea that since the fall of the angels, two societies have existed: the Righteous and the Reprobate, one to rule eternally with God and the other condemned to Hell with the Devil. One he equated with Abel and the other with Cain.

<sup>18</sup> Emerson, op. cit., p. 836.

Medieval concept was that Cain, because his father was Satan, produced a race of giants and monstrous beings.<sup>19</sup> Many modern theologians, following traditional lines of interpretation, believe that the giants who performed mighty deeds in Genesis 6 were the product of marriages between the daughters of the godly Seth and the sons of the godless Cain.<sup>20</sup> Still others hold, however, that some of the fallen angels married mortal women and a super-race of giants results from the union.<sup>21</sup>

A continuing link between Grendel and the giants of Genesis 6, which most critics of Beowulf refer to in a Biblical examination of Grendel, cannot be maintained, however attractive the possibility, since these monsters were destroyed by the flood (Genesis 7.21-22); still one does not, as previously stated, expect complete consistency from the creative mind, but rather the weaving of various strands of narration into a unified pattern. Furthermore, the Medieval mind did accept the connection.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 880.

<sup>20</sup> Scofield, ed., The Holy Bible, p. 6.

<sup>21</sup> Unger, op. cit., pp. 52-53. These Biblical scholars base their argument on the premise that the particular Hebrew form for sons of God refers only to angels. Since according to Jude 6, some of Satan's angels are imprisoned and others are still free to roam the earth in the form of demons, these theologians state that those fallen angels who cohabitated with human beings are suffering a special punishment. According to Robert B. Thieme, Jr., pastor of Berachah Church, Houston, Texas, this cohabitation was regarded as a threat to the redemption of the human race in that if all mortals had eventually entered into the bloodline of the fallen angels, the prophecy of Genesis 3.15, that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of Satan could not have been fulfilled and Christ could not have been mankind's Savior since he would not have possessed true humanity.

<sup>22</sup> Emerson, op. cit., p. 889.

The possibility that the poet may have had in mind Goliath, the mighty Philistine whose height was nine feet and three inches, seems feasible when one studies the strong resemblance between King David and Beowulf and the parallels between the Beowulf-Grendel encounter and the David-Goliath narration in I Samuel 16.<sup>23</sup>

Beowulf, as a youth, was considered unworthy of honours in court since the Geats thought him to be sluggish and weak; as a result, they slighted him (2183-2188). David, too, was not held in esteem by his own family as a youth. When the prophet Samuel travelled to the house of David's father Jesse, the Bethlehemite, where Jehovah had told the priest that he would find Israel's next king, Jesse presented his seven elder sons to Samuel, but neglected even to mention David, the youngest, who kept the sheep, until God had rejected all seven with the words "...man looketh on the outward appearance, but God upon the heart," and had directed Samuel to ask if there was not another son (I Samuel 16.1-11).

Nevertheless, both Beowulf and David proved to be men of strength and valor.<sup>24</sup> Beowulf developed into the strongest man alive

<sup>23</sup>Dr. Donald Lee of the English department of the University of Houston first suggested this parallel to me; after considering the possibility at different times over the period of a year, I am convinced that the connection is striking.

<sup>24</sup>In her Master's thesis, Helen M. Yarbrough discusses the concept of the Christian athlete, an idea which this investigation will explore in Chapter Four. In Old Testament times, physical and spiritual strength were closely related so that if a Jew lost his spiritual strength, he could also become physically debilitated. The notable example of this relationship occurs of course in the life of Samson, who lost his strength when he allowed Delilah to cut his long

(Beowulf 196); in his handgrip he had the strength of thirty men (379-380), and he performed even before his encounter with Grendel such feats as killing nine sea-monsters in one night while he battled for his life after racing Breca, King of the Brondings, in a swimming contest lasting for four days (535-583).

David, too, was extremely strong. With his hands when only a youth, he killed a lion and a bear that tried to steal his father's sheep (I Samuel 17.34-37). Moreover, he, too, in a sense had the grip of thirty men; for he led thirty mighty men, who performed unusual feats under his command (I Chronicles 11.25). In addition both Beowulf and David were unusually handsome. Hrothgar's coast guard praised Beowulf's heroic appearance and peerless form (Beowulf 250-251). David was said to be "of a beautiful countenance and goodly

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hair, the mark of distinction of a Nazarite, or one dedicated especially to God. Samson, however, regained his power as a result of prayer long enough to destroy his enemies (Judges 17.17-37). Saul, too, early in his career possessed unusual physical power and he was described as being a head higher than any other Israelite (1 Samuel 9.2). David, as will be pointed out, was also notable for his strength. In the New Testament, however, as Helen Yarbrough has explained, Paul describes the Christian in his combat against the forces of evil and in his striving for rewards, by using the metaphor of the soldier or of the athlete. Spiritual rather than physical strength is emphasized (Romans 13.12; II Corinthians 6.7; Ephesians 6.11, 13; 1 Timothy 2.3-5). Paul, for instance, describes himself as being physically weak (II Corinthians 12.7-10); yet he can at the same time state that he is not "behind the very chiefest apostles" (II Corinthians 12.16). Thus, the aging Beowulf in section three, the section most akin to New Testament doctrine, could qualify as well as the youthful Beowulf as a Christian athlete.



to look at" (I Samuel 16.12).

Finally, these strong and handsome men eventually became kings, even though they were not originally expected to be monarchs. And both were reluctant to seize this honour except by lawful means. Beowulf accepted the crown only after the deaths of Hygelac, Haetheyn, Herebeald, and Heardred, all the heirs of Hrethel before Beowulf, though the Geats and the Queen Regent would have gladly given him the kingship in young Heardred's place.

David, after his encounter with Goliath, increased in favor with the Jews until Saul became so jealous that he tried to kill the younger man. Yet even when David had the opportunity to slay Saul and to take over the kingdom, he refused to do so (I Samuel 18-27, passim). Only after Saul's death would he accept the throne which Samuel had promised would one day be his (II Samuel 1.17-27).

Not only do the general careers of Beowulf and David mirror each other, but the Beowulf-Grendel and David-Goliath encounters contain several parallels. In both cases, the gigantic adversary attacked alone before the protagonist appeared on the scene, met no opposition, and left a people led by a once brave king in a state of fear and confusion.

Grendel, after being angered by the sound of joyful celebration at Heorot and by the scop's song of creation (Beowulf 86-91), entered the hall at night and killed thirty thanes (122-123); afterward he continued to wage war against Hrothgar and the entire nation of the Danes (149-161). Hrothgar brooded over the trouble, but he was powerless to stop Grendel (189-193). Though he had ruled successfully

over the Danes for fifty years, winning many battles, he could not protect them against their relentless enemy (1769-1778). Moreover, the Danes as a nation reacted with fear. Rather than making an attempt to defend Heorot, as one might expect, Hrothgar's retainers carefully avoided the monster (134-140).

When the Phillistines were at war with Israel, Goliath came out from the camp of the Phillistines and challenged the Jewish soldiers, "I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together" (I Samuel 17.10). Though Saul had previously been victorious in warfare (I Samuel 11.11), he and the other Israelites "were dismayed and greatly afraid" (I Samuel 17.12). Whenever Goliath appeared to repeat the challenge, the Jews were so frightened that they fled from the giant (I Samuel 17.24).

Beowulf and David met the challenge in a similar manner. Both were at another place when the threat began; yet they volunteered to rid the nation of the adversary single-handedly though no one expected them to take up the fight. Moreover, both men, although they were previously known to the ruler, had to convince him and his followers that they were capable of performing the task; and both, though they mentioned past feats of strength and courage, really placed their confidence in their ability to perform the tasks in God rather than in themselves.

Beowulf, in Geatland, had heard of Hrothgar's suffering and had travelled to Denmark to aid the troubled nation. In order even to see Hrothgar, Beowulf had to convince the coast guard that he was not

a spy, and Wulfgar, attendant to the king, that he had a worthy motive for the audience. Furthermore, he felt it necessary to remind Hrothgar that in the past he had killed a family of giants and had destroyed several sea-monsters. Hrothgar had known Beowulf when the Geat was a child and had heard of his extraordinary strength; as a result, he was ready to believe that God had sent the young man to help the Danes and that Beowulf, therefore, did stand a chance of overcoming Grendel. Even so, Unferth, one of the king's retainers who sat in a place of honour, taunted Beowulf with accusations of cowardice. Unferth reminded the young man that he had, out of conceit or foolishness, entered the swimming contest with Breca and had lost the race. Retorting to Unferth, Beowulf asserted that he had been the faster swimmer and had stayed near Breca to protect him until a storm drove the two apart. Furthermore, Beowulf reproached Unferth for murdering his brothers, a repetition of the Cain theme, and for not defending his nation against Grendel.

Thus, Beowulf maintained steady confidence before the encounter. To the coast guard, he said that Hrothgar's only chance to overcome Grendel lay in listening to his counsel. To Wulfgar, he did not explain his mission, but maintained an air of confidence. After reminding Hrothgar of former deeds of bravery, Beowulf told the king that he and his men would purge Heorot alone. To Wealhtheow, he promised that he would kill Grendel or die in the attempt. And to his own men, he stated that he did not consider himself inferior to Grendel in strength or experience and that he would fight the monster

with bare hands. Then he lay down quietly with his head resting on a pillow while he awaited Grendel's attack, though he did not allow himself to fall asleep.<sup>25</sup>

Yet Beowulf's confidence did not really lie so much in his own strength as in his conviction that God would decide the battle. He told Hrothgar that God would pass the verdict on who should die. To his men he stated that the wise God would give victory to whichever one He thought should have it (Beowulf 685-687).

David was sent by his father to Saul's camp to carry food for his elder brothers and to find out how they were faring in battle. Soon after David's arrival, Goliath, who had challenged the Israelites for forty days, appeared and repeated his taunts. David upbraided the Israelites for their lack of courage, asking, "...who is this uncircumcised Phillistine that he should defy the armies of the living God" (I Samuel 17.27). Eliab his elder brother, in a manner similar to Unferth's, reproached David by accusing him of leaving his

<sup>25</sup>The New Testament sets forth the idea that the Christian must be awake, spiritually alert to God, in order to combat the Devil. Paul in Ephesians 5.14 exhorts, "...awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." Peter, along the same lines, exhorts Christians, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5.8). Beowulf, by keeping watch, was able to anticipate Grendel's attack and meet it (Beowulf 745-749). The thirty thanes who were killed when Grendel first attacked were sleeping after a feast (119). Hondscioh, the Geat who was killed, significantly slept while Beowulf waited for Grendel and, thus, became an easy prey for Grendel (739-743, 2076, 2080), as was Aeschere, who "sare angeald aefenraeste" (1251-1252) when Grendel's mother appeared.

sheep uncared for in the wilderness in order to view the battle:

"I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart," Eliab reprimanded (I Samuel 17.28). David, though, like Beowulf, declared his innocence of the charge and then continued to scold the Israelites for their lack of valor.

The Jewish soldiers repeated David's words to King Saul, who sent for the youth. Saul, like Hrothgar with Beowulf, had known the young man earlier, for David had once served as a musician to Saul and as an armour bearer (I Samuel 16.14).<sup>26</sup> When David entered into Saul's tent, the youth encouraged the King, "Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go forth and fight with this Phillistine (I Samuel 17.32). Saul replied that David was only a boy, whereas Goliath was an experienced warrior; David answered with the tale of how he had killed the animals attacking the sheep. Since Goliath had defied the army of Jehovah, David concluded, the giant's outcome would be as theirs (I Samuel 17.37). Saul reluctantly agreed to permit David to go out against the giant, saying, "...Go, and the Lord be with thee" (I Samuel 17.37).

Even as David faced the gigantic Phillistine, he, like Beowulf, exhibited steady confidence. The youth declared to Goliath, "...I will smite thee, and take thy head from thee; and I will give

<sup>26</sup> Though Saul had previously known David, he had to inquire about the name of the youth's father. Some readers of the Bible find that slip in memory confusing; however, it would not be unusual for an Oriental despot to forget details about one of his subjects.

the carcasses of the hosts of the Phillistines this day unto the fowls of the air, and to the wild beasts of the earth...." (1 Samuel 17.46). Yet he made it clear that his confidence was based on faith in God. Not only did he tell the Israelites, including King Saul, that Goliath's challenge was a reproach to the "armies of the living God" (I Samuel 17.26, 36), but he also told Goliath that he came in the name of Israel's God (I Samuel 16.45), and he stated, "This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; ....That all the earth may know there is a God in Israel ....he will give you into our hands" (I Samuel 17.37, 46, 47).

The combats with the two giants contain a few parallel details. Both Beowulf and David chose to fight with their hands, both showed righteous anger and unusual courage, and both cut off the heads of their victims after the deciding blows.

Beowulf, refusing to use a sword, waited angrily for Grendel to approach; when the giant came close to the warrior, Beowulf firmly seized Grendel's hand and refused to release him. So strong was Beowulf's grip that Grendel lost his arm and sustained a fatal wound in his effort to escape. Later Beowulf, after the underwater fight with Grendel's mother, severed the head of the dead Grendel and the Geats carried it to Heorot as a trophy (745-836, 1585-1950, 1637-1639).

David refused to use Saul's armour for protection; nor would he use a sword in his combat with Goliath (I Samuel 17.38, 39). He chose instead to rely on the strength of his hands, as he had with the lion and the bear. The only weapon that he held in his hands was

a slingshot along with five stones.<sup>27</sup> Angrily he approached the Phillistine who had shamed the armies of God. When Goliath came toward David, the youth ran forward to meet the giant and, hitting him with a stone on the forehead, caused the Phillistine to fall unconscious on the ground (I Samuel 17.45-50). Only after David had won the battle did he draw out a sword and, like Beowulf, cut off the head of his opponent (I Samuel 17.51). David then took Goliath's head to Jerusalem as evidence of the victory (I Samuel 17.54).

Finally, the results of the fights were in some respects similar. Both men were lauded by the people even to the detriment of the ruling monarch; both were adopted by the King; both were given precious gifts; and yet in the midst of both celebrations warning notes sounded.

After Beowulf killed Grendel, the monster's arm was placed in Heorot;<sup>28</sup> and Danes travelled from all over the country to see the

<sup>27</sup> There were five giants, all sons of Gath, in the Phillistine army. One explanation of the reason for five stones is that David was willing to fight all five. Eventually he and his men were responsible for the death of them all, including, Goliath; Ishbibenot; Saph, a brother of Goliath with a staff like a weaver's beam; and a giant with twelve fingers and twelve toes (II Samuel 21.15-22). The number five suggests a possible parallel to the five giants that Beowulf captured when he destroyed a family of giants (419-420).

<sup>28</sup> For a head to be considered a battle trophy was of course a common concept in the ancient world and one that can be found in several passages in the Protestant canon, including I Samuel 17.54, in which David took Goliath's head to Jerusalem; II Samuel 4.8, in which Rechab and Baanah took the head of Ishbatheth, son of Saul, to David; and I Samuel 31.9, in which the Phillistines cut off Saul's head and sent it to their homeland to be published in the nation and in their house of idols. The head as a trophy is also found in The Old Testament, Douay Version (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1961), in Judith 13.9-19, in which Judith cut off the head of Holofernes, general of the invading

trophy and the monster's tracks leading to the fen, where, the author piously asserts, Grendel gave up his pagan ghost and hell received him. The people praised Beowulf as they returned from the fen. Some said that nowhere in the world was there a better fighter or a man more deserving of a kingdom than he. They compared him to Sigemund, a famous adventurer who early in his career killed giants and later slew a dragon, capturing his treasure. The comparison is prophetic, for Beowulf would follow the same career. Then they contrasted Beowulf to the evil King Heremod, a man who started out with might and daring, but eventually was possessed by evil and became such a burden to his subjects that they forced him into exile (Beowulf 835-915). The contrast takes on an ominous quality in section two when Heremod's name again appears. There Hrothgar predicted that Beowulf, with his humility and wisdom, would be a lasting help to his nation as contrasted to Heremod, who received his power from God, but used it unwisely in that he killed his drinking companions in spasms of fury, he was parsimonious, and he took pleasure in the death and destruction rather than in the well-being of his subjects (1707-1722). Using Heremod as a negative example,

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Assyrian army, and carried it to her home in Bethulia. The most striking parallel to the Grendel incident, however, occurs in the Douay, Machabees 7, in which Nicanor, who had threatened to destroy the Jewish temple, was slain by Judas Machabees and his troupes. The Jews then cut off Nicanor's head; "and his right hand, which he had proudly stretched out, and they brought it, and hung it up over against Jerusalem" (7.47). The people then, like the Danes, rejoiced and spent the day in celebration because the Lord had overcome their enemies.



Hrothgar warned Beowulf that he must not be corrupted by success as it came to him. One, thus, feels that Beowulf faced an eventual choice of going the way of Heremod or the way of a man living to please God.

In section one, however, Hrothgar unreservedly praised Beowulf for ridding the Danes of Grendel, thanking God for the sight of the claw of the vanquished monster and declaring Grendel's defeat a miracle. Indeed he exclaimed that the woman who bore Beowulf could say God was good to her in childbearing, a phrase that takes on special significance viewed from section three. Hrothgar also promised to cherish the young man as his own son (Beowulf 925-956). Yet the King did not, as one might expect, reward the young man who had saved the kingdom with the hand of the princess, Freawaru<sup>29</sup>; instead Hrothgar had arranged a marriage for political alliance between Ingeld and her, the union that Beowulf spoke of disapprovingly to Hygelac, rightly predicting that it would bring war between the Danes and the Heathobards (Beowulf 2020-2069).

Finally, Hrothgar held a feast in Beowulf's honour. There, Hrothgar gave the young hero and his band of Geats costly presents; the King also ordered compensation paid for the murdered Geat. The

<sup>29</sup>The idea that the King should have offered Freawaru to Beowulf, who does not appear to have a wife, may be colored by the writer's acquaintance with fairy tales. Still it is surprising that Freawaru was betrothed, possibly after the beginning of Grendel's attacks since they lasted for twelve years, to a man who, so far as the reader knows, made no attempt to aid his future father-in-law. Another consideration for Beowulf's single state, however, is perhaps his later identification with Christ, as explored in chapters four and five.

poet religiously asserts that even more Geats would have been killed if God's mercy and Beowulf's courage had not saved them. He adds that God ruled over humanity then as now and that a man should, therefore, be wise and circumspect in his actions, though evil comes to all in the troubled world.<sup>30</sup>

At the feast the story of the Danish-Frisian quarrel was sung by Hrothgar's scop.<sup>31</sup> Then Wealhtheow made her appearance, charging Beowulf to be a good friend to her sons and graciously presenting him with a golden collar.<sup>32</sup> After that the men celebrated late into the night and at last fell asleep exhausted (Beowulf 991-1278).

David, too, was praised by the king and the people. Saul insisted that the young man come to live in the palace (I Samuel 18.2),

<sup>30</sup> These ideas are repeated in many places in the Scriptures. The last part of the poet's exhortation however, echoes Ephesians 5.15-17,

<sup>15</sup> See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools,  
but as wise,

<sup>16</sup> Redeeming the time because the days are evil.

<sup>17</sup> Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what  
the will of the Lord is.

<sup>31</sup> A possible resemblance exists between the story of the Danes who made peace with the Frisians after the Danish defeat by Finn's men and who subsequently broke the peace when Hengest, a Dane, killed Finn, the Frisian King, with the thrust of the sword and the story of how Abner, Captain of Ish-bosheth's armies, made peace with David only to receive a fatal thrust from Joab (II Samuel 3.27).

<sup>32</sup> The women in Beowulf form an interesting contrast to each other. Wealhtheow and Hygd, for example, are illustrations of godly women, as described in Proverbs 31, a chapter written by King Lemuel, a pseudonym for Solomon. In contrast to the virtuous woman are Modthryth, who before her marriage personified what a woman should not be but afterward conformed to New Testament standards, and the fierce mother of Grendel. Wealhtheow, as described in Beowulf, lines 612-641

and Saul's son Jonathan loved the youth "as his own soul" (I Samuel 18.3). From all over Israel came women who sang and danced in celebration of the killing of Goliath. These women had a saying, though, that greatly disturbed Saul, who in personality resembled Heremod, but in function Hrothgar. To the chant, "...Saul hath slain his thousand and David his ten thousands," (I Samuel 18.7), Saul angrily retorted, "...What can he have more but the kingdom?" (I Samuel 18.8). After that, Saul was bitter toward David. Like Heremod, Saul was

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and 1162-1331, is a particularly good example of the virtuous woman, "whose price is far above rubies" (Proverbs 31.10). She showed constant devotion to her husband, fulfilling verse 12, "She will do him good and not evil all the days of her life." Furthermore, she encouraged her husband to distribute battle spoils, answering to, "The heart of her husband doth safely trust in her, so that he shall have no need for spoil" (31.11). She was generous to her subjects, reminding one of the words, "She stretcheth out her hands to the poor; yea, she reached forth her hands to the needy" (31.20). Her clothes were gold and she wore a diadem, fulfilling verse 22, "She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silver and purple." She was careful to distribute the cup to both the younger and elder men, fulfilling, "She looketh well to the ways of her household and eateth not the bread of idleness" (31.27); "She giveth meat to her household...." (31.15). She thanked God for answering her prayers by bringing Beowulf to Denmark, thus indicating that she could be described by "...a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised" (31.30). She considered carefully the future of her sons when she counselled her husband to be free with gifts during his life and, thereby, leave the kingdom safe for his children after his death; when she asked Hrothulf to look after her boys if he outlived his uncle; and when she asked Beowulf to be a friend to her boys. Therefore, she fulfilled, "She openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness" (31.26), and one can believe that in time to come she would fulfill, "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her" (31.28). Her husband was in a high position in the nation, corresponding to "Her husband is known at the gates where he sitteth among the elders of the land" (31.23). And finally, she, too, shared the respect of his retainers, for she could say that even the carousing soldiers obeyed her commands, fulfilling, "...let her own works praise her in the gates" (31.31).

possessed by an evil spirit (1 Samuel 18.10) so that he tried three times to kill David, who was his drinking companion in that the two men ate at the same table (I Samuel 20.5, 6). Furthermore, Saul's great sin, like Heremod's, was greed. When Jehovah commanded him to destroy Amalek, men, women, children, and animals, he spared the best sheep and oxen (I Samuel 15.9). It was for that disobedience that God commanded Samuel to anoint David as King.

Though Saul had given his word that whoever killed Goliath should receive the hand of Michal, the princess, in addition to great riches (I Samuel 17.25), Saul tried to withhold his daughter from David. The King told the young man that he must purchase Michal with the foreskins to a hundred Phillistines, hoping that David would be killed in the attempt (I Samuel 18.27). David slew two hundred Phillistines so that Saul was forced to allow the marriage; however, after David fled from his presence, Saul gave Michal to another man (I Samuel 25.44).

Finally, the contrast between Saul, who had once been mighty and daring, and David, whose early career was similar to Saul's leaves the reader wondering, just as he did with Beowulf, if the young man would continue to be true to his God or if he would follow the steps of the self-willed king.

## CHAPTER IV

### SECTION TWO OF BEOWULF

The second section of the poem begins with the vengeful attack made by Grendel's mother on the Danes, which resulted in Aeschere's having to pay for his night's rest with his life (Beowulf 1255). The section continues with Beowulf's retaliatory killing of the giantess following a fierce struggle in which the hero nearly lost his life and prevailed over the she-demon only because God granted him a last-minute victory (1492-1590). The section ends with the return of Beowulf and his retainers to their homeland (1885).

This section is sometimes considered to be a subdivision of the first adventure; in fact, many critics hold that the material surrounding the giantess-Beowulf combat is inferior to that climaxed by the Grendel-Beowulf struggle. Such critics regret that the elaborately portrayed banquets of the first section do not recur and think that their absence is evidence that the poet lacked the power to sustain artistic description.<sup>1</sup> Two recent critics, however, have pointed out that the section centered around Beowulf's wrestle with the giantess is just as important as the ones describing his encounters with Grendel and the dragon.

<sup>1</sup>Adrien Bonjour, Twelve Beowulf Papers, 1940-1960, with Additional Comments (Geneve Universite de Neuchatel, 1962), p. 47.

Dorothy Whitelock, one of the two, observes that a recapitulation of the combat with Grendel is given by the part before the attack made on Heorot by Grendel's mother; furthermore, excluding the introduction to section one, the three narratives are of equivalent length. As a result, she believes that the poet intended the sections to be recited on three separate occasions as distinct adventures in the life of the hero.<sup>2</sup>

Adrien Bonjour, the second critic, bases his reasoning on dramatic principles. Bonjour notes that the Grendel-Beowulf encounter, which is rapidly covered, is merely sandwiched in between the two banquet scenes. Grendel proved no real match for the Geat so that the reader at no time feels uncertain about the outcome of the struggle. On the other hand, much suspense is built during Beowulf's encounter with the mother of Grendel. Through the difficulty Beowulf had in winning the struggle, even though the poet asserts that the woman's fighting strength is inferior to a man's,<sup>3</sup> the reader realizes that the hero's professed dependence on God is no mere formula. And the extreme vulnerability of the Geat, as revealed in the section, prepares one for section three, in which Beowulf was definitely outmatched by

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, pp. 47-48.

<sup>3</sup>The woman, according to St. Paul, is the "weaker vessel" (I Peter 3.7). The Greek word used in that passage for "weaker" is transcribed "asthenesteros" and according to Young's Concordance, p. 1040, it refers to physical weakness. Actually, though, the woman proves to be quite strong, a fact which places her in an

the fire-dragon.<sup>4</sup>

There may, however, be an even more significant reason for treating the section as material separate from part one. For, if one accepts the hypothesis that Beowulf does form an allegory and if, furthermore, certain elements of the first section foreshadow elements in the third, one can find a basic distinction between the second section and the other two. Section one reveals an Old Testament society. As J. R. R. Tolkien has observed, "Hrothgar is consistently portrayed as a wise and noble monotheist, modelled largely it has been suggested in the text on the Old Testament Patriarchs and Kings; he refers all things to God, and never omits explicit thanks for mercies."<sup>5</sup> And Beowulf in section one, as has been demonstrated, appears to resemble the Old Testament warrior-king David. Resemblances to the New Testament found in section one appear to be limited to a value system and to the Pauline link between David, the Old Testament deliverer, and Christ, the Deliverer of the New Testament times. In section, two, on the other hand, one finds a transition between the former section, in which Beowulf's adventure resembles David's, and section three,

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unnatural position so far as the New Testament doctrine is concerned, but still her strength in a negative way reminds one of the battle strength of the Old Testament characters Judith (Judith 13.9,10, Douay,), Deborah (Judges 4.4-5), and Jael (Judges 4.18-21).

<sup>4</sup>Bonjour, op. cit., pp. 34-46, passim.

<sup>5</sup>"Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," An Anthology of Beowulf Criticism, ed. Lewis E. Nicholson (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 1963), p. 97.

in which his experience reminds one of the last days of Jesus Christ on earth.<sup>6</sup> While Beowulf in section two still retains the appearance of the strong and youthful David, nowhere in the career of that King of Israel is found anything similar to the adventure with Grendel's mother. Indeed, the most striking parallel to the material in the second section is found in the events subsequent to the death of Christ. Still, unlike section three, much of two fits into the Old Testament as well as a New Testament society.

For instance, Beowulf's reaction to the death of Aeschere may seem at first examination to belong solely to the "eye-for-an-eye-tooth-for-a-tooth" code of the Old Testament. His words, "It is better for a man to avenge his friend than to mourn him long,"<sup>7</sup> are in the spirit of the Old Testament command, "...the murderer shall surely be put to death. The revenger of blood himself shall slay the murderer; "when he meeteth him, he shall slay him" (Numbers 35.18, 19). What one sometimes forgets is that the words also fit into a New Testament order. As Arthur Brodeur points out in The Art of Beowulf, "throughout the Christian Middle Ages revenge for one's kin or for one's lord continued to be regarded as the duty of a warrior."<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the same Christ who said,

<sup>6</sup>The possible parallel will be discussed in chapter 5.

<sup>7</sup>Wright, trans., Beowulf, p. 60

<sup>8</sup>Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1960), p. 184.



"And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other ..." (Luke 6.30) also observed, "Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, nay; but rather division" (Luke 12.51). And furthermore John gives a description of a militant Christ as he prepares for the battle of Armageddon

...he doth judge and make war. His eyes were as the flame of fire .... he was clothed in a vesture dipped in blood .... And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses .... And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19. 11-16).

Beowulf in section two no longer went unarmed. Among his accessories for the battle with Grendel's mother were a decorated helmet and a woven corselet. In his hand, he carried Hrunting, Unferth's ancestral sword, and when its blade failed him, putting his life in grave danger, God's means of granting Beowulf victory was to allow him to grab an ancient sword made by Titans with which he killed the giantess and beheaded Grendel (Beowulf 1529-1590). The well-armed man of God, like the avenging warrior, may also be found in both Old and New Testament Scriptures. The armour in the Bible is of course a metaphor for spiritual uprightness; and, ultimately, Beowulf's righteousness rather than his accessories and his superior physical strength saved him. In chapter five of the apocryphal book Wisdom is found the following passage describing the armour of the just:

- 1<sup>6</sup>But the just shall live for evermore: and their reward is with the Lord, and the care of them with the most high.
- 1<sup>7</sup>Therefore shall they receive a kingdom of glory, and a crown of beauty at the hand of the Lord; for with his right hand he will cover them, and with his holy arm he will defend them.
- 1<sup>8</sup>And his zeal will take armour, and he will arm the creature for the revenge of his enemies.
- 1<sup>9</sup>He will put on justice as a breastplate, and will take true judgment instead of a helmet.
- 2<sup>0</sup>He will sharpen his severe wrath for a spear, and the whole world will fight with him against the unwise.

Similar descriptions of the armour of the Christian warrior are found in the New Testament epistles of St. Paul. In Ephesians 6.11-17, Paul exhorts the Christians at Ephesus,

- 1<sup>1</sup>Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.
- 1<sup>2</sup>For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against Spiritual wickedness in high places.
- 1<sup>3</sup>Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.
- 1<sup>4</sup>Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;
- 1<sup>5</sup>And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace.
- 1<sup>6</sup>Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked.
- 1<sup>7</sup>And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God (Ephesians 6.12-17).

To the Thessalonians Paul writes related words of admonition and in the same passage makes some statements that remind one of the scene in which Grendel's mother came upon the sleeping Danes. He warns the Christians that the Day of the Lord will arrive as a thief in the night so that just when men believe they are in peace and safety,

sudden destruction will overtake them as travail on a mother with child. Therefore, he exhorts them to remember that they are children of light, not of darkness, and that as a result they must not sleep or be drunken at night, but rather they must be alert, putting on the breastplate of love and faith and the helmet of salvation (I Thessalonians 5.2-8).

The reference to the sudden destruction when men believe they are safe is significant because the Danes felt so complacent after the defeat of Grendel that they again spent the night at Heorot; moreover, the men after the beer banquet were no doubt sluggish from drink, for they were sleeping heavily when the sorrowing mother arrived seeking revenge. The Danes grabbed their swords and shields, but, the poet observes, interestingly in view of the passage in Thessalonians, no one thought of the helmets or corselets. As a result, Aeschere made an easy prey for the giantess (Beowulf 1251-1291).

After Beowulf had put on his armour and had requested that Hrothgar look after his retainers if he should die in the battle, the young hero plunged into the mere of Grendel's mother, a lake overhung by huge trees, the roots of which darkened the water. At night fire danced on the lake and at all times black waves rose to the sky from the bloody and troubled waters. Moreover, reptiles, dragons, and all manner of monsters lived in its waters and basked on its shore. The lake was so deep that it took Beowulf an entire day to reach its bottom, where Grendel's mother lived. There she dwelt in a watertight

cavern, in which the darkness was relieved by a brilliant flame  
(Beowulf 1345-1371).<sup>9</sup>

The adventure may be accounted for in three ways from the standpoint of Biblical parallels. One may continue to view it in the light of the Old Testament, identifying the monstrous creatures with Israel's enemies, a view that can be supported by a possible link between the giantess and Egypt and between the mere and the Red Sea. Or one can see in pseudoapocryphal materials a probable parallel between the lake and sections of hell in which fallen angels dwell and between the giants and the children of those angels. Or, finally, one may identify Beowulf with Christ and the mere with the hell into which Christ descended immediately after his death. The latter interpretation, which employs both canonical and pseudoapocryphal materials,<sup>10</sup> turns the adventure into an allegory of Christ's harrowing of hell.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Wright, op. cit. p. 59.

<sup>10</sup> Canonical material includes works in the Old and New Testaments as defined by the Roman Catholic Church; pseudo-apocryphal materials are not accepted by Protestants or Catholics as being part of the Scriptures, but are accessory pieces to the Bible and were once considered to be inspired by God.

<sup>11</sup> Alan Cabanis, "Beowulf and the Liturgy, " Anthology, p. 223.

Chapters 16 through 19 of Wisdom, in the Douay, describe Egypt's malice toward Israel in phrases that remind one of Grendel's mother; Egypt's dwellings in words recalling the mere; and Egypt's downfall at the hands of a righteous man in a manner similar to the death of the giantess at the hands of Beowulf.

Egypt's evil intentions toward Israel are presented in Wisdom 18.5: "... they thought to kill the babes of the just...." Grendel's dam of course "thought to kill" the Danes, though God, in sending Beowulf, prevented her from murdering anyone but Aeschere. In Wisdom 17.2, the plight of the wicked nation is described: "For while the wicked thought to have dominion over the holy nation, they themselves being fettered with the bonds of darkness, shut up in their houses, lay there exiled from eternal providence." Similarly Grendel's mother, who planned to terrorize the Danish nation dwelt herself in a cave underneath the dark and detestable lake and was exiled from God's love. According to Wisdom 17.4, the den of the wicked nation gave its inhabitants no security; for noises and visions disturbed them, a sudden fire appeared, and a certain face brought fear to them:

<sup>4</sup>For neither did the den that held them, keep them from fear; for noises coming down troubled them, and sad visions appearing to them, affrighted them.

<sup>5</sup>And no power of fire could give them light, neither could the bright flames of the stars enlighten that horrible night.

<sup>6</sup>But there appeared to them a sudden fire, very dreadful: and being struck with the fear of that face, which was not seen, they thought the things which they saw to be worse.

In a passage of Beowulf containing similar imagery, Grendel's mother was startled by Beowulf's appearance at the bottom of the mere. And a flame in her den provided Beowulf with the light that he needed to see the sword with which he murdered the giantess (Beowulf 1492-1517, 1557-1590).

In Wisdom 16.24 God's instrument of destruction is described as being a righteous man: "For the creature serving thee the Creator, is made fierce against the unjust for their punishment; and abateth its strength for the benefit of these that Trust in Thee". So, Beowulf executed God's vengeance on Grendel's dam. And finally in Wisdom 18.5 the method of Egypt's punishment is depicted: "... to reprove them thou tookest away the multitude of their children and destroyed them all together in a mighty sea." (God, through Beowulf, disciplined Grendel's mother by allowing the Geat to destroy her under the lake and then to sever the head of her dead son from his body.)

In the pseudoapocryphal Book of the Secrets of Enoch, known in Northumbria in the eighth century, are found a description of hell reminding the reader of the underwater dwelling of Grendel's mother and another remindful of the physical description of the two giants. In the first passage, one division of hell is described as " ... a very terrible place and there were all manner of tortures in that place; cruel darkness and unillumined gloom, and there is no light there, but murky fire constantly flameth aloft, and there is a fiery

river coming forth and that whole place is everywhere fire ...."  
(10.1-2).

In still another division of hell, Enoch found the doomed Grigori "of human appearance, and their size was greater than of great giants and their face withered" (18.1). Whereas other fallen angels inhabited another section of hell, a place of great darkness (7.1), the Grigori had not only followed Satan in his revolt against God, but had also broken "their vows on the shoulder of the hill Ermon and saw the daughters of men how good they are, and befouled the earth with their deeds, who in times of their age made lawlessness and mixing, and giants were born and marvellous big men of great emnity" (18.3). This explanation of the origin of the giants, of course, fits into one of the possibilities for Grendel's ancestry mentioned in chapter three.

The third possibility, related to the second, which involves identifying the habitation of the giantess with hell and the whole adventure with the story of Christ's death, his descent into hell, and his resurrection is perhaps the most popular way of looking at the section when one is considering the feasibility of Biblical sources for the poem. Such an interpretation is built on the following points.

After the attack on Heorot made by Grendel's mother, the Danes were once again helpless in the face of the monster, just as mankind, according to the Scriptures, is helpless without its deliverance by Christ from the penalty of sin. Thus, the old King, who could not

find help among his own people, had to call on Beowulf once more, wondering if God would ever grant him relief from sorrow (Beowulf 1307-1315). And, thus, Paul writes, "There is none righteous, no not one .... For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3.10, 23), a condition which made it necessary for men to look to someone not of earth for redemption (Christ said to Pilate, according to John 18.36, "... my kingdom is not of this world....").

The parallel continues as the adventure develops. Before plunging into the mere, Beowulf gave Hrothgar instructions to care for his retainers in the event of his death (Beowulf 1477-1487) just as Christ gave John instructions to look after His mother as He was dying (John 19.26-27). Furthermore, Beowulf forgave his enemy Unferth to the point of taking the Dane's sword into the battle against the giantess (Beowulf 1488-1490) as Christ forgave his enemies and even requested that His Father, too, forgive them since they had no understanding of Whom they crucified (Luke 23.34).<sup>12</sup>

There is a similarity in the reaction of the followers of the two men as the parallel continues. Though Beowulf had promised to kill the giantess, the men waiting by the mere saw blood coming to the surface at the ninth hour and automatically assumed that the Geat, not the monster, had been slain. The Danes, therefore, went

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 224.



home and while Beowulf's retainers continued to watch for him, they had little confidence that he would return (Beowulf 1591-1605).

Likewise, Christ had told his disciples that the third day after His crucifixion, He would rise from the dead; yet they had so little confidence in His power to perform His word that when He died on the ninth hour of the day, they mourned for their leader without hope of ever seeing him again (Matthew 27.46, Luke 23.49, John 20.11). Even the faithful Mary Magdalene, Jo Anna, and Mary, mother of James, could not understand the disappearance of Christ's body from the grave; and the disciples, when the women told them that two men said that Christ had been resurrected, considered the words to be idle tales (Luke 24.1-11). In fact, when Christ stood in the midst of the disciples, they at first believed Him to be a ghost (24.36-37).

The underwater combat of Beowulf and Christ's experience in hell may also be compared. Cabaniss feels that the abode of Grendel's dam is definitely linked by the poet to hell; he reconciles the crux created by line 852, which states that "hel onfeng" Grendel, and line 978, stating that Grendel still awaited the "miclan domes" by saying that the poet identified the mere itself with hell.<sup>13</sup> Cabaniss also

<sup>13</sup> Ibid. Such a reconciliation is interesting since the noted critic Kenneth Sisam, in Structure of Beowulf (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 56, declares that an obvious inconsistency exists between the poet's statement that hell received Grendel and Beowulf's declaration that the monster awaited Judgment Day. However, the two lines are not Biblically incompatible, for John, in Revelation 20.13, also observes

notes that the mere was aflame at night (1365), a reminder of the Biblical lake of fire (Revelation 19.20, 20.24, 21.8). Supporting the identification of the mere with hell is evidence that it was common practice once to vivify animals in order to portray a Biblical truth. Thus, the sea-serpents that tore at Beowulf's corselet after Grendel's dam seized the Geat at the bottom of the mere would be in place in a Medieval account of hell; for the Anglo-Saxon poet might easily identify them with devils tormenting lost souls.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, M. B. McNamee points out that definitely as early as the eleventh century and very likely earlier, the Anglo-Saxon represented hell as "a lake infested with dragons and man-eating, man-shaped monsters."<sup>15</sup>

In addition, a linking of the adventures of Beowulf and those of Christ is given historical strength by the Christian baptismal ceremony, which from the earliest times of the Church has been identified with Christ's death and His subsequent descent into "the lower parts of the earth" (Ephesians 4.10). For M. B. McNamee and Alan Cabaniss have seen in Beowulf's descent into the mere and in his triumphant overcoming of the monsters, a series of actions which they

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that the dead already in hell will be cast up to face God at the Last Judgment: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them and they were judged every man according to their works" (Revelation 20.13).

<sup>14</sup>Christabel F. Fiske, "Animals in Ecclesiastical History," PMLA, XXXIII (1913), 378,385.

<sup>15</sup>Op. cit., Anthology, p. 343. To prove this statement, McNamee reminds the reader of illuminations in Harley MSS, no. 603.

identify with the Anglo-Saxon baptismal rite, and thus an allegory of Christ's incursion into hell, where He vanquished Satan<sup>16</sup> in that He obtained the release of the holy captives held in Paradise since the time of Adam and led them into Heaven (Matthew 27.52-53, Ephesians 4.8-9, Luke 23.43). McNamee and Cabaniss feel that such an identification would have been almost automatic in the Anglo-Saxon period since much was made of the baptismal rite; indeed, each initiate underwent a period of questioning that the theologian equated to the temptation of Christ and total submergence, which Saint Cyril of Jerusalem referred to as "a descent into the waters of death into the habitation of the sea dragon."<sup>17</sup> Lending support to that connection are Paul's words, "Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?" (Romans 6.4).

One pseudoapocryphal account of Christ's harrowing of hell even, to some extent, mirrors the details of Beowulf's adventure. It is found in The Gospel of Nicodemus, which was known at least at Lindisfarne in the eighth century.<sup>18</sup> The writer of the book states that subsequent to Christ's death, He descended into hell, bringing with Him a brilliant light which shone in the dark habitation. (This

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 339 and Cabaniss, op. cit., pp. 223-343.

<sup>17</sup> Cabaniss, Ibid., p. 227

<sup>18</sup> Duckett, Saints and Scholars, pp. 23-24.

light could be equated to the glowing flame in the cavern).<sup>19</sup> Once in hell, Christ seized the prince of darkness, deprived him of his power, and trampled on Death.<sup>20</sup> Another translation of the book shows a slightly clearer explanation of the last detail. In it, Christ, after breaking into hell, bound Satan, placed His foot on the devil's throat, and then, by trampling him underfoot, delivered the creature into Hades. Christ's treatment of Satan may remind the reader of Beowulf's act of cutting of the head of Grendel.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, Beowulf's return to the surface of the water after his men had counted him dead and Christ's resurrection may be compared. When Beowulf swam ashore with Grendel's head as a trophy of the adventure, his retainers rejoiced over the hero's appearance and

<sup>19</sup>There is no evidence apart from its unusual brilliance and Beowulf's dependence on the light in finding the weapon with which he killed the giantess and in locating Grendel that the flame was provided by God to aid the hero. And certainly no evidence exists that the light was not in the cave before Beowulf's arrival; therefore, the reader must be cautious in considering this detail as evidence of a parallel.

<sup>20</sup>"Gospel of Nicodemus," Lost Books of the Bible (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1926), pp. 83-86.

<sup>21</sup>"Gospel of Nicodemus," The Ante-Nicene Fathers, trans. by Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (New York, 1908), VIII, 457, quoted in McNamee, op. cit., p. 342. The significance of this expanded detail is that in Genesis 3.5, Jehovah told Satan, disguised as a serpent, that one day the seed of the woman "shall bruise thy head." As Beowulf cut off the head of Grendel, so Christ was to crush the head of the serpent Satan.

thanked God for his safety. They then made their way toward Heorot and the disbelieving Danes with Grendel's head impaled on the end of a spear as testimony of their leader's triumph (Beowulf, 1600-1639).

Similarly, when the resurrected Christ had revealed himself to his disciples, they were overcome with joy (Luke 24.41). According to Paul, Christ displayed the trophies of his triumph over Satan: "And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it" (Colossians 2.15).<sup>22</sup> Indeed, according to McNamee, on early book illuminations of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic origin, "... Christ is frequently represented as leading souls out of fiery caverns or out of the flaming mouth of a dragon and as making Satan, represented sometimes as a human monster and sometimes as a dragon or serpent, feel His complete triumph over him by transfixing him with a sword or spear ...."<sup>23</sup> And, last of all, as Beowulf's men rushed to the Danes with the good news that Beowulf was still alive and had overcome his opponent, so Christ's disciples were commissioned to "go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost" (Matthew 28.19).

In the denouement to section two are found many of the values already stressed in section one: the worthy and brave warrior, tried

<sup>22</sup>Cabaniss, op. cit., p. 225.

<sup>23</sup>McNamee, op. cit., pp. 342-343.

in battle, makes a good king; since a man owes all that he has to God, power, riches, and fame, he should, from the days of youth, walk humbly in God's presence; and even a young man should exhibit wisdom. However, statements made by Hrothgar, in addition to reflecting those values and to tying into the Beowulf-Heremond, David-Saul contrast, already examined in chapter three, peculiarly echo New Testament material.

Hrothgar began his monologue by uttering words which remind the reader of accounts of Christ. The King judged that Beowulf was a better man (Beowulf 1703), as Pilate said of Jesus, "I find no fault with this man" (Luke 23.4) and Peter commented, "... ye should follow his steps; who did no sin ...." (I Peter 2.21, 22). Hrothgar also praised Beowulf for bearing his might with wisdom and humility (1705-1706), as Luke comments, "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2.52).<sup>24</sup> Hrothgar proclaimed the establishment of Beowulf's worldwide fame (Beowulf 1702-1705). Paul declares, "... we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it is written, as I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God" (Romans 13.11). Finally, Hrothgar predicted that Beowulf would be a comfort to his nation and a help to all mankind (Beowulf 1707-1709), just as the ancient Simeon prophesied on seeing the Child Jesus that He

<sup>24</sup>These words may remind the reader that David, too, as set forth in the parallel developed in chapter three, increased in wisdom, in physical strength, and in favour with men as he matured.

would be God's "salvation which thou hast prepared before the face of all people. A light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel" (Luke 2.30-32).

Then Hrothgar began to contrast Beowulf with the wicked Heremod, remarking that it is God who makes one rank above another just as Paul remarks in Romans, "Let every soul be subject to higher powers. For there is no power but of God. The powers that be are ordained of God .... Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom, fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour" (Romans 13.1, 7). Even a man once honoured by God, Hrothgar warned, could become unwisely arrogant. Similarly, Paul told the Corinthians, "And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence" (I Corinthians 1.28, 29). The results of such pride echoes two of the passages on the Christian warrior. Hrothgar said that the proud man falls asleep and then Satan can pierce his heart with a sharp arrow (Beowulf 1740-1744), as Paul warns, "Therefore let us not sleep as do others .... But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love...." (I Thesalonians 5.9). Paul explains, "For we wrestle ... against the rulers of the darkness of this world .... taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench the fiery darts of the wicked" (Ephesians 6.11, 16).

In conclusion, after Beowulf, who was making preparations to depart, had generously returned Unferth's sword without disparaging its blade, fulfilling the command in Romans 12.10, "Be kindly affected one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring another" and had promised to aid Hrothgar and his elder son Hrethric if they were ever in distress, the old King marvelled that one so young as Beowulf should speak with such wisdom (Beowulf 1842-1845). His observation perhaps prompts the reader to think of three verses in the New Testament. The doctors in the Jewish temple were "astonished" on listening to the "understanding and answers" of the young Jesus (Luke 2.47). Paul exhorted Timothy, who was "a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Timothy 2.3) to "let no man despise thy youth, but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (I Timothy 4.12). And Paul commanded the Colossians, "Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man" (Colossians 4.6).

Hrothgar, before Beowulf departed, presented the young hero with twelve jewels (Beowulf 1866-1867). The gift strikes one as rather curious and it may bear a deliberate resemblance to the twelve stones set as a memorial in the midst of the Jordan after the Israelites had passed over to the Promised Land (Joshua 4.7-9); to the twelve stones of jasper, sapphire, chalcedony, emerald, sardonyx, sardius, chrysolite, beryl, topaz, chrysophrasus, jacinth, and amethyst forming



the foundation of the new Jerusalem, where, according to John, Christ will one day reign; and to the twelve pearls used as the twelve gates to the city (Revelation 21.10-27, passim). The number twelve, like many other details in section two, has both Old and New Testament significance. In the Old Testament it is the number of the tribes of the children of Israel; in the New, it is important both as the number of the tribes and as the number of the apostles of Jesus Christ (Revelation 21).

## CHAPTER V

### SECTION THREE OF BEOWULF

The final section of the poem centers upon Beowulf's fatal encounter with the firedragon. Beowulf, at the time of the encounter, had ruled the Geats for fifty years (Beowulf 2688-2693). All that has gone before in the poem, in a special sense, prepares the reader for the third section. The poet has provided direct hints of what would happen to the hero with the comparison of the youthful Beowulf to the good dragon slayer Sigemund (875-895), with the prophecy made by Hrothgar that Beowulf would one day be a lasting help to his nation (1707-1709), with Hrothgar's suggestion that Beowulf would make an excellent King (1845-1853), and with the contrast between Beowulf and the wicked King Heremod (890-915). In addition there is strong evidence that the poet has provided a parallel in section one between Beowulf and King David foreshadowing a parallel between Beowulf and Christ, which begins to become clear in section two.

A link between David and Christ has ample Biblical precedence. In the Scriptures, Christ is often referred to as David's Son, not merely because He was of David's lineage, but also because David was promised a greater son to sit on the throne of Israel forever:

<sup>6</sup>For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given:  
and the government shall be upon his shoulder and  
his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the

Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup> Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall perform this. (Isaiah 9.6-7)

A question which Jesus posed to the Pharisees indicates that many of the learned Jews believed the Messiah would be this son of David:

<sup>35</sup> ...how say the scribes that Christ is the son of David?

<sup>36</sup> For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, the Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool.

<sup>37</sup> David therefore calleth him Lord; and whence is he then his son? .... (Mark 12.35-37)

Finally, according to John, Jesus identified himself as that Son of David: "...I am the root and offspring of David, and the bright and morning star" (Revelation 22.16).

However, the link between the two deliverers is even stronger than sonship, for certain passages written by David in the Psalms<sup>1</sup> have been interpreted as Messianic Psalms.<sup>2</sup> A Messianic Psalm is one, such as 2, 16, 22, 40, or 110, in which David prophesies of Christ,<sup>3</sup> yet at the same time often speaks of his own experience. For example,

<sup>1</sup> According to Duckett in Alcuin, p. 9, Anglo-Saxons associated with religious houses were through the liturgy thoroughly familiar with Psalms.

<sup>2</sup> Smalley, Medieval Bible Study, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Unger, Bible Dictionary, p. 718.

in Psalms 16, when he confidently asserts, "for Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption," he is speaking of his own hope for eternal life as well as predicting the resurrection of the Messiah.<sup>4</sup>

This Beowulf-David-Christ connection is further fortified by details given by the poet that apply to all three. For example, Hrothgar in section one declared that the mother of Beowulf could say God had been good to her in child bearing (Beowulf 942-946), and though the phrase is not found in the story of David, it peculiarly pertains to Christ. For in the Magnificat Mary declares, "...my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Savior. For he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed" (Luke 1.47-58).<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, just as Beowulf and David were considered to be inferior youths, so Christ was not honoured in Nazareth, his own country. As a Child, when He remained at the temple in Jerusalem after His family had begun their journey home after Passover, His mother rebuked Him. He defended His action with a statement that He was performing His Father's business, but Mary and Joseph failed to understand what He meant (Luke 2.41-50). Later, when He preached in the synagogue of Nazareth the people reacted coldly, and taunted, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary, the brother of James, and of Joses, and of Juda, and of Simon?"

<sup>4</sup> Scofield, ed., The Holy Bible, p. 605.

<sup>5</sup> Klaeber, Beowulf, p. 168, 942 ff. Klaeber compares the line to Luke 11.27.

And are not his sisters here with us...." (Mark 6.3)

In the pseudoapocryphal book of 1 Infancy 19 are found additional suggestions that the Child Jesus was not well regarded. Although this book was not accepted by the Roman Catholic Church as canonical, 1 Infancy may have been known in Anglo-Saxon England since certain writers whose works were read there were familiar with it.<sup>6</sup> In 1 Infancy 19, when a Jewish child tried to destroy a fish-pool where Jesus played on the Sabbath, the young Lord caused the boy to die; later another child pushed Him down and then met the same end (19.18-24). And when Jesus refused to pronounce the letters of the alphabet for a schoolmaster who would not tell Him what they meant, the teacher whipped the Child and then fell dead. These deaths prompted Joseph to say, "...henceforth we shall not allow him to go out of the house: for every one who displeases him is killed" (20.16).<sup>7</sup>

Jesus as well as David and Beowulf grew up to be an extremely strong man. Besides the statement in Luke 2.52 that Christ increased in stature, there is, for instance, the incident in which He managed to carry His own cross part of the way to Golgatha though He had endured much during the questions and scourgings connected with His trials (John 19.17, Matthew 27.32).

<sup>6</sup>Lost Books, p. 38. The book was known by the Gnostics in the second century; by Peter Martyr, Bishop of Alexandria, in the third; and by Chemnitius of Stipulensis, Eusebius, Athanasius, Ephiphanius, Chrysostom, etc.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 56-57.

Finally, Beowulf in sections one and two in his skirmishes with Grendel and his dam, David in his combat with Goliath, the older Beowulf in his onslaught against the dragon, and Christ in his battle with the forces of evil all resemble each other in their attitude toward warfare. For each took the task upon himself, each was unafraid of the battle though he faced an adversary of uncommon physical strength, each was willing to face the moment of greatest pressure alone, each took the offensive in battle, and each found ordinary weapons of no use.<sup>8</sup>

Still another device which the poet may have employed in section one to foreshadow the last section is the emphasis on the two deliverers of the Danes in addition to Beowulf the Geat. If one accepts as a possibility the parallels suggested for Scyld and Beowulf I, one finds that the two men may be identified with Moses and Joshua. One of these, Moses, like David, is considered to be an Old Testament type of Christ; for both Moses and Christ were divinely chosen deliverers (Exodus 3.7-10, Acts 7.25, John 3.16). Furthermore, both turned to the Gentiles after being rejected by the Jews (Exodus 2.11-15, Acts 7.25, 18.5-6, 28.17-38), both during their rejection obtained Gentile brides, Christ's bride being the Church (Exodus 2.16-21, Matthew 12.14-21, II Corinthians 11.2, Ephesians 5.30-32).

<sup>8</sup> Just as Beowulf fought with Grendel with his bare hands and found that the sword Hrunting failed him in his combat with the giantess so that he had to use the wonderful sword of the Titans, so the aging Beowulf found Naegling of no use in the fight against the dragon (2680-2687) and Christ refused to allow Peter to use a sword to protect Him (Matthew 26.51-54).

Yet both once again attempted to act as Israel's deliverer and the second time were accepted (Exodus 4.29-31, Romans 11.24-26, Acts 15.14-17). Moses typified Christ as a prophet (Acts 3.22-24), an advocate (Exodus 32.31-35, 1 John 2.1-2), and a leader or king (Deuteronomy 33.4-5, Isaiah 55.4, Hebrews 2.10).<sup>9</sup> A link between the deliverers Joshua and Christ is not so strong except for a curious interchange of their names. The Greek words for Joshua and for Jesus are the same,<sup>10</sup> a fact which has resulted in textual confusion. For example, the Confraternity translators rendered Hebrews 4.8, "For if Josue [Joshua is translated Josue throughout the Confraternity and Douay] had given them rest, then he would not have afterward have spoken of another day." On the other hand, the translators who produced the King James rendered the verse, "For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day."

With this background in mind, the reader is prepared for the concluding section of the poem, in which McNamee finds that "the price of salvation" is dramatized, "the very life of the Savior Himself."<sup>11</sup> And Klaeber comments on the section, "One is strongly tempted to look for a deeper, spiritual interpretation" for "some incidents in the encounter with the dragon lend themselves to comparison with the

<sup>9</sup> Scofield, ed., The Holy Bible, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Young, Concordance, p. 55.

<sup>11</sup> "An Allegory of Salvation," p. 347.

happenings in the garden of Gethsemane...."<sup>12</sup>

Before plunging into the part that is so strongly reminiscent of the last days of Christ on earth, the poet mentions the homecoming of the still youthful Beowulf from Denmark. Once his vessel touched shore, Beowulf was eager to tell his adventure to his young kinsmen King Hygelac and Queen Hygd.<sup>13</sup>

Hygd is contrasted to Modthryth (Beowulf 1931-1962), wife of King Offa; for before her marriage Modthryth had been so fierce that no courtier dared glance at her lest she order him slain. After her marriage, on the other hand, she too conformed to a pattern of behavior that follows New Testament standards. Her husband caused her former viciousness to cease, a firm action reminding one of Paul's command, "...as the church is subject unto Christ, so let wives be to your own husbands in every thing" (Ephesians 5.24). Furthermore, Modthryth loved her husband greatly, answering to a command to wives expressed most clearly in The Amplified New Testament:

<sup>1</sup> In like manner you married women, be submissive to your own husbands--subordinate yourselves as being

<sup>12</sup> Beowulf, li.

<sup>13</sup> Hygd qualifies as a godly woman. She strongly resembled Wealhtheow, whose description paralleled the profile in Proverbs 31 of the woman of God. Hygd was concerned with the welfare of her subjects, was gracious to Beowulf in her reception of his gifts, and was wise in preferring that Beowulf rather than her young son succeed her husband to the throne (Beowulf 1929-1983 and 2369-2379).



secondary to and dependent on them, and adapt yourselves to them. So that even if any do not obey the Word [of God], they may be won over not by discussion but by the [godly] lives of their wives,<sup>2</sup> When they observe the pure and modest way in which you conduct yourselves, together with your reverence [for your husband. That is, you are to feel for him all that reverence includes]--to respect, defer to, revere him; [revere means] to honor, esteem (appreciate, prize), and [in the human sense] adore him; [and adore means] to admire, praise, be devoted to, deeply love, and enjoy [your husband].<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Modthryth lived to become famous for her charitable behavior and for the good use that she made of her position. She in that way conformed with Paul's suggestion that women should "adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh a woman professing godliness) with good works" (I Timothy 2.9-10).

With the completion of the poet's discussion of the two women, he reports that Beowulf and his companions entered the King's hall, where Beowulf recounted his adventures in Denmark to Hygelac and shared with him treasures that Hrothgar had given the young adventurer. Hygelac in turn presented Beowulf with an ancestral sword and with a hall and land (1963-2199).

The author then telescopes over half a century to the time when Beowulf, long King of the Geats, found his nation threatened by a hostile dragon, a plight similar to Hrothgar's years before. During

<sup>14</sup>I Peter 3.1, 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1958), p. 888.

the passing of time, the Geats had been involved in a series of foreign wars, which had taken the lives of Hygelac and his heir Heardred (Beowulf 2200-2208). The political situation might be compared to Israel's at the time of Christ except that the Geats, unlike the Hebrews, still retained political autonomy. Furthermore, all other heirs to Beowulf's grandfather Hrethel were dead, for before Hygelac's reign the eldest son, Herebeald, had been accidentally slain by the second son, Haethcyn.<sup>15</sup> The old King died in sorrow and the throne came to Haethcyn. Soon afterwards Haethcyn fell from a blow dealt by Ongentheow, the Swedish monarch (Beowulf 2425-2471).

The dragon that attacked Beowulf's nation, terrorizing his subjects, proved to be his fiercest opponent. The connection between the firedragon and Satan is even stronger than the connection between Grendel and his mother and Satan. In Revelation 20.2 as well as in other verses in that book the Devil is portrayed as a dragon: "And he [an angel] laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years." Klaeber, in discussing the religious elements of Beowulf, makes note of the connec-

<sup>15</sup> A repetition of The Cain Theme may be detected here. A parallel to the Absalom-Amnon enmity is more likely, though. Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar and King David, his father, refused to punish him, though Jewish law demanded execution (Leviticus 20.17). David's son Absalom seized matters into his own hands and killed his brother. David, who mourned bitterly over the death, refused to forgive Absalom fully. Later Absalom led a rebellion against his father and was killed when Joab, Captain of David's Guard, thrust three darts through the young man's heart (II Samuel 18.9-14).

tion, "...the dragon was in ecclesiastical tradition the recognized symbol of the archfiend."<sup>16</sup>

In the Scriptures, as has been explained, political power is attributed to the Devil. In addition, he is considered to be the author of false religion. For example, it is the dragon in Revelations that gives power to the beast which many men will worship toward the end of time (13.4). Moreover, Jesus accused the Pharisees, extremely religious and learned Jews, "Ye are of your father, the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do..." (John 8.44). The crucifixion of Jesus was fostered by the religious Jews, "the chief priests, and the scribes, and the elders of the people," who gathered at the palace of the high priest to form their plot (Matthew 26.3). The command for Christ's execution was given by the Roman governor Pilate (Luke 23.24). One can, therefore, through this Biblical scheme, see the connection between Christ's death and the workings of Satan, the dragon and the ultimate enemy of Jesus.

Moreover, the treasure that the dragon guarded was protected by an ancient curse; any man violating the treasure, according to the curse, would be guilty of sin and would be tormented in hell (Beowulf 3069-3075). Lawrence states that the man taking the cup from the barrow should have received the curse, but that instead it fell on Beowulf.<sup>17</sup> It is by no means clear, though, that Beowulf received the

<sup>16</sup>Op. cit., l.

<sup>17</sup>William Witherle Lawrence, "The Dragon and His Lair in Beowulf," PMLA, XXXIII (1918), 557.

full brunt of the curse; for though he died physically it is far from obvious that he received spiritual death, as will be demonstrated later.

Similarly, Paul in Romans declares that mankind had sinned and had earned the penalty of transgression, "...the wages of sin is death...." (Romans 6.23). Yet mankind's curse, dating back to the time of Adam (Genesis 3.14-15, I Corinthians 15.22), fell on Christ, according to the Scriptures: "...Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree" (Galatians 3.23). Still Christ, like Beowulf, did not receive the full impact of the curse; for after He descended into hell, He later ascended into heaven (Acts 1.11).

Finally, in spite of statements made by more than one critic, including Arthur DuBois, that Beowulf, like Heremod, became greedy for gold in his old age,<sup>18</sup> one might note that the Geat did not go against the dragon for burning his own palace but rather for attacking the national seaboard. And Beowulf's main concern lay in protecting his people and in winning the gold for them rather than in adding to his private coffer. Indeed, just before he died, he thanked God that he could obtain the treasure for the Geats (Beowulf 2324-2353; 2792-2808). Thus, Brodeur comments, "Beowulf expresses a feeling as unselfish as the gratitude of Hrothgar for the deliverance of the Danes from

<sup>18</sup>DuBois, "The Unity of Beowulf, p. 402.

Grendel."<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, Christ's concern was for His people rather than for Himself. When Pilate asked Him why His own nation demanded His death, He responded, "...My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom from hence" (John 18.36). Rather He had earlier proclaimed, "I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10.10).

Furthermore, the incidents surrounding Beowulf's combat with the firedragon strongly reflect the incidents surrounding the death of Jesus Christ. The man who directly brought about the death of Beowulf stole the cup<sup>20</sup> from the dragon's barrow (2221-2231). The betrayer of Christ was His disciple Judas, who was a thief (John 12.6).<sup>21</sup>

Beowulf, unlike himself in the past, was so troubled before the encounter with the dragon that he became preoccupied with gloomy

<sup>19</sup>Art of Beowulf, p. 94.

<sup>20</sup>The cup from which Christ drank at the Last Supper has come to occupy an important place in Christianity. Drinking wine, symbolic of partaking of Christ's blood, from a cup representing the one Christ used is part of the Communion Service (1 Corinthians 11.23-29). Furthermore, in literature later than Beowulf, such as the Vulgate Romances, the same cup plays a central role.

<sup>21</sup>McNamee, op. cit., p. 348, also notes this similarity.

thoughts (2331-2332). Similarly, Christ in the Garden of Gethsemene was in such mental agony that, as he prayed, drops of sweat fell from his body (Luke 22.39-46).

Beowulf did not make his usual boasts before meeting the dragon; rather he said that God would decide the issue and that he, at any rate, would stand his ground (Beowulf 2510-2528). The poet has predicted by that time the death of the hero. Christ, too, realized the imminence of his death. Thus, after praying in the garden, he murmured to his sleeping disciples, "...sleep on now, and take your rest; behold, the hour is at hand when the son of man will be betrayed into the hands of sinners" (Matthew 26.45). And, throughout the Scriptures, the reader is informed that Christ is fated to die. For example, John records in his gospel that Christ told His disciples, "...It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart I will send him unto you" (16.7). And even in the Old Testament, Isaiah prophesied in chapter 52, verse 14, that the Holy One's appearance would be "marred more than any man" when "...he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows" (53.4).

Next, Beowulf in going to Ernanaes, near where he fought the dragon, was accompanied by twelve men, including the thief; still only one, Wiglaf, once he realized that Beowulf was outmatched, was willing to face death with the old King, though all of his retainers had sworn their loyalty to him (2404-2409).

Similarly, all of Christ's disciples vowed that they would

never betray Him, yet each one fled when Christ was taken captive (Matthew 26.56), and only John stood beside Him at the crucifixion (John 19.26).<sup>22</sup>

The details involved in the immediate endings of the two men show a few similarities. Beowulf did not shrink from danger, but moved forward to meet his opponent (2538-2540). The dragon plunged his fangs into Beowulf's neck, and the blood gushed forth (2690-2693). Then, after Beowulf ripped open the dragon, the observation that the old King's work was finished is made by the poet (2709-2711). Likewise, Christ went forward unhesitatingly to meet the men whom He knew would capture Him (Matthew 26.46-50). Christ's last words reflected that His work was completed: "It is finished" (John 19.30). And after he died, one of the Roman soldiers pierced a spear through His side so that the blood flowed freely (19.34).

Even critics admitting a Christian influence in the poem often feel a necessity to justify Beowulf's burial, the cremation which they consider to be pagan. Klaeber, for example, compares the funeral to Attila's in that horsemen rode around the bodies in both cases singing praises to the dead heroes and reminds the reader that Attila's horsemen were probably Arian Christians.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 349.

<sup>23</sup>Beowulf, pp. 228-229. Chambers in Beowulf: Introduction, pp. 123-124, makes the same points. He further observes that the author of Beowulf may have been a sincere Christian who chose to describe the funeral in the old style. The funeral is not sufficiently accurate from an archeological standpoint, Chambers asserts, to be a firsthand account.

However, the poet may have had an even deeper reason in mind than is generally attributed to him for his choice in the method of burial. He makes it obvious that Beowulf's soul was acceptable to heaven, for he says that Beowulf's spirit sought the judgment of the righteous (Beowulf 2819-2820). The poet also states that the curse on the gold could be overcome by the man whom God allowed to touch the treasure (3047-3057). He may have used the cremation, therefore, as a further identification between the deaths of Beowulf and Christ, one appropriate in a poem where no New Testament personage is directly mentioned or any New Testament doctrine overtly stated.

The writer of the Book of Hebrews states that in Old Testament times the Jews were cleansed from their sin by the blood and ashes of sacrificial animals which were burned on an altar. That writer, in explaining why Christ had to die, concludes:

<sup>23</sup>It was therefore necessary that the pattern of things in heaven should be purified with these, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

<sup>28</sup>...So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear a second time without sin unto salvation.

(Hebrews 9.23, 28)

Thus, the burnt body of Beowulf may have been, particularly placed by the poet in a society not yet evangelized, symbolic of the burnt offerings of the Old Testament, which were considered to be efficacious in that they foreshadowed the truly acceptable sacrifice



of Christ.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, after Beowulf's death a messenger bearing the news to the Geats predicted that there would be wars and suffering (2911-2998). He stated that the Geats would not profit physically from the treasure gained by Beowulf, for they should burn it with his body (2999-3027). The Geats bitterly sorrowed over the loss of their King. The poem ends with twelve chiefs circling the barrow erected to Beowulf and reciting an elegy to him (3169-3182).

After Christ's death, His followers underwent persecution and suffered from political unrest (Matthew 24.6, John 16.2, Romans 8.36). Indeed, during the centuries subsequent to His death, His followers were often engaged in warfare. While He said that He had come to provide the abundant life, still His followers learned the truth of His words, "...except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John 12.24). Thus, to obtain the abundant life they found themselves sacrificing much of the glitter

<sup>24</sup>In II Corinthians 2.15, Ephesians 5.2, and Phillipians 4.18, the Christian's spiritual worship is called a "sweet savour" presented to God. In Phillipians 4.18, for example, offerings are called "an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God." This imagery could have entered the poet's mind when he chose a cremation for Beowulf's body.

of the present life. Last of all, as Beowulf's retainers praised him after death, so the Christians, led by the twelve Apostles, found that their mission was to praise Christ on earth, and as Paul portrays it in II Corinthians 5.20, to act as "ambassadors of Christ," begging the world in His place to be "reconciled to God."

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION

An exact list of books that the poet of Beowulf read will never be discovered. A catalogue of what ran through his mind as he composed the poem could never have been collected. Still one can state with assurance that the Bible had some influence on the poem as it is known today.

I personally am convinced that some of the parallels that I have drawn are valid and that the others are at least possible. To go beyond that, to present my private interpretation for the poem, is at this point rash. Still I, like most other students of Beowulf, have developed a theory on what the poet may have intended by the poem. The reader has probably inferred much of that theory from the selection and presentation of the parallels and from the emphasis placed on the foreshadowing technique. If I may be excused for a moment for engaging in speculation, and truly just now I am unable to present anything more than speculation, my idea is this: in Beowulf I see the whole of the Bible, from the fall of Satan to the creation of the New Jerusalem, compressed "into one ball."<sup>1</sup> Yet certain key figures stand out, just as they do in

<sup>1</sup>Andrew Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress," Understanding Poetry, ed. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1960), p. 309.

the Bible, forming a unified concept of history. In section one, I see God, through a special servant, as was His custom, granting victory to a nation against her political enemies, for the emphasis of the Old Testament is on the political sovereignty of God's chosen people. In section three, I see a different type of struggle, one more spiritual in character. Here God allows the nation to be weakened politically, but His Servant dies to secure safety and gain for His people, revealing His concern for them. In the same way, Christ died for the individuals in disintegrating Israel as for all other men. Section two, of course, in a chronological sense, follows section three; for it shows the Servant victorious over evil and resurrected from the dead. The servants merge into one, Christ, when one stands back and views the poem as a whole, just as David's characteristics merge into Christ's when one takes a total view of the Bible.

Another formula and still another may fit the poem equally well. As I indicated in the first chapter, attributing something to one source does not preclude the possibility that another one came into play. And is it not one test of a great literary work that one may see in it multiple layers of meaning? I only hope that this addition of possible sources for the poem Beowulf added to the studies of others tracing the influence of many literary traditions on the poem may increase our enjoyment of the poem and our appreciation of the cultural depth and imagination of the poet.

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