

The lady and the letter: Two ecclesiastical analogies in the Old English *Soliloquies*¹

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This article analyses two ecclesiastical analogies in the Old English *Soliloquies*: the analogy of the lady and the analogy of the letter. It argues for a more nuanced and practical interpretation of Alfred's analogies in the Old English *Soliloquies* than has previously been put forward. The analogies original to Alfred as well as those derived from Augustine's *Soliloquia*, which he manipulates and omits, are designed to be useful, with practical implications for Anglo-Saxon society. Since his prose preface to *Pastoral Care* suggests that the demise of the *Angelcynn* is contingent on the demise of the English Church, Alfred's analogies in *Soliloquies* prompt the reintegration of these two infrastructures, Church and state, to reconsolidate the *Angelcynn* and recover its sacred and secular *ar* ('favour with God' and 'cultural capital'). By encouraging responses in the individual reader—recourse to the sacramental Church and renewed commitment to reading and prayer—Alfred's analogies, particularly of the lady and the letter, seek to cultivate the Gregorian "mixed life". Alfred thus aims to revive the terrestrial and celestial favour of the *Angelcynn* by fusing the concerns of *Ecclesia* and state, heaven and earth, contemplative, and active.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon literature; Augustine; King Alfred the Great; Old English prose

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1. Introduction

Analogies in Alfredian texts have long been studied by scholars. Commonly analysed are the pitcher in the verse epilogue to the Old English *Pastoral Care* (Irvine & Godden 2012: 412–413) and the wagon wheel in the *Boethius* (Godden & Irvine 2009: 521–522).² However, receiving less attention are the analogies in the *Soliloquies*, the text which arguably contains more analogies than any other text of the Alfredian canon.³ In the Latin *Soliloquia* and the vernacular *Soliloquies*, analogies punctuate the discourse between the characters of Augustine and Reason, underpinning the key tenets of their philosophical discussion. Analogy, like simile, is the “[i]llustration of an idea by means of a more familiar idea that is similar” (Baldick 2015: 14).⁴ However, in the *Soliloquies*, analogy often merges into allegory: a visual image which establishes “a continuous parallel between two (or more) levels of meaning” (Baldick 2015: 8). Alfred’s often unclear distinction between these two literary devices is suggestive of his experimental attempt to convert a Latinate metaphorical tradition into vernacular English for the first time.

Critical opinions tend either to emphasise the epistemology of Alfred’s analogies in the *Soliloquies*, reducing them to nebulous abstractions which advocate an ascetic rejection of worldliness in order to pursue the divine (Wilcox 2006, Heuchan 2007), or conversely, they interpret Alfred’s analogies as his means to replace Augustine’s spiritual preoccupations with a king’s more earthly, socio-political concerns (Ganze 2011). The imagery of the preface to the *Soliloquies* has been extensively studied (Sayers 2008, Irvine 2014: 164–166, Treschow 2017) but less studied are the analogies within the text itself. Exceptions to this are Ruth Waterhouse’s (1986) study of the ship, the lover, and the king, Miranda Wilcox’s (2006) analysis of the “eyes of the mind” metaphor, and Paul Szarmach’s (2014) survey of wisdom, health, and friendship

² On the pitcher, see Whobrey (1991) and Irvine (2014: 158–161); on the wheel, see Pratt (2017: 299–301).

³ For an overview of the debate on the authorship of the Alfredian canon, see Discenza & Szarmach (2014: 397–415).

⁴ Hereafter, the Augustinian text will be referred to as the *Soliloquia* and the Alfredian text as the *Soliloquies*. This study, like most critics other than Godden (2007), assumes Alfred as the author of the *Soliloquies*. Alfred is identified as such in a colophon and the text is closely related to the Old English *Boethius* which features prose and verse prefaces also identifying Alfred as author.

as analogies. This article refines these previous studies by focusing on two specific analogies —the lady and the letter— and relating them to broader Alfredian concerns. Since, according to the prose preface to the Old English *Pastoral Care* (Sweet 1871: 3), it is partly due to the separation of Church and state that the *Angelcynn* has decayed (*oðfeallenu*), Alfred aims to re-establish the link between *Ecclesia* and *Angelcynn* through the use of analogies in the *Soliloquies*, persuading his reader that the restoration of Church and *Angelcynn* fuses as one and the same issue.⁵

The two key analogies of the lady and the letter are contextualised by other ecclesiastical images in the text to prompt the reader's recourse to the sacramental Church and to a renewed commitment to reading and prayer. These analogies encourage the enactment of *cræft*: man's "proper function" with which, employing the necessary material tools and graces from God, he is able to contribute to the proper ordering of society (Hitch 1986–1987: 144). Complementing Hitch's understanding of any exterior *cræft* as "centred on the most important of *cræfts*, the pursuit of the knowledge of God" (1986–1987: 145), Alfred injects Augustine's analogies with an emphasis on "usefulness" and "deeds" to stimulate both practical productivity and piety in the reader, thereby strengthening the Church body politic.⁶ Not only would the Church sanctify the individual, but it would also channel the divine wisdom necessary for the entire *Angelcynn*'s revival of learning.⁷ The reader's proactive response will thus

⁵ All references to the Old English *Pastoral Care* (Hatton MS) are cited by page number from Sweet (1871). s.v. *Angel-cynn*: 'English race' (Bosworth & Toller 2010). For a detailed study of the origins and meaning of *Angelcynn*, see Foot (1996). Just as Alfred prioritises historical exegesis in the Old English *Prose Psalms* to render the text immediately applicable to his Anglo-Saxon reader (O'Neill 2016), he undertakes a similar contemporising of *Soliloquia* by turning Augustinian analogies "earthwards" (Pratt 2017: 336).

⁶ The Church body politic is the collective entity of individual Christians who constitute the Church. See 1 Corinthians 12:27–28. All references to the Bible are to the Vulgate, www.latinvulgate.com (27 February 2020).

⁷ Members of the Church are responsible for the educational revival of the *Angelcynn*. The prose preface to the *Pastoral Care* is addressed to Alfred's bishops and cites the archbishop Plegmund and the monks Asser, Grimbald and the priest John as Alfred's scholarly delegates, helping with the translation programme. The purposeful translation of religious texts —the *Dialogues*, *Boethius*, and the *Prose Psalms* as well as the *Soliloquies*— will bring the *Angelcynn* devotionally closer to God, and will simultaneously

guarantee their own soul's favourable judgement after death, a restoration of the state's *ar* ('honour') through cultural revival, and God's imminent *ar* ('mercy') in alleviating the *Angelcynn* of their recent affliction by the Vikings (Ganze 2011: 31).⁸

Alfred thus adapts Augustine's analogies —and invents his own— to advocate the "mixed life". Pioneered by Gregory the Great and reinforced by Bede, this "mixed life" synthesised active labour in the public world with contemplative personal prayer.⁹ Although it has been argued that the "mixed life" was only practised by the laity "towards the end of the fourteenth century" (Carey 1987: 361), the circulation of devotional and theological texts in the vernacular as part of Alfred's translation programme suggests that, from the ninth century, laypeople as well as ecclesiastics were encouraged to conflate their commitment to sacred and secular duties. It is by analysing two key analogies of the lady and the letter that this Alfredian agenda of reintegrating Church and state becomes evident.

renew the state's cultural reputation which previously attracted men *utanbordes* ('from abroad', Sweet 1871: 3, 7).

⁸ DOE s.v. *ār, āre* (21 occurrences); the dual secular and sacred meanings of this noun include 'honour, distinction (as received, gained, held or enjoyed); dignity, glory; token of respect, temporal dignity' [sense A.1.c.], 'mercy, grace, favour, help' [sense B], 'forgiveness (of sins gen.)' [sense B.1.a.], 'grace, favour granted by God; salvation' [sense B.2.], 'temporal prosperity, good fortune, benefit [sense B.4.], property, possession(s), goods, resources' [sense C].

⁹ See Watson (2016: 6) for Gregory's preface to the *Dialogi*, in which, "weighed down with too many troubles of certain worldly affairs" (*nimiis quorundam sclarium tumultibus depressus*), Gregory seeks "a solitary place" (*secretum locum*). See Hecht (1965: 1) for the prose preface to Werfeth's *Old English Dialogues*, in which Alfred paraphrases Gregory's pursuit of the "mixed life" by declaring that there is "seo mæste ðearf, þæt we hwilon ure mod betwix þas eorþlican ymbhigdoo geleoðigen and gebigen to ðam godcundan and þam gastlice rihte" ('the greatest need, that at times during these earthly anxieties we yield and bend our minds to divine and spiritual duties'). See Hurst (1983: 274–275) for Bede's definition of the Church body politic as constituted by those "qui in serenitate uitae temporalis psalmis ieiuniis [...] orationibus et elemosinis [...] domino seruire cupiunt" ('who in temporal life's serenity desire to serve the Lord with psalms, fasts, prayers and alms'). Gregory, Bede, and Alfred thus all encourage their reader's dedication to God through both spiritual and physical labour. All Latin and Old English translations are my own.

2. The lady

In his recent study, Szarmach describes the interaction of lady Wisdom and her lover as “[c]ertainly the most startling metaphor in *Soliloquies*” (2014: 242). Szarmach agrees with Waterhouse that Alfred’s more “sensuous and emotive” adaptation of the Latin “crowds out the literal level of intellectual desire, ignoring logical problems (such as wisdom’s relationship back to the lover) in the immediate appeal to erotic experience” (2014: 243). However, if the lady Wisdom is understood in its original biblical context as a figuration of God, the omniscient source of all knowledge, then there is no “logical problem” in wisdom reciprocating the lover’s advances: it is a doctrinal given that God can respond by returning grace (*ar*) to the faithful Christian who pursues Him. Moreover, by reading the analogy within the context of the biblical Solomonic books and the theological development of Dionysian mysticism, we can better appreciate how intellectual desire is *intensified* rather than “crowded out” by Alfred’s eroticising of the Latin text.

Throughout the Solomonic books of the Bible, wisdom is personified as a lady with whom man greatly desires nuptial union, signifying the all-consuming desire of man to be one with God and the limitless knowledge He epitomises. In Proverbs 31:10, Wisdom is extolled as the ideal wife, the *mulierem fortem* (‘valiant woman’), whilst in Wisdom 6:21 Solomon asserts that “concupiscentia itaque sapientiae deducet ad regnum perpetuum” (‘the desire of wisdom thus leads to the everlasting kingdom’). Likewise, in Wisdom 8:2 and 8:4 he declares,

hanc amavi et exquisivi a iuventute mea et quaesivi sponsam mihi adsumere et amator factus sum formae illius [...] doctrix est enim disciplinae Dei et electrix operum illius

‘I have loved her and sought her out since my youth and I have desired to take her for my bride and I have become a lover of her beauty [...] for she is the teacher of God’s instruction and the chooser of His works’

Given the importance of King Solomon as a model for royal wisdom in early medieval kingship, Alfred’s incorporation of Solomonic tropes —particularly the lady Wisdom in the Old English *Boethius* and in the *Soliloquies*— enhances the authority of his regal public image.¹⁰ However, the Latin text is primarily

¹⁰ On the kingship of Alfred and Solomon, see Abels (1998: 219–257), Pratt (2007: 75–78, 133, 151–178).

concerned with the behaviour of the *lover*, insisting that he must be pure in his pursuit of Wisdom, free from any other claims on his attention. The Old English text instead focuses on the purity of *Wisdom herself* and urges the lover to only engage with her unadulterated form, undiluted by any intermediaries. To stress this point, Alfred injects the analogy with much greater sensuousness than it has in the more spiritualising *Soliloquia*.

In Book One of *Soliloquia*, Reason enquires of Augustine what kind of lover of Wisdom he is (*qualis sis amator sapientiae*, p. 54), and Reason encourages Augustine's chaste love for Wisdom.¹¹ The relationship between man and Wisdom is emphatically characterised as truly chaste and without any defilement (*vere casta est et sine ulla contaminatione coniunctio*, p. 56), despite man's desire to see and hold Wisdom naked with no intermediary garment dividing them. The analogy's main message is that Augustine should concentrate on Wisdom as his sole pursuit (*solam*, p. 56), with no other distractions, just as a lady demands her lover's undivided attention. The Latin text characterises Wisdom as the agent of the relationship, as it is she who decides when to show herself (*se [...] demonstrabit*, p. 56) and give herself (*se [...] daret*, p. 56) to those very few and highest chosen of her lovers (*paucissimis et electissimis amatoribus suis*, pp. 54–56).¹² As a chaste union, contact with Wisdom functions nebulously as an ethereal illumination of the spirit with *[l]ux est quaedam ineffabilis et incomprehensibilis mentium* ('the light of our minds, that which is ineffable and incomprehensible', p. 56). This metaphysical union will edify (*doceat*, p. 56) man as Wisdom provides a microcosmic insight to the macrocosmic brightness of the beatific union which lies ahead. Augustine's *Soliloquia* thus situates Wisdom within a cosmic context as she endows her lover with an incremental comprehension of the universe and its Creator. Wisdom enables man's mind to escalate from terrestrial reflections of God's radiance —the material glimmer of gold and silver which is the starting point (*effulget, ut argentum, aurum et similia*, p. 56)— to the more profound celestial insight derived from mystical contemplation of the stars, moon, and splendour of the dawn (*sidera, deinde luna, deinde aurorae fulgor*, p. 56).

¹¹ All references to the *Soliloquia* are cited by page number from Watson (1990).

¹² Although Waterhouse (1986: 70) asserts that a reciprocal relationship with man is "something wisdom can hardly do, further separating the literal and figurative levels", these reflexive verbal constructions in the Latin source indicate Wisdom's considerable agency in her interactions with man.

In Alfred's more tangible terms, Reason explains to Augustine that he should unite himself to Wisdom as completely as a man does with his lady, touching and kissing her bare body directly rather than through the obstruction of clothes (*þaccian and cyssan ðone oðerne on bær lic, þonne þer þær claðas beotweona beoð*, p. 75).¹³ Whereas the Latin text only makes passing reference to Wisdom's nakedness and the absence of any intervening garments (*nullo interposito velamento quasi nudam*, p. 54), the nudity of Wisdom and the tactility with which she should be handled is a more vivid and repeated preoccupation of the Old English text. Alfred's text goes on to assert that Wisdom cannot be held with gloved hands (*mid geglofedum bandum*, p. 76), suggesting that Wisdom cannot be properly grasped if one only tries to contact her through intermediaries. Alfred's more tactile language recalls that of Proverbs 3:18–19, where *adprehenderint* implies a vigorous 'seizing hold of' and *tenuerit* suggests a 'holding onto' the bride Wisdom: "lignum vitae est his qui adprehenderint eam et qui tenuerit eam beatus" ('she is a tree of life to those who seize hold of her and blessed is he who holds onto her'). Augustine's Latin text also attributes Wisdom with greater agency, leaving the lover dependent on the passive receipt of grace, whereas the Old English text shifts emphasis to the action required on the part of the lover. Reason orders Augustine to put his own bare body up against Wisdom in order to feel her (*[ð]u scealt æac don bær lic ongean*, p. 76) and Reason prompts Augustine to be an active pursuer of Wisdom by questioning what he would do if she were to flee from him: "heo ðonne þe fluge [...] þæt þu woldest ælce oðer lufe aletan for hyre anre lufe, woldest þu þonne swa don swa heo wylnode?" ('suppose she fled from you [...] that you would abandon every other love for love of her alone, would you then do just as she wanted?', p. 76). Alfred thus enhances the eroticism of the lady analogy so as to emphasise the importance of engaging man's entire soul *and body* in striving to attain knowledge of the divine.

I would suggest that Alfred's intensified emphasis of the physical union of man and lady especially recalls the sensuousness central to the Song of Solomon: the biblical book in which, according to exegetical tradition, the collective Church, as Christ's bride (*sponsa*), yearns for union with Christ. Particularly resonant is the first verse of the text, in which the bride commands "let him kiss me with the kiss of his mouth" (*osculetur me osculo oris*).¹⁴ In Bede's commentary *In Cantica Canticorum*, with which Alfred was possibly familiar,

¹³ All references to *Soliloquies* are cited by page number from Carnicelli (1969).

¹⁴ See Song of Solomon 1:1. The Synagogue is a type of the Christian Church.

this verse is interpreted as the bride's wish for Christ to instruct her directly Himself (Holder 2011: 38).¹⁵ Bede's understanding is probably informed by Origen's interpretation of the bride's prayer as the Church's yearning for direct knowledge of God through divine revelation (Edwards 2018: 84). For Alfred, the moral and material dilapidation of the Church meant that the *Ecclesia Anglorum* was likewise in need of a revitalisation of holiness and a restoration by God's grace, as he articulates in the prose preface to the *Pastoral Care*. It is possible then that Alfred adapts Augustine so that the *Soliloquies* more closely resembles the Song of Solomon. His text's echoing of the Song of Solomon would thus further his own political agenda of promoting the revival of Church and state.

Analogous to the Song's "kiss of the mouth" is Alfred's yearning for "gloveless", unmediated contact with Wisdom, implying his aspiration to revive the Anglo-Saxon Church's pure oneness with Christ so as to retrieve the *Anglecynn's* temporal and eternal prosperity.¹⁶ Alfred's more bodily perception of lady Wisdom encourages a more immersive, physical engagement with Christ. The early teachings of Christian mysticism were known to the Anglo-Saxons—likely through the translations of Eriugena—as early as the eighth century; for example, a citation of Pseudo-Dionysius features in Bede's commentary on Mark (Rutherford 1980: 221).¹⁷ Central to these teachings is what Rutherford calls *Jenseitssehnsucht*, a longing for the other-world, yearning for mystical union with Christ (p. 226). Contrary to Waterhouse's statement that the "graphic detail" of this encounter "swamps" the intellectual layer of the argument in the *Soliloquies* (1986: 69), Alfred's addition of erotic imagery does not obstruct but rather illuminates his intellectual point: the importance of striving for this personal union with God through the pursuit of wisdom in learning and devotion. Alfred's sophisticated analogy of the lover of Wisdom thus describes a transcendent experience of mystical divine union through the erotic imagery, which is a commonplace of the Middle English mystics such as Margery Kempe.

¹⁵ For further echoes of the Song of Songs in Alfredian writing, see Pratt (2007: 153) and O'Neill (2001: 90). There is no evidence for the direct influence of Bede's commentary on Alfred but even if he was not exposed to this specific commentary, he would likely have known about interpretations of the Song of Solomon from listening to homilies, devotion to the Psalms and praying the liturgy of hours (Pratt 2007: 242).

¹⁶ This is similar to the Old English *Boethius* in which "the journey towards God is presented as a consequence of the ever-closer relationship between Wisdom and Boethius/*mod*", unlike in *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (Brooks 2018: 529).

¹⁷ On Anglo-Saxon mysticism, see Flight (2016).

The specifically manual emphasis of Alfred's analogy may prompt the reader to directly grasp in their own hands Scripture, a patristic text, or even an Alfredian translation from which God's divine wisdom can be derived. This emphasis on tactility links to the Alfred jewel, which a reader may have held as a pointer or bookmark whilst reading the Old English *Pastoral Care*, the text which it accompanied. Since the figure depicted within the crystal inset of the Alfred jewel has been identified as Wisdom, the reader physically holds Wisdom whilst practising the exterior *craft* of reading as well as mentally holding the wisdom they acquire from what they read, the interior *craft* of knowing God (Hitch 1986–1987: 144–145). Alfred's dual *craft* of providing both leadership to his state and pastoral care to the English Church as a pious Christian ruler — following the examples of Charlemagne, Louis the Pious, and Charles the Bald— is complemented by the Song of Solomon's pun on the bridegroom's identity as both a king (*rex*) and a shepherd with flocks (*greges*).¹⁸ The allegory of lady Wisdom thus goes some way to promote Alfred's societal reform: he encourages each individual's integration of their intrapersonal sacred and interpersonal secular activity by pursuing, holding onto and acting upon divine wisdom.¹⁹ The aim is to reunite the collective ecclesiastical and state body politics, advancing the *Angelcynn* in divine wisdom, cultural capital, and salvation.

Alfred's "materialising" of Augustine's more metaphysical metaphor of the lady Wisdom is the king's means of tethering his adaptation to its immediate context of the Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical and societal reforms. This interpretation of the lady analogy is reinforced by an analogy just before it. In this earlier analogy, Alfred adapts Augustine's text to remind the reader of God's immanence in the Church's prayer and learning and the need for a renewed awareness of this divine intimacy in rebuilding the *Angelcynn*. In the Latin text, God's activity is figured cosmologically as He works,

per menses incrementis decrementisque lunaribus, [...] per lustra perfectione cursus solaris, per magnos orbis recursu in ortus suos siderum [...] (p. 26)
 'through the months with the waxing and waning of the moon, [...] through the lustra with the completion of the course of the sun, through the great cycles with the return of the stars to their beginnings [...]'

¹⁸ See Song of Solomon 1:3 and 1:6.

¹⁹ For Bede on wisdom, acts of charity and the Song of Solomon, see Holder (2006: 169–188).

The intricacy with which God orders the solar system—even the minutiae of the moon’s motion— suggests His close involvement with Creation. Yet the Augustinian God operates more remotely from mankind than the Alfredian God, just as the Augustinian lady exists more metaphysically than the more tangible Alfredian lady. The configuration of natural cycles by Alfred’s God is thus grounded within the proximity of humans on earth rather than the loftiness of the universe:

þa ylcan eft ne cumað þær ðær hy er weron, eallunga swa swa hy er weron. Ac cumað oðre for hy, swa swa leaf on treowum; and æpla, (and) gears [sic], and wyrtan, [...] and swa eall nytenu and fugelas [...] (p. 53)
 ‘the same come not again there where they formerly were, completely just as they were before. But others come in their stead, as leaves on trees; and apples, grass, and plants [...] and likewise all beasts and fowls [...]

The passage of seasons and ageing of livestock are thus more effective analogies with which to bolster Alfred’s “homely” agenda of reconsolidating the *Angelcynn*. These rustic images encourage the reader to use their immediate earthly life for growth in divine wisdom just as God uses His worldly immanence to manifest graces. It is this same earthly usefulness which is promoted to the reader by the practical hunting (*huntingan*), fowling (*fuglian*), and fishing (*fiscian*) which the temporary cottage (*lænan stoclife*) facilitates in the preface to *Soliloquies* (p. 48).

The ageing bodies of the *nytenu* (‘beasts’) and *fugelas* (‘fowls’) not only indicate the transience of earthly life and thus man’s need to prepare for eternity through prayer, but they also accentuate man’s superiority over these animals due to his divine intellect. Although men’s bodies eventually decay like those of animals, Alfred emphasises that it is because of men’s rationality that “swa swa hy ær wurðlicor lybbað þonne treowu oðþe oðre nytenu, swa hy eac weorðfulicor arisað on domes dæge” (‘just as they live[d] before [while on earth] more worthily than trees or other creatures, so shall they also arise more worthily on Doomsday’, p. 53). Since Reason teaches authoritatively throughout *Soliloquies*, Alfred hints that this particular text in his translation programme is indispensable for the salvific wisdom it imparts to the *Angelcynn*, as it is man’s reason that warrants him an afterlife superior to that of animals. By highlighting that man is privileged by his *imago Dei* intellect, Alfred encourages the reader to use their elevated reason as a tool while on earth, just as Alfred’s lady analogy

promotes the mind and body's zealous pursuit of and firm hold of Wisdom.²⁰ Man should acquire divine wisdom from the Church and through reading and prayer to earn God's immediate favour for the *Angelcynn* and the merits of heavenly glory which are reserved for the rational human soul.

3. The letter

It is likewise the pursuit of divine wisdom by use of the rational soul which Alfred promotes in another analogy in *Soliloquies*. Alfred adds the analogy of a thane obeying the contents of a letter he has received from his lord to Book One, in which Reason answers Augustine's question of how he can attain virtues and forsake material attachments so as to trust more wholly in God:

geþenc nu gyf ðines hlafordes ærendegewrit and hys insegel to ðe cymð, hwæðer þu mæge cweðan þæt ðu hine be ðam ongytan ne mægæ, ne hys willan þær-on gecnawan ne mæge. gyf þu ðonne cwyst þæt þu hys willan ðer-on gecnawan mage, cweð þonne hweðer þe rihtra þince þe þus hys willan folgie, þe þu folgie þam welam þe he ðe er forgeaf to-eacan hys freondscype (p. 62)

'Consider now if a letter from your lord with his seal should come to you, whether you would say that you cannot understand him by that, nor recognise his will therein? If you then say that you cannot recognise his will therein, say then whether it seems more proper that you follow his will, or that you follow the wealth that he previously gave you over and beyond his friendship'

Encouraging the Gregorian "mixed life" and contemporising Augustine's *Soliloquia* is Alfred's original analogy of the Anglo-Saxon comitatus. Obedience to one's "lord" simultaneously signifies loyalty to King Alfred and the state as well as to the Lord God and His Church, thus prompting the reader's conformity to both. Alfred encourages the reintegration of sacred and secular duty through analogical ambiguity in order to restore stability the *Angelcynn*.

The synthesis of sacred and secular meanings in this analogy is anticipated by the analogy which directly precedes it, an analogy in which the directness of

²⁰ The human soul as man's divine imprint is an especially Augustinian idea articulated in his commentary on Genesis, with which Alfred was probably familiar (Migne 1841–1855a: col. 0331): "scilicet rationales mentes, in quo genere homo factus est ad imaginem Dei" ('that is to say, rational minds, in which kind man was made in the image of God').

a ship's connection to its cable parallels the immediacy of an individual's mental access to God.²¹ Reason articulates this nautical analogy thus:

for ðam þingum is ðearf þæt þu rihte hawie mid modes ængum to gode, swa rihte swa swa scipes ancer streng byð aþenæd on gerihte fram þam scype to þam ancræ; and gefastna þa eagan þines modes on gode swa se ancer byd gefastnoð on ðære eorðan. þeah þæt scyp si ute on ðære sæ on þam ydum[sic], hyt byð gesund [and] untoslegen, gyf se streng aþolað; forðam hys byd se oðer ende fast on þære eorðan and se oðer on ðam scype (pp. 61–62)

‘Therefore it is necessary that you look properly with the mind’s eyes towards God, just as the anchor-cable of a ship is stretched directly from the ship to the anchor; and fasten the eyes of your mind on God as the anchor is fastened in the earth. Though the ship is out at sea on the waves, it is sound [and] not broken to pieces if the cable endures; because one end of it is fastened to the earth and the other to the ship’

Reason then explains that the mind’s eye is reason, and that the anchors enabling reason to fixate on God are the virtues, including wisdom, humility, and prudence. The ship is then identified as the individual mind —“ship of the mind” (*scyp* [...] *modes*, p. 62).

Scholars have been critical of this analogy, arguing that the shift in the ship’s symbolism lacks rationale and that the analogy’s meaning is overwhelmed by its logical problems (Waterhouse 1986: 68). However, in focusing on the mechanics of Alfred’s analogy, critics have overlooked the larger theological tradition from which Alfred is drawing in order to communicate his message. Just as Bede defines the ecclesiastical body politic as constituted by “every elect soul” (*anima quaeque electa*, Hurst 1983: 210), so Alfred’s ship of the mind could be a microcosm of the larger Church body politic (*scyp*) of which it is a member. The earliest nautical figuration of the Church is by Tertullian: “*avicula illa figuram ecclesiae praeferebat quod in mari, id est in saeculo, fluctibus id est persecutionibus et temptationibus inquietetur*” (“[T]hat little ship presented a figure of the Church because on the sea, that is, in the present age, it is being troubled by the waves of persecutions and trials’, Evans 1964: 29). Such an interpretation of the ship would suitably describe the struggling Anglo-Saxon mind and Church, both of which have been traumatised by the Viking invasions and their effects. Given the patristic precedent for allegorising the Church as a

²¹ On “eyes of the mind”, see Waterhouse (1986: 64–68); on “ship of the mind”, see Wilcox (2006: 179–217).

ship then, the ship in *Soliloquies* may be understood as a figure of the Church, the conduit of divine graces to which the reader should have recourse through its sacraments and Scripture, especially during times of political turbulence.

The lord issuing the letter in the subsequent analogy, then, strongly evokes God issuing His commandments in Scripture. He expects each of His Christian thanes and the collective Church comitatus to obey these decrees after unsealing the letter: this could *literally* mean after opening the Bible and reading its contents so as to “know” (*ongytan*) God, yet this could metaphorically mean after “unsealing” God’s Word through exegesis (p. 62).²² Carnicelli (1969: 100) has also identified an “implicit appeal to scriptural authority” in this analogy, but he interprets the analogy as arguing for the “*contrast* between God and an earthly lord” (*italics mine*). Since it was common for kings to communicate their will to their subjects through vernacular letters and writs (Abels 1998: 231), the more secular interpretation of this multivalent analogy is that it advocates the submission of Alfred’s subjects, the state body politic, to his decrees as king (Waterhouse 1986: 72).

I would suggest, however, that rather than perceiving obedience to secular and sacred lordships as conflicting principles, the analogy promotes their *assimilation*. In addition to this interpretation of the letter as the Bible, the lord’s letter could also correspond more specifically to Alfred’s own writings. Alfred’s prose preface to the *Pastoral Care* is literally a letter from a lord as he addresses the bishops with spiritual and temporal authority, demanding their support in reforming Church and state. Similarly Alfred’s book of law codes, the *domboc*, synthesises Christian and Anglo-Saxon laws to advance the *Angelcynn*’s unity of Church and state through obedience to the concurrent lordships of God and Alfred.²³ This preface frames Alfred’s laws as direct descendants of the divine laws revealed to Moses in the Old Testament (*Dryhten was sprecende ðas word to Moyses*, p. 26).²⁴ Alfred’s laws are aligned with those of Christ, as both the Alfredian and the New Testament Christian laws seek to bring forth (*geecenne*) rather than annul the Mosaic covenant with God. Particularly promoting simultaneous obedience to the divine Lord and the earthly lord Alfred is the

²² The metaphorical “unsealing” of the Bible pertains to the *gebedmen* and those studying for holy orders who are described as Alfred’s target audience in the prose preface to *Pastoral Care* (Sweet 1871: 7). The *Soliloquies* is likely aimed at those who can disseminate scriptural exegesis to congregations through homilies.

²³ On the *domboc*, see Preston (2012).

²⁴ All quotations from the *domboc* are cited by page number from Liebermann (1903).

emphasis on Christ’s mercy, which both operates through and is bestowed upon *weoruldhlafordas* (‘secular lords’, p. 44) according to the law codes’ preface. The preface strategically changes Christ’s command to love one’s neighbour as oneself (*illi diliges proximum tuum tamquam te ipsum*, Mark 12:31) to loving one’s *lord* as the Lord Himself: “he bebead þone hlaford lufian swa hine” (p. 46). The analogy of the lord’s letter in *Soliloquies* similarly equates obedience to God with obedience to the king, and this intertwining of earthly and heavenly duty is thus promoted to the reader across the wider Alfredian corpus.

The interpretation of the lord’s letter (*ærendgeurit*) as a metaphor for Scripture, encouraging the reader’s devotion to the Church’s textual tradition and to God’s will as communicated therein, is supported by Alfred’s subsequent promotion of reading to acquire divine wisdom. After the letter analogy, in Book Three of the *Soliloquies*, Alfred increases the urgency to acquire divine wisdom through the Church’s written tradition by supplying an analogous reference to the parable of Dives, Abraham, and Lazarus. Whereas in Luke 16:29 it is the study of and belief in Moses and the Prophets (*Mosen et prophetas*) which will save the relatives of Dives from his same Hellish fate, in *Soliloquies* it is instead their study of and belief in patristic texts —the *haligra fedra bec* (‘books of the Holy Fathers’, p. 95)— which will save them from damnation. Alfred thus adapts Christ’s parable to implicitly coerce his reader—who is vicariously addressed by the imperatives [*l]eornien þa on, and gelyfan þam* (‘[l]et them study them and believe them’, p. 95)— to read and believe in the patristic texts translated as part of the Alfredian reform programme —such as Gregory’s *Dialogi* and *Regula Pastoralis* and Augustine’s *Soliloquia*— in an effort to rebuild the English Church and state with divine wisdom.²⁵ As well as Alfred’s biblical analogy of Dives, Abraham, and Lazarus encouraging the reader—and the *Angelcynn* they synecdochise—to advance in divine wisdom via contemplative reading, it also prompts their conversion of this contemplation into action by performing good deeds, since it was for neglecting to show charity towards Lazarus that Dives was damned. Reading, prayer, and practice is intended to privately save the reader’s soul and publicly improve the cohesion of the *Angelcynn*. Alfred thus reasserts that it is by each individual—including himself— living a “mixed life”, integrating contemplative spiritual duties with

²⁵ The preface to the *Soliloquies*, with its imagery of the author building a cottage in the woods, may itself serve as an allegory for, among other things, the building of the English Church.

active societal duties, that the *Angelcynn* will doubly recover its sacred and secular *ar*.

Alfred also supplies the analogy of the king's house to accentuate the need of simultaneous allegiance to both regal authority and divine authority. In *Soliloquia*, the various paths to God's wisdom are described in vague epistemological abstractions: "Quippe pro sua quisque sanitate ac firmitate comprehendit illud singulare ac verissimum bonum" ('Indeed everyone embraces that unique and truest good in accordance with his own health and stamina', p. 56). Alfred adapts Augustine's philosophical tone to add the more practical analogy of attaining God's wisdom by journeying on various paths to the king's home:

Geðenc nu hweðer awiht mani mann cynges ham sece þer ðær he ðonne on tune byde, oððe hys gemot, oððe hys fird, oððe hweðer ðe ðe ðince þæt hi æalle on anne weig þeder cumen. Ic wene þeah cume on swiðe manige wegas: sume cumað swiðe feorran, and habbað swiðe læ[n]gne [...] sume habbað swiðe langne and swiðe rihtne and swiðe godne. Sume habbað swiðe sceortne [...] ælc þara þe hys wilnað and þe hys geornful byt, he hym mæg cuman to and on hys hyrede wunian [...] swa swa ælces cynges hama beoð sume on bure, sume on healle, [...] and lybbað þeah æalle be anes hlafordes are [...] (p. 77)

'Think now whether any man seeks there the king's home where he is town, or his court, or his army, or whether it seems to you that they all must come there by the same road. Conversely, I think they come by very many paths: some come very far, and have a very long path [...] some have a very long and very proper and very good path. Some have a very short path [...] each of those who desire and eagerly pray for it, he can come to and live in its household [...] just so is every king's home, some live in cottages, some in halls, [...] and they nevertheless all live by the favour of one lord'

The anaphoric "sume" ('some') combined with the extensive list of available paths *en route* to and dwellings in proximity to the king's house implies the vast means of revering the king and benefitting from his favour, as exemplified by the three estates of the fighters (*ferdmen*), labourers (*weorcmen*), and religious men (*gebedmen*) mentioned in the Old English *Boethius* (Godden & Irvine 2009: 421). Alfred thus contemporises Augustine's *Soliloquia* to prompt the reader to persevere in honouring the king by contributing to Anglo-Saxon society and thus restoring stability to the *Angelcynn*.

However, the extensive listing of possible paths to guaranteeing *anes hlafordes are* ('the favour of one lord') particularly recalls the monotheistic focus of

striving to attain the favour of God, especially by contributing to His Church. The repetition of *quosdam* and *alios* in Ephesians 4:10–12 is very similar to the aforementioned *sume* anaphora in the Old English text, as this scriptural passage likewise demonstrates the diverse means by which God’s wisdom and favour can be attained:

qui descendit ipse est et qui ascendit super omnes caelos ut impleret omnia et ipse dedit quosdam quidem apostolos quosdam autem prophetas alios vero evangelistas alios autem pastores et doctores ad consummationem sanctorum in opus ministerii in aedificationem corporis Christi.

‘He who descended is He who ascended above all the heavens in order to fill all things and He himself gave some apostles, and some prophets, and others some evangelists, and others some pastors and doctors for the perfecting of saints in the work of ministry in building up the body of Christ.’

It is therefore by living out a vast range of vocations, whether as apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and doctors even in the face of difficulty, that the Church Militant can be strengthened. Not only will these roles reinforce the societal infrastructure of peoples while on earth, but it will enable them to reach the Church Triumphant, gaining the spiritual graces with which God fills all things (*impleret omnia*). Alfred thus equates his kingship with that of Christ in his analogy of persevering on the paths to wisdom, although some paths may demand harder efforts than others: “sume habbað swiðe langne [...]. Sume habbað swiðe sceortne” (‘some have a very long path [...]. Some have a very short path’, p. 77). Alfred thus prompts the reader to commit purposefully to their pursuit of his favour and the favour of the *Angelcynn* which he represents, just as members of the Church undertake their Christian vocations to help the ecclesiastical body politic coalesce and to merit temporal and eternal graces from the King at its head.

Alfred’s promotion of the *Angelcynn*’s restoration by active recourse to the Church’s textual tradition is also amplified by its echoing of Augustine’s distaste for the passive receipt of wisdom as articulated in *Soliloquia*: “exspectamus, ecquid nobis librorum alienorum in manus incidat” (‘we are waiting, should something from other people’s books fall into our hands’, p. 106). Augustine insists that the Truth which was written in these books during a more prosperous era should no longer be concealed from the present reader. This is echoed in the Alfredian attempt to revive the Anglo-Saxon golden age of learning by rendering universally accessible the Latin theological tradition in

the vernacular.²⁶ It is hoped that the *Angelcynn* will conform more fervently to the Church and its belief system by reading the theological and devotional texts translated as part of Alfred's reform programme, just as Augustine epiphatically converted to Christianity by fulfilling the command to "pick up and read" (*tolle, lege*) the Bible, according to his *Confessions* (Hamond 2014: 408–409). Alfred's translations will also restore the *Angelcynn*'s cultural reputation, as suggested by the *æstel*, the luxurious book-pointer, with which *Pastoral Care* was likely accompanied.²⁷

4. Conclusion

Previous scholars have attempted sweeping surveys of the analogies in Alfred's *Soliloquies* with a narrow, practical criticism-type focus. However, this current study has instead honed in on the analogies of the lady and the letter to argue for their coherence when understood within their theological and historical contexts and their significant purpose in realising the Alfredian agenda, the "[m]aking of the *Angelcynn*" (Foot 1996: 29). Just as Hitch (1986–1987: 145) argues that the performance of any practical *cræft*—whether ruling as a king or working as a builder—is synonymous with the spiritual *cræft* of pursuing divine wisdom, this essay argues for the usefulness of Alfred's analogies in promoting the synthesised rebuilding of state and Church, with the restoration of the secular polity contingent on the restoration of the sacred.

Since the prose preface to the *Pastoral Care* equates the devastated English churches with the dilapidated *Angelcynn*, Alfred encourages the reader's renewed devotion to the sacramental Church, and their renewed commitment to spiritual reading and prayer through the analogies of the lady and the letter.²⁸ By switching the Latin text's focus from the constancy of the lover to the purity of

²⁶ See Sweet (1871: 2–9).

²⁷ See Sweet (1871: 9) for the *æstel*, which symbolised the twofold wealth—terrestrial treasure and celestial graces—which the *Angelcynn* would acquire through renewed learning. The Alfred Jewel—probably an *æstel*—is inscribed *ÆLFRED MEC HEHT GEWYRCAN* ('Alfred ordered me to be made'). Alfred is thus glorified for his revival of both types of wealth by attempting to reintegrate Church and state.

²⁸ The churches are deprived of the treasures and books with which they were filled just as the state has, "lost both the wealth and the wisdom" ("ægðer forlæten ge ðone welan ge ðone wisdom", p. 5).

Wisdom herself and by recalling the Song of Solomon and Dionysian mysticism in his eroticised account of lady Wisdom, Alfred promotes the Church as harbouring the purity of divine wisdom on earth in its sacraments and Scripture. Alfred grounds Augustine's cosmic analogies within a local context to emphasise God's immanence in the world, the operation of His grace through secular as well as sacred polities, and the material accessibility of God's presence while on earth. The analogy of the letter advocates adherence to the Church's textual tradition as well as to the temporal law codes, fusing the importance of obedience to Alfred as earthly king and God as heavenly king. Complementing this, the analogy of the paths to the king's court promotes the manifold means of contributing to the state and the vast vocations by which one belongs to the Church. The intertwining of the secular and sacred interpretations in the lady, the letter and the surrounding analogies by which they are contextualised thus prompt the strengthening of the ecclesiastical body politic and the reinforcement of the *Angelcynn's* identity as a united "English people" (Foot 1996: 29). According to Alfred's prose preface to Pastoral Care, it was when obedience to God bound king and cleric that *sibbe* ('peace'), *siodo* ('morality'), and *onweald* ('power') were enjoyed by the *Angelcynn* and when *māðma* ('treasures') and *boca* ('books') filled the churches (1996: 5). The more secular interpretations elicited from Alfred's royal analogies thus do not undermine ecclesiastical interpretations of them. The coexistence of both hermeneutic possibilities accentuates the Alfredian agenda of merging Church and state to restore the past golden age.

As Augustine argues in *De Doctrina Christiana*, analogies can be enjoyed for their intellectual stimulation as well as being valued for their utility as a spiritual exercise in advancing the soul towards a clearer understanding of God.²⁹ Alfred's analogies thus serve a mnemonic function: a familiar key image lodges in the reader's memory, prompting their understanding of an unfamiliar spiritual concept, which is then converted into the wilful execution of a corresponding

²⁹ See Green (1995: 14): "Res ergo aliae sunt quibus fruendum est, aliae quibus utendum, aliae quae fruuntur et utuntur. [...] istis quibus utendum est tendentes ad beatitudinem adiuvamur et quasi adminiculamur, ut ad illas quae nos beatos faciunt pervenire atque his inhaerere possimus" ("There are some things therefore which are to be enjoyed, some which are to be used, some which are for enjoyment and for use [...] those which are for use help and so to speak, prop us up while we are striving towards blessedness, so that we can reach and adhere to those things which make us blessed').

earthly action.³⁰ This intertwining of metaphysical and physical practice is likewise promoted in the verse preface to the Old English *Dialogues*, a translation of Gregory's *Dialogi* undertaken by Bishop Wærferth at the king's instigation: one should not only trust in the saints' intercession (*haligra helpe geliefed*) but also carry out their example (*biora bisene fulgað*, p. 404).³¹ Nicole Guenther Discenza's comment that Alfred's *Boethius* "never forgets that the rise to heaven begins here on earth" (2014: 217) thus pertains even more to the *Soliloquies*. As a text preoccupied with Providence, Augustine's analogies are adapted by Alfred to initiate an impulse to the "mixed life". The analogies of the lady and the letter emphasise that it is by each individual living out their simultaneous duties to the Church and state that the Anglo-Saxon society of which they are a microcosm will be structurally reintegrated. This reintegration will see secular and sacred *ar* restored to the *Angelcynn*, protecting them from future Viking invasion and enhancing their temporal and eternal prosperity.

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³⁰ On the Augustinian trinity of memory, understanding, and will, see Teske (2001a).

³¹ All references to the Alfredian verse prologues and epilogues are cited by page number from Irvine & Godden (2012: 404–415).

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