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Cosmetic Theology in England, *c*. 650–1100: Aldhelm of Malmesbury, the Venerable Bede, and Goscelin of St Bertin

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This thesis is submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

20 March 2025

DECLARATION

This thesis is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

It is not substantially the same as any that I have submitted or is being concurrently submitted for a degree or diploma or other qualification at the University of Cambridge or any other University or similar institution except as declared in the Preface and specified in the text.

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Alexandra Zhirnova

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the concept of modesty in England, between the seventh and eleventh centuries, and analyses the influence of late antique literature on medieval English depictions of dress and adornment. In late antiquity, Christian moralists told women that the very salvation of their souls could depend on the way they dressed their bodies—a phenomenon Marcia Colish called 'cosmetic theology'. This thesis questions whether early English ecclesiastical writers inherited this structure of thought, whereby women's adornment was presented as dangerous, deceptive, and sinful. Chapter 1 begins by analysing the formation of cosmetic theology in the patristic period (c. 250–600), focusing on Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, who linked the female body and its adornment to broader theological problems of sin, human agency, and the created order. Chapters 2 to 4 follow the reception of cosmetic theology by the most influential Latin authors of early medieval England: Aldhelm of Malmesbury (c. 639–709), the Venerable Bede (c. 672–735) and Goscelin of St Bertin (c. 1040–1106). These authors, active during three distinct moments of ecclesiastical development—Aldhelm during the conversion of England to Christianity, Bede during a time of corruption and crisis in the church and Goscelin in the wake of the Norman Conquest—make use of different possibilities for the rhetorical use of modesty to define female virtue and the women's place in the church. Writing in England, they addressed their instructions on modesty to an audience which held women in comparatively high regard and perceived adornment as an important expression of power, which is evident from the authors' emphasis on the spiritual aspect of modesty. The analysis shows that each author's presentation of adornment responds to contemporary social and political circumstances, yet all three define female virtue as nearly synonymous with modesty and submission. In Chapter 5, Aldhelm, Bede, and Goscelin's stand on women's dress is compared to the same authors' prescriptions for men, adding to them the works of Alcuin of York (c. 735–804). This comparative critical analysis demonstrates that, while the discourse of female modesty was highly entangled with sexuality, male modesty was divorced from sexual ethics and instead concerned the expression of authority. Overall, this thesis argues that late antique writings on modesty exerted significant influence on the gendered perception of virtue in early medieval England and that, despite the innovative emphasis on spirituality, cosmetic theology in England nevertheless helped to sustain the gender hierarchy. Individual women may attain holiness, primarily by demonstrating sexual purity, but women, with very rare exceptions, continued to be seen as inferior to men, and their modesty—as a sign of subordination.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

So neither the one who plants nor the one who sows is anything,
but only God who gives the growth.
I Cor. III.7

This work would not have been possible without the support of many wonderful people.

Thanks must go first and foremost to my supervisor, Professor Rosalind Love, for her invaluable guidance and patience: I am grateful to have received both encouragement and trust. I am also profoundly grateful to my advisor, Professor Elizabeth Ashman Rowe, whose professionalism and rigour has kept me on track. Many thanks also to Professor Richard Dance for his advice and humour, and to Dr Lea Niccolai for mentorship and support. A special thank you to Dr Anna Lefteratou for guiding me as a mentor and looking after me as a friend. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to David Manns, whose donation to Trinity College funded this research.

I am most grateful to those who have helped me keep body, soul, and mind together over the past three years. To Davide and Emily, for being a constant source of care, an insightful pair of readers, and a reliable font of laughter; to Bea, Elisa and Hugo—thank you for your friendship, humour, advice, and incredible cooking. You have shown me what medieval writers meant by 'spiritual kinship'. Thanks to Pau for being the best CCASNC and *Quaestio* partner, and to Brigid for guiding me through the different stages of the PhD: I am so lucky to have had your support along the way. I am also grateful to Trinity's chaplain, Anne, for helping me through many big decisions. To Evgeniia, friend since day one in a locked-down college: thank you for your helpful comments and the many brunches. And to Amber: thank you for your thoughtful questions, your cheerful attitude, and for getting me out into nature.

I am also thankful to the members of the Cambridge Late Antique Network and the Patristics Reading Group for camaraderie and advice. Among them, I am very grateful to have met Clare Pryor, with whom we have shared many insightful chats about Prudentius, Christian feminism, and music, and who helped me proofread parts of this thesis (all errors remain my own).

I owe a special thank you to my wonderful parents, Svetlana and Evgeny, who first taught me to love history—I would not be here without you. To my twin sister Barbara: thank you for cheering me on and believing in me even when I did not. Finally, I would not have arrived at the Department of Anglo-Saxon, Norse and Celtic without my husband Jake, who first encouraged me to pursue my love of Anglo-Saxon riddles; I am forever grateful for his love and unwavering support.

Alexandra Zhirnova

Feast Day of St Cuthbert

20 March 2025

Introduction

Scope and Aims of This Thesis

In the fourth book of the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede reports the words that Æthelthryth, abbess of Ely, allegedly spoke to her nuns as she lay dying from a tumour on her throat:

> 'Scio certissime, quia merito in collo pondus langoris porto, in quo iuuenculam me memini superuacua moniliorum pondera portare; et credo, quod ideo me superna pietas dolore colli uoluit grauari, ut sic absoluar reatu superuacuae leuitatis; dum mihi nunc pro auro et margaritis, de collo rubor tumoris ardorque promineat'.
>
> 'I know well enough that I deserve to bear the weight of this affliction on my neck, for I remember that when I was a young girl I used to wear an unnecessary weight of necklaces; I believe that God in His goodness would have me endure this pain in my neck in order that I may thus be absolved from the guilt of my needless vanity. So instead of gold and pearls, a fiery red tumour now stands out upon my neck.'[1]

Æthelthryth's interpretation of her illness as punishment for wearing necklaces is a striking example of a connection between adornment and sin. But it is certainly not the only one. Since late antiquity, Christian hagiographers, moralists, and exegetes spent considerable time outlining acceptable forms of dress and adornment: for them, how Christians were dressing was a matter of deep religious significance—a phenomenon which Marcia Colish dubbed 'cosmetic theology'.[2]

Colish's study traces how Christian patristic thinkers transformed Classical satire against feminine adornment to reflect theological conceptions. Attitudes to sexuality, gender, and women's place in creation could be powerfully expressed through dress, and Colish argues that early Christian Latin writers used dress rhetorically to present women as dangerous, deceptive, and weak and thus justify their subordination to men. Colish's study makes clear how theology, ethics, and practice are intimately intertwined in early Christian thought, and she hoped that 'subsequent research may reveal still other modifications of the theme by later patristic and medieval thinkers.'[3] Her work prompts me to ask a question that has a broader purchase for early Christian history: how did late antique cosmetic theology influence conceptions of gender in subsequent centuries? And further: how might its precepts have been modified and contested?

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[1] Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* IV.19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 396–97.
[2] Colish, 'Cosmetic Theology'.
[3] *Ibid.*, 12.

This thesis investigates the reception of cosmetic theology during the first five centuries of Christianity in England. I begin by analysing the formation of cosmetic theology in late antiquity (c. 250–600), focusing on the works of Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and Pelagius. I then examine its reception by the most influential Latin authors of early medieval England: Aldhelm of Malmesbury (c. 639–709), the Venerable Bede (c. 672–735) and Goscelin of St Bertin (c. 1040–1106). I show how these writers, active during three distinct moments of ecclesiastical development—Aldhelm during the conversion of England to Christianity, Bede on the cusp on monastic reform, and Goscelin in the wake of the Norman Conquest—expressed and debated their gendered ideals through dress. I ask whether they inherited the misogynistic outlook of their late antique predecessors and, in the final chapter, whether they applied cosmetic theology differently when writing about men.

The shift in geographical and temporal focus from late antique Mediterranean to early medieval England addresses an important gap in existing literature. While scholars have paid close attention to late antique conceptions of modesty,[4] as well as their influence on high and late medieval culture,[5] the impact of cosmetic theology on the early Middle Ages remains understudied.[6] It is as if the works of patristic theologians spent five centuries waiting to be discovered, and early medieval writers had no role in how they were transmitted and understood. I therefore contribute to feminist history by studying material that was instrumental in transmitting ideas about modesty and gender to the later Middle Ages but has not yet received dedicated attention. Moreover, as will be discussed below, many feminist scholars assert that Aldhelm, Bede, and Goscelin provide a fairer representation of women than their predecessors, making a study of their cosmetic theology all the more compelling—precisely because it demonstrates how early Christian ideas about modesty could be made manifest and contested through depictions of dress.

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[4] Notable studies include Wilkinson, *Women and Modesty*; Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*; and Coon, *Sacred Fictions*. Brown's *The Body and Society* remains the foundational work on asceticism and sexuality in the early church but largely ignores gender.

[5] The disconnect between the early and late Middle Ages in the study of gender and modesty is evident in Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*, pp. 37–64, which claims to describe the history of misogyny but skips straight from late antiquity into the twelfth century. Similarly, Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption* explores the conceptions of the female body in Christian religious practice in the age of women mystics without continuity from late antiquity to the twelfth century.

[6] Only a few studies exist of the reception of cosmetic theology in Merovingian and Carolingian Europe: see Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, pp. 120–41 on the *vita* of St. Radegund; and Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, pp. 21–67 on Carolingian conceptions of beauty.

'Cosmetic Theology'

The above is the rationale for focusing on *England, c. 650–1100*. But the title *Cosmetic Theology* also requires some further explanation and qualification. Colish, who coined the phrase, does not provide an explicit definition: she simply uses it as a shorthand to describe the ways in which Latin moralists' theological worldview is intertwined with their insistence that Christians dress modestly. I prefer this term, however, to other available ways to describe the polemical uses of male and female clothing, such as 'modesty discourse' and 'rhetoric of adornment'. Unlike these, 'cosmetic theology' is not just a collection of rhetorical devices, but a 'structure of thought and feeling', to borrow a phrase from Raymond Williams—a set of cultural attitudes (both conscious and unconscious, individual and collective) rather than a literary convention.[7]

The term 'cosmetics' embraces a broader range of activities than 'dress' or 'adornment', as it entails any intentional ordering of an individual's appearance. Arrangement, grooming or dyeing of hair, wearing of clothing and jewellery, the application of makeup and use of medicines for beautification all fall within this category. This term also carries the implication that beauty achieved through these activities is artificial and even superficial, which is a key concern of early Christian texts on women's dress. To describe the late antique and early medieval interpretation of cosmetics, I follow Colish in using the term 'theology', with the caveat that these developments were not purely theological. Attitudes to cosmetics originated in specific historical circumstances and depended on political, social, and economic structures. But on the individual authors' level, depictions of dress were based not in historical fact but in biblical *topoi*, theological debate, and moral imperative. The term 'theology' reflects the entanglement of this discourse with problems of sin, human agency, and the created order. It also expresses the basis of this study—the theological and didactic agendas of male writers rather than the historical lives of their subjects. What the title *Cosmetic Theology* does not explicitly convey but I also examine are the behavioural aspects of modesty, which in early Christian texts appear as a range of activities such as seclusion or restricted movement, silence or restricted speech, domesticity, limited eating and drinking, controlled gestures and glances, and generally high self-restraint. Most importantly, then and now, modesty implied sexual purity, whether in the form of complete abstinence or monogamy. Sexual ethics are thus the key concern of cosmetic theology.

[7] Williams, *Preface to Film*. I am grateful to Prof. Mark Vessey for suggesting this term.

In Latin, these behaviours fall under the virtue of *modestia*, but the more common terms throughout the sources examined in this thesis are *pudicitia* and *castitas*. *Pudicitia*, when applied to women, is closest in meaning to the English word 'modesty', and *castitas*—to 'chastity'.[8] While *castitas* usually refers specifically to sexual restraint, *pudicitia*, as Wilkinson observes, 'could have a fairly loose sense and cover any number of ideas including sexual purity, demure behaviour, quietness, moral character, and shyness.'[9] In other words, *pudicitia* signified both a mode of behaviour and an internal disposition: 'For women, *pudicitia* or *sōphrosynē* implied both an objective fact and a subjective mode of being; it was a state of body and a state of mind.'[10] Cosmetic theology, then, is the set of ideas that provided religious meaning to modest behaviour, connecting it to broader issues of spirituality, salvation, and the created order.[11] It articulated how outward modesty made spiritual purity visible—and vice versa.

A term that does not appear in my source material but is nevertheless important for the discussion of cosmetic theology is 'uniform', which can be defined as 'a device to resolve certain dilemmas of complex organisations—namely, to define their boundaries, to assure that members will conform to their goals, and to eliminate conflicts in the status of their members.'[12] These goals are shared by many of the authors prescribing particular 'techniques of the body'[13] to Christians, especially to celibate Christians, as a way to distinguish them from other groups. Importantly, uniforms also define gender boundaries and exert control over sexuality. In the case of men, as Craik observes, 'there is a close fit between the attributes of masculinity as inscribed in uniform conduct and normative masculine roles and attributes.'[14] For women, however, 'uniforms function as a code of discipline and some attributes of ideal femininity', but also as 'training about the highly refined control of the bodies, minds, and even language'.[15]

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[8] The Oxford English dictionary defines modesty as 'decorum, propriety; scrupulous sobriety of thought, speech, conduct, etc.; natural avoidance of coarseness or lewdness', noting that 'in early use [it was] regarded as a virtue proper to women, and often discussed as such' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, "modesty (*n.*)," December 2024, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1010808118). Chastity is defined as 'purity from unlawful sexual intercourse', 'virginity, celibacy', or 'exclusion of meretricious ornament' (Oxford English Dictionary, "chastity (n.)," March 2025, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6259228517). The use of these terms for men is discussed in Chapter 5.

[9] Wilkinson, *Women and Modesty*, p. 15.

[10] Harper, *From Shame to Sin*, p. 41 (quoted in Wilkinson, p. 15).

[11] Female modesty also carried religious meaning in pre-Christian Rome, and Classical Latin writers linked women's sexual propriety to social harmony: see Daniel-Hughes, 'Dress as Embodied Theology', pp. 87–95, for a discussion of the Christian transformation of Roman *pudicitia*.

[12] Joseph and Alex, 'The Uniform', 719. See also Joseph, *Uniforms and Nonuniforms*, pp. 1-5

[13] Mauss, 'Techniques of the Body', coined this term to describe a combination of outward behaviours such as dress and demeanour that produce a 'social self'.

[14] Craik, 'The Cultural Politics of the Uniform', 130.

[15] *Ibid.*, 139.

Thus, although the authors I discuss would not have used the term 'uniform', it is productive to think about their instructions in this way: as a set of rules for dress and behaviour aimed at defining the organisation (Church or monastery) and the gender expression permitted within it.

But sacred texts, hagiography, exegesis and didactic works often present conflicting images of female modesty. In early Christian literature, outspoken misogyny coexists with a kind of proto-feminism, as cosmetic theology is used both to justify and restrict women's spiritual authority, sometimes within one text.[16] As Coon explains,

> Paradox, inversion, reversal, transformation, and rebirth are all essential components of sacred discourse. Masculine and feminine spirituality both appropriate traditional constructions of male and female behaviour and invert them to instruct human audiences that the sacred operates in a manner antithetical to profane convention. Medieval theologians manipulated the paradoxical nature of sacred gender.[17]

When a gendered reading of such texts is made, one faces the problem of deciding how far the theoretical constructs that lay behind them were 'socially actualised', and whether the conclusions presented by one class of texts should be preferred to another when they appear to offer conflicting evidence. This problem and the scholarly approaches to it to date are discussed below, before I delineate my own methodology.[18]

Feminist Approaches to Early Medieval England

Above I have located this thesis in the field of feminist history, so it follows that I use gender as a category of analysis. But, as Wilkinson notes, 'there are almost as many feminist methodologies as there are feminists.'[19] Historians, theologians and literary scholars have applied contrasting interpretative approaches to tackle the presence of conflicting gender ideologies in the same body of evidence. In what follows, I evaluate the major feminist studies of early medieval England,[20] which have variously emphasised or denied the influence of misogynistic doctrines on women's lives. I then show how my approach addresses the issues that have resulted in such vastly different conclusions.

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[16] Cameron, 'Virginity as Metaphor'.
[17] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. xviii.
[18] A more extensive survey of twentieth-century scholarship can be found in Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 1–9.
[19] Wilkinson, *Women and Modesty*, p. 21.
[20] I prefer the term 'early medieval' to 'Anglo-Saxon' for this study as it covers the writings of Goscelin, who was not Anglo-Saxon and wrote in the post-Conquest period.

In studies of early medieval England, as in other fields, 'the impetus behind feminist history was initially the same as that behind nineteenth-century philanthropy—rescuing our lost sisters.'[21] In the 1890s, feminist historians turned to the Anglo-Saxon era to recover the 'secret history' of women's independence.[22] As Lina Eckenstein wrote,

> We turn to a study of the past, confident that a clearer insight into the social standards and habits prevalent in past ages will aid us in a better estimation of the relative importance of those factors of change we find around us today. […] The right to self-development and social responsibility which the woman of today so persistently asks for, is in many ways analogous to the right which the convent secured to womankind a thousand years ago.[23]

What Eckenstein saw in Anglo-Saxon history were charismatic, authoritative, active women, and a church which was an enabler rather than an oppressor of female autonomy. These women were not passive recipients of responsibilities prescribed by ecclesiastical men, but active subjects redefining themselves in a changing society. This line of scholarship continued for most of the twentieth century. Doris Stenton, writing in 1957, concurred with Eckenstein that 'the evidence which has survived from Anglo-Saxon England indicates that women were then more nearly equal companions of their husbands and brothers than at any other period before the modern age,'[24] and was the first to argue that the status of women in England declined as a result of the Norman Conquest.

A similar conclusion was drawn by Christine Fell in 1986. She recognised the presence of misogynistic ideas in early Christian literature but argued that they were not 'socially actualised' until the late eleventh century: 'What is important is not whether such theories existed, or even how often they were repeated, it is the extent of their actual application within society as a whole, both secular and ecclesiastic. Throughout the Anglo-Saxon period they seem to have little practical effect.'[25] The reason for this, Fell argued, is the strong position women traditionally held in Anglo-Saxon England. She identified such activities as inheriting and holding property independently and rejecting marriage to practice celibacy as demonstrations that Anglo-Saxon women wielded considerable power and autonomy, which prevented the church's misogynistic teachings from influencing the lives of real historical women.

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[21] Matthews, 'Feminist History', 147.
[22] There had been earlier feminist historians (see, for example, Way, '"Our Mother-Tongue"', on the eighteenth-century antiquarian Elizabeth Elstob), but this period is the beginning of feminist history as a broader movement.
[23] Eckenstein, *Woman Under Monasticism*, p. ix.
[24] Stenton, *The English Woman in History*, p. 28.
[25] Fell, *Women in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 13.

This line of scholarship produced important revisions in our understanding of women's role in early English history and added long-neglected figures to the spotlight of mainstream history. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, however, attempts to recover legitimising models from the past became the subject of criticism for compromising the integrity of historical research. For instance, Fell, as Stephanie Hollis observed, 'does not draw much upon the specifically ecclesiastical sources that make up the bulk of the surviving documentation,'[26] such as any forms of ecclesiastical regulation, because she does not believe it reflects the actualities of Anglo-Saxon society. Conversely, Stephanie Hollis, Jo Ann McNamara, Suzanne Wemple and Jane Tibbets Schulenburg concentrated on the misogynistic motifs of early medieval English literature.[27] They acknowledged female agency in overcoming misogyny in rare cases but stressed the oppressive circumstances for women generally. Similarly, Jane Chance's study of women in Old English literature concluded that 'Anglo-Saxon society demanded passivity, rather than leadership and initiative, from most of its women. Those exceptions who became political, social or religious leaders and models did so only through great wisdom and chastity, virtues which—according to the metaphors used throughout the literature—were themselves considered heroic.'[28] In the twenty-first century, Clare Lees and Gillian Overing likewise turned to the works of Aldhelm, Bede and Old English hagiography to show the prejudicial treatment of their female subjects. They argue that women were purposefully silenced in surviving sources and 'deserve to be rescued… and afforded [their] own place in history'[29]—thus coming full circle to the goals of the nineteenth-century scholars. In more recent scholarship, as can be seen from the volume of essays on early medieval English women edited by Robin Norris, Rebecca Stephenson, and Renée Trilling, both approaches are embraced by different scholars.[30]

Both the early feminist view and its later antithesis share two methodological flaws. First, most of the scholars mentioned above tend to 'present the centuries before the Conquest as a single and largely undifferentiated period, sharply distinguished from the twelfth and later centuries with respect to attitudes to women.'[31] Scholars of Old English in particular treat the pre-Conquest

[26] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 5.
[27] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*; McNamara, *Sisters in Arms*; McNamara and Wemple, 'The Power of Women through the Family in Medieval Europe, 500–1100'; Schulenburg, 'Female Sanctity: Public and Private Roles, ca. 500–1100', 102–25; and Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*.
[28] Chance, *Woman as Hero*. Niles, 'The Problem of the Ending', draws a similar conclusion about the Old English *Wife's Lament*.
[29] Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 28.
[30] R. Norris, R. Stephenson, and R. R. Trilling (eds.), *Feminist Approaches*.
[31] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 4.

period as homogenous, even though the vernacular texts for which a date can be assigned crowd into the ninth and tenth centuries, and others are difficult to date at all, so any conclusions drawn about them should only be extended to 'the Anglo-Saxon age' with caution. For this reason, I have chosen to focus on Latin works—a body of material which makes it possible to show the changes between several periods of ecclesiastical development. In doing so, we may discover that 'rather than a monolithic "medieval view", a monovocalic discourse of misogyny, there was a diversity of opinion, even within what might broadly be termed "the Church" and even during periods of reform.'[32]

The second issue is that both lines of scholarship focus on only half of the paradoxical treatment of women in early medieval discourse, because they prioritise either the prescriptive, misogynistic elements of the texts or the transgressive depictions of women's power. What is needed to interrogate Aldhelm, Bede, and Goscelin's writings on cosmetics are methodological tools and frameworks that refuse to foreground either and instead interrogate the functions of both attitudes within one text. I borrow this approach from studies of late antiquity, most importantly Lynda Coon, who adopted a post-structuralist approach to early Christian literature:

> Recent work on women and early Christianity has been influenced by post-structuralist interpretations of the social and cultural construction of gender, sexuality, and the body. Historians focusing on these constructions examine the fluidity of gender models and the means by which various historical cultures recreate the categories of 'masculine' and 'feminine'.[33]

This methodology also considers more fully the relationship between author and text, as well as author and reader. Kate Cooper suggests that, rather than focusing on the practical application of misogynistic doctrines to women, early Christian literature should be interpreted for the spiritual messages it directs to the audience,[34] and Kim Power cautions that 'what is received in sources about women is not objective reality, but one vision of how reality ought to be.'[35] Literary evidence can be used only circumspectly to document the actual condition of late antique and early medieval Christian women because its primary aim was the spiritual transformation of the reader. Thus, although I examine both fictional and didactic works, I offer no conclusions on the 'social actualisation' of cosmetic theology. The aim of this thesis is not to uncover the lived realities of medieval women, were that even possible, but to show the range of competing ways that dress

[32] Scheck, *Reform and Resistance*, pp. 18–19.
[33] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. xx.
[34] Cooper, 'Insinuations of Womanly Influence', 151.
[35] Power, *Veiled Desire*, p. 15.

could be used to delineate the distinctive roles of men and women. In this way, this study responds to Joan Wallach Scott's definition of the genre of feminist history: 'The story is no longer about the things that have happened to women and men and how they have reacted to them; instead it is about how the subjective and collective meanings of women and men as categories of identity have been constructed.'[36] Through close reading, comparative analysis, and investigation of the historical context, I show how Latin authors from early medieval England utilised cosmetic theology to create a gendered conception of virtue.

Chapter Overview

In Chapter 1, I analyse the development and functions of cosmetic theology in late antiquity. Latin exegetes Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Prudentius and Pelagius provide a large collection of texts about early Christian women's cosmetics, which link the female body and its adornment to broader theological problems of sin, human agency, and the created order. I analyse their hortatory works addressed to women living under three different labels—virgins, widows, and wives—and compare their presentation of cosmetics to corresponding models in late antique hagiography. I conclude by examining the evidence for these works' presence in early medieval England, which underpins my subsequent analysis.

The second, third and fourth chapters examine the use of cosmetic theology by Aldhelm of Malmesbury, the Venerable Bede, and Goscelin of St. Bertin for their depiction of female virtue, showing how each author shaped the texts from Chapter 1 to his own goals and circumstances. I begin in Chapter 2 with Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, the first English work on monasticism, which combines direct instruction with hagiographical *exempla*. Chapter 3 examines Bede's commentaries on the biblical books which have been frequently used in cosmetic theology, namely, his *In Genesim*, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, and *In Cantica Canticorum*, and his presentation of women in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*. And Chapter 4 examines Goscelin's female hagiographies in conversation with the *Liber confortatorius*, a work of spiritual advice for a cloistered nun who used to be his student—a comparison which points to the disjunctions between ecclesiastical men's official stance on cosmetics and their relationships with individual women. These three authors pursue different and sometimes conflicting strategies towards representing ideal Christian

[36] Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, p. 6.

women, but they all draw on the late antique tradition which links theology and cosmetics to present a gendered view of sanctity, and for all three female virtue is never completely separated from the body.

Chapter 5 redresses the balance of evidence by showing that dress was also a moral issue for men. Through the works of Aldhelm, Bede, Alcuin, and Eadmer, I describe the influence of the institutionalization of the male priesthood on subsequent depictions of dress. I compare polemical writings and men's *vitae* to similar prescriptions for women and show how the rhetoric of modesty delineates distinctive theological roles for both sexes. This analysis demonstrates that, while the discourse of female modesty was highly entangled with sexuality, male modesty was divorced from sexual ethics and instead concerned the expression of authority.

I conclude that late antique writings on modesty exerted significant influence on the gendered perception of virtue in the Latin literature from early medieval England and that, despite their innovative emphasis on spirituality, Aldhelm, Bede and Goscelin were unable to divorce cosmetic theology from the gender hierarchy. Individual women could attain holiness, primarily by restraining their sexuality, but women, with very rare exceptions, continued to be seen as inferior to men, and their modesty—as a sign of subordination.

Chapter 1:
The Legacy of Late Antiquity

To understand what happened in England, we need first to consider how cosmetic theology developed in early ecclesiastical culture in the Mediterranean regions and how it was introduced into the northern reaches of Christendom. Late antiquity witnessed a proliferation of works disparaging women's adornment and promoting modest attire. Latin writers Tertullian, Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Prudentius and Pelagius as well as sacred texts and hagiography, linked women's adornment to broader theological issues of men's and women's relationship to God and their place in the created order. Individual texts and authors pursued independent and sometimes conflicting strategies towards finding theological grounds for female modesty, exemplifying 'a variety of approaches that were possible within the same basic Christian orientation'.[37] But questions of theology are intertwined with questions of social order, for all these texts effectively sustain a gender hierarchy. While modesty may have offered some women liberation from male authority, the authors discussed in this chapter are very cautious about what forms this liberation could take.

This chapter will serve as an introduction to the key principles of cosmetic theology in early Christian texts. These principles are grounded in the broader Christian disdain for worldly possessions and for sexuality, and the explicit aim of the works I discuss was to promote spiritual efforts over concerns for transient beauty. But by presenting women's bodies as dangerous unless meticulously restrained and concealed, cosmetic theology also supported women's subjection to male authority and made modesty a crucial requirement for a woman to be considered virtuous.

I will also discuss the available evidence for these texts' dissemination in early medieval England to evaluate the extent to which Aldhelm, Bede and Goscelin could have been influenced by early Christian approaches to constructing women's identity through cosmetic discourse.

[37] Colish, 'Cosmetic Theology', 12.

WOMEN, MODESTY AND THE *IMAGO DEI*

Emerging from within the Roman Empire, the early church followed the Greco-Roman and Hebrew ideologies, which, with few exceptions, defined men alone as rational, autonomous beings. Women, though capable of attaining sanctity, were not seen as equals to men: more often, they were presented as seductive, corrupting, and weak, which justified male control over them.[38] Cosmetic theology reflects these patriarchal values and gives them a theological foundation by rendering the female body, and especially its beautification, morally problematic. This is achieved through three main arguments which all writings on female dress in late antiquity present in some form: the argument of nature, the argument of gender difference, and the argument of shame.

1. The argument of nature

For writers in antiquity, *cosm*etics had something to do with the *cosm*os: as Amy Richlin observed, 'keeping the female body in order is an important aspect of keeping the universe in order.'[39] Richlin's comment reflects the position of Roman moralists, many of whom believed that following nature was the only way to live morally.[40] This view was shared by early Christian writers,[41] who connected their instructions regarding adornment to the creation narrative. Since all aspects of the universe including the human body were created by God, Christian exegetes argued that trying to change one's appearance was offensive to the Creator. According to Tertullian, 'non placet Deo quod non ipse produxit; nisi si non potuit purpureas et aerinas oues nasci iubere. Si potuit, ergo iam noluit; quod Deus noluit utique non licet fingi'[42] ('what He has not produced Himself is not pleasing to God, unless He was unable to order sheep to be born with purple and sky-blue fleeces. If He was able, then He was just unwilling: what God did not will ought not to be fashioned').

[38] Notable studies on women and patriarchy in the early church include Ruether, 'Misogynism and Virginal Feminism' and *Sexism and God-talk*; Coon, *Sacred Fictions*; DeConick *Holy Misogyny*; Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*.
[39] Richlin 'Making Up a Woman', 186. On the etymological connection, see *Oxford English Dictionary*, "cosmetic (*adj.* & *n.*)," July 2023, https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/6202538272.
[40] See Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism*, pp. 73–75 and Colish, 'Cosmetic Theology', 3–7.
[41] The adaptation of the Stoic idea for Christian theology is discussed in detail by Colish.
[42] Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* I.8.2, ed. Kroymann, *Opera* I, p. 350. Translations my own unless stated otherwise.

Similarly, Ambrose cautioned: 'pictus es ergo, o homo, pictus a domino deo tuo,' and therefore 'noli bonam delere picturam, non fuco sed ueritate fulgentem, non cera expressam sed gratia'[43] ('you, o human, are painted, painted by the Lord your God […] do not erase this good painting, shining not with paint but with truth, expressed not in wax but in grace'). But this seemingly straightforward principle did not apply to men and women in equal measure, because of the second argument of cosmetic theology.

2. *The argument of gender difference (and the problem of the* imago Dei)

The Christian scriptures state that men and women were created not only *by* God, but also *in the image* of God (Genesis I.27), which has implications for the ethics of dress and adornment. But while Christian exegetes agreed that men were reflections of the *imago Dei*, the status of women in relation to the image of God was a contested issue.

'Apparent contradictions regarding women's status in the earliest writings of the Church,' Scheck notes, 'point to internal contradictions in Christian doctrine.'[44] The account of the creation of Eve (Genesis II.21–24) justified the view that women were only necessary as 'helpers',[45] and the apostle Paul ratified this view of female deficiency in his first letter to the Corinthians when he explained that women must cover their heads: 'a man ought not to cover his head, being the image and glory of God, but the woman is a man's glory' (I Cor. XI.7). The contradiction between Paul and Genesis I.27 led early Christian exegetes to take directly opposing viewpoints on women's status in relation to the *imago Dei*. Some, like Cyprian and Ambrose, did not deny the *imago Dei* to women;[46] others, like Tertullian or Ambrosiaster, could entertain the notion that women were not made in the image of God at all.[47] An attempt to reconcile the two viewpoints, which went on to have a tremendous influence on medieval exegesis, was made by Augustine, who distinguished between the woman

[43] Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.8.47, ed. Schenkl, p. 238.
[44] Scheck, *Reform and Resistance*, p. 2.
[45] For instance, Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram* IX.5, ed. Zycha, p. 273: 'Aut si ad hoc adiutorium gignendi filios non est facta mulier viro, ad quod ergo adiutorium facta est? nondum erat labor, ut adiumento indigeret, et, si opus esset, melius adiutorium masculus fieret. Quanto enim congruentius ad convivendum et conloquendum duo amici pariter quam vir et mulier habitarent?' ('But if the woman was not made to help the man by bearing sons, for what help was she made? There wasn't yet labour, for which he would need assistance, and if there was, a man would have been a better helper. How much more suitable would two equal friends be to live and talk together than a man living with a woman?').
[46] Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 3 (ed. Keenan, p. 44); Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.8.47 (ed. Schenkl, p. 238).
[47] Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* I.1.2, ed. Kroymann, p. 343; Ambrosiaster, *Commentary on I Corinthians*.

as *homo* (reflecting God's image because she has a rational mind) and the woman as *femina* (not reflecting God's image because of her sexualised body).[48]

Whatever view these late antique theologians may have held regarding women and the *imago Dei*, they all agreed on the central point of Paul's message: that women's secondary creation renders them different from and inferior to men, and this difference and inferiority should be made visible by means of dress. Paul makes this clear in the same letter: 'Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering' (I Cor. XI.14–15). This passage exemplifies the entanglement of nature and culture that characterises cosmetic theology: the demarcation of gender by hairstyle and dress, which is a matter of culture, is constructed as a requirement of nature because it demonstrates the divinely established order of creation, in which men are superior to women.

The arguments of nature and inferiority, ultimately intertwined, can be illustrated by a passage from Prudentius's poem *Hamartigenia* ('The Origin of Sin'), which condemns womanly adornments as unnatural and attributes the desire to be beautiful to the weakness of the female sex:

> nec enim contenta decore
> ingenito externam mentitur femina formam
> ac, velut artificis Domini manus inperfectum
> os dederit, quod adhuc res exigat aut hyacinthis
> pingere sutilibus redimitae frontis in arce,
> colla vel ignitis sincera incingere sertis,
> auribus aut gravidis virides suspendere bacas,
> nectitur et nitidis concharum calculus albens
> crinibus aureolisque riget coma texta catenis.
> taedet sacrilegas matrum percurrere curas,
> muneribus dotata Dei quae plasmata fuco
> inficiunt, ut pigmentis cutis inlita perdat
> quod fuerat, falso non agnoscenda colore.
> haec sexus male fortis agit, cui pectore in arto
> mens fragilis facili vitiorum fluctuat aestu.[49]
>
> Not content with natural beauty,
> woman feigns an appearance that's not hers
> and, as if the hand of God, her maker, gave her
> an unfinished face, which she still has to complete, either adorning it
> with sapphires strung together into a crown on her forehead,
> or surrounding her pure neck with glowing necklaces,

[48] Augustine, *De genesi ad litteram* VI.6.10, ed. Zycha, p. 177. See Power, *Veiled Desire*, pp. 132–57.
[49] Prudentius, *Hamartigena* ll. 264–78, ed. Thomson, p. 222.

or hanging green jewels on burdened ears,
and little white stones from sea-shells are fastened in her gleaming hair,
and her hair is woven to stiffness with golden chains.
It is tiring to list the profane cares of matrons,
who stain with makeup the forms God gave them,
so that the painted skin loses what it was, unrecognisable in its false colour.
These are the things which the weaker sex does,
in whose narrow breast a frail intelligence tosses lightly on the waves of sin.

Thus, paradoxically, although ornamentation is against nature, women, through their inherent weakness, naturally covet ornamentation.

3. *The argument of shame*

The key difference between men and women's nature was women's potential for seduction. Although they might bear the image of God in their inmost being, women as corporeal creatures were deemed dangerous for their ability to provoke the concupiscence of men. Even those authors who afforded women a more dignified position as *imago Dei* could not imagine a reason for women to enhance their appearance other than for seduction.[50]

Women's seductive potential is another rationale behind Paul's requirement of head coverings, as concealing the hair would visibly demonstrate a woman's concern for shame.[51] In other words, the observation of chastity demanded a visual performance of this virtue through dress, and later writers would go so far as to say that a woman can only be considered chaste if her sexual purity is accompanied by a modest appearance of dress and grooming. Thus, as Colish observed, Christian theology holds the natural condition of women as intrinsically flawed 'not on account of any conscious choices they may have made but because of the inadvertent erotic effect that they have on the opposite sex. Men may sin when they improve on nature but women sin whether they improve on nature or adhere to it.'[52]

As can be seen, modest attire was far from a trivial cultural requirement. Cosmetic theology created the impression for women that their fleshly bodies were inherently dangerous, and their very salvation could depend on the way they dressed. The rest of this chapter analyses how the arguments outlined above were presented to women in two separate but related forms of literature. The first are hortatory writings, which directly addressed women about the issue of modesty; the

[50] Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 9 (ed. Keenan, p. 52); Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.8.47 (ed. Schenkl, p. 238).
[51] On hair, shame, and sexuality in the ancient world, see Levine, 'The Gendered Grammar of Ancient Mediterranean Hair'.
[52] Colish, 'Cosmetic Theology', 8.

second are saints' lives, which depicted exemplary behaviour and often 'voiced' women's 'own' reflections on dress and ethics. This discussion is divided into sections according to the three kinds of female chastity recognised in patristic literature: virginity, widowhood, and marriage.[53] As will be seen, no matter what rank a woman held in this hierarchy of chastity, cosmetic theology demanded that her dress should reflect her concern for shame and subordination.

VIRGINS

Hortatory literature

Women who vowed their virginity to God were widely revered in the Christian church, making consecrated virginity a desirable alternative to marriage. But while consecrated virgins were thought to receive the highest rewards in heaven, they also faced considerable pressure because their purity was always under suspicion. As monastic culture was only beginning to take shape in late antiquity, most women's vow of virginity was distinctly private and did not include the surrender of property; as a result, many consecrated virgins sought a life of close union with God without giving up the comforts they were accustomed to and were not governed by strictly defined rules. Consequently, the dress code for virgins became a matter of heated dispute.

The key source for late antique cosmetic theology is Tertullian of Carthage (ca. 155–220), who was active a few decades before the start of the period known as late antiquity (ca. 250–750). Tertullian wrote to consecrated virgins to correct what he saw as a dangerous and sinful practice: the virgins' custom of keeping their hair unveiled. His treatise, *De virginibus velandis* ('On Virgins, Who Ought to Be Veiled'), made the case for the veil with one central point: female virgins are women. Thus, the rules of cosmetic theology apply to them as well. He justified the veiling of virgins by recalling the dangers of the male gaze: a virgin, in his view, should strive not to be seen at all, least of all show her bare head, lest she provoke the lust of men and imperil her virginity.[54] But what Tertullian disparaged most of all, as D'Angelo shows, 'is the long and widely held conviction that virginity does indeed bestow transcendence of sex, indeed of gender.'[55] Tertullian insisted that the

[53] This division was popularised by Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, who had each compared these three states to the hundred-fold, sixty-fold and thirty-fold fruit of the biblical parable (Matthew 33. 8, Mark 4. 8)—see Ambrose, *De virginibus*, I.10.60 (ed. Dückers, pp. 198–200); Jerome, *Ep.* 48.11 (ed. Hilberg, pp. 365–67); Augustine, *De sancta virginitate* XLV (ed. Zycha, p. 290).
[54] Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 17.1–3, ed. Dekkers, *Opera II*, p. 1125.
[55] D'Angelo, 'Veils, Virgins, and the Tongues', p. 149.

virgins' unveiling is an insult to God's creation and a threat to the natural hierarchy: 'Si caput mulieris vir est, utique et virginis… nisi si virgo tertium genus est monstruosum aliquod sui capitis'[56] ('If man is the head of woman, he is also [the head] of the virgin… unless she is a monstrous third gender with a head of its own').[57]

Tertullian thus presented modesty as a natural requirement, and in another treatise, addressed to all women, he explicitly linked the need for modest attire to the Genesis narrative of Eve's transgression:

> Tu es diaboli ianua; tu es arboris illius resignatrix […] tu imaginem Dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti; propter tuum meritum, id est mortem, etiam filius Dei mori habuit: et adornari tibi in mente est super pelliceas tuas tunicas?[58]
>
> You are the devil's gateway: you are the unsealer of the tree [of knowledge] […] You have so easily destroyed God's image, man. Because of your reward – that is, death – even the son of God had to die. And you think about adorning yourself above your tunics of skins?

For Tertullian, women had to show penance for Eve's sin by dressing modestly in subordination to men—and virgins were no exception. As Elliott observes,

> Tertullian's response was to insist that these virgins were not only women but matrons of a sort, who must wear veils as a sign of their submission to their celestial bridegroom, Christ. Despite constant reiterations that virginity was primarily a state of mind among church authorities, Tertullian's embodied literalism was the wave of the future. As the female religious vocation developed, Christ's bride became ever more embodied, physical integrity jockeying with mental integrity for the prize.[59]

Tertullian's arguments appear to have worked: by the time of Cyprian, bishop of Carthage from 249 to 258, the veil was no longer a contested issue. The attire of virgins, however, continued to cause controversy, and Cyprian's treatise, *De habitu virginum* ('On the Attire of Virgins'), addressed the wealthy virgins of his congregation to remind them that 'continentia uero et pudicitia non in sola carnis integritate consistit sed etiam in cultus et ornatus honore pariter ac pudore' ('continence and chastity consist not alone in the purity of the body, but also in dignity as well as in modesty of dress and adornment'[60]).

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[56] Tertullian, *De virginibus velandis* 7.1, ed. Dekkers, *Opera II*, p. 1216.
[57] On the concept of virginity as a 'third gender' in Anglo-Saxon England, see MacDaniel, *The Third Gender*.
[58] Tertullian, *De cult. fem.* I.1.2, ed. Kroymann, p. 343.
[59] Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell*, p. 3.
[60] Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 5, ed. and trans. Keenan, p. 47.

For Cyprian, who was deeply influenced by the writings of Tertullian, the dedication of virginity to Christ was insufficient—indeed, impossible —without rejecting external finery.[61] Like Tertullian, Cyprian condemned cosmetics and jewellery as unnatural, chastising virgins for piercing their ears, wearing colourful garments, and dying their hair.[62] Their beauty, he argued, was not only artificial but also dangerous to men:

> Certum si tu te sumptuosius comas et per publicum notabiliter incedas, oculos in te iuuentutis inlicias, suspiria adulescentium post te trahas […] ut etsi ipsa non pereas, alios tamen perdas et uelut gladium te et uenenum uidentibus praebeas, excusari non potes, quasi mente casta sis et pudica.
>
> But if you adorn yourself too elaborately and appear conspicuous in public, if you attract to yourself the eyes of the youth, draw after you the sighs of young men… so that, without perhaps losing your own soul, you nevertheless ruin others and offer yourself a sword and poison, as it were, to those who behold you, you cannot be excused on the ground that your mind is chaste and pure.[63]

By the time Cyprian wrote his treatise, the notion that women dress up for male attention seems to have been widely accepted (at least by men). For this reason, Cyprian appears anxious that the ostentatious dress of consecrated virgins may negatively impact the reputation of his church and his authority as bishop. He reminded the virgins of the 'infames earum ac detestabiles fabulas' ('the notorious and detestable gossip about them'[64]) and came to the astounding conclusion that a virgin who dresses conspicuously loses her virginity: 'Sic dum ornari cultius, dum liberius euagari uirgines uolunt, esse uirgines desinunt' ('hence virgins in desiring to be adorned more elegantly, to go about more freely, cease to be virgins'[65]). In other words, although the veil became an accepted mark of a virgin's concern for chastity, by Cyprian's time it was no longer enough, and the discourse of shame created an inseparable link between virginity and modesty.

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[61] A comprehensive table of parallels between Cyprian's *De habitu virginum* and Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum* can be found in Keenan's introduction (pp. 13–27).

[62] Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 14, ed. and trans. Keenan, p. 59: 'Neque enim Deus coccineas aut purpureas oues fecit aut herbarum sucis et conchyliis tinguere et colorare lanas docuit […] an uulnera inferri auribus Deus uoluit, quibus innocens adhuc infantia et mali saecularis ignara crucietur, ut postea de aurium cicatricibus et cauernis pretiosa grana dependeant, grauia etsi non suo pondere, mercium tamen quantitate?' ('For God has not made sheep scarlet or purple, nor has He taught how to tint and colour with the juices of herbs and with shell fish […] Has God wished that wounds be inflicted on the ears, by which childhood still innocent and without knowledge of the world may be tortured, so that later from the incisions and holes in the ears precious stones may hang – heavy, although not by their own weight but by their high prices?')

[63] *Ibid.* 9, ed. and trans. Keenan, p. 53.

[64] *Ibid.* 20, ed. and trans. Keenan, p. 65.

[65] *Ibid.*

Later authors, notably Ambrose (c. 339–397), attempted to present virginal modesty as a liberating practice by popularising the idea of 'spiritual adornment'. Ambrose, building on Cyprian, encouraged virgins to metaphorically adorn their souls with virtues just like ordinary women adorn their bodies for their earthly bridegrooms.[66] According to Ambrose's *De virginibus*, married women were shackled by their jewellery like slaves, whereas ascetic virgins had a superior kind of adornment, their virtues, which they put on for a superior bridegroom—Christ:

> Vos vero, beatae virgines, quae talia tormenta potius quam ornamenta nescitis, quibus pudor sanctus verecunda suffusus ora et bona castitas est decori, non humanis addictae oculis alieno errore merita vestra pensatis. habetis sane et vos vestrae militiam pulchritudinis, cui virtutis militat forma, non corporis, quam nulla extinguit aetas, nulla eripere mors potest, nulla aegritudo corrumpere. solus formae arbiter petitur deus, qui etiam in corpore minus pulchro diligat animas pulchriores.[67]
>
> But you, blessed virgins, who do not know such torments, much less such ornaments, to whom holy modesty, a blushing face and good chastity are beauty, [you] do not, intent upon human eyes, consider as your merits what is earned by another's error. You, too, have your own army of attractions, which is served by the beauty of virtues, not of the body, which no age can extinguish, no death can take away, no sickness can spoil. God alone is sought as the judge of beauty, who loves even in less beautiful bodies more beautiful souls.

But the rhetoric of spiritual adornment, as Power observed, also 'allowed the social constraints on Roman matrons to be prescribed for the "brides of Christ", [whose] seclusion could be greater than other women's, for their divine Bridegroom possesses divine honour and so consequently the power to shame is likewise enhanced.'[68] A similar instance of cosmetic theology bound up with the discourse of the virgin bride is Pelagius's letter on virginity, which describes a virgin's spiritual wardrobe, with its pearls of chastity, tunics of charity, and rouge of modesty,[69] and immediately cautions that *physical* adornment is offensive to her divine Bridegroom:

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[66] Ambrose, *De virginibus* I.7.37, ed. Dückers, p. 162: 'corporis species virginalis spiritu consecrata divino formae suae adquirit augmentum' ('the appearance of the virginal body, consecrated by the divine spirit, gains an increase in its own beauty'). Cf. Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 13 (ed. Keenan, p. 56).

[67] Ambrose, *De virginibus*, I.6.30, ed. Dückers, p. 150. Cf. I.9.54, ed. Dückers, p. 192: 'Cernis ut pomparum ferculis similis incedat quae se componit ut placeat, omnium in se vultus et ora convertens, eo ipso quo studet placere deformior; prius enim populo displicet quam placeat viro. At in vobis reiecta decoris cura plus decet hoc ipsum quod vos non ornatis ornatus est' ('You see how she goes about, resembling idols at processions, she makes herself up to please, and draws everyone's eyes and faces to herself, [but] precisely by that through which she strives to please, [she appears] all the more ugly; indeed, she displeases the people sooner than she pleases her husband. But the rejection of concern for beauty becomes you more; and precisely this, that you do not adorn yourselves, is your adornment').

[68] Power, *Veiled Desire*, p. 67.

[69] Pelagius, *De virginitate* 12.1, ed. Halm, p. 242 (in Halm's edition, the text is attributed to 'Pseudo-Sulpicius').

> caue ergo ne cui uel concupiscendi occasionem tribuas, quia sponsus tuus Deus zelans est: criminosior est enim Christi adultera quam mariti. […] uirginem te in omnibus exhibe: nihil corruptionis obiciatur capiti tuo.
>
> make sure you do not give any man a chance to lust after you, since God is a jealous husband, and it is a greater offence to commit adultery against Christ than against a husband […] Show that you are a virgin in all respects: let no suspicion of corruption be cast upon your person.[70]

In other words, Christian moralists viewed external beauty as a danger to the virgin's purity and reputation and used cosmetic theology to try to compel consecrated virgins to eschew any external adornment—or better yet, to avoid being seen completely.

Thus, the poet Prudentius (347–c. 413) made visibility a point of contrast between Christian consecrated virgins and their pagan counterparts, the Vestals:

> sunt et virginibus pulcherrima praemia nostris:
> et pudor et sancto tectus velamine vultus,
> et privates honos nec nota et publica forma.[71]
>
> [Our] virgins too have illustrious rewards:
> modesty, and a face covered with the holy veil,
> and private honour, and their figure not being known to the public.

Christian modesty, according to Prudentius, is superior because it requires a retiring life, while the Vestal is a public figure, travelling with a retinue and with her face uncovered in an ostentatious display for all the city to see:

> interea dum torta vagos ligat infula crines
> fatalesque adolet prunas innupta sacerdos,
> fertur per medias ut publica pompa plateas
> pilento residens molli, seque ore retecto
> inputat attonitae virgo spectabilis urbi.
> […] sedet illa verendis
> vittarum insignis phaleris fruiturque lanistis.[72]
>
> Meanwhile, as the twisted band ties her straying locks
> and the unwedded priestess keeps the coals of destiny burning,
> she is carried through the middle of the streets as if in a public procession,
> sitting in a soft carriage, and with uncovered face
> the outstanding virgin obliges the astonished city.
> She sits conspicuous with the dreadful trappings
> of her ribbons and enjoys what the trainers of gladiators have produced.

[70] *Ibid.* 19, ed. Halm, pp. 249–50.
[71] Prudentius, *Contra Symmachum* 2.1055–57, ed. Thomson, p. 90.
[72] *Ibid.* 2.1084–95.

As Lewis observes, 'the description of the Vestal as *spectabilis,* "visible, conspicuous" (1090) as she makes her way to the amphitheatre is picked up by her own active watching: *visura* (1092), *spectatura* (1094) and *spectant* (1110, referring to the collective Vestals).'[73] This is contrasted with the Christian virgins' modest gaze: not only should Christian virgins not make a spectacle of themselves, but they should also avoid looking at violent sights (such as gladiatorial games) which Prudentius labels immodest.

Just how closely sight was bound up with virtue and how contested the virgins' appearance continued to be in the fourth century can also be discerned from the letters of Jerome (c. 342/47–420).[74] Writing to a consecrated virgin, Jerome described the behaviour of Christian virgins who wear conspicuous dress, disparaging their attire alongside drunkenness and promiscuity:

> Purpura tantum in veste sit tenuis, et laxius, ut crines decidant, ligatum caput, soccus vilior et per humeros maforte volitans, strictae manicae bracchiis adhaerentes et solutis genibus fractus incessus: haec est apud illas tota virginitas.[75]
>
> They have only a narrow stripe of purple on their dress and a somewhat loose headband, so that their hair falls down, cheap slippers and a mantle fluttering from their shoulders, narrow sleeves fitting closely to the arms, and a loose-kneed gait: this is about all the virginity they possess.

Despite this vehement attack on adornment, Jerome could be equally suspicious of modest dress, accusing ascetic virgins of trying to attract the notice of men with their extreme pallor or tantalisingly concealed faces.[76] The dress of true virgins, he wrote, 'nec satis munda nec sordida et nulla diversitate notabilis, ne ad te obvia praetereuntium turba consistat et digito demonstreris'[77] ('should be neither very clean nor filthy, and not noticeable by any strangeness lest you attract the

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[73] Lewis, 'Gender and Violence', p. 133.

[74] When dealing with Jerome's instructions on dress, it is important to remember that during his lifetime, he was seen not as a church father but as 'a non-practicing priest… who was officially pronounced a miscreant *twice* in one decade by the high-profile sees at Rome (385) and Jerusalem (394)' (Cain, 'Rethinking Jerome's Portraits', p. 48; on Jerome's expulsion from Rome see Cain, *The Letters of Jerome*, 99–128). By creating a strict moral code of dress for consecrated virgins, he probably aimed to bolster his claim to spiritual authority and visually distinguish himself and his followers from other Christian groups.

[75] Jerome, *Ep.* 22.13, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 160.

[76] Jerome, *Ep.* 117.7, ed. Hilberg, vol. 2, p. 430: 'Uestis ipsa uilis et pulla animi tacentis indicium est, si rugam non habeat, si per terram, ut altior uidearis, trahatur, si de industria dissuta sit tunica, ut aliquid intus appareat operiatque, quod foedum est, et aperiat, quod forosum. Caliga quoque ambulantis nigella ac nitens stridore iuuenes ad se uocat. […] Et quando in publico quasi per uerecundiam operit faciem, lupanarum arte id solum ostendit, quod ostensum magis placere potest' ('Your very dress, cheap and dark, is evidence of your unspoken feelings, if it has no creases, if it drags along the ground, so that you appear taller, if your tunic is artfully ripped to show and hide what is beneath—hide what is repulsive and show what is beautiful. Also, while walking, your shiny little black shoes with their creaking call young men to follow you. […] And when in public you cover your face as if out of modesty, with the skill of a prostitute you show only your most pleasing features').

[77] Jerome, *Ep.* 22.27, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 183.

attention of passers-by and have fingers pointing at you'). That is, what Jerome criticised is not so much the virgins' attire as their ability to attract notice and receive public praise.[78] Just like Tertullian (whose works he recommended to his protégés as manuals of instruction[79]), Jerome used cosmetic theology to deny the virgins' right to prominence and respect in the church, as well as assert his own authority as a spiritual teacher. Virginity that is noticed is not virginity: displaying it is nearly equal to prostitution. The fear that virgins may view their status as superior to that of ordinary men also led Jerome to prohibit male dress and hairstyles for consecrated virgins. Even if they transcended the limitations of their gender through practices of self-denial, they were not and could not be equal to men: 'Aliae virili habitu, veste mutata, erubescunt feminae esse, *quod natae sunt*, crinem amputant et inpudenter erigunt facies eunuchinas'[80] ('others wear the garments of men, changing their attire, ashamed to be *what they were born*: women; they cut off their hair and shamelessly lift up their eunuch-like faces').

In this sense, the early Christian requirements for virginal dress resemble the contradictions and ambiguities of today's female uniforms. As Craik observes, 'some aspects of [the uniform] are directed towards the acquisition of a second-rank array of attributes of masculinity—discipline, achievement, and conformity,' but these are counter-balanced by elements which mark the wearer as feminine, such as skirts or long hair: 'They are not men—but they are marked out from non-uniformed attributes of femininity'.[81] In other words, the authors discussed in this section were seeking theological grounds for making Christian virgins visually distinct from other women while maintaining the boundaries of gender and thus the created order.

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[78] See Jerome, *Ep.* 22.13, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 161: 'Hae sunt, quae per publicum notabiliter incedunt et furtiuis oculorum nutibus adulescentium gregem post se trahunt' ('There are some who go out to attract notice, and with secret winks attract troops of young men to follow after them'). Cf. note 69 above.

[79] *Ep.* 22.22 (ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, pp. 174–75), *Ep.* 107.12 (ed. Hilberg, vol. 2, p. 303). For a discussion of Tertullian's influence on Jerome see Adkin, 'Tertullian in Jerome (Epist. 22,37, 1f.)'; and for the influence of Cyprian on Jerome's letters, see Keenan, pp. 36–38.

[80] Jerome, *Ep.* 22.27, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 184 (my emphasis). Cf. the Synod of Gangra, canon 17: 'Si qua mulier, propter eam quae existimatur pietatis exercitationem, comam tondeat, *quam Deus ei dedit in memoriam subjectionis*, ut quae subjectionis praeceptum dissolvat, anathema sit' ('If any woman from pretended asceticism, shall cut off her hair, *which God gave her as a reminder of her subjection*, as though annulling the order of subjection, let her be anathema' (my emphasis)). Jerome was willing to allow short hair for women if it was not known, citing the example of the desert mothers, who 'crinem monasteriorum matribus offerant desecandum non intecto postea contra apostoli uoluntatem incessurae capite sed ligato pariter ac uelato. Nec hoc quisquam praeter tondentes nouit et tonsas' ('get their hair cut by the mothers of the monasteries, not to go about afterwards with uncovered heads, against the apostle's command, but with their heads bound [in a cap] and veiled. And no one knows this except the ones cutting the hair and the ones being shorn' (*Ep.* 147.5, ed. Hilberg, vol. 3, p. 321).

[81] Craik, 'The Cultural Politics of the Uniform', 140.

Hagiography

While surviving letters to consecrated virgins agree that their appearance must be natural, feminine, and unadorned, the picture presented by hagiography is more complicated. The authors of sacred biographies had to account for the pre-existing legends, the expectations of the communities they were writing for and the contemporary discourse of modesty. Moreover, while a large proportion of moral writings on female modesty crowd into the fourth century, hagiographical accounts are often difficult to date and reflect a wider range of ideas about female modesty. Nevertheless, late antique depictions of holy virgins share in some if not all principles of cosmetic theology, connecting adornment to sexuality and praising their subjects for overcoming their seductive nature to devote their virginity to Christ.

One of the most famous examples of an early Christian virgin whose sanctity was reflected by her modest dress was St. Agnes, a third-century martyr. Agnes was one of the most popular saints of Rome, and there was a long tradition, both oral and written, behind her legend as it was inherited by her sixth-century hagiographer.[82] This author identified himself as 'Ambrosius episcopus', evidently aware that the bishop had composed several treatises on virginity and attempting 'to pass off the present *passio* […] as a work of Ambrose, to ensure for it a wider audience'.[83] While the attribution to Ambrose is false,[84] the author's approach to constructing female sanctity in this *vita* echoes Ambrose's *De virginibus*. The account of Agnes relies heavily on the *topos* of 'spiritual adornment', forging a link between virginal chastity and modest attire. The author narrates that Agnes inflamed the desire of a wealthy pagan youth but rejected his offer of marriage and his precious gifts: 'detulerant secum pretiosissima ornamenta, quae a beata Agne veluti quaedam stercora sunt recusata' ('he brought with him precious ornaments, which were refused by St Agnes as if they were some kind of excrement'[85]). A little later, Agnes gives an explanation:

> 'Discede a me, fomes peccati, nutrientum facinoris, pabulum mortis: discede a me; quia jam ab alio amatore praeventa sum, qui mihi satis Meliora obtulit ornamenta, et annulo fidei suae subarrhavit me, longe te nobilior et genere et dignitate. Ornavit inaestimabili dextrocherio dextram meam, et collum meum cinxit lapidibus pretiosis. Tradidit auribus meis inaestimabiles margaritas, et circumdedit me vernantibus atque coruscantibus gemmis. Posuit signam in faciem meam, ut nullum praeter ipsum amatorem admittam.

[82] *Passio Sanctae Agnetis* (hereafter *PSA*), *BHL* 156, ed. Migne, *PL* XVII, cols. 735–42, trans. Lapidge, *Roman Martyrs*.
[83] Lapidge, *Roman Martyrs*, p. 351.
[84] See Lanéry, *Ambroise de Milan*, pp. 355–61, 369–71.
[85] *PSA* 2 (*PL* XVII, col. 735); trans. Lapidge, p. 354.

> Induit me cyclade auro texta, et immensis monilibus ornavit me. Ostendit mihi therauros incomparabiles, quos mihi se datum repromisit, si in ejus perseveravero amore.'
>
> 'Depart from me, you torch of sin, nourishment of crime, fodder of death: depart from me, because I have been taken up by another lover, who gave me quite pleasing ornaments, and engaged me with the ring of his faith, (a lover) more noble than you both by kin and by station. He adorned my right arm with an unimaginable bracelet, and surrounded my neck with precious stones; he placed on my ears pearls of incalculable price, and wrapped me with glistening and shining gems. He put his sign on my face, so that I would admit no lover but him. He dressed me in a gown woven from gold, and adorned me with immense necklaces. He revealed to me incomparable treasures, which he promised to give to me if I should remain constant to him.'[86]

The spiritual adornment Agnes hopes to receive from her heavenly bridegroom eventually materialises when the steadfast virgin is stripped naked and led into a brothel, where

> Cumque se in orationem Domino prostravisset, apparuit ante oculos ejus stola candidissima, et apprehendens eam induit se […] Ita namque ad mensuram corpusculi ejus aptum erat indumentum, et ita nimio candore conspicium, ut nullus dubitaret hoc angelicis manibus praeparatum.
>
> When she prostrates herself to the Lord in prayer, a shining white robe appeared before her eyes […] The cloak was so suitable to the size of her little body, and so gleaming in its brightness, that no one could think that it had been fashioned by anything other than angelic hands.[87]

Agnes's unearthly garment becomes the irrefutable proof of the grace of God and helps her to transform the brothel into a house of prayer. The trope of divinely-given garments as a defence of chastity appears to be an innovation in Christian literature,[88] most likely inspired by the idea of spiritual adornment as developed by patristic theologians. Thus, although the young martyr endures the trials with soldierly fortitude and even preaches to the crowd gathered for her execution,[89] cosmetic theology helps to code Agnes's sanctity as distinctly feminine. As McDaniel observes, in this and other accounts of virgin martyrs, 'the virgins demonstrate the soldierly masculine fortitude of their souls through their steadfast resistance to paganism and the material allurements of marriage and wealth, but they also evince the feminine desire of a bride for her bridegroom,'[90] which includes the conventional desire for precious ornaments, in this case spiritual. Her conversionary achievement is likewise curtailed by the appearance of the angelic

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[86] *PSA* 3 (*PL* XVII, col. 736); trans. Lapidge, p. 354.
[87] *PSA* 8 (*PL* XVII, cols. 738–39); trans. Lapidge, p. 357.
[88] See Bossu, 'Steadfast and Shrewd Heroines', for a comparison of the plot of 'virginity pursued' in Christian *vitae* and the Greek novel.
[89] *PSA* 10.
[90] McDaniel, 'Agnes among the Anglo-Saxons', 222.

garment: it is not Agnes's proselytising but the material—and feminine—token of divine favour that converts the sinners in the brothel. The *topos* of spiritual adornment and the association between modesty and virginity are used both to exalt Agnes's saintly power and to limit it.

Many other virgin martyrs follow a similar model and will be discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Crucially, the trope of 'spiritual adornment', whereby virtues or even the virgins themselves are represented as ornaments, became a staple of female hagiography—despite the objections voiced against feminine ornamentation. Thus, Prudentius, who had denounced jewellery as false and presumptuous in *Hamartigenia*, was happy to depict chaste women as necklaces in the *Peristephanon* ('Crowns of Martyrdom'):

nunc addo gemmas nobiles,	Now in addition I give you noble jewels,
ne pauperem Christum putes,	so you do not think Christ is poor,
gemmas corusci luminis,	jewels of flashing light,
ornatur hoc templum quibus.	with which this temple is adorned.
cernis sacratas virgines,	You see consecrated virgins,
miraris intactas anus	admire chaste old women,
primique post damnum tori	who after the loss of their first marriage-bed
ignis secundi nescias.	have known no second passion.
hoc est monile ecclesiae,	This is the Church's necklace,
his illa gemmis comitur;	by these gems she is beautified;
dotata sic Christo placet,	thus endowed she pleases Christ,
sic ornat altum verticem.[91]	thus she adorns her high head.

For Prudentius, as Cyprian and Ambrose before him, modesty is a distinguishing characteristic of Christian virginity but, paradoxically, modesty allows the virgin to transcend the profane associations of adornment and acquire—or become—a jewel of a higher order. The notion that virgins and widows are the Church's ornaments, however, once again underscores the limitation of women to and by the body—and thus the limitation of men by the temptation of the female body. Their primary value is still their beauty, albeit a beauty that has transcended into the spiritual realm.

Late antique hagiography does present several examples of women who broke the prescriptions of cosmetic theology, particularly those who ignored the prohibition against wearing men's clothes and cutting their hair, such as St Thecla. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, the holy woman renounced both her family and her fiancé after learning about the chaste life from the apostle Paul. Thecla became Paul's disciple and asked him to tonsure her and let her preach, which Paul refused to do. After being captured and escaping her torturers, Thecla baptized herself,

[91] Prudentius, *Liber peristephanon* 2.297–308, ed. Thomson, p. 126.

cut her hair and put on male dress. Following Paul to Myra, she was finally able to convince him of her worth and received his permission to preach.[92] Thecla's masculine dress and short hair presumably symbolised her rejection of marriage and the subordinate position of a wife under Roman patriarchy. It appears that her hagiographer viewed her behaviour as permissible, as her virginity allowed her to transgress the limitations placed on married women. But while the *vita* of Agnes had unquestionable success, the *Acts of Paul* had a mixed reception. Tertullian denounced the work as heretical for its depiction of Thecla's transgressive behaviour,[93] and a later version of the *vita* had to defend the saint's attire as a form of submission rather than transgression: 'In this account,' Schulenburg writes, 'Thecla justifies the act of cutting off her hair and altering her appearance as a strategy to conceal her beauty. Specifically, the removal of her "beguiling" hair would permit her to avoid the looks of the over curious, while male disguise would preserve her from torture.'[94] In other words, the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* are a relic of the tradition which viewed consecrated virgins as equals of men; but later centuries, influenced by Tertullian and Jerome's vision of cosmetic theology, favoured the virgin bride over the virgin preacher.

This brief overview makes it clear that cosmetic theology was closely aligned with the overall contempt for sexuality and material wealth in Christian literature. But in discourses about female virgins, it served the additional role of emphasising their subordinate position in the natural hierarchy. Although virgins were thought to surpass all other women because they rejected sexual relations, their prominence caused significant anxiety about the significance of their dress.

WIDOWS

Hortatory literature

Although widows were thought to receive a lesser reward in heaven than virgins, they were also held in high regard and could play extremely influential roles in the Christian community. Wealthy patrician widows were especially prominent within ecclesiastical circles: 'They were the only lay persons who accumulated all the attributes of effective members of the clergy, barring

[92] *Acta Pauli et Theclae,* ed. Lipsius and Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum,* pp. 253–72. Thecla's story was also transmitted as *Passio S. Theclae*, most recensions of which (*BHL* 8020a-8024m) are edited by Von Gebhardt.
[93] Tertullian, *De baptismo* 17.5, ed. Borleffs, *Opera I*, pp. 291–92.
[94] Schulenburg, *Forgetful of Their Sex*, p. 156.

the crucial prerogative of ordained service at the altar.'[95] At the same time, stereotypes about 'bad' widows reveal apprehensions about the dangers of their wealth and independence: excessive spending on food and clothing, drunkenness, and seeking lovers or new husbands.[96] The latter is especially important because, although second marriages were permitted, Paul the Apostle encouraged widows to remain chaste (I Corinthians 7. 8), and the Church Fathers continued to do the same. The close attention paid to adornment in instructional writings on widowhood reveals the same anxieties about chastity that we encountered in texts about virgins. Since elaborate clothing and makeup could incite male lust, widows had to prove their concern for chastity by eschewing any external finery.

Ambrose argued in his treatise on widowhood that a widow's attire is her defence against accusations of promiscuity: 'vidua, quae probandae subsidium virginitatis amiserit, non in voce obstetricis, sed in suis moribus habet castitatis examen'[97] ('a widow, who has lost the help of provable virginity, demonstrates her chastity not by the testimony of a midwife, but by her own manner of life'). Plain clothing and avoidance of makeup, alongside fasting and acts of charity thus become the visual manifestation of the widow's dedication to Christ. In fact, Ambrose encouraged widows to disregard bodily care almost entirely: 'afficias corpus tuum quasi quotidie moriens, ut moriendo reviviscas'[98] ('treat your body as dying daily, so that by dying you may live again').

While Ambrose popularised the rhetoric of spiritual adornment in his work on virginity, his treatise on widowhood does not contain it, as he apparently did not view widows as potential brides of Christ. Ambrose's disciple Augustine, however, used the language of spiritual adornment to create an image of widowhood as a 'second marriage' to Christ. In Augustine's view, widows and virgins alike were able to adorn themselves as brides of Christ by eschewing external finery and turning to the cultivation of spiritual beauty. Writing to the widow Juliana, mother of the consecrated virgin Demetrias, he encouraged both women to adorn their souls for their shared Bridegroom:

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[95] Brown, *The Body and Society*, p. 148. In many early Christian churches, widows not only held seats of honour but had a say in important communal decisions and sometimes were even considered an order of the clergy – see Thurston, *The Widows*, pp. 81–91.
[96] Tertullian, *Ad uxorem* 1.8 (ed. Kroymann, *Opera I*, p. 382); Ambrose, *De viduis* 7; and Jerome, *Epistle* 54.9 (ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, pp. 474–75) describe a stereotypical 'bad' widow whose gluttony reveals her lustfulness.
[97] Ambrose, *De viduis* 4.26, ed. Migne, p. 242.
[98] *Ibid.* 9.56.

> hac pulchritudine illi placete; hanc pulchritudinem studiosa cura et sollicita cogitatione conponite. non amat ille fallaciarum fucos, ueris ueritas delectatur; et ille, si quod legisti agnoscis, ueritas uocatur. […] certe si mariti essent, quibus placendum esset, iam te fortasse cum filia puderet ornari; nunc non pudeat agere quibus simul ornemini, quia non est criminosum, sed potius gloriosum, ut ab illo uno simul amemini.[99]
>
> Please him by this [inner] beauty, take care of this beauty with zealous diligence and anxious thought. He does not love deceitful rouge; truth delights in true things, and He, if you remember what you have read, is called the Truth. […] Certainly if you had husbands whom you had to please, then you would, perhaps, feel ashamed to adorn yourself together with your daughter; now let it not shame you to do what may adorn you both together, because it is not shameful but glorious that you should both be loved by the One.

Augustine stated that all chaste and virtuous women, regardless of virginity or age, could be beautiful in the eyes of Christ.[100] But he also used this as an opportunity to condemn external finery as deceptive and thus immoral: 'simulatum autem candorem ac ruborem et pigmentis inlitum non adhiberetis, etiamsi uiros haberetis, non putantes dignos, quos fallevetis, nec uos, quae fallere deberetis'[101] ('but you should not use feigned white and red and other cosmetic dyes, even if you had husbands, not thinking that they deserve to be deceived, nor that you ought to deceive them'). In other words, for Augustine, like for Ambrose, Cyprian, and Tertullian, internal beauty is incompatible with external adornment because the latter is false and therefore offensive to God's creation.

The idea that adornment is incompatible with chaste widowhood was most explicitly argued by Jerome, who named a variety of reasons why this is the case. Like Ambrose, Jerome believed that external finery is an instrument of seduction and therefore dangerous to the widow's reputation: 'ne propositum uiduae exquisitior cultus infamet, ne oculorum nutibus et hilaritate uultus iuuenum post se greges trahat, ne aliud uerbo, aliud habitu polliceatur' [102] ('she should not discredit her profession of widowhood by overly sophisticated dress, or draw crowds of young men to follow after her winking eyes and joyful face, lest she promise one thing by her words and another by her manners'). For this reason, Jerome criticised widows who wear elaborate clothing, hairstyles, and cosmetics, which, he argued, are not only an insult to God's creation, but also a mark of wantonness:

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[99] Augustine, *De bono viduitatis* XIX.23–24, ed. Zycha, pp. 333–34.
[100] *Ibid.*: 'in qua pulchritudine etiam illius auia, socrus tua, quae iam certe senuit, est pulchra uobiscum' ('in this [inner] beauty her grandmother, your mother-in-law, who by now has surely grown old, is also beautiful together with you').
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] Jerome, *Epistle* 123.4, ed. Hilberg, vol. 3, p. 75.

> Illae Christianos oculos potius scandalizent, quae purpurisso et quibusdam fucis ora oculosque depingunt, quarum facies gypseae et nimio candore deformes idola mentiuntur… Erubescat mulier Christiana, si naturae cogit decorum, si carnis curam facit ad concupiscentiam.[103]
>
> Those women, rather, offend a Christian's eyes who paint their lips and eyes with rouge and other pigments; whose faces, unsightly from the excessive whiteness of powder, imitate idols… A Christian woman should blush if she gets by force what should be natural beauty, or if she takes care of the flesh to incite desire.

But the most crucial and innovative aspect of Jerome's instructions for widows is his emphasis on penitence. In his view, wealthy widows who had experienced the pleasures of both luxury and sex needed to make up for these excesses by practicing self-denial, which included the concealment and besmirching of their beauty. In his letter to Furia, Jerome argued that it is impossible for a woman to be penitent for her sins if she adorns her body:

> Quid facit in facie Christianae purpurissus et cerussa? […] Quomodo flere potest pro peccatis suis, quae lacrimis cutem nudat et sulcos ducit in facie?[104]
>
> What do rouge and white lead have to do on a Christian woman's face? […] How can she weep over her sins, when with these tears she bares her skin and makes furrows in her face?

Thus, while Augustine wrote that widows and virgins had equal access to spiritual adornment, Jerome created a new kind of spiritual adornment for widows. Instead of imagining virtues as bridal ornaments put on for Christ, he paints a portrait in which the usual features of a wealthy matron are reversed: expensive dyes give way to dirt, the weight of ornaments to the weariness of incessant prayer, and makeup—to tears.

Hagiography

The penitential aspect of widows' asceticism is most evident in Jerome's biographies of women he was associated with who went on to be recognised as saints, such as Marcella, Fabiola and, most notably, Paula. These chaste widows closely adhere to the precepts of Jerome's cosmetic theology and appear as counterparts to the self-indulgent Roman matrons. They exchange their patrician silks for the coarse hairshirts of asceticism, which Jerome sees as an act of penitence for indulgence in both adornment and sex: the two are inextricably linked in Jerome's descriptions.

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[103] Jerome, *Ep.* 38.3, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 291.
[104] Jerome, *Ep.* 54.7, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, 473.

Thus, Fabiola, who was married not once but twice, exemplifies the kind of penance Jerome expects from a woman who gave in to her carnal desires:

> Quis hoc crederet, ut post mortem secundi uiri in semet reuersa, quo tempore solent uiduae neglegentes iugo seruitutis excusso agere se liberius, adire balneas, uolitare per plateas, uultus circumferre meretricos, saccum indueret, errorem publice fateretur et tota urbe spectante Romana […] staret in ordine paenitentum, episcopo et presbyteris et omni populo conlacrimanti sparsum crinem, ora lurida, squalidas manus, sordida colla submitteret?
>
> Who would believe that, after the death of her second husband, when most widows, having shaken off the yoke of servitude, usually become careless and act too freely, visiting the baths, flitting about in the streets, showing around their harlot-like faces, Fabiola came to herself, put on sackcloth and publicly confessed her error, and with the whole city of Rome watching […] stood in the ranks of the penitents and exposed before bishop, presbyters, and people her unkempt hair, sallow face, dirty hands and unwashed neck?[105]

The penitential erasure of female beauty features even more prominently in Jerome's *epitaphium* of Paula, his long-term patron and monastic companion. Paula was a wealthy matron and mother to five children, including Eustochium, the consecrated virgin to whom Jerome dedicated his treatise on virginity discussed above (*Epistle* 22). After the death of her husband in 381, Paula vowed not to remarry. Upon Jerome's arrival in Rome in late 382, she was evidently so impressed with his monastic and scholarly résumé that she not only retained him as her spiritual mentor for the duration of his stay in Rome but also followed him into exile to Palestine, bringing Eustochium with her and establishing a convent next to Jerome's monastery in Bethlehem, where she remained until her death in 404.

Running to some forty-five pages in Hilberg's edition of the correspondence, Paula's *vita* is one of the longest of Jerome's extant letters, detailing the widow's transformation from a self-indulgent patrician to a philanthropic recluse. 'In many respects,' Coon observes, 'Jerome's symbolic chronicle overturns classical gender constructions: Paula abandons her children, makes an independent pilgrimage to Egypt and the Holy Land, constructs monasteries in Bethlehem, studies languages and scripture, administers a religious community, and engages in rigorous *askesis*'.[106] Jerome, however, moderated this radical departure from social expectations by depicting Paula as the embodiment of conventionally female sanctity, in which his cosmetic theology plays an important role.

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[105] Jerome, *Ep.* 77.4, ed. Hilberg, vol. 2, p. 40.
[106] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 103.

Thus, according to Jerome, Paula not only concealed her innate beauty but even deliberately mutilated her physical appearance, wearing nothing but coarse hairshirts and refusing to take baths unless she was seriously ill. Jerome reports her explanation for this behaviour as follows:

> 'Turpanda est facies, quam contra dei praeceptum purpurisso et cerussa et stibio saepe depinxi; adfligendum corpus, quod multis uacauit deliciis; longus risus perpeti conpensandus est fletu; mollia lineamina et serica pretiosissima asperitate cilicii conmutanda. quae uiro et saeculo placui, nunc Christo placere desidero.'[107]
>
> 'I must disfigure that face which contrary to God's commandment I have often painted with rouge, white lead, and antimony. I must mortify that body which has been given up to many pleasures. I must make up for my long laughter by constant weeping. I must exchange my soft linen and costly silks for rough goat's hair. I who have pleased my husband and the world in the past, desire now to please Christ.'

These lines echo Jerome's instructions for widows from his earlier epistles, implicitly crediting Jerome with Paula's ascetic transformation. Moreover, Paula apparently transmitted Jerome's modesty principles to other nuns in her charge, instructing them in words which echo Jerome and Cyprian:

> Si uidisset aliquam comptiorem, contractione frontis et uultus tristitia arguebat errantem dicens munditiam corporis atque uestitus animae esse inmunditiam […] quibus signis libidinosus animus ostenditur et per exteriorem hominem interioris hominis uitia demonstrantur.[108]
>
> If she happened to notice any sister dressed too elegantly, she reproved her for her error with knitted brows and a harsh look, saying: 'A clean body and a clean dress mean an unclean soul […] for these are the marks of a lascivious mind and by the outward man the faults of the inward are made manifest.'

'Jerome's depiction of the Roman matron mortifying her flesh,' Coon observes, 'is a lesson for his patrician contemporaries on the necessity of refashioning the body into a vessel of repentance.'[109]

Jerome's penitential model was, of course, not the only way a widow could attain sanctity. Many women, especially royal women such as St Helena, mother of the Emperor Constantine, were revered for using their wealth and status for the church's benefit by acquiring relics, building

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[107] *Ep.* 108.15, ed. Hilberg, vol. 2, p. 326.
[108] *Ep.* 108.20, ed. Hilberg, vol. 2, p. 336.
[109] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 108.

churches and sponsoring other ecclesiastical projects.[110] Nevertheless, the repeated demands from male moralists to visually demonstrate their chastity indicate that modest dress was still a crucial requirement for widows to be considered virtuous. Renunciation of marriage alone was insufficient: there had to be a public, visible demonstration of their purity. The idea that adornment is put on by women for male attention created a cultural environment that allowed suspicions to be cast on widows who dressed conspicuously and thus made it possible to challenge their claims to authority within the Christian community.

The texts examined in this section highlight the diversity of approaches to the dress of widows in late antiquity, but all of them emphasise the widows' modesty above other important achievements such as teaching, church leadership, and biblical studies. The additional emphasis on the penitential besmirching of one's bodily attractiveness, hinted at by Ambrose and fully-fledged in Jerome, is especially important, as it further solidified the connection between sexuality and adornment.

WIVES

Hortatory literature

On the lowest tier of the hierarchy of chastity were married women, whose dress was the concern of the earliest Christian cosmetic theology:

> Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as elaborate hairstyles and the wearing of gold jewellery or fine clothes. Rather, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to adorn themselves. They submitted themselves to their own husbands, like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her lord. (I Peter III.2–6)

While Peter's request corresponds to the New Testament prioritisation of the spiritual good over the material, the last sentence reveals a concern for the preservation of the gender hierarchy. In Peter's view, the unadorned simplicity of a woman's appearance is the manifestation of her obedience to her 'lord', the husband – a view also expressed by Paul.[111] It was this discourse of marital fidelity that was transferred onto the 'brides of Christ', who were required to demonstrate fidelity and obedience to their Bridegroom as matrons do to their husbands. That is, because

[110] Eusebius of Caesarea, *Vita Constantini*, *passim*.
[111] See p. 12.

Christian moralists cannot imagine a reason for women to adorn themselves other than to increase their opportunities for sex, a woman's lack of adornment signals her sexual exclusivity, whether she is exclusive to Christ or her husband.

Christian authors were certainly not the first to demand from married women a visible demonstration of spousal obedience, which consisted in the avoidance of jewellery, makeup, and expensive garments. 'The distinction between the undisguised looks of respectable women and the deceptively dressed-up appearance of prostitutes,' as Richlin notes, was common in Latin literature long before Christianity, and pagan matrons faced similar pressures to make public demonstration of their concern for shame.[112] The crucial difference between pagan and Christian discourses about married women's attire, however, was that by prioritising spiritual adornment, Christian authors, beginning with Paul, sought to redefine the meaning of marriage between Christians as one where the wife's spiritual beauty is more attractive than her body.

In his treatise on the apparel of women, Tertullian attempted to redefine Christian marriage as primarily spiritual. His idea of what a Christian man should find attractive is especially interesting because Tertullian himself was married. Throughout the treatise, he denounced married women's use of ornamentation as an offence to God's creation and a source of concupiscence and encouraged women to take pains to conceal even their natural attractions. Expecting married women to retort that they need to adorn themselves to please their husbands, Tertullian claimed that a Christian husband will not be pleased by their efforts:

> [U]xor nulla deformis est marito suo; satis placuit cum electa est seu moribus seu forma commendata. Ne quae uestrum putent si temperauerint a compositione sui, odium et auersionem maritorum prosecuturam. Omnis maritus castitatis exactor est; formam uero fidelis non expectat quia non isdem bonis quae gentiles bona putant capimur […] Cui ergo pulchritudinem tuam nutrias? Si fideli, non exigit; si gentili, non credit. Quid gestias aut suspect aut non desideranti placere?[113]
>
> No wife is ugly to her husband; she was pleasing enough for him when he chose her, whether she was distinguished for her beauty or good ways. Neither let any of you think that if they abstain from making themselves presentable, they will incur the hate and aversion of their husbands. Every husband demands chastity; but a believing husband does not expect beauty, because we are not captivated by those qualities which the gentiles consider to be good […] For whom, then, do you cultivate your beauty? If for a believer, he does not require it; if for a gentile, he does not believe it [is natural]. Why do you strive to please either one who is suspicious, or one who is undesiring?

[112] Richlin, 'Making Up a Woman', 194. See also Wyke, 'Woman in the Mirror'.
[113] Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* II.4, ed. Kroymann, p. 357.

Tertullian's argument not only presents an overly optimistic view of Christian men's sexuality but also undermines the main point of the treatise: that adornment is dangerous because of the erotic effect it has on men. Such contradictions are typical of cosmetic theology, and this instance supports Power's observation that patristic moral treatises represent 'not objective reality, but one vision of how reality ought to be.'[114] Few Christian husbands wanted their wives to conceal their beauty, and few women heeded Tertullian's admonition. Consequently, later authors continued to exhort wives to abandon adornment but used different rhetorical strategies.

Thus, Ambrose's treatise on virginity also addresses the problem that married women need to adorn themselves to remain attractive to their husbands. Ambrose argued that adornment is not actually pleasing to the husband because it is deceptive:

> [H]inc illa nascuntur incentiva vitiorum, ut et quaesitis coloribus ora depingant, dum viris displicere formidant, et de adulterio vultus meditentur adulterium castitatis. quanta haec amentia effigiem mutare naturae, picturam quaerere et, dum verentur maritale iudicium, prodere suum. prior enim de se pronuntiat quae cupit mutare quod nata est. ita dum alii studet placere, prius ipsa sibi displicet. quem iudicem, mulier, veriorem requirimus deformitatis tuae quam te ipsam, quae videri times? si pulchra es, quid absconderis? si deformis, cur te formosam esse mentiris nec tuae conscientiae nec alieni gratiam erroris habitura? ille enim alteram diligit, tu alteri vis placere. et irasceris, si amet aliam qui adulterare in te docetur? male magistra es iniuriae tuae.[115]
>
> And hence spring up the incentives to vice, so that they paint their faces with elaborate colours, because they are afraid to displease their husbands, and from defiling the face they can think about defiling their chastity. How foolish it is to change the fashion of nature and seek a painting and, fearing the husband's judgement, to abandon one's own. For she speaks against herself first who desires to change what she was born with. So while she strives to please another, she displeases herself. What truer sign of your ugliness do we require, woman, than yourself, since you are afraid to be seen? If you are beautiful, why do you hide? If you are ugly, why do you pretend to be pretty, having the esteem neither of your own conscience nor another's error? For he loves another, you wish to please another. And you would be angered if he loves another woman, even though you have taught him adultery through your own person? You are, sadly, the teacher of your own injury.

In this passage, Ambrose attempts to present modest dress as a dignifying experience for married women. But his main argument rests on the subservient role of wives, 'quas ante iussit deus servire quam servos'[116] ('whom God commanded to serve even before slaves'). In his view, a wife who enhances her appearance by means of cosmetics and jewellery deceives her husband and thus

[114] Power, *Veiled Desire*, p. 15.
[115] Ambrose, *De virginitate* I.28, ed. Dückers, p. 146.
[116] *Ibid.* I.27.

leads him into sin, endangering both her own chastity and his, as he is effectively committing adultery with his own wife. Thus, both Ambrose and Tertullian insisted that a married woman's unadorned appearance is better pleasing to the (Christian) husband than one enhanced by cosmetics and jewellery.

But it is one thing to encourage women to wear simple dress and another to make it into an ecclesiastical legislation. When Possidius, bishop of Calama, wanted to prohibit jewellery and fine clothing to all women in his charge, Augustine responded by advising him against forbidding adornment to married women.[117] He still forbade unveiling, which signals promiscuity, and makeup, which is a form of deception. But only celibate women were forbidden to use jewellery and expensive garments. Married women, on the other hand, were expected to dress to please their husbands, even though Augustine disapproved of men taking pleasure in their wives' adornment. Augustine's hesitation to impose simple dress on married women, as Casias observes, shows that the men of his congregation 'neither wanted nor expected to hear that they had to change radically to be Christians.'[118] And while Tertullian and Ambrose simply rejected the possibility that Christian men could want their wives to be adorned, Augustine found himself walking a tightrope between promoting asceticism and upholding male headship.

The problematic relationship between cosmetic theology and the gender hierarchy becomes especially apparent in situations where married women adopted ascetic dress without their husband's consent, usually alongside a complete rejection of sexual relations. Although, as we have seen, celibacy and ascetic dress were closely tied and highly encouraged by Christian preachers, in the case of married women, the husband's wishes overrode those of the moralists. For instance, Augustine's letter to Ecdicia, a wealthy married woman, goes into detail regarding the problem of adornment.[119] Ecdicia had apparently agreed with her husband to pursue abstinence, then began to dress like a widow and gave away some of her property. Angered by her behaviour, her husband broke his vow of celibacy with another woman, and Ecdicia wrote to Augustine complaining of his infidelity. Augustine, however, blamed Ecdicia, stating that her behaviour, including her dress, had compelled her husband to be unfaithful. Ecdicia's own letter is no longer extant, so we cannot be sure what significance a widow's attire had for her. But we may not be wrong to assume that Ecdicia (and Celantia, too) wished to do exactly what Christian

[117] Augustine, *Epistle* 245.1–2, ed. Goldbacher, p. 582.
[118] Casias, 'Women in Late Antique North Africa'.
[119] Augustine, *Ep.* 262, ed. Goldbacher, pp. 621–31.

preachers had been urging women to do: to visually demonstrate her sexual renunciation by changing her style of dress. But for Augustine, it is not permissible for a married woman, even a chaste one, to dress as though she does not have a husband because it challenges his authority over her:

> Non enim quia pariter temperabatis a commixtione carnali, ideo tuus maritus esse destiterat […] Neque enim et ille qui tecum iam coeperat custodire tam magnum continentiae bonum, etiamsi coniugale, non viduale, voluisset ut acciperes indumentum, ad indecentem quoque te compulisset ornatum, quo etsi aliqua dura condicione cogereris, posses habere in superbo cultu cor humile. Nempe apud patres Esther illa regina deum timens, deum colens, deo subdita, marito regi alienigenae non eundem secum colenti deum tamen subiecta serviebat. Quae cum extremo periculo non suo tantum sed etiam gentis suae, qui tunc erat populus dei, domino prosterneretur orando, in ipsa oratione sua dixit ita sibi esse ornatum regium sicut pannum menstrualem; et ita orantem confestim exaudivit, qui cordis inspector eam verum dicere scivit.[120]
>
> For he did not cease to be your husband because you were both abstaining from carnal intercourse […] Nor even if he, who had begun with you to preserve the great virtue of continence, wished you to put on the dress of a wife and not a widow, and also compelled you to wear unbecoming adornment, even if you were forced to by some harsh condition, you could have had a humble heart beneath your haughty attire. Surely among the patriarchs Esther, that God-fearing queen, though worshipping God and obeying God, subjected herself to her husband, a foreign king, and obeyed him, although he did not worship the same God as her. At a time of extreme danger not just to herself but to her nation, who were then the people of God, she prostrated herself to pray to the Lord, and in her prayer said that she regarded her royal adornments as a menstruous rag; [Esther 14:16] and He who is the inspector of the heart [Proverbs 24:12], heard her and knew she was telling the truth.

Augustine's solution to the problem of married women's adornment by reference to Proverbs 24:12 is particularly significant for the present discussion, as we have seen that in earlier cosmetic discourses, spiritual purity is deemed insufficient without modest attire. Cyprian went so far as to claim that a virgin's heart cannot be pure at all if she adorns herself elaborately: 'sericum et purpuram indutae Christum induere non possunt, auro et margaritis et monilibus adornatae ornamenta cordis ac pectoris perdiderunt'[121] ('dressed in silk and purple, they cannot put on Christ; adorned by gold and pearls and necklaces, they have lost the ornaments of the heart and soul'). And Tertullian explicitly argued against Proverbs 24:12 in his treatise on the apparel of women, saying that all women, whether married or celibate, need to make public demonstration of their chastity:

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[120] Augustine, *Ep.* 262.4, 10, ed. Goldbacher, pp. 624, 629.
[121] Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 13, ed. and trans. Keenan, p. 56.

> Aliqua fors dicet: 'Non est mihi necessarium hominibus probari. Nec enim humanum testimonium requiro. Deus conspector est cordis.' Scimus omnes, cum tamen quid idem per apostolum dixerit recordemur: "Probum uestrum coram hominibus appareat.'[122]
>
> Perhaps a woman will say: 'I have no need to prove myself to the people. I do not require human testimony. God is the inspector of the heart.' [Proverbs 24:12] We all know that, but only as long as we remember what the same God said through the Apostle: 'Let your righteousness appear before the people.' [Philippians 4:5]

The difference between Tertullian and Augustine highlights not only Augustine's more pragmatic approach to women's lived realities, but also the difference in the two preachers' understanding of male headship. Tertullian asserts that a woman's unadorned appearance signals her submission to male authority, as the besmirching of her beauty is a way to repent for Eve's original act of pride that caused Adam's fall.[123] Unlike Tertullian, Augustine believes that self-enhancement is permissible for the married woman, but only because women's inherent subjection to men (even before the Fall) means that her husband's wishes outweigh her own desire for ascetic life.[124] In other words, although they differ on the practical application of cosmetic theology to married women, Tertullian, Ambrose and Augustine derive their prescriptions from the same underlying idea: that the dress of wives must demonstrate their subordination to their husbands, even if that means, as in Augustine's case, that cosmetic theology must be turned on its head.

Hagiography

Nevertheless, spousal obedience was evidently insufficient to attain sanctity. No evidence survives for the veneration of married women who did not have a claim to sanctity other than their spousal virtues. Most sainted women of late antiquity who were neither virgins nor widows were wives who lived in continence with their husbands, such as Melania the Younger, or exceptional cases where the woman left her husband to enter a monastery, such as Radegund.[125] Similarly, Perpetua and Felicity, both described as new mothers, are sainted for their heroic martyrdom, but their status as wives plays no role in their *vita*—in fact, the readers are never explicitly told that they were married.[126] In other words, while spousal obedience was encouraged, it was not an avenue for sanctity.

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[122] Tertullian, *De cultu feminarum* II.13.1, ed. Kroymann, p. 369.
[123] *Ibid.* I.1.2.
[124] See Power, *Veiled Desire*, pp. 132–66, for further discussion of Augustine's views on women's subjection.
[125] On both these figures, see Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, pp. 95–141.
[126] *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*, ed. Cobb.

The works of Latin theologians reveal that the dress of women had a deep significance for the Christian church. Their discussions of dress were coloured by broader developments in theology, the church's identity, and ecclesiastical politics. Cosmetic theology linked the adornment of women to the questions of human nature, salvation, and sexuality, encouraging the formation of a uniquely Christian dress-code that was aligned with Christian values. Ideally, perhaps, the Christian cosmetic discourse offered certain (celibate) women the promise of greater independence and spiritual authority. But male moralists clearly had reservations about any prominence that dress could offer. Their instruction for virgins, widows and wives indicate that cosmetic theology was concerned with the gender hierarchy. It was not the only concern: these instructions are part of the broader Christian discourse against material and bodily goods. Moreover, many of the authors discussed wrote to women out of genuine care for their spiritual progress and a desire to create communities driven by new, Christian values.

But in warning women that their beauty is a danger to men, they made it possible for modest dress to be interpreted—and required—as a sign of subordination.

TRANSMISSION OF COSMETIC THEOLOGY IN ENGLAND

The chapters that follow will evaluate the impact cosmetic theology had on Anglo-Latin depictions of modesty. But before discussing the transformation of cosmetic theology at the hands of Aldhelm, Bede and Goscelin, it is helpful to sketch out an overview of the available evidence for these works' presence in early medieval England.[127]

Tertullian's *De cultu feminarum* and *De virginibus velandis* are not attested in medieval England, and neither were any of his other works concerning dress.[128] His cosmetic theology, however, was known indirectly through Cyprian.

Cyprian's *De habitu virginum* is cited extensively by Aldhelm and once by Bede, although no manuscript evidence has survived.[129]

Ambrose's *Hexameron* was known to Aldhelm and Bede,[130] and in Bede's case was deeply embedded as a source of his own *Commentary on Genesis*. Of the four surviving

[127] The library of Saint-Bertin, where Goscelin began his career, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.
[128] Only one of Tertullian's many works, the anti-pagan *Apologeticum*, is attested in England, and only in a single twelfth-century manuscript—see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 334.
[129] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 298.
[130] *Ibid.*, p. 280. See also Bankert, Wegmann, and Wright, *Ambrose in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 18–22, and Lockett, *Anglo-Saxon Psychologies*, p. 216.

manuscripts known to be in England early on, two are of eleventh-century provenance while the others are post-Conquest.[131] ***De virginibus ad Marcellinam*** was used by Aldhelm[132] and Bede cited it in *De orthographia* and *De genesi*;[133] it survives in four eleventh-century manuscripts.[134] ***De viduis*** is also once cited by Bede[135] and may have been known to Goscelin.[136]

Augustine's *De bono viduitatis* and ***De sancta virginitate*** were known to Aldhelm and Bede, as was another of Augustine's works which touches upon the issue of gender, ***De Civitate Dei***.[137] His letter to Ecdicia is unattested in surviving English sources.

Prudentius's *Liber peristephanon*, *Hamartigena*, and *Contra Symmachum* were known to Aldhelm and survive in several pre-Conquest manuscripts.[138]

Jerome's *Epistles* are the most widely attested of the texts discussed in this chapter. The earliest citations appear in the late seventh-century Canterbury biblical commentaries, and *Epistle* 22 is specifically mentioned by Aldhelm, Bede and Goscelin.[139] Lapidge believes that the *Epistles* were a required item in even the smaller Insular libraries,[140] and his *Epistle* 22 on virginity was a staple text for monastic education.

Although this list shows that Aldhelm, Bede and Goscelin were familiar with a wide array of patristic works, it is important to remember that the extent of their reading was exceptional for this period, and scholars of early medieval manuscripts caution that very few libraries, in England or on the Continent, were as large and diverse as Aldhelm's or Bede's.[141] It therefore appears that direct knowledge of cosmetic theology was only available in the most elite educational circles, and mostly before 740 and after 980. This does not mean, however, that late antique ideas about modesty were only available to a handful of highly educated scholars. In contrast to moral writings, the *vitae* of holy women enjoyed a wide readership.

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[131] Arras, BM, 346 (867) (?Abingdon, s. x/xi; prov. Bath, prov. Saint-Vaast); Cambridge, UL, Kk. 1. 23, fos. 1–66 (Christ Church, Canterbury, s. xi/xii); Cambridge, CCC 193 (N. France, s. ix^{2}; prov. England, s. xi); Cambridge, Trinity College O. 3. 35 (s. xi/xii; prov. Chichester).

[132] See Lapidge, *The Prose Works*, p. 56.

[133] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 194; Love, *Bede: Commentarius in Genesim (Libri I et II)*, https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/fontes/; for manuscript evidence, see Gneuss and Lapidge, *Handlist*, pp. 463, 464, 630, 635.

[134] Cambridge, Trinity College, B. 14. 30, fos. 58–129 (s. xi^{ex}; prov. Exeter), Oxford, BodL, Bodley 768 (Salisbury, s. xi^{ex}), Oxford, BodL, Bodley 792 (s. xi/xii; prov. Exeter), Paris, BNF, lat. 1751 (?St Augustine's, Canterbury, s. xi^{2}). See Gneuss and Lapidge, *Handlist*, pp. 35, 76, 559.

[135] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, p. 194; see Gneuss and Lapidge, *Handlist*, pp. 463, 464, 630, 635.

[136] See Love, *The Hagiography of the Female Saints of Ely*, p. 177 note 4.

[137] Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 179, 196; Love, *Bede: Explanatio Apocalypsis*, https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/fontes/ and Love, *Bede: Commentarius in Genesim (Libri I et II)*, https://arts.st-andrews.ac.uk/fontes/.

[138] *Ibid.*, p. 185; see also Orchard, *The Poetic Art of Aldhelm*, pp. 171–78. For manuscripts, see Gneuss and Lapidge, *Handlist*, pp. 47, 90, 120, 195, 439, 516, 573, 642.

[139] *Ibid.*, p. 315 (for Aldhelm and Bede). For Goscelin, see Hayward, 'Spiritual Friendship', p. 349.

[140] *Ibid.*, p. 127.

[141] See Webber, 'The Patristic Content of English Book Collections in the Eleventh Century', p. 192; Thomson, 'The Norman Conquest and English Libraries', p. 31; Hall, 'Biblical and Patristic Learning', p. 334.

The *Passio Sanctae Agnetis* is preserved in over 400 manuscripts,[142] and shortly after the establishment of monastic Christianity in England, Agnes became one of the three most popular martyrs in the region.[143] She features prominently in Aldhelm's *De virginitate* and Bede's *Martyrology*, and Bede also commemorated her by a hymn. Jerome's portraits of holy widows were also included in Bede's list of saints and likely inspired some of his own *vitae* from the *Ecclesiastical History*, as shall be discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, while theological tractates on modesty were only accessible to a minority of scholars, the trappings of cosmetic theology were being transmitted to a much wider Latinate audience thanks to their prominence in the lives of female saints. 'As a coercive discourse, intended to bend the recipient to its imperatives,' Coon observes, 'hagiography dictated proper reverence for sacred behaviour,' and its role in the transmission of gender ideologies should not be underestimated.[144]

The relative rarity of patristic works in early medieval England also highlights the importance of Aldhelm, Bede and Goscelin for the transmission of early Christian cosmetic theology to their English audiences. The subsequent chapters will turn to these authors' transformation of the patristic rhetoric of adornment to their own ends.

[142] See Lanéry, *Ambroise de Milan*, pp. 347–55.
[143] On the popularity of Agnes and other martyr saints of her type, see Wogan-Browne, *Saints' Lives and Women's Literary Culture*, p. 3, where she comments that these *vitae* represent 'a, perhaps the, major Western form of representing women.'
[144] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 27.

Chapter 2:
Aldhelm of Malmesbury:
Modesty, Monasticism and Conversion

The first text authored in England which systematically deals with cosmetic theology is *De virginitate*, a treatise on the merits of virginity composed by Aldhelm of Malmesbury (c. 639–710).[145] As a member of West Saxon aristocracy,[146] Aldhelm would have been familiar with the value of adornment in Anglo-Saxon culture,

In *De virginitate*, Aldhelm linked virginity to adornment, drawing closely on the works of late antique theologians discussed in the previous chapter. Aldhelm's interpretation of Cyprian, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine and Pelagius had a significant impact on subsequent treatments of adornment in England and beyond.[147] This chapter draws out the ways in which Aldhelm connected adornment to his gendered articulation of sanctity. Like his patristic predecessors, Aldhelm saw modesty as a requirement for virgins, but he also used earlier works selectively to give greater importance to modesty's spiritual dimension. Aldhelm's adornment imagery served to promote monastic discipline, and this chapter will show that he focused especially on patristic works which connected adornment to active pursuit of spiritual growth. But his saintly *exempla*, selected from the most famous works of late antique hagiography, show that Aldhelm's view of sanctity was closely aligned with earlier works, in which female virtue was inseparable from the body.

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[145] Aldhelm's treatise is an *opus geminatum*: a prose work, *Prosa de virginitate* (hereafter *PdV*), followed by a verse rendition of (almost) the same material, the *Carmen de virginitate* (hereafter *CdV*); they are referred to collectively as *De virginitate* in this chapter. Both prose and verse were edited by Ehwald, *Aldhelmi Opera*, pp. 226–323, and a second edition of the *PdV* was made by Gwara, *Aldhelmi Malmesbiriensis Prosa De Virginitate*. This chapter uses Ehwald's edition. The *PdV* has been translated by Lapidge in *The Prose Works*, pp. 59–132, and the *CdV* by Rosier in *The Poetic Works*, pp. 102–67. Unless otherwise noted, all English quotations of *De virginitate* will be taken from these translations.

[146] See Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', 15–52, on Aldhelm's aristocratic background and early education.

[147] On the dissemination and influence of *De virginitate* in England, see Gneuss and Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts*, p. 890; Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*,
. On the diffusion of Aldhelm's works on the continent, see Manitius, *Geschichte der lateinischen Literatur des Mittelalters*, I, p. 726; and Breeze, 'The Transmission of Aldhelm's Writings'.

DE VIRGINITATE IN CONTEXT

Aldhelm's *De virginitate* is constructed as two letters (in prose and in verse) addressed to Abbess Hildelith of Barking and a number of other monastic women.[148] When Aldhelm composed the treatise around 675, Christianity was still fairly new to England: less than a hundred years had passed since Augustine of Canterbury travelled from Rome to Kent to convert the English and no more than a decade since Barking Abbey was founded.[149] *De virginitate* thus offers a rare glimpse of how Christian virtue and monastic values were understood in the formative period of the church in England. Many scholars have examined its presentation of virginity for its relationship to late antique works and contemporary English norms, with vastly different conclusions. Some scholars view Aldhelm as 'a skilful manipulator of the ideas of the Church Fathers in the light of contemporary circumstances,'[150] who transformed patristic teachings to elevate the status of women, performing 'a daring work of cultural translation, one intended to make the virtue [of virginity] coherent with early medieval English habits of thought.'[151] Others argue that Aldhelm subscribed completely to the misogynist ideals of late antiquity and used *De virginitate* to depict women as seductive and dangerous: 'By giving currency to the view that women embody the temptations of the flesh, he effectively adds weight to orthodox pressures for the establishment of monastic separation.'[152] These conflicting positions reflect the importance given by individual scholars to pre-Christian cultural norms in the formation of the new ecclesiastical culture. On one end of the spectrum, Thornbury argues that native culture, which she believes held women in high regard, shaped Aldhelm's text almost completely.[153] On the other, Hollis and Lees and Overing argue that Aldhelm was trying to 'erase' any customs that did not adhere to the masculinist ideas of the church fathers. These conflicting responses to the same text highlight the complexity of *De virginitate* and the dangers of over- or understating the differences between seventh-century England and the late antique Mediterranean.

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[148] Lapidge believes that all the women mentioned in the letter belonged to Barking Abbey (*The Poetic Works*, p. 51), while Gwara argues that some of them were abbesses of other monasteries in southern England (*Aldhelmi Prosa*, pp. 19–21).

[149] Although *De virginitate* is Aldhelm's most difficult work to date, a reference in the first chapter to an episcopal synod suggests it was written shortly after the Synod of Hertford, which took place in 672 (see Lapidge, *The Prose Works*, p. 14, and Lapidge, 'The Career of Aldhelm', 15-69). On the foundation of Barking (dated between 665 and 675), see Hart, *The Early Charters*, pp. 117–45.

[150] O'Sullivan, 'Patristic Pastiche?', 271.

[151] Thornbury, 'The Ornament of Virginity', p. 180.

[152] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 103; a similar view is expressed by Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, pp. 111–124.

[153] This position is also argued by Pettit, 'Holiness and Masculinity in *De Virginitate*'.

Several aspects of *De virginitate* are, indeed, markedly different from patristic works and can only be explained by the difference in English customs and Aldhelm's personal views. The first is the inclusion of male saints in a treatise on virginity. Unprecedented in earlier works, Aldhelm's decision to use holy men as exemplars of virginity reflects the needs of his audience: although the treatise is explicitly addressed to women, Barking was not a women's house but a double monastery. Double monasteries, which housed both monks and nuns, were widely preferred to single-sex establishments for women in England at the time. They were founded, patronised and, generally, commanded by women from the local royal family, serving as important centres of learning and pastoral care.[154] As a work addressed to a double monastery, *De virginitate* had to include moral lessons for both male and female religious. A related feature that stands out in *De virginitate* is Aldhelm's new 'hierarchy of chastity'. In the previous chapter, we encountered three distinctions of purity: virginity (*virginitas*), widowhood (*viduitas*) and marriage (*iugalitas*). But in *De virginitate*, widowhood is replaced by the broader category of 'chastity' (*castitas*), and the three states are defined as follows:

> virginitas sit, quae ab omni spurcitia carnali illibata spontaneo caelibatus affectu pudica perseverat, castitas vero, quae pactis sponsalibus sortita matrimonii commercia regni caelestis causa contempsit, iugalitas, quae ad propagandam posteritatis sobolem et liberorum procreandorum gratia licitis conubii nexibus nodatur.
>
> virginity is [that which], unharmed by any carnal defilement, perseveres pure out of the spontaneous desire for celibacy; and chastity on the other hand [is that] which, having been assigned to marital contracts, has scorned the commerce of matrimony for the sake of the heavenly kingdom; or conjugality [is that] which, for propagating the progeny of posterity and for the sake of procreating children, is bound by the legal ties of marriage.[155]

Castitas, then, overlapped with widowhood but was broad enough to include women who withdrew to monasteries before the death of their husbands—a phenomenon which was common enough in seventh-century England that Archbishop Theodore had to make an exception for it in his prohibition against divorce.[156] As Yorke points out, many double monasteries throughout the

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[154] For a comprehensive study of female monasticism in early medieval England, see Yorke, *Nunneries*, and Sarah Foot, *Veiled Women* and *Monastic Life*. On double monasteries, see Peyroux, 'Abbess and Cloister', pp. 4–18; Godfrey, 'The Double Monastery in the Anglo-Saxon Minster System', esp. p. 346; Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 161–62; and Thacker, 'Monks, Preaching and Pastoral Care'. On Barking as a centre of learning, see Hollis, 'Barking's Monastic School'.

[155] *PdV* 19, ed. Ehwald, p. 249; trans. Lapidge, p. 75.

[156] 'Theodore's *Canons*', ed. Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, III, p. 199: 'Mulieri non licet virum dimittere licet sit fornicator, nisi forte pro monasterio' ('It is not permitted for a woman to abandon her husband even if he is an adulterer, unless perhaps [she abandons him] for the monastery'). Theodore's legislation regarding marriage is discussed in detail in Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women and the Church*, pp. 46–74, and the custom of abandoning marriages for the religious life is covered by Lapidge, *The Prose Works*, pp. 53–56.

period were governed by aristocratic women who had been married and either lost or left their husbands,[157] and that they often turned to monasticism without giving up the comforts they were accustomed to, including jewellery and expensive dress.[158]

Aldhelm's depiction of virginity as an internal rather than physical quality, especially through the rhetoric of 'spiritual adornment', may therefore appear as an attempt to reconcile late antique ideals of sanctity with the cultural environment of seventh-century England. But it is just as important to highlight the many similarities between Aldhelm's situation and that of his late antique predecessors. As the previous chapter has shown, in the early church, widows acted as leaders of religious communities much more frequently than virgins, and some women would convince their husbands to live chastely together or abandon their marriages for the monastic life. As Casiday notes, 'the status of the nuns at Barking is not a uniquely Anglo-Saxon phenomenon. Examples of marriages set aside for the pursuit of consecrated virginity are known in eastern ascetic literature [and] parallels are available in the west: e.g. the celebrated chaste marriages of Paulinus and Therasia and of Melania and Pinianus.'[159] Nor was it unprecedented for men to be held up as examples of chastity: holy men who conquered the temptations of the flesh appear frequently in early monastic literature, such as Athanasius's *Life of Anthony*. What is unusual about Aldhelm's work is the inclusion of male and female exemplars under one cover, not the exhortation of men to chastity in itself. Moreover, it is perhaps Aldhelm's mixed audience that motivated the new feature of *castitas*, since Latin had no word for a widower[160] and many monks would have set aside their wives for the sake of celibacy.[161] Lastly, although Thornbury believes that 'to imagine virginity as an ornament was to bring it into a complicated relationship with biblical and late antique discourses on the subject of women's appearance,'[162] it was early Christian

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[157] Yorke, *Nunneries*, p. 30

[158] Yorke, '"The Weight of Necklaces"', p. 110. Some scholars believe that Barking may have been a comfortable if not luxurious establishment on the basis of archaeological discoveries of combs, jewellery, weaving tools and traces of gold thread within its precincts (MacGowan, 'Barking Abbey'). However, MacGowan concludes that there is no 'direct archaeological evidence to suggest that the Saxon phases of the site were ecclesiastic or that they are located within the precinct of the Saxon monastery' (178), so one should be cautious when attempting to link Aldhelm's exhortations to the realities of monastic life at Barking.

[159] Casiday, 'St Aldhelm's Bees', 10.

[160] The Library of Latin Texts gives 23 results for *viduus* in the masculine throughout the Classical and medieval periods, but before the twelfth century, the word is only used as the past participle of *viduo*, 'I separate'—never to describe a bereft husband. The most frequent example is from Horace, *Carm.* 10 verse 9: 'viduus pharetra / risit Apollo' ('deprived of arrows, Apollo laughed'), which appears in multiple medieval commentaries and grammars, glossed as evidently an uncommon word. A different meaning is given by Tertullian, *Ad nationes* 2.15.2 (ed. Borleffs, *Opera I*, p. 70), who described a North African god of death called *Viduus*, 'qui animam corpore uiduet' ('who separates the soul from the body').

[161] Lapidge provides several examples in *The Prose Works*, p. 54.

[162] Thornbury, 'The Ornament of Virginity', p. 185.

moralists who developed the rhetoric of spiritual adornment—precisely because Roman women, just like Aldhelm's contemporaries, valued ornaments as an important means to display wealth and rank. Aldhelm, writing to an audience of wealthy women about the new profession of consecrated virginity, was faced with the challenge of transforming jewellery and clothes into symbols of a new, Christian status, just as the church fathers, whose successor he perhaps considered himself to be, had done.

This chapter will demonstrate that Aldhelm's treatment of adornment is closely aligned with late antique cosmetic theology. As monasticism took shape in seventh-century England, Aldhelm drew on earlier works of cosmetic theology—not only Cyprian, as O'Sullivan observed,[163] but also Ambrose, Jerome, Prudentius, Augustine and Pelagius—which used the rhetoric of adornment to encourage modest dress and spiritual exercise. In *De virginitate*, Aldhelm attempted to find the difficult balance between presenting spirituality as the key aspect of monastic life and at the same time upholding the special status of virginity and the importance of bodily modesty. Aldhelm inherited this contradiction from late antique works of cosmetic theology and transmitted it to his English audience, as both aspects were important for monastic discipline in their own way. This chapter will show that in the hortatory sections of the treatise, Aldhelm emphasised the importance of non-bodily chastity through the rhetoric of 'spiritual adornment', beginning a trend in Anglo-Latin literature which continued well into the eleventh century. But in his saintly *exempla*, which focus on the preservation of physical virginity, female sanctity is inherently tied to corporeality, particularly to the erotic effect female bodies can have on men. My aim is to demonstrate that for Aldhelm, cosmetic theology was first and foremost a tool of monastic discipline, and he transmitted and transformed the works of late antique moralists which he deemed useful for the encouragement of monastic life.

THE HORTATORY CHAPTERS (*PdV* I–XIX, LV–LX)

The *Prosa de Virginitate*, which contains the bulk of Aldhelm's depictions of adornment, consists of a catalogue of saints framed by two sections describing the merits of virginity and exhorting readers to preserve it. Despite Aldhelm's apologies for the work's brevity, *PdV* is not brief by any stretch of the imagination. Like its individual sentences, the treatise is circuitous and lengthy, and if Aldhelm maintained a definite position regarding women's dress, it 'only emerges with

[163] O'Sullivan, 'The Image of Adornment'.

difficulty from the profusion of similes which accompanies it'.[164] Aldhelm's tone, moreover, repeatedly shifts between irate and apologetic, now denouncing adornment and now proclaiming modest dress unimportant. The resulting rhetoric is confusing and self-contradictory. But Aldhelm's conflicting statements are subservient to his dual aim of promoting virginity and learning. Gwara, who views *De virginitate* as first and foremost a monastic text, notes that 'for Aldhelm monasticism also meant zeal for erudition that would permit one to teach the Gospel as a confident and charismatic interpreter. In these terms *PdV* could also be called a self-conscious declaration about the centrality of Latin learning in the missionary movement.'[165] This much is clear from the opening of the treatise, where Aldhelm compared his addressees first to athletes (*PdV* II–III) and then to bees (*PdV* IV–VI), thus praising their spiritual and intellectual efforts.[166] This section of the chapter will therefore show how *PdV*'s rhetoric of adornment in the hortatory sections was tailored to these two aims. Aldhelm associated elaborate dress with sexuality to show that modesty was essential to the virgins' profession. But he also reimagined virtues as ornaments as a reminder that virginity alone was insufficient, and that cultivation of virtues and learning was a key part of monastic life.

Spiritual Adornment I: Encouraging Modest Dress

In Chapter 1, I have shown how late antique moralists used the idea of spiritual adornment to exhort virgins to dress modestly. Cyprian, Ambrose, Augustine and Jerome repeatedly linked adornment to marriage and sexuality to discourage their readers from dressing conspicuously. Those who disobeyed were accused of promiscuity and pride. Following in their footsteps, Aldhelm presented adornment as incompatible with religious life. Towards the end of *PdV*, he openly voiced his disapproval of contemporary dress, which he described in elaborate detail:

> Nam cultus gemini sexus huiuscemodi constat subucula bissina, tonica coccinea siue iacintina, capitium et manicae sericis clauatae; galliculae rubricatis pellibus ambiuntur; antiae frontis et temporum cincinni calamistro crispantur; pulla capitis uelamina candidis et coloratis mafortibus cedunt, quae uittarum nexibus assutae talo tenus prolixius dependunt. Vngues ritu falconum et accipitrum seu certe adinstar cauanorum acuuntur, quos naturaliter ingenita edendi necessitas instigat obunca pedum fuscinula et rapaci ungularum arpagine alites et sorices crudeliter insectando grassari.

[164] Lapidge, *The Prose Works*, p. 57.
[165] Gwara, *Prosa De Virginitate*, p. 62*.
[166] On the latter, see Casiday, 'St Aldhelm's Bees' and O'Sullivan, 'Patristic Pastiche', 291–3.

> This sort of glamorisation for either sex consists in fine linen shirts, in scarlet or blue tunics, in necklines and sleeves embroidered with silk; their shoes are trimmed with red-dyed leather; the hair of their forelocks and the curls at their temples are crimped with a curling-iron; dark-grey veils for the head give way to bright and coloured head-dresses, which are sewn with interlacings and ribbons and hang down as far as the ankles. Fingernails are sharpened after the manner of falcons or hawks, or more properly, to the likeness of the night-owl, whom the innate need for food naturally incites to pursue and attack with cruelty small mice and birds with the curved trident of their feet.[167]

It is uncertain which items on Aldhelm's list refer to 'both sexes' and which are part of women's costume. As Owen-Crocker has pointed out, Aldhelm's obscure vocabulary is nearly impossible to match to the archaeological record, as even more conventional clothing terminology tends to be unstable.[168] Moreover, there is a strong possibility that the list derives from glossaries rather than the practical realities of what his contemporaries wore.[169] It is certainly notable that expensive dress was an issue for both male and female religious, and Chapter 5 will deal with Aldhelm's instructions for men. What this passage highlights is that the nobility, who founded, supported, and inhabited the early monasteries, did not feel that they had to change their attire in order to observe celibacy. In this instance, Aldhelm withheld any strong accusations. But elsewhere in *PdV*, armed with several patristic treatises, he depicted elaborate dress as seductive, worldly, and thus irreconcilable with virginal life.

Aldhelm did this most explicitly in chapter XVII, turning to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 7. 34 to show the difference between virginal modesty and married women's ostentation:

> Innupta cogitat, quae sunt domini, quomodo placeat Deo; nam quae nupta est, cogitat, quae sunt mundi, quomodo placeat viro. Revera grande constat intervallum et larga spatiosae intercapidinis differentia inter divinae dilectionis munificentiam et infimi amoris diligentiam: […] Ista collum lunulis et lacertos dextralibus ornari ac gemmiferis digitorum anulis comi concupiscit, illa pulcherrimo fulgentis pudicitiae cultu splendescere et auratis virtutum monilibus rutilare simulque candidis meritorum margaretis decorari desiderat; ista tortis cincinnorum crinibus calamistro crispantibus delicate componi et rubro coloris stibio genas ac mandibulas suatim fucare satagit, illa inculta criniculorum caesarie et neglegenter squalente capillatura cum palma virginitatis coronam gloriae in capite praefert; ista stolidis ornamentorum pompis indruticans adinstar illius mulieris aureo

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[167] *PdV* LVIII, ed. Ehwald, p. 318; trans. Lapidge, p. 128.

[168] Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 134–37, esp. p. 135: 'Professor Lapidge's readable translation vividly depicts a striking costume, but to accept this as a picture of eighth-century dress without considering other ways of translating Aldhelm's words would be deceptively simplistic.' She offers a different, though no less plausible, interpretation: '…a linen shirt; a scarlet or violet tunic, hooded, and sleeves striped in purple with silks; the [garments] are encircled with dark red furs… dark-grey veils for the head yield to white and coloured wimples which hang down from the grips of fillets as far as the ankles.'

[169] Cf. Theodore's *Commentarius Primus in Pentateuchum*, c. 450–54 (ed. and trans. Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*, pp. 381–83). I am grateful to Prof. Rosalind Love for this observation. On Aldhelm's use of glossaries, see Lindsay, *The Corpus*, pp. 97–100, and Winterbottom, 'Aldhelm's Style'.

> calice prostibuli poculum letiferum propinantis, quam apocalipsis super bestiam sedisse describit, composita pulchrum pariter et perniciosum cernentibus spectaculum praestat, illa castae conversationis documenta et supernorum civium exemplar aemulari cupientibus monstrare non cessat.
>
> And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord; that she may be holy both in body and in spirit. But she that is married thinketh on the things of the world; how she may please her husband' [1 Cor. 7. 34] In truth a great interval and a large dissimilarity of vast proportion exists between the munificence of divine dilection and the affection of baser love: […] the latter strives that her neck be decorated with necklaces and her arms with bracelets and that she be adorned with gem-studded rings on her fingers; the former desires to be radiant with the most beautiful adornment of shining modesty and to gleam with golden necklaces of virtues and at the same time to be decked out with the dazzling pearls of her merits. The one is busy being alluringly coiffed with the twisted curls of her ringlets curling round the tongs, and to paint her cheeks and lips after her own fashion with the scarlet rouge of artificial colour; the other, with an uncombed mane of hair and with her tresses carelessly matted bears the crown of glory with the palm-wreath of virginity on her head; the one, parading with the senseless pomp of her ornaments – in the likeness of that woman offering the lethal drink of the brothel in a golden chalice, whom the *Apocalypse* describes as having sat on the beast – when turned out offers a sight which is equally pleasing and harmful to the spectators; the other never ceases from displaying the lessons of chaste behaviour.[170]

Once again, it is uncertain whether he had contemporary fashions in mind. The mention of rouge certainly suggests that the description is derived from late antique sources rather than observation, as there is no evidence for the use of makeup in seventh-century England.[171] But Aldhelm's point was not to prohibit specific elements of dress. Rather, as Hollis puts it, 'he embarks on a contrast between the chaste adornment of the self in virtues and the kindling of marital wantonness with necklaces, bracelets and rings, the curling of tresses and the painting of the face. Nor can he conceive of any reason why fine clothing should be worn *except* for the purpose of enticement.'[172] The link between adornment and sexuality was so strong for Aldhelm that he even compared the married woman to the Whore of Babylon, the embodiment of sexual indulgence in Revelation 17.

The contrast between worldly and spiritual adornment is clearly modelled on earlier ascetic literature, namely, Cyprian, Ambrose and Pelagius, whose works on virginity Aldhelm knew.[173]

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[170] *PdV* XVII, ed. Ehwald, p. 246; trans. Lapidge, p. 73.

[171] Cf. Goscelin's descriptions makeup which draw on Jerome on p. # below. There is evidence that a 'red face' was an aesthetic trope in Anglo-Saxon England: see Rauer, ed., *Old English Martyrology*, pp. 35 and 229, and Rauer, 'Errors and Textual Problems', 151, on the description of St Anastasia as 'beautiful with a red face'. There is little evidence, however, that makeup was used to achieve this. Aldhelm's dislike for curls may also be borrowed from Paul's epistles rather than reflect reality: cf. 1 Timothy 2. 9,10. On hair curling in early medieval England see Cavell, 'Old English "wundenlocc" Hair'.

[172] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 99.

[173] Cf. Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 5 (ed. Keenan, p. 46), Ambrose, *De virginibus* I.6.29–30 (ed. Dückers, pp. 148–50), and Pelagius, *Ad Demetriadem* 24.2–3 (ed. Greshake, p. 144).

Aldhelm reinforced the same idea again in chapter LVI, invoking Cyprian as a special authority on the matter. First, he quoted a passage in which Cyprian linked elaborate attire to earthly marriage: '*Quid*, inquit, *ornata, quid compta procedit, quasi maritum aut habeat aut quaerat*?' ('why does [a virgin] set out adorned, why made up, as if she either has or seeks a husband?'[174]). But Cyprian disapproved of self-enhancement even for the purpose of pleasing one's husband, and Aldhelm repeated his assertion that '*ornamentorum enim ac uestium insignia et lenocinia formarum non nisi prostitutis et impudicis feminis congruunt*' ('the regalia of jewellery and clothing and the allurements of physical appearance are not appropriate to any but prostitutes and wanton women'[175]). Once again, Aldhelm underscored the association between adornment and wantonness by referring to Revelation: 'In apocalipsi: Mulier illa amicta erat pallium purpureum et coccineum' ('In the *Apocalypse*: "And the woman [i.e. the whore of Babylon] was clothed round about with purple and scarlet" [Revelation 17. 4]'[176]). And again, he added that women's beauty is a danger to men, this time on the authority of Cyprian:

> Et alibi *ceterum*, inquit, *si tu te sumptuosius comas et per publicum notabiliter incedas… ut, etsi ipsa non pereas, alios tamen perdas et uelut gladium te et uenenum uidentibus exhibeas, excusari non potes, quasi mente casta sis et pudica. Redarguit te cultus improbus et impudicus ornatus nec computari iam potest inter uirgines Christi, quae sic uiuit, ut possit adamari.*
>
> Elsewhere Cyprian says: 'If you dress yourself sumptuously and go out in public so as to attract notice [so that] even if you yourself don't perish, you nonetheless destroy others and present yourself to your onlookers as if you were poison or the sword, you cannot be excused as if you were of a chaste and modest mind. Your shameless dress and your immodest jewellery condemn you, nor can she who lives in such a way as to be the subject of passion be counted among the virgins of Christ.'[177]

Following the tradition running back to Tertullian, Aldhelm also warned his audience to eschew outer adornment because it contravenes the laws of God and nature:

> Et quid [Deus], cum conderet orbem, originaliter creare nequiuerit, quod nunc mortalium industria stolidis et superfluis adinuentionum argumentis addere ac amplificare contendit? Vnde inclitus idem Cyprianus, Punicorum pontifex, infit: *neque enim Deus coccineas aut purpureas oues fecit aut herbarum sucis et conquiliis tinguere et colorare lanas docuit*.
>
> And why would [God], when He created the world, not have been able to create at the beginning that which the enterprise of mortals strives to augment and amplify by means of the foolish and superfluous experiments of its inventions? Whence the same excellent

[174] *PdV* LVI, ed. Ehwald, p. 315; trans. Lapidge, p. 125, referring to *De habitu virginum* 5.
[175] *Ibid.*; trans. Lapidge, p. 125, quoting *De habitu virginum* 12.
[176] *Ibid.*.
[177] *Ibid.*, quoting *De habitu virginum* 9.

> Cyprian, bishop of the Africans, says: 'For God did not create scarlet and purple sheep, nor teach dyeing and colouring of wool with the juice of plants or with shell-fish.[178]

But he soon returned to the issue of adornment's seductive effect. In chapter LVII, he followed Ambrose in presenting the biblical heroine Judith as an exemplar of chaste widowhood—only to highlight the dangers of feminine allurements:

> Iudith, filia Merari, post obitum Manasse sumpto viduitatis theristro et spreto sponsali peplo blanda procorum lenocinia contempnens […] De qua in .LXX. translatoribus scriptum est: Induit se vestem iocunditatis suae et imposuit periscelides et dextralia et anulos et omnia ornamenta sua et composuit se nimis in rapinam virorum. En, non nostris assertionibus sed scripturae astipulationibus ornatus feminarum rapina virorum vocatur!
>
> Judith, the daughter of Merari, scorned the flattering allurements of suitors after the death of Manasses, taking up the weeds of widowhood and rejecting a wedding dress […] Of her, it is written in the Septuagint: "And she clothed herself with the garments of her gladness, and put sandals on her feet, and took her bracelets, and lilies, and earlets, and rings, and adorned herself with all her ornaments" [Judith 10. 3], and tricked herself out to prey on men. You see, it is not by my assertion but by the statement of Scripture that the adornment of women is called the depredation of men![179]

Although Aldhelm excused Judith's use of adornment, perhaps influenced by Ambrose's *De virginibus*,[180] he added one more biblical example of adorned women's dangers:

> Necnon in proverbiis mulier illa procax et pertinax […] ornatu meretricio et luxu lenocinante vecordem iuvenem pellexisse et fraudulento verborum oblectamento deceptum lugubriter elisisse describitur.'
>
> Similarly, that stubborn and insolent woman in Proverbs […] in the trappings of a harlot and with alluring luxury, is described as having enticed a foolish young man and, when she had deceived him with the fraudulent delights of her promises, destroyed him pitiably.[181]

In other words, although Judith had good reason to use seductive adornments, Aldhelm made sure to reinforce the message that elaborate dress is immoral and unsuitable for chaste women.

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[178] *Ibid.*, referring to *De habitu virginum* 14.

[179] *PdV* LVII, ed. Ehwald, p. 316; trans. Lapidge, pp. 126–27. Lapidge notes that the phrase *et composuit se in rapinam virorum*, on which Aldhelm based his claim, is not found in the Vulgate but appears in a Vetus Latina version (*The Prose Works* p. 197, n. 32). Cf. the mixed readings of the Vulgate and Vetus Latina in the Old English *Judith*: see Griffith, ed., *Judith*, pp. 47–61.

[180] *Ibid.*: 'in arta Betuliae obsidione pro contribulibus dolitura compatientis affectu, non castitatis defectu fecisse memoratur' ('she is known to have done this during the siege of Bethulia, grieving for her kinsfolk with the affection of compassion and not through any disaffection from chastity'). Cf. Ambrose, *De virginibus* II.4.24 (ed. Dückers, p. 242): 'et Iudith se, ut adultero placeret, ornavit. quae tamen quia hoc religione, non amore faciebat, nemo eam adulteram iudicabat' ('and Judith adorned herself that she might please an adulterer, but because she did this for religion and not for love, no one considered her an adulteress').

[181] *Ibid.*

'That Aldhelm elects to warn the nuns of Barking against self-adornment in ways that identify women as agents of sexual temptation may seem unsurprising in view of the weight of patristic tradition to which he is heir, and from which he quotes prolifically,' Hollis observes.[182] These passages make clear that Aldhelm followed the long tradition of cosmetic theology, which viewed adornment and chastity as incompatible. These are the examples which led Hollis to conclude that Aldhelm was campaigning for gender segregation, as women's seductiveness would have made cohabitation of monks and nuns seem dangerous. Textual evidence is insufficient to prove this (if anything, the address of the treatise to women indicates that this was not Aldhelm's immediate aim). But Aldhelm clearly wanted women to abandon worldly ornaments if they were going to pursue a life of chastity. He therefore used the rhetoric of spiritual adornment to encourage modesty, condemning worldly adornment and praising the adornment of the soul with virtues.

Spiritual Adornment II: Encouraging Moral Effort

At the same time, just like many of the patristic authors, Aldhelm presented 'spiritual adornment' as more than a replacement of worldly finery. Throughout *PdV*, he established spiritual adornment and spiritual virginity as parallel ideas. This allowed him to encourage his monastic audience to pursue virtue and learning, as virgins and non-virgins alike would need to possess a virtuous soul, not just a virginal body. Aldhelm therefore depicted virtues, including virginity, as ornaments which can be attained through active spiritual effort.

Aldhelm's rhetoric of spiritual adornment is discussed extensively by O'Sullivan, who argues that Aldhelm saw inner adornment and inner virginity as parallel images of Christian purity because of Cyprian's influence.[183] Indeed, Cyprian's *De habitu virginum* is the earliest Latin work on virginity concerned not simply with physical purity, but rather with its moral and spiritual dimensions: 'The virgin who adorns her body with physical ornaments already loses the virginity of her soul. Earlier exegetes had certainly been interested both in adornment and in virginity, but Cyprian was the first to link these images, especially the idea of inner adornment with spiritual virginity.'[184] Since Aldhelm, as we have seen, followed Cyprian in comparing the finery of worldly women to the spiritual adornment of virgins, O'Sullivan concludes that 'Aldhelm's indebtedness to Cyprian is very great indeed. […] Both adornment and virginity are examined as spiritual or

[182] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 100.
[183] O'Sullivan, 'The Image of Adornment', 50.
[184] *Ibid.*, 51.

inner states. The virgin must be pure in mind and body; this purity is reflected in the inner adornment of the soul.'[185] Cyprian undoubtedly helped Aldhelm to form his approach to spiritual adornment. But there is a crucial difference between the two authors. For Cyprian, the virgin's internal virtue should be evident in the way she is dressed, and the physical purity of her body may be undone by ostentatious dress:

> *Sic et mulier et uirgo innupta cogitat ea quae sunt Domini, ut sit sancta corpore et spiritu.* uirgo non esse tantum sed et intellegi debet et credi: nemo cum uirginem uiderit, dubitet an uirgo sit. parem se integritas in omnibus praestet nec bonum corporis cultus infamet.
>
> 'So the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh of the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit.' A virgin should not only be a virgin, but she ought to be known and considered as such. No one on seeing a virgin should doubt whether she is one. Let her innocence manifest itself equally in all things, and her dress not dishonour the sanctity of her body.[186]

Aldhelm, as we have seen, followed Cyprian in associating the Pauline passage with the adornment of wives and maidens, but his lesson is strikingly different:

> Ergo nequaquam carnalis integritas comprobatur, nisi consors spiritalis castimonia comitetur. Unde vas electionis Ut sit, inquit, sancta et corpore et spiritu. En, apostolicis manifestatur vocibus, quod sola carnalis pudicitiae immunitas caelestis regni claustra reserare nequeat et solitaria nequaquam paradisi valvam recludere valeat […] nisi utrimque duplex sanctimonia concorditer candescat. […] pura incontaminatae virginitatis perseverantia Deo mancipatur indefessa cogitationis instantia et ediverso effrenatae iugalitatis libertas efficitur securae immunitatis captiva paupertas.
>
> Therefore carnal integrity is in no way approved of, unless spiritual purity is associated with it as a companion. Whence the 'vessel of election' says, 'And the unmarried woman and the virgin thinketh on the things of the Lord; that she may be holy both in body and in spirit'. Clearly, it is shown by the apostle's statements that the stainlessness of bodily purity by itself cannot unlock the gates of the heavenly kingdom, and on its own can in no way serve to reopen the door of Paradise […] unless a dual sanctity on each side glistens in harmony. […] The pure steadfastness of uncontaminated virginity is made a servant of God through the tireless constancy of contemplation; and, on the other hand, the freedom of restrained conjugality is made into a servile poverty of complacent spotlessness.[187]

Aldhelm illustrated this argument with several elaborate metaphors, comparing virginity to embroidered fabric, the multicoloured curtains of the Temple (Exodus 26. 1–2), and a jewel in a golden ring, to show that 'incompta virginitatis industria sine reliquarum amminiculo virtutum non opulenta ecclesiasticae segetis ubertate cum centenis meritorum manipulis ditabitur, sed

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[185] *Ibid.*, 57.
[186] *De habitu virginum* 5, ed. and trans. Keenan, p. 49.
[187] *PdV* XVI, ed. Ehwald, p. 245; trans. Lapidge, pp. 72–73.

infructuosa et infecunda sterilitate marcescens cum fatuis virginibus extinctas lampadas gestantibus multabitur' ('the unadorned diligence of virginity, without the assistance of other virtues, will not be enriched with the opulent abundance of the ecclesiastical harvest by a hundred-fold return on its merits, but withering with fruitless and barren sterility will be punished along with the foolish virgins carrying burned-out lamps'[188]). Thus, for Aldhelm, physical virginity alone was not enough. It is through asceticism and contemplation (*cogitatio*) that both virgins and non-virgins could attain the ornament of spiritual purity.

This is a notable departure from the cosmetic theology of Cyprian, who used the rhetoric of spiritual adornment primarily to encourage modest dress. As Thornbury observes, 'virginity, conceived as an ornament, is thus the end result of lifelong endeavour, rather than an innate quality preserved by withdrawing from the world.'[189] To drive this point home, Aldhelm relied on two late antique authors: Augustine and Pelagius. Although divided by their understanding of free will,[190] both theologians argued that virginity could be—and needed to be—maintained not only through bodily purity but also through active pursuit of virtue.

The image of virtues as ornaments put on for Christ through daily efforts is especially striking in the work of Pelagius. Aldhelm was familiar with Pelagius's *Epistola ad Demetriadem*, a letter of advice to a wealthy patrician girl who had recently become a consecrated virgin. This letter is the source of Aldhelm's portrait of Demetrias in his catalogue of saints,[191] where he quoted several passages from Pelagius verbatim—although without naming the author.[192] But Pelagius's image of spiritual adornment underpins Aldhelm's ascetic ideal more broadly. Most significantly, Pelagius wrote to Demetrias that virginity alone was insufficient:

> Nec earum te exempla decipiant, quae sibi sola in castitate plaudentes, ut post suas voluptates eant, abiciant voluntatem Dei. Quae perpetuae castitatis bonum non cum iustitia, sed pro iustitia offerre volunt et in compensationem peccatorum pretium virginitatis annumerant.
>
> Do not let yourself be deceived by the examples of those women who, while applauding themselves on chastity alone, reject the will of God and follow the dictates of their own

[188] *Ibid.* XV, ed. Ehwald, p. 244; trans. Lapidge, p. 71.
[189] Thornbury, 'The Ornament of Virginity', p. 183.
[190] On the conflict between Augustine and Pelagius, which resulted in the latter being condemned as a heretic, see Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, pp. 357–61, and more recently Lamberigts, 'Pelagius and Pelagianism'. Bonner argues in *The Myth of Pelagianism* (*passim*) that Augustine may have deliberately misrepresented Pelagius's teachings—in opposition to earlier studies which view 'Pelagianism' as a distinct if not easily defined set of ideas; see Lössl, 'Augustine, "Pelagianism," Julian of Aeclanum'; Beatrice, 'The Pelagian Critique'.
[191] *PdV* XLIX, ed. Ehwald, p. 303 and *CdV*, l. 2162, ed. Ehwald, p. 442.
[192] For a discussion of Aldhelm's knowledge of the Pelagian controversy and the authorship of the *Letter to Demetrias*, see Zhirnova, '*Liberae mentis praesidium*'.

> wills. What they want to do is to offer the good of perpetual virginity not along with righteousness but in its place and to count the reward for their virginity as part of their compensation for sins.[193]

As Rees puts it, Pelagius's letter 'provides a large-scale map of the route to moral excellence, annotated with warnings of the traps and pitfalls along the road and sharp reminders from time to time that the state of virginity, blessed though it undoubtedly is and far superior to that of the ordinary, run-of-the-mill Christian, will turn out to be no more than a mirage in life's wilderness, if the one who seeks to fulfil all its requirements fails to satisfy those of the Christian life as a whole,'[194]—a view that clearly underpins Aldhelm's warnings against taking pride in virginity and neglecting spiritual effort. Indeed, Aldhelm's extended comparison of the wife and the virgin, where the virgin 'pulcherrimo fulgentis pudicitiae cultu splendescere et auratis uirtutum monilibus rutilare simulque candidis *meritorum* margaretis decorari desiderat' ('desires to be radiant with the most beautiful adornment of shining modesty and to gleam with golden necklaces of virtues and at the same time to be decked out with the dazzling pearls of her *merits*'[195]) is probably inspired not by Cyprian but by Pelagius's comparison of bridal attire to the spiritual riches necessary to please Christ:

> Saeculi virgines, quae se nuptiis praeparant […] ut sponsis placeant eosque in amorem sui magis incitent, mira se solicitudine formare student, et naturalem corporis pilchritudinem ornandi arte commendant. Est haec illis in dies singulos cura praecipua, decentibus fucis colorare faciem, implicare auro crinem et ardentes concharum lapides capitis honorem facere, suspendere ex auribus patrimonia, bracchia onerare monilibus ac latera, inclusas auro gemmas a collo in pectus demittere. Non minorem sponsus tuus requirit ornatum […] Illum honorem serva capitis, quem acquisisti chrismatis sacramento, cum tibi in coelestis regni mysterium diadema quoddam regalis unctionis impositum est. Optima ortamenta sint aurium verba Dei, ad quae sola paratus esse debet auditus virginis eaque pretiosissimis lapidibus anteferre. Omnia prorsus membra decorentur operibus sanctitatis, totaque virginalis animae pulchritudo, gemmati monilis instar, vario virtutum fulgore resplendeat.
>
> The maidens of the secular world who prepare themselves for marriage… take pains to get themselves up with remarkable care and to make their natural physical beauty attractive by use of the cosmetic art so as to please their bridegrooms and excite them to greater love. This is their special concern day by day, colouring their faces with the appropriate paints, entwining their hair with gold, beautifying their heads with glittering gems and pearls, suspending a family fortune from their ears, [weighing down] their arms and bosoms with bracelets and letting precious stones enclosed in gold hang down onto their breasts from their necks. Your bridegroom requires no less adornment on your part […] As a decoration for your head keep what you acquired by the sacrament of unction,

[193] *Ad Demetriadem* X.2, ed. Greshake, p. 94; trans. Rees, p. 47.
[194] Rees, *Pelagius*, p. 32.
[195] *PdV* XVII, ed. Ehwald, p. 246; trans. Lapidge, p. 73 (my emphasis).

> when a diadem of royal unguent was placed upon you as a token of the mystery of the kingdom of heaven. As for the ears, their best ornament are the words of God; it is for them alone that the hearing of the virgin should be prepared, they are what she should prefer to the most precious of stones. As for her limbs, all of them without exception must be adorned with works of holiness, and the whole beauty of her virginal soul, like a necklace made of jewels, must gleam with the multicoloured brilliance of her virtues.[196]

Both Pelagius and Aldhelm were drawing on 1 Cor. 7. 34, but Aldhelm's argument, with its emphasis on merit, clearly echoes *Ad Demetriadem*—with one crucial change. The virgin in Pelagius's text strives to be virtuous to earn the love of Christ, but Aldhelm's virgin adorns herself to display 'castae conversationis documenta et supernorum civium exempla aemulari cupientibus' ('the lessons of chaste behaviour and the exemplar of the citizens of heaven to those desiring to emulate (her)'[197]). That is, while Pelagius used spiritual adornment to show how moral effort leads to salvation, Aldhelm additionally emphasised its conversionary effect. Just as a richly adorned secular woman leads the beholder astray, so the virgin, with her wardrobe of virtues, attracts others to the life of chastity. In other words, for Aldhelm, it was not enough to preserve one's own virginity or engage in spiritual efforts for one's own salvation: 'spiritual adornment' had to be put on for the salvation of others.

Moreover, Aldhelm took a step further from Cyprian by arguing that 'spiritual virginity', which according to *De habitu virginum* could be undone by ostentatious dress, could also be preserved regardless of bodily purity. At the end of his treatise, as Hollis put it, Aldhelm 'deconstructs his own concern with outer, literal and bodily garments'[198] by stating that spiritual rather than physical integrity constitutes virginity, drawing on Augustine to make his point:

> Sed de intactae virginitatis gloria dicturi propemodum superflue de peplorum amiculo rethoricamur […] Omne etenim purae virginitatis privilegium potius in solo liberae mentis praesidio servatur, quam in arto carnis clustello continetur, et magis inflexibili ultroneae voluntatis arbitrio salubriter tutatur, quam coacto corporis famulatu funditus ad nihilum redigatur, unde Augustinus Afer, Ypponae Regiensis pontifex, eleganti prosae sententia promulgat dicens: Ita non amittitur corporis sanctitas manente animi sanctitate etiam corpore oppresso, sicut amittitur sanctitas corporis violata animi puritate etiam corpore intacto. […] Denique praefatus Punicorum praesul Virginitas, inquit, carnis corpus intactum, virgintas animae fides incorupta.
>
> But as I was about to speak of the glory of intact virginity, I began to harangue unnecessarily about the covering of garments – almost superfluously […] For every privilege of pure virginity is preserved only in the fortress of the free mind rather than being contained in the restricted confines of the flesh; and it is beneficially safeguarded by

[196] Pelagius, *Ad Demetriadem* XXIV.2–4, ed. Greshake, pp. 146–48; trans. Rees, p. 62.
[197] *PdV* XVII, ed. Ehwald, p. 246; trans. Lapidge, p. 73.
[198] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 106.

> the inflexible judgement of the free will, rather than being diminished out of existence by the enforced servitude of the body. Whence Augustine of Africa, the bishop of Hippo Regis, declares in an elegant sentence of prose, saying, 'Thus the sanctity of the body is not lost provided that the sanctity of the soul remains, even if the body is overcome, just as the sanctity of the body *is* lost if the purity of the soul is violated, even if the body is intact.' [*De Civit. Dei* I.18] […] Finally, the aforesaid bishop of the Africans states, 'Virginity of the flesh is an intact body; virginity of the mind is an uncorrupted faith.' [*Enarr in Ps. CXLVII*, 19].[199]

Thus, while Aldhelm accepted the patristic teachings about the danger of outer adornment for inner purity, he modified Cyprian's notion of ornamentation as defilement with Augustine's theology, which abandoned the earlier preoccupation with the literal condition of the body and emphasised the spiritual aspect of virginity. Augustine's work on widowhood, discussed in the previous chapter, is another possible influence on Aldhelm's rhetoric of adornment, as Augustine stated that all chaste and virtuous women, regardless of virginity or age, were beautiful in the eyes of Christ: 'hac pulchritudine illi placete; hanc pulchritudinem studiosa cura et sollicita cogitatione conponite. […] in qua pulchritudine etiam illius auia, socrus tua, quae iam certe senuit, est pulchra uobiscum' ('please him by this [inner] beauty, take care of this beauty with zealous diligence and anxious thought. […] In this [inner] beauty her grandmother, your mother-in-law, who by now has surely grown old, is also beautiful together with you'[200]).

Aldhelm did not say whether inner virtue can guard against the dangers of outer adornment. But the description of Judith in the *Carmen de virginitate*, which echoes Augustine's statement on the power of the mind, seems to suggest so:

> Quid referam Iudith generosa stirpe creatam
> Prostibulum regis temnentem corpore puro
> Et stuprum sceleris calcantem corde profanum?
> Civibus idcirco mortis discrimina passis
> Casta cruentatum gestavit bulga tropeum
> Servans integrum devota mente pudorem.
>
> What shall I say of Judith, born to a noble lineage,
> with a pure body scorning a king's whoredom,
> and trampling in her heart the profane fornication of sin?
> For which reason the chaste woman brought back
> a bloody trophy in a bag to citizens in mortal peril,
> preserving unimpaired modesty in her devout mind.[201]

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[199] *PdV* LVIII, ed. Ehwald, p. 319; trans. Lapidge, p. 129.
[200] Augustine, *De bono viduitatis* XIX.23–24, ed. Zycha, pp. 333–34. See Chapter 1.
[201] *CdV* ll. 2560–65, ed. Ehwald, p. 457; trans. Thornbury, 'The Ornament of Virginity' p. 191 (she renders the final line closer to the Latin than Rosier did).

As can be seen, Aldhelm followed Cyprian in arguing that virginity must be accompanied by the 'inner adornment' of virtues, but he was also influenced by Pelagius and Augustine, who emphasised that virginity itself is a state which needs to be maintained through strenuous spiritual work. This allowed him to make the virtue of virginity accessible for women who had been married (as Augustine did) and to encourage nuns to persevere in spiritual and intellectual efforts (as Pelagius did). The image of virginity as an ornament acquired through the cultivation of virtues may have resonated, as Thornbury argued, with an Anglo-Saxon audience's preconceptions about adornment. But perhaps more obviously, it speaks to the aims of an author writing during the formative period of monasticism, who strove to downgrade the social status of wealth by showing the superiority of spiritual riches.[202] Aldhelm's innovative emphasis on the conversionary effect of spiritual adornment is especially telling in this regard, as is his conception of virtues as ornaments, which follows a long patristic tradition. Aldhelm's conflicting presentation of adornment, whereby outer finery is to be shunned, but spiritual finery is to be desired, served the two aspects of monastic discipline: physical austerity and spiritual effort.

THE SAINTLY *EXEMPLA* (*PdV* XL–LII, *CdV* ll. 1653–2443)

While recognising the importance of 'spiritual virginity', however, Aldhelm also showed that *physical* chastity and modesty were still crucial attributes of female sanctity. In his catalogue of holy virgins, the object of Aldhelm's praise is a purity that, for all his equivocation, is never entirely independent from the female body. In these *vitae*, contempt for adornment is one of the key manifestations of virginal resolve, which is rewarded by spiritual ornaments: crowns, garlands, necklaces and jewels galore. At the same time, the virgins' unadorned bodies are themselves objects of male desire, and their claim to sanctity is their ability to defend their virginity from sexual threat. Moreover, throughout *De virginitate*, women themselves are often depicted as a kind of ornament—a metaphor Aldhelm never applied to men. In other words, like his patristic predecessors, Aldhelm associated women primarily with the body, even if this association was positive.

[202] Aldhelm, who

In *Prosa de virginitate*, Aldhelm described twenty-two exemplary women (twenty in the *Carmen*), most of them martyrs. Of these twenty-two virgins, six reject both luxuries and marriage; in the verse, the number is even higher—twelve out of twenty. This is out of a total of twelve marriage rejections in the prose and fourteen in the verse. In other words, a significant number of Aldhelm's female *exempla* equate rejection of adornment with rejection of marriage, just as Aldhelm had done in the hortatory sections.

Among these exemplary virgins is Agnes, whom we encountered in Chapter 1 as a prominent model of female sanctity: rejecting her suitor's gifts in favour of spiritual adornment and, after a series of temptations and torments, winning the crown of martyrdom.[203] Aldhelm copied Agnes's speech about the heavenly gifts of Christ almost verbatim, adding that Agnes 'pro integritate servanda omnem ornamentorum gloriam [contempsit] ut lurida fetentis cloacae volutabra' ('in order to preserve her purity, scorned like the yellow-brown scum of a reeking sewer all the array of ornaments'[204]). This was certainly not a pleasant comparison for those women in Aldhelm's audience who had been married and wore jewellery. A number of other saints follow the same model. Anatolia and Victoria, for example,

> omne patrimonium et ornamentorum gloriam tam discriminalia capitum et periscelides crurum quam olfactoriola nardi et crepundia collo gemmiferis lunulis pendentia ad stipem mancis et matriculariis prodiga liberalitate contulerunt. Quo conperto procorum praecordia furibundis vesaniae faculis inflammantur, dum universi facultatum reditus et copiosa quaestus stipendia ad agapem pauperculis mendicantibus venirent.
>
> gave away with prodigal generosity all their inheritance and the wealth of their ornaments—both the hair-pins for their coiffure and the anklets for their legs as well as their perfume-bottles of balsam and the pendants hanging from the neck with gem-studded bangles [cf. Isaiah 3. 20]—for the sustenance of the sick and poor. When this was discovered, the hearts of their suitors were set ablaze with raging torches of madness—since all the income from their wealth and the copious reward of their suit went to the benefit of poor beggars![205]

And Lucia, similarly, gave away her earthly dowry to attain heavenly marriage: 'arcarum clustella reserantur, mancorum marsuppia replentur; sponsalia erogantur crepundia et Caeli comparantur triclinia, ac dum carnale stirpatur patrimonium, spiritale exercetur mercimonium. Verum pro huiusmodi negotio sponsus iracundiae facibus inflammatur' ('the recesses of treasure-chests are opened up, purses of coins are filled, wedding fripperies are disbursed, and a heavenly banquet

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[203] See Chapter 1.
[204] *PdV* XLV, ed. Ehwald, p. 298; trans. Lapidge, p. 112.
[205] *Ibid.* LII, ed. Ehwald, p. 308; trans. Lapidge, pp. 119–20.

is prepared; and while a fleshly inheritance is being uprooted, a spiritual contract is being settled. But because of this settlement the bridegroom is kindled with the flames of anger'[206]).

Even when rejection of marriage was not central to the plot, Aldhelm still stressed rejection of wealth and adornment as a marker of true virginity. Thus, Aldhelm praised Demetrias, the dedicatee of Pelagius's letter, in words copied from Pelagius himself, as first and foremost an ascetic who resisted the temptation of worldly luxuries:

> Scribendum est igitur ad Demetriadem, virginem Christi, virginem nobilem, virginem divitem et, quod his maius est, ardore fidei nobilitatem divitiasque calcantem et infra: Quae summo loco nata, in summis opibus summisque delciis nutrita tantis tamque variis vitae huius blandimentis velut tenacissimis quibusdam vinculis irretita subito eruperit cunctaque simul bona corporis animi virtute mutarit; et post pauca Meminit enim, inquit, quas mundi opes gloriamque respuerit, quas denique contempserit vitae praesentis illecebras, quibus voluptatibus renuntiaverit.
>
> 'Therefore I must write to Demetrias, a virgin of Christ, a noble virgin, a wealthy virgin and, what is greater than these things, a virgin spurning her nobility and her wealth in the ardour of her faith,' and further on, '(Demetrias), born in this high station, nourished with the greatest riches and the greatest luxuries, and ensnared with so many and so various attractions of this life as if (entangled) in exceedingly tenacious chains, suddenly broke free and transformed all her bodily goods by the power of her soul'; and a little later he says: 'For she recalls what riches and glory of this world she has rejected, and what allurements of this present life she has scorned, what pleasures she has renounced.'[207]

Fondness for asceticism was hardly a new phenomenon in the seventh century, but it is instructive that rejection of adornment is explicitly linked to rejection of marriage in so many *vitae* of women—but not men.[208] Out of the thirty-nine holy men described in *Prosa de virginitate*, only one, Chrysanthus, is depicted resisting the temptations of beautiful clothing. Chrysanthus, a Christian sworn to virginity, was imprisoned for his faith but rescued by his father, who tried to entice him into married life with various worldly luxuries:

> Iam non tormentorum supplicio, sed blandimentorum lenocinio natum ad suos libitus flectere nititur. Auferens illum de ergastulo squalente olosericis et bombicinis indutum vestibus misit in triclinium, ubi pulcherrimae virgines pretiosis comptae cicladibus dilicatas defruti dilicias et sumptuosa ferculorum convivia praepararent effrenatos laetitiae cachinnos et iocosos ludorum amplexus miscentes, ut in talibus blandimentis ferrea iuvenis praecordia mollescerent.
>
> He now strives to bend his son to his wishes not with the pain of tortures but with the allurement of pleasures. Taking him from his squalid prison, he dressed him in silken

[206] *Ibid.* XLII, ed. Ehwald, p. 293; trans. Lapidge, p. 108.
[207] *Ibid.* XLIX, ed. Ehwald, p. 303; trans. Lapidge, p. 116 (quoting *Ad Demetriadem*, c. 1).
[208] It must be noted that Aldhelm's holy men likewise reject marriage. But they reject it *in principle*, rather than resisting the advances of a particular woman charmed by their looks.

> garments and sent him into the dining-room where very beautiful girls adorned in sumptuous dresses had prepared the luxurious delights of wine and the sumptuous entertainment of a feast, combining unrestrained shrieks of joy with the light-hearted embraces of sexual play, so that they might soften the iron resolve of the youth with blandishments.[209]

Seeing the youth unmoved by rich clothing, luxurious food, and enticing women, the father presented him a bride: 'Daria, virgo vestalis satis pulchra et eleganti forma, gemmis auroque radians […] ut militem Christi tam urbana verborum facundia quam falerata colli crepundia ad thalami copulam inclinarent' ('Daria, a very beautiful vestal virgin of elegant appearance, radiant with jewels and gold, […] in order that both the polished eloquence of her speech as well as the ornamented gew-gaws on her bosom should incline the soldier of Christ to the tie of marriage'[210]). Chrysanthus, however, persevered once again and converted his unsuccessful temptress to Christianity. Although this *vita* broadly follows models such as Saint Agnes (rejecting adornment) and Cecilia (converting one's spouse-to-be), it is significant that rejection of adornment plays only a minor part in Chrysanthus's trial. Conversely, it is his ability to resist the allure of beautifully adorned women that marks him out as a saint—not his avoidance of becoming an object of desire or escaping the consequences of being desired.

As McInerney observes, 'Aldhelm succeeds in separating virginity almost entirely from corporeality in the case of his male virgins. In the case of women, on the other hand, virginity is defined not simply by corporeality but by the erotic charge that the female virgin body inevitably arouses.'[211] Indeed, many of the *vitae* Aldhelm chose to include follow the same pattern: the virgins arouse the lust of pagan persecutors and die in defence of their chastity; they are pursued for their virginity, which is indistinguishable from their beauty. Thus, in the *vita* of Chionia, Irene and Agape, Aldhelm stated that the virgins appeared desirable precisely because their beauty was unadorned:

> Quarum formosam vultus venustatem non stibio confectam vel calamistro cirris crispantibus indeptam, sed genuina conspersione ingenitam praeses petulcus contemplans statim oculorum lenocinio captus in luxum labescit, ut cera ante larem liquescit.
>
> This wanton guard, contemplating (the sisters') comely beauty of face—not produced by make-up, nor achieved by ringlets curling from the crimping-iron, but inborn through

[209] *Ibid.* XXXV, ed. Ehwald, p. 278; trans. Lapidge, p. 97.
[210] *Ibid.*. For a link between eloquence and sexual seduction, cf. Aldhelm's *Letter* 3 (ed. Ehwald, p. 479, trans. Herren, *The Prose Works*, pp. 154–55). Note also the similarity to Prudentius's contrast between Vestals and Christian virgins noted in Chapter 1, p. 14.
[211] McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, pp. 91–92.

> natural grace—was immediately caught by the lasciviousness of his eyes and tumbled into debauchery, just as wax before a fire.[212]

The statement that the virgins' beauty was natural is nowhere to be found in Aldhelm's source material and must therefore be his own addition,[213] which corresponds to the idea of 'spiritual adornment' we find elsewhere in *De virginitate*. Occasionally, this virginal beauty, derived from 'spiritual adornment', has the kind of conversionary effect Aldhelm envisaged in c. XVII, such as in the *vitae* of Constantina (c. XLVIII[214]) and Cecilia (c. XL), who convert their suitors to Christianity through their unassailable virtues. But it is significant that even 'spiritual' adornment turns women into objects of desire, or into ornaments to be looked at. This much is clear from the passage in *Prosa de virginitate* which connects the catalogues of male and female saints:

> Expletis igitur summatim masculini sexus exemplis, qui nequaquam nutabundo integritatis fundamento castae conversationis structuram sustentabant, ad inclitas itidem secundi sexus personas, quae in sanctae virginitatis perseverantia inflexibili mentis rigore usquequaque duruerunt, verborum gressibus gradatim spatiantes ab isdem pulcherrimos pudicitiae flores feliciter carpere contendamus, quatenus aeternae beatitudinis coronam.
>
> Having, therefore, completed in a cursory fashion the examples of the masculine sex—who supported the edifice of chaste behaviour with anything but a crumbling foundation of integrity—and moving gradually with verbal footsteps to the equally distinguished personalities of the second sex, who continually endured in the perseverance of holy virginity with an inflexible strength of mind: let us strive to pluck successfully the most beautiful flowers of purity from these (women), so that we may be able to embroider with a braid that cannot be unplaited the crown of eternal beatitude.[215]

The imagery of this passage is somewhat at odds with Aldhelm's assertion that the distinction of female virginity is the same as that of men. The final metaphor, in which Aldhelm proposed to 'pluck the flowers of purity' from his female examples, is ambivalent, as it recalls the title of Prudentius's *Liber peristephanon* ('Crowns of Martyrdom'), but also the Classical metaphor for defilement. Even leaving the latter interpretation aside, the passage still presents male and female

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[212] *PdV* L, ed. Ehwald, p. 305; trans. Lapidge, p. 117.

[213] Cf. *De Sanctis Sororibus Agape, Chionia, et Irene, Virginibus et Martyribus Thessalonicae*, ed. *Acta Sanctorum,* Aprilis I.248–50.

[214] Constantina's rejection of adornment is emphasised even more strongly in *CdV*, ll. 2051–58, ed. Ehwald, pp. 437–38: 'Nobilis in Roma vixit pulcherrima virgo / Constantina novae praebens spectacula vitae / Omnibus, integre qui conversarier optant / Lurida linquentes veteris contagia vitae. / Haec, inquam, virgo caelesti freta patrono / Contempsit mundum felix cum flore virentem, / Arida ceu paleae proiecta peripsema squalent' (trans. Rosier, p. 148: 'A very beautiful and noble virgin, Constantina, lived in Rome, offering examples of the new life to all those who wish to live chastely, renouncing the foul contaminations of their previous life. This blessed virgin, I say, relying on her heavenly Patron, despised the world flourishing with false adornments, as the dried-up refuse of chaff is cast aside and rejected.')

[215] *PdV* XXXIX, ed. Ehwald, p. 291; trans. Lapidge, p. 106.

sanctity as materially different. While men are the 'foundation of integrity', the role of women is decorative: they appear as flowers to be woven into a garland.

Many of the *vitae* contain this kind of imagery, especially in the poetic version, which is influenced by Prudentius's *Liber peristephanon*. Following Prudentius, Aldhelm's virgins not only win spiritual ornaments as a reward for their martyrdom but are themselves transfigured into precious objects. Thus, Eugenia is 'gemma[] virgineo rutulan[s] stemmate rubra[],'[216] and Justina is both adorned and turned into a trophy when she is martyred with her virgin husband:

> Sic geminis felix ornatur virgo triumphis:
> Martira cum roseis rubuit veneranda coronis,
> Candida virgineis florebat femina sertis;
> Cum qua martirii meruit vexilla cruenti
> Crudus athleta Dei Cyprianus fuso cruore.
>
> Thus the blessed maiden was adorned by a two-fold triumph:
> not only was the venerable martyr reddened with wreaths of roses,
> but the fair woman blossomed with the garlands of a virgin.
> Together with her, Cyprian, the champion of God,
> bleeding with his spilled blood, merited the standards of bloody martyrdom.[217]

As Thornbury notes, here, 'the boundaries between woman and ornament dissolve as Justina takes on the colors of the crowns associated with her saintly status: she, not the red roses she is imagined wearing, *rubuit* (grew red), just as Justina and not her (lily) wreath of virginity is *candida* (bright white) and *florebat* (flourished; blossomed). Her ornaments transfigure her, visually as well as spiritually.'[218] This passage thus corresponds to Aldhelm's ideas about adornment expressed in the hortatory sections, as the virgin is transformed through active spiritual effort. But the male virgin, Cyprian, undergoes no such transformation: his role is that of an *athleta Dei*, 'champion of God', the two images corresponding to the *Prosa*'s distinction between male and female sanctity.

Thornbury also observes that the final section of the *Carmen*, which depicts a battle between Virginity, personified as a female warrior, against the seven Vices, seems scrupulously gender-balanced in its metaphors, 'oscillating between feminine-gendered terms for its imagined addressees (e.g., *virgo*, 2586), masculine-gendered (e.g., *bellator* and *miles*, 2648 and 2654), and those like *animae* or *mentes* which imply no biological sex (e.g., 2641–2),' and Aldhelm's addressees are

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[216] *CdV* l. 1884, ed. Ehwald, p. 431; trans. Rosier, p. 145: 'a ruby-red jewel glittering with virgin crown'.
[217] *Ibid.* ll. 1876–82, ed. Ehwald, p. 430; trans. Rosier, p. 144.
[218] Thornbury, 'The Ornament of Virginity', 183.

presented as armed defenders of his work.[219] But even if women may be included among the warriors of Christ, it is telling of Aldhelm's perceptions of gender that only the women, and not the men, are also imagined as brides and ornaments, as in the very end of the prose treatise: 'Valete, o flores ecclesiae, sorores monasticae, alumnae scolasticae, Christi margaretae, paradisi gemmae et caelestis patriae participes!' ('Farewell, you flowers of the Church, monastic sisters, scholarly pupils, pearls of Christ, jewels of Paradise, and participants in the celestial homeland!'[220]). For Aldhelm, this is not necessarily a negative association, as spiritual adornment is desirable and good. But, as Bloch reminds us, the association of women (and not men) with ornaments is based on the assumption that women are inferior to men: 'If man's desire for ornament, or for that which is secondary, is analogous to man's desire for woman, it is because woman is conceived *as* ornament. She is, by her secondary nature, automatically associated with artifice, decoration.'[221]

Thus, Aldhelm's saintly *exempla* serve the same primary aims as the hortatory sections of the treatise: to promote asceticism, on the one hand, and moral effort, on the other. The holy women of *De virginitate* spurn earthly adornments like filth, winning shining crowns and flowery wreaths for their struggles. But, as the above examples have shown, their sanctity is crucially tied to corporeality: their ability to incite desire by their unadorned beauty and either convert their would-be lovers or die defending their virginity.

CONCLUSION

One of the most learned authors of the early medieval period, Aldhelm drew on the foundational works of cosmetic theology, adapting those ideas which were aligned with his vision of monasticism. Ultimately, he allowed his cosmetic theology to remain self-contradictory. Like the writers of the patristic period, Aldhelm presented virginity as inseparable from modesty and associated female sanctity primarily with the body. At the same time, he followed Augustine and Pelagius in stressing the spiritual aspect of virginity and reminding his readers that bodily purity alone is insufficient without other virtues. This dual interpretation of adornment served to encourage his monastic audience on the one hand to follow the requirements of asceticism, and to persevere in their spiritual and intellectual pursuits on the other. Unlike Prudentius in *Hamartigena*,

[219] *Ibid.*, p. 191–92. Cf. Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, which centres around feminine virtues and vices specifically — see Lewis, 'Gender and Violence', pp. 85–120.
[220] *PdV* LX, ed. Ehwald, p. 323; trans. Lapidge, p. 132.
[221] Bloch, 'Medieval Misogyny', 12.

Aldhelm did not present women's desire for adornment as a lack of intelligence. Conversely, the above analysis demonstrates that Aldhelm credited women with significant abilities both as readers and as proselytisers, and it is the conversionary effect of spiritual adornment that stands out as most innovative in *De virginitate*. But he was also responsible for transmitting the pervasive association of women with ornament and sexual temptation to his English audience, especially through the hagiographical sections of his treatise. As we will see in Chapter 5, in *De virginitate*, bodily virginity is only one aspect of sanctity for men. For women, it is virtually the only one, and it is indistinguishable from their beauty, which can have both a conversionary and an erotic effect. Consequently, all three assumptions of cosmetic theology outlined in the previous chapter emerge out of Aldhelm's treatise: that adornment is unnatural and therefore immoral; that individual women may attain holiness but are ultimately inferior to men; and that women's beauty, natural or not, is dangerous. Aldhelm's solution to the issue of modesty was to draw his addressees' attention to what truly matters: the beauty of the soul. And it is this focus on the spirit that he bequeathed to subsequent writers, as we will see in the next two chapters.

Chapter 3:
The Venerable Bede:
Cosmetic Theology and Ecclesiastical Crisis

A younger contemporary of Aldhelm, the Venerable Bede (672/3–735) is one of the best-known scholars from early medieval England, who was widely celebrated for his works of computation, biblical exegesis, hagiography, and history. Unlike Aldhelm, Bede did not express his views regarding feminine ornamentation in a single work. As Arthur Holder noted, 'Bede was not a systematic theologian […] Since he produced no treatise on a single topic, we find his spiritual teachings embedded in his biblical commentaries, homilies, and portraits of the saints. The best way to identify Bede's teachings, then, is simply to read as much of [his] voluminous corpus as possible, noting the recurrent images and themes.'[222] This chapter will concentrate on two subsets of his scholarly output in which his views on adornment are markedly present. The first part of this chapter will consist of an analysis of Bede's commentaries on the biblical books which have been frequently used in cosmetic theology, namely, his *In Genesim*, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, and *In Cantica Canticorum*. The second part will address the presentation of women in Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica* in light of his exegetical works and the political landscape of eighth-century Northumbria.

As will be argued, these examples demonstrate that Bede did not explicitly link adornment to female sexuality, and, like Aldhelm, applied certain principles of cosmetic theology to men and women alike. However, as the analysis of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* will demonstrate, cosmetic theology was nonetheless an important tool for Bede to reconcile the social prominence of real women with the established norms for female virtue, which demanded subordination to male authority. The resulting conclusions from this chapter will have ramifications for how we understand the theological, moral and political motivations informing Bede's writings, and how his rhetorical use of adornment informed later presentations of virtuous men and women.

[222] Holder, *Song of Songs*, pp. 9–10.

THE BIBLICAL COMMENTARIES

Henry Mayr-Harting believed that Bede produced no theological treatises on specific topics because his interest was not in theory but in application, and his 'greatest strength was in this sphere where doctrine and the practical life of the Christian met.'[223] This assessment is true as long as we take 'practical life' to mean spiritual progress rather than the details of the individual Christian's daily practices or dress. Indeed, Bede seems remarkably uninterested in the real wardrobes of women: he produced no prescriptions on ascetic attire of the kind he encountered in Jerome's letter to Eustochium, nor did he urge ecclesiastical women, in the manner of St Paul, to show subordination to men by means of their dress.[224] For whatever reason, Bede was interested in biblical passages depicting adornment for their spiritual rather than literal meaning. It is also important to note that Bede's target audience must have included women – members of double monasteries generally, and occasionally particular women he knew.[225] That is, Bede's biblical commentaries, just like Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, contain moral instruction intended for believers of any gender – a point worth emphasising in light of the paucity of misogynistic interpretations typical of patristic exegetes.

In Genesim

As discussed in Chapter 1, one of the main justifications for women's subordination to men in all respects including dress was the Genesis account of Creation. As we have seen, some exegetes, notably Tertullian, used it as proof that women are not made in the image of God and, moreover, must be perpetually penitent for the Fall.[226] Bede, as far as we know, had no access to Tertullian's works on women, but was influenced by Ambrose, who argued for the opposite position, maintaining that both man and woman were created in God's image:

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[223] Mayr-Harting, *Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 219.

[224] The only time Bede invoked Paul's hierarchy of "heads" from 1 Cor. XI was in order to explain why the Bridegroom in the Song of Songs is said to have a head of gold—see Bede, *In Cantica* III.501–05, ed. Hurst, *Opera Exegetica 2B*, p. 284: 'Dicit apostolus quia *caput mulieris uir caput uiri Christus caput autem Christi Deus*. Quod uidelicet caput aurum est optimum quia sicut auro nil pretiosius aestimatur in metallis ita singularis et sempiternal Dei bonitas iure omnibus quae ipse fecit bonis antecellit' (trans. Holder, p. 156: 'The Apostle says that *the head of the woman is the man, the head of the man is Christ, and the head of Christ is God* (1 Cor. XI.3). This head is the finest gold because just as no metal is considered more precious than gold, so does the unique and everlasting goodness of God rightly surpass all the good things that he himself has made').

[225] One of Bede's commentaries, *In Habacuc* (ed. Hudson, *Opera Exegetica 2B*), is dedicated 'to my dearest sister', presumably a nun. On this commentary and its addressee, see Ward, '"To My Dearest Sister".

[226] Tertullian, *De cult. fem.* I.1.2, ed. Kroymann, p. 343: 'tu imaginem Dei, hominem, tam facile elisisti; propter tuum meritum, id est mortem, etiam filius Dei mori habuit: et adornari tibi in mente est super pelliceas tuas tunicas?' ('you so easily destroyed God's image, man. Because of your doing, that is, death, even the Son of God had to die: and you have in mind to adorn yourself on top of your leather tunics?')

> [S]criptura sacra cum dixisset, *Et creauit Deus hominem, ad imaginem Dei creauit illum*, statimque subiungeret, *Masculum et feminam creauit eos*, noluit addere, "ad imaginem Dei creauit eos." Et femina enim ad imaginem Dei creata est secundum id quod et ipsa habebat mentem rationalem; sed addendum hoc de illa non putauit scriptura quod propter unitatem coniunctionis etiam in illa intellegendum reliquit.
>
> When Holy Scripture said, *And God created man, in the image of God he created him*, and followed this immediately with, *male and female he created them*, it declined to add, 'in the image of God he created them.' For the female also was created in the image of God, on account of the fact that she too had a rational mind. But Scripture did not consider that this needed to be added about her, because it is left to be understood about her as well on account of the oneness of their union.[227]

But while Ambrose used this argument to warn women against enhancing their appearance,[228] Bede made no reference to contemporary women's attire anywhere in his discussion of Eve. On the contrary, his interpretation of Genesis reflects the non-sexual character of his cosmetic theology. Admittedly, the origin of clothing is connected to sexuality, as Adam and Eve clothed themselves with fig leaves once they had lost control over their flesh:

> *Anima rationalis bestialem motum in membris suae carnis erubuit eique incussit pudorem, non solum quia hoc ibi sentiebat ubi numquam antea tale aliquid senserat, uerum etiam quo dille pudendus motus de praecepti transgressione ueniebat. Ibi enim sensit qua prius gratia vestiretur, quando in sua nuditate nihil indecens patiebatur… Denique illa conturbatione ad folia ficulnea concurrerunt*, quae forte petrurbati prima inuenerunt, perizomata, id est, *succinctoria consuerunt. Et quia glorianda deseruerunt, pudenda texerunt. Nec arbitror eos cogitasse aliquid in illis foliis quod talibus congrueret contegi iam membra prurientia, sed occulto instinctu ad hoc illa conturbatione compulsi sunt, ut etiam talis poenae suae significatio a nescientibus fieret.*
>
> *The rational soul blushed for the bestial motion in the members of its own flesh, and struck shame into it, not only because it felt this in that place where it had never before felt any such thing, but also because that shameful motion came from the transgression of the command. For it felt this there, where before it was clothed in grace, since in its nudity it experienced nothing unseemly… And then in that confusion they ran together to the leaves of the fig-tree*, which perhaps in their confusion they came upon first. *They sewed* 'perizomata', that is, *aprons, and because they forsook what ought to be glorified, they covered their genitals. Nor do I think that they supposed that there was something in those leaves that made it suitable for their now wanton members to be covered with the like; but with an obscure urge they were compelled to it by that confusion, so that even so important a sign of their punishment would be made by them in ignorance*.[229]

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[227] Bede, *In Genesim* 1.835–41, ed. Jones, *Opera Exegetica 1*, p. 28; trans. Kendall, *On Genesis*, p. 92.
[228] Ambrose, *Hexameron* 6.8.47 (ed. Schenkl, p. 238): 'Nolli tollere picturam Dei, et picturam meretricis assumere' ('Do not erase God's image and put on the image of a prostitute').
[229] Bede, *In Genesim* I, 3.1974–88, ed. Jones, p. 62; trans. Kendall, p. 128. Italicised passages from Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram* 11.32, ed. Zycha, p. 366.

That is, following Augustine, Bede maintained that the donning of clothes by the first humans was the result of their loss of control over their sexual organs. But what truly matters to Bede is that the sexual body is also a mortal body, as indicated by the subsequent explanation of the significance of fig leaves:

> Mysterium autem huius arboris sub qua et Nathanael adhuc positum Dominus uidit, beatus Ambrosius breuiter quidem sed patenter exposuit dicens, *Beati qui sub uite et olea equos suos alligant, laborum cursum suorum faciei laetitiae consecrantes. Me ficus adhuc, id est, illecebrosa delitiarum obumbrat prurigo mundi – humilis ad altitudinem, fragilis ad laborem, mollis ad usum, sterilis ad fructum.* Et in alio loco, *Quod igitur grauis est*, inquit, *hac se Adam interpretatione succinxit eo loci ubi fructu magis castitatis se succingere debuisset* […] *male ibi succinctus Adam foliis inutilibus, ubi futurae generationis non fructum futurum, sed quaedam peccata signaret*.
>
> Moreover, the blessed Ambrose briefly but clearly explained the mystical meaning of this tree beneath which the Lord also saw Nathanael placed, saying, *Blessed are they who tie their horses under the vine and the olive-tree, devoting the course of their labours* to the appearance of *joy. The fig-tree – low in height, easily broken when worked, weak in use, barren of fruit – that is, the enticing itch of the delights of the world, still overshadows me.* And in another place he says, *What is more serious, therefore, is that Adam girded himself with this interpretation there in that very place where he ought to have girded himself rather with the fruit of chastity* […] *Adam wickedly girded himself there with useless leaves, where it would signify that it was not going to be the fruit of future generations, but of certain sins.*[230]

In other words, for Bede, the role of the fig-leaf aprons is not merely to cover the genitals that humans have lost control over, but to signify the vanity of their transgression and the mortality it has led to. He makes the association between clothing and death even more explicit in a later passage, when Adam and Eve receive garments of skins from God:

> [N]am huiusmodi indumento Dominus eos mortales iam factos fuisse insinuat. Pelles quippe, quae non nisi mortuis pecudibus subtrahantur, mortis figuram continent. Ita *cum contra preceptum non imitatione legitima, sed inlicita superbia Deus esse appetit homo, usque ad belluarum mortalitatem deiectus est*. Et quidem ipsi sibi fecerant perizomata de foliis fici, quibus pudenda tegerent; sed Deus facit illis tunicas pellicias, quibus omne corpus illorum induat.
>
> For by a garment of this kind the Lord teaches that they had become mortal. Skins, of course, which are not removed except from dead animals, contain the allegorical figure of death. Thus, *when, against the command, man desired to be God not by lawful imitation, but by unlawful pride, he is cast down to the mortal nature of wild beasts*. And indeed they had made for themselves aprons of the leaves of the fig-tree, with which to cover their genitals; but God makes them garments of skins, with which to cover their whole body.[231]

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[230] *Ibid.* III.1989–2001, ed. Jones, pp. 62–63; trans. Kendall, pp. 128–29.
[231] *Ibid.* III.2214–23, ed. Jones, p. 63; trans. Kendall, p. 136. Italicised passages from Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 2.21.32, pp. 155–56.

As these passages demonstrate, Bede viewed clothing as something that binds humans to the mortal world away from Paradise. The symbolism of the fig tree, derived from Ambrose's *De paradiso*, helps him emphasise this, as the fig is interpreted as 'illecebrosa delitiarum prurigo mundi' ('the alluring itch of the world's delights'). Thus, the fig leaves and the dead skins symbolise man's mortality.

Another important point Bede makes in his discussion of the fig leaves is the possibility of a double interpretation of this image – *in bono et in malo*. As Kendall observed in his translation of Bede's commentary, 'In the "good" interpretation, based on Micah 4:4 and Prov. 27:18, the spiritual fig-tree, under which the righteous and the saints rest, is abundant in fruit. In the "bad" interpretation, it cannot bear fruit or keep its verdure. Adam girds himself with the bad interpretation, choosing the leaves rather than the fruit.'[232] The *sensus in bono et in malo* is an integral component of Bede's exegetical method, as he explains later in the commentary: 'Solitum namque est in scripturis, et per bonos mala, et per malos aliquoties bona designari' ('It is customary in the Scriptures not only for evil things to be signified by good men, but also at times for good things to be signified by wicked men'[233]).

Thus, Bede's *In Genesim* reveals two key points about his exegetical use of adornment. First, material garments signify human mortality and worldly preoccupations; second, Bede is open to extreme dualities of symbolism, whereby the same image can have a good and a bad interpretation.

In Cantica Canticorum

The link between garments and the mortal world crucially informs Bede's engagement with adornment throughout his works. Before he articulated it in the commentary on Genesis, Bede had already used the interpretation of ornaments *in bono et in malo* in his exposition on the Song of Songs.[234] According to Bede, the Song of Songs was the only part of the Scripture that contained 'nil carnale et iuxta litteram' ('nothing carnal or according to the letter'[235])—in other words, it described no actual sexual relationship and only had a spiritual meaning, being a love song

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[232] Kendall, *On Genesis*, p. 129 n. 300.
[233] Bede, *In Genesim* IV.1515–16, ed. Jones, p. 236; trans. Kendall, p. 315. See Kendall, p. 18 n. 91 for a list of examples.
[234] Bede's *In Genesim* is usually dated to the 720s (see Kendall, *On Genesis*, pp. 45–53), while *In Cantica* is thought to be Bede's earliest commentary on the Old Testament, written prior to 716 (see Holder, *On the Song of Songs*, p. 28). For a timeline of Bede's Old Testament commentaries, see DeGregorio, 'Bede and the Old Testament', pp. 129–32.
[235] Bede, *In Cantica* V.842, ed. Hurst, *Opera Exegetica 2B*, p. 337; trans. Holder, p. 223.

between Christ and the Church. Nevertheless, being a love song, this text contains a multitude of references to adornment and beauty. Like many interpreters before him, Bede provided the reader with an allegorical exposition of the Song's erotic imagery, which involved the dual interpretation of adornment.

Thus, his reading of the Bride's statement: 'I have taken off my garment; how should I put it on again?' (Sg. V.3) foreshadows the above interpretation of Adam and Eve's clothing:

> Ac si aperte dicat, Deserui negotia rerum infimarum, qua ratione repetam? […] Nam quia tunic occupationes saeculi huius figurate denuntiat testatur ipse dominus cum de aduentu nouissimi sui examines loquens ait: *Et qui in agro est non reuertatur tollere tunicam suam*, mystice ammonens ut qui erga profectus fructuum spiritualium manum mentemque occupauerit nequaquam ad obligamenta mundi quae abiecerat appetenda redeat.
>
> It is as though she were saying openly, "I have forsaken the affairs of the things below; why should I take them up again?" […] For a garment figuratively indicates the affairs of this world, as the Lord himself testifies when, speaking of his own coming at the last judgement, he says: *And the one in the field must not turn back to get a coat* (Matthew XXIV.18), mystically admonishing that one whose hand and mind are employed in the growing of spiritual fruits must never go back to pursuing the obligations of this world, once they have been cast aside.[236]

That is, like in the Commentary on Genesis, Bede used clothing as a symbol of worldly, mortal affairs. But this is not the only possible interpretation – in fact, the majority of ornaments in Bede's *In Cantica* are interpreted *in bono*, as metaphors for the various virtues of preachers and teachers. The most important example to highlight for the present discussion is Bede's exposition of Sg 1:10–11 (Vulg 1:9–10): 'Your neck [is] as jewels; we will make you necklaces of gold, inlaid with silver'. Bede's commentary reads:

> Monilia autem sunt ornamenta quae uirginum solent collo pendere, quamuis et monilium uocabulo plerumque omnia matronarum ornamenta designentur quia doctorum spiritalium constantia caelestium uirtutum munitur simul et decorator insignibus utpote qui ea quae uerbo docent operibus ostendant. Murenulae quoque sunt ornamenta colli uirginalis catenulae uidelicet auri contextae uirgulis et interdum etiam additis argenti uirgulis uariatae ut haec sententia probat quae ad similitudinem murenae serpentis nomen accipiunt. Hae autem apte contextum diuinarum significant scripturarum quibus sanctae ecclesiae uenustas augescit cum singuli quique fidelium perspectis patrum dictis atque acribus magis magisque etiam ipsi uirtutibus fulgere contendant.

[236] *Ibid.* III.206–19, ed. Hurst, pp. 276–77; trans. Holder, p. 146.

> Now necklaces [*monilia*] are ornaments that customarily dangle from the necks of virgins. However, all the ornaments of married women are also frequently represented by the word "necklace," [*monilium*] because the constancy of spiritual teachers is protected and at the same time adorned with the insignia of heavenly virtues, inasmuch as they show forth in deeds what they teach in words. The necklaces [*murenulae*] are also ornaments for a virgin's neck, namely, little chains woven with golden bands and sometimes embroidered as well with additional silver bands that, as this verse indicates, take the name of a kind of serpent because they bear a close resemblance to a striped eel [*murenæ*]. Now these aptly signify the weaving together of divine scriptures through which the loveliness of the holy church increases when every single one of the faithful strives to shine with virtues by observing the words and deeds of the fathers more and more.[237]

This reading is clearly informed by Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*: like Aldhelm, Bede makes a distinction between the necklaces of wives and virgins, interpreting the latter as the spiritual beauty of those who actively strive for virtue. Bede's bivalent interpretation of adornment as both evil and good also echoes the contradictory use of ornamentation in *De Virginitate*.

But Bede's and Aldhelm's 'spiritual adornments' are not exactly the same. Aldhelm had contrasted the physical ornaments of married women (*interpretatio in malo*) with the spiritual ornaments of virgins (*interpretatio in bono*): while the married woman decks herself out for seduction, the virgin 'castae conversationis documenta et supernorum civium exemplar aemulari cupientibus monstrare non cessat' ('never ceases from displaying the lessons of chaste behaviour'[238]). For Bede, although physical adornment signified worldly attachment (*in malo*), neither spiritual nor physical adornment was explicitly connected to chastity or sexuality, and he was able to extend the reading *in bono* to married women and widows as well. Moreover, the idea that the ornaments of married women should signify the virtues of spiritual teachers (and not only demonstrate the value on virginity) echoes Bede's acknowledgement of the role of mothers in spiritual education:

> Non solum pastores episcopi presbyteri diaconi uel etiam rectores monasteriorum sunt intellegendi sed et omnes fideles qui uel paruulae suae domus custodiam gerunt pastores recte uocantur in quantum eidem suae domui sollicita uigilantia praesunt.
>
> It is not only bishops, presbyters, deacons or even those who govern monasteries who are to be understood as pastors, but all the faithful who keep watch over the little ones of their house are also properly called pastors, insofar as they preside with solicitous watchfulness over their own household.[239]

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[237] *Ibid.* I.489–507, ed. Hurst, pp. 202–03; trans. Holder, p. 54.
[238] *PdV* XVII, ed. Ehwald, p. 246; trans. Lapidge, p. 73.
[239] Bede, *Homeliarum evangelii libri*, I.7.104–07, ed. Hurst, *Opera Homiletica*, p. 49; trans. Ward, '"To My Dear Sister"', p. 108.

The spiritual adornment in Bede is different from Aldhelm's because of the virtues it represents: it is no longer a symbol of virginity (physical or spiritual) but a mark of the inner qualities that distinguish a good spiritual leader. In other words, Bede's interpretation of necklaces in *In Cantica*, while undoubtedly informed by Aldhelm, shifted the focus away from sexuality and treated adornment in purely metaphorical terms.

Expositio Apocalypseos

Even in his commentary on Revelation,[240] where one of the key apocalyptic signs is the 'great harlot' decked out in alluring garments, Bede was hesitant to connect adornment to female sexuality. Instead, the harlot's garments once again represent the deceptive appeal of worldly affairs, as he explains with a quote from the commentary of Tyconius:

> [17:4] *Et mulier erat circumdata purpura et coccino*. In purpura focus simulate regiminis, in coccino cruentus impietatis habitus demonstratur. *Et inaurata auto et lapide pretioso et margaritis*, id est omnibus inlecebris simulatae ueritatis.
>
> 'And the woman was clothed in purple and scarlet'. *In purple is shown the guise of a feigned rule; in scarlet the bloody robe of impiety.* 'And covered with gold and precious stones and pearls'. *That is, with all the allurements of simulated truth*.[241]

For Bede, then, the allurements of the harlot should not be interpreted as indicating any literal fornication, and neither did he use this passage as an opportunity to comment on the moral qualities of women who wear ostentatious dress. What Bede is interested in is a kind of political discernment which is guided by Christian spirituality, which allows those who possess it to distinguish between the deceptive allure of false grandeur and the true splendour of righteous deeds, represented by the white robes of the Church as Bride (Rev. XIX.8):

> *Et datum est illi ut cooperiat se byssino splendente candido*. Datum est illi factis suis indui. Quo contra impii, qui iuxta Esaiam *telas araneae texunt, non operientur operibus suis; opera enim eorum opera inutilia*.
>
> 'And it was granted to her that she should clothe herself with fine linen, glittering and white.' It is granted to her to be clothed in her own deeds. On the other hand, the wicked,

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[240] The earliest of the three commentaries considered here, completed in the first decade of the eighth century (see Wallis, *Commentary on Revelation*, pp. 39–56).

[241] Bede, *Expositio Apocalypseos*, XXX.24–25, ed. Gryson, *Opera Exegetica 5*, p. 465; trans. Wallis, *Commentary on Revelation*, p. 231. Italicised passages in translation indicating quotes from Tyconius, *Expositio Apocalypseos* 6.5–6, ed. Gryson, p. 204.

> who according to Isaiah *have woven the webs of spiders*, will not be *covered by their works. For their works are unprofitable works* [Isa. LIX.5–6].[242]

The accumulation of parallels detailed above demonstrates that Bede associated adornment primarily with the deceptiveness of worldly attachments. Clothing and ornaments appear as symbols of mortality: they were first donned by Adam and Eve after their transgression and will be cast aside by the virtuous at the end of days. In this regard, Bede's exegesis has some similarities to that of Ambrose, who associated adornment with deception – with one crucial difference. In Bede's commentaries, it is not women who deceive men with their alluring looks, but men and women who are deceived by the allure of worldly riches. At the same time, Bede also relied heavily on the language of spiritual adornment, revealing an openness to interpretation *in bono et in malo* whereby adornment could also signify inner virtues. The most innovative aspect of Bede's interpretation of adornment is its lack of emphasis on female sexuality, which is replaced by a call for the pursuit of inner virtue and good deeds – a natural progression from Aldhelm's cosmetic theology and a reflection of his concern for spiritual leadership that informs much of his *Historia Ecclesiastica*.

HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA

In the *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* (hereafter *HE*), Bede provides us with fascinating portraits of many of the leading figures of the conversion age, including a significant number of women. Analyses of Bede's depiction of women in this work have drawn a wide variety of conclusions: from glowing accounts suggesting that the conversion period was an age of female empowerment, to thundering rebukes arguing that Bede sought to completely erase women from the 'cultural record'.[243] Such vastly different interpretations of the same evidence, as Máirín MacCarron points out, indicate the complexity of Bede's work and the dangers of superficial readings of the text.[244] Without coming down firmly on either side of this debate, the following analysis builds on Kirby's idea that 'the key to unlocking the process of writing the *HE* may still lie concealed in the tensions of the time in which Bede wrote.'[245] I therefore attempt to place Bede's

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[242] *Ibid.*, XXXIII.82–85, ed. Gryson, p. 467; trans. Wallis, p. 245.

[243] For positive appraisals, see Nicholson, 'Feminae Gloriosae'; Luecke, 'The Unique Experience of Anglo-Saxon Nuns'; Bauer, 'Abbess Hilda of Whitby'; Gravdal, *Ravishing Maidens*. For a more critical reception of Bede's women, see Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*; Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*.

[244] MacCarron, 'Royal Marriage and Conversion', p. 651. See also MacCarron, 'Gendered Data', on her *Gendered Networks* project, which explores data-based approaches to women in Bede's *HE*.

[245] Kirby, 'Bede's Native Sources', p. 341.

account of seventh-century female religious in the broader context of the political tensions and ecclesiastical reforms that were taking place when Bede composed the *HE* in the 730s,[246] as well as viewing them in light of the biblical commentaries discussed above.

The rest of this chapter focuses on three episodes from the fourth book of the *HE* where cosmetic theology occupies a prominent place—namely, the life of Æthelthryth, who repents for wearing necklaces, the life of Hild, who appears in a vision *as* a necklace, and the destruction of the monastery at Coldingham for the luxurious attire of its nuns.[247] As will be argued, all three episodes operate with the same rhetoric of adornment that we saw at work in Bede's biblical exegesis, whereby clothing and ornaments can signify both worldly attachments and heavenly virtues. The dual interpretation of adornment helps Bede to create a series of images which allow him to promote his ideas about spiritual leadership without engaging in direct polemic.

Bede's Ideal of Reform?

Before we can proceed with the textual analysis, then, it is important to determine what is known about Bede's aspirations for the Northumbrian church and its leaders. For obvious reasons, it is impossible to discern exactly what Bede thought. But it is clear that he was not a 'detached scholar out of touch with the power struggles of contemporary politics.'[248] On the contrary, as Goffart argued, Bede, 'though a monk, was a famous theologian well connected to the royal family,'[249] and 'as a narrative of the Northumbrian Church dedicated to King Ceolwulf, the *HE* was well suited to pleading a cause and pressing a course of action.'[250] Two of Bede's key concerns during this period can be gleaned from the letter Bede sent to Egbert, the newly appointed archbishop of York, in 731. The more general concern was the provision of the Northumbrian church with those whom

[246] The date Bede gives for the composition of the *HE* is 731, but it was more likely completed in 733 or 734 – see Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 242, and Kirby, 'King Ceolwulf of Northumbria', p. 170.
[247] Bede, *HE* IV.19, 23, 25; ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, *Ecclesiastical History*, pp. 390–98, 404–15, 420–27.
[248] Farmer, 'St. Wilfrid', p. 37.
[249] Goffart, 'Bede's Agenda and Ours', 39, 44.
[250] Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 253. In his study, Goffart situates Bede's writings in the political context of eighth-century Northumbria, demonstrating that Bede supported the claim of Ceolwulf to the Northumbrian throne against the descendants of Oswy, who were eventually defeated, resulting in the installation of Ceolwulf as king and his relative, Egbert, as the bishop of York. For the political agenda of Bede's *HE*, see Goffart, 'Bede's History in a Harsher Climate'. For a more detailed discussion of these events, see Kirby, 'Northumbria in Time of Wilfrid', pp. 20–1; 'Bede, Eddius Stephanus and the *Life of Wilfrid*', p. 106; and 'King Ceolwulf of Northumbria'.

he variously called the *spirituales magistri*, the *sancti praedicatores*, the *rectores* and *doctores ecclesiae*,[251] and Bede's letter entreated the newly appointed archbishop to turn his attention this problem:

> [N]ecessarium satis est, ut plures tibi sacri operis adiutores asciscas, presbyteros videlicet ordinando, atque instituendo doctores, qui in singulis viculis praedicando Dei verbo, et consecrandis mysteriis caelestibus, ac maxime peragendis sacri baptismatis officiis, ubi opportunitas ingruerit, assistant.
>
> It is necessary that you appoint others to assist you in the holy work, by ordaining priests and nominating teachers who may be zealous in preaching the word of God in every village, and celebrating the holy mysteries, and especially by performing the sacred rites of baptism wherever opportunity may offer.[252]

The appointment of teachers and preachers is related to the other major problem Bede perceived in the Northumbrian church of his day: the greed and corruption of the clergy. In the same letter he urged:

> Attende quid gravissimi sceleris illi commiserint qui et terrena ab auditoribus suis lucra diligentissime requirere, et pro eorum salute aeterna nihil omnino praedicando, vel exhortando, vel increpando, laboris impendere contendunt. […] Sicque fit, ut episcoporum quidam non solum gratis non evangelizent, vel manus fidelibus imponant; verum etiam, quod gravius est, accepta ab auditoribus suis pecunia, quam Dominus prohibuit, opus verbi quod dominus iussit exercere contemnant.
>
> Consider what a heavy crime is committed by those who diligently seek earthly lucre from their hearers, and take no pains for their everlasting salvation, by preaching, exhorting, or rebuking them. […] Thus some of our bishops not only do not freely preach the Gospel and confirm those who have been baptized, but do what is worse; for they receive money from their hearers contrary to God's commands, and neglect the ministry of the word, which God ordained them to preach.[253]

But it was not only bishops who had given themselves over to material pursuits. Later in the letter, Bede vehemently criticised certain monasteries which apparently had no monastic values in them at all and petitioned Egbert to dissolve these corrupt establishments to furnish resources for bishops:

> [S]unt loca innumera, ut novimus omnes, in monasteriorum ascripta vocabulum, sed nihil prorsus monasticae conversations habentia: e quibus velim aliqua de luxuria ad castitatem, de vanitate ad veritatem, de intemperantia ventris et gulae ad continentiam et pietatem cordis synodica auctoritate transferantur, atque in adiutorium sedis episcopalis quae nuper ordinari debeat assumantur.

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[251] See Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', p. 130.
[252] Bede, *Letter to Egbert* §5, ed. and trans. Grocock and Wood, *Abbots of Wearmouth and Jarrow*, p. 130.
[253] *Ibid.* §7, ed. and trans. Grocock and Wood, p. 134.

> There are innumerable places, as we all know, allowed the name of monasteries by a most foolish manner of speaking but having nothing at all of a monastic way of life, some of which I would wish to be transformed by synodal authority from wanton living to chastity, from vanity to truth, from over-indulgence of the belly and from gluttony to continence and piety of heart, and that they may so help to sustain the episcopal see, which is to be created.[254]

These monasteries, as Bede explained further, were founded by members of the local governing class by acquiring land from the king – presumably Osred, Ceolwulf's predecessor. But these 'abbots' had not been (and had no desire to be) trained as monks: they continued to live with their wives and retinues, using their monasteries for economic gain.[255]

In other words, in the decades immediately prior to the composition of the *HE*, the church in Northumbria had been in a state of corruption and crisis. Bede never said openly in the letter whom he held responsible for this state of affairs. But both the *Letter to Egbert* and the *HE* subtly imply that the years of corruption coincided with the rule of king Osred and his principal supporter, bishop Wilfrid. As Goffart puts it, 'Bede's sympathies are apparent from the royal dedication of the *HE*, his relations to Egbert, and his Canterbury connection. According to Bede, the "bad" past began at the death of King Aldfrith in 705; the pullulation of abusive monasteries thereafter coincided with Wilfrid's last restoration and with the power of his principal successor, Acca of Hexham.'[256] Between them, Kirby, Goffart and Stancliffe have demonstrated that antipathy to Wilfrid permeates Bede's historical and hagiographic writings, and Bede's treatment of this controversial bishop will be analysed in greater detail in the final chapter of this thesis.[257]

What is important to emphasise for the present discussion is that for Bede, the ascension of Ceolwulf to the Northumbrian throne and the appointment of Egbert as archbishop were the end to a long history of abuse by Wilfrid and his supporters, which 'gave Bede confidence in the current government and emboldened him to map out a program of church reform'.[258]

This program, presented explicitly in the *Letter to Egbert*, also informs the *HE*, which, as Thacker demonstrated, shows a similar desire for 'a general reform of Church and society, the instruments of which were to be an instructed king and aristocracy, a rejuvenated episcopate and, above all, a

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[254] *Ibid.* §10, ed. and trans. Grocock and Wood, p. 142.
[255] *Ibid.*; see also Grocock and Wood, *Abbots and Wearmouth and Jarrow*, pp. lv–lvi.
[256] Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 325.
[257] See Chapter 5; see also Kirby, 'Bede, Eddius Stephanus and the "Life of Wilfrid"'; Goffart, *Narrators*, pp. 236–325; and Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy'.
[258] Goffart, 'Bede's Agenda and Ours', 43.

reformed monasticism.'[259] DeGregorio has argued convincingly that Bede's reformist mindset is especially evident in Book IV of the *HE*, which parallels the invective of the *Letter to Egbert* as it carefully demonstrates that 'it is the aristocratic sphere which Bede singles out as a principal cause for the dilution of true monastic values'.[260] But in a work that presents itself as an objective narrative of past events, Bede had to 'dress his reformist objectives in different rhetorical clothing'[261] and 'resorted to devious tactics, unavoidably, in order to attain his goal.'[262]

The rest of this chapter aims to demonstrate that the rhetoric of adornment was one of the 'devious tactics' that allowed Bede to present his ideals of ecclesiastical leadership and condemn corruption while appearing to be entirely remote from politics. As will be argued, his narratives of Æthelthryth, Hild, and the nuns of Coldingham are a calculated manipulation of the principles of cosmetic theology he inherited from earlier exegetes and developed in the biblical commentaries. In these three episodes, Bede reflects on the state of the Northumbrian church in the eighth century under the pretext of conventional depictions of female virtue and wickedness. Nevertheless, one must be careful not to underestimate the impact Bede's presentation of female sanctity had on later writers, and the conclusions from this chapter will have ramifications for how we understand the subsequent increase in misogynistic depictions of holy women.

*Æthelthryth (*HE *IV.19)*

In the nineteenth chapter of book four of the *HE*, Bede records the life of St Æthelthryth, daughter of King Anna, who had retained her virginity through two marriages: first to an unknown nobleman called Tonberht, who died before consummating the union, and then to King Ecgfrith of Northumbria, to whom she was married for twelve years before she was at last allowed to become a nun. Æthelthryth then took the veil at Coldingham and went on to found a nunnery in her home province of East Anglia, where she passed away seven years later.[263]

Throughout the chapter, Bede's focus appears to be on Æthelthryth's modesty, particularly in the concluding section of the prose account, where she gives a speech to her nuns as she is dying from a tumour on her throat:

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[259] Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', p. 149.
[260] DeGregorio, 'Monasticism and Reform', p. 686.
[261] *Ibid.*, p. 675.
[262] Goffart, 'Bede's History', p. 213.
[263] *HE* IV.19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 390–98.

> 'Scio certissime, quia merito in collo pondus langoris porto, in quo iuuenculam me memini superuacua moniliorum pondera portare; et credo, quod ideo me superna pietas dolore colli uoluit grauari, ut sic absoluar reatu superuacuae leuitatis; dum mihi nunc pro auro et margaretis, de collo rubor tumoris ardorque promineat.'
>
> I know well enough that I deserve to bear the weight of this affliction in my neck, for I remember that when I was a young girl I used to wear an unnecessary weight of necklaces; I believe that God in His goodness would have me endure this pain in my neck in order that I may thus be absolved from the guilt of my needless vanity. So instead of gold and pearls, a fiery red tumour now stands out upon my neck.[264]

Æthelthryth's explanation comes after Bede has reported the eye-witness account from Cynefrith, the doctor who was called to operate on the tumour, but whether the speech was preserved by Cynefrith or somebody else is unclear. What is clear, however, is that Æthelthryth's explanation of her illness reflects the same ideas about adornment that we have seen in Bede's biblical commentaries. That is, Æthelthryth's necklaces serve as a symbol of worldly preoccupations and pride: gold and pearls are literally transformed into a deadly tumour, driving home the point about adornment and mortality. In her analysis of this episode, Máirín MacCarron noted that Æthelthryth's punishment greatly exceeds her crime,[265] and Barbara Yorke pointed out that Æthelthryth's *monilia* were an important demonstration not just of her own royal status but of the status of Northumbria as a wealthy Christian kingdom.[266] But it is not the real necklaces Æthelthryth wore but their symbolic value that concerned Bede. Like the garments of Adam and Eve or the ornaments of the apocalyptic harlot, Æthelthryth's necklaces represent the misleading allure of worldly glory and the dangers of pride.

The claim that Æthelthryth's necklaces included pearls is worth pausing over in this regard. Barbara Yorke pointed out that pearls are practically unattested in seventh-century English jewellery, and Christine Fell suggested that the passage would make more sense if Æthelthryth's necklaces had included not pearls but garnets, which are very common in Anglo-Saxon jewellery, as their red glow would parallel that of the tumour.[267] But by highlighting pearls as an element of

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[264] *HE* IV.19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 396–97. Kesling, *Medical Texts*, p. 153, discusses this episode in the context of Anglo-Saxon medicine, noting that 'there is no suggestion that the abbess was wrong in seeking professional medical attention' (in contrast to later medieval ascetic literature). For an examination of the symbolic value of illness in lives of virgin saints and the association between illness and sin, see Scott, 'Symbolic Illness'; and Zhirnova, 'Sanctity in a Scar' (forthcoming), which explores the parallel between Æthelthryth's tumour and the healed tumour of St Macrina.

[265] MacCarron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', p. 152.

[266] Yorke, 'The Weight of Necklaces', p. 107. On the importance of women's display of wealth during this period, see Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 320.

[267] Yorke, 'The Weight of Necklaces', p. 107, and Fell, 'Saint Aeðelþryð', p. 30.

Æthelthryth's jewellery, Bede probably aimed to invite a spiritual rather than literal interpretation.[268]

However, unlike the garments of Adam and Eve, which mark only their fall, Æthelthryth's necklaces-turned-tumour also become the instrument of her living martyrdom and an important mark of her sanctity, which is hinted at in two ways. First, Bede's anonymous source relates that the saint 'cum praefato tumore ac dolore maxillae siue colli premeretur, multum delectata sit hoc genere infirmitatis' ('when she was afflicted with this tumour and by the pain in her neck and jaw, she gladly welcomed this sort of pain'[269]), because, as explained above, she viewed it as her divinely given penance. Second, as MacCarron noted, the red and white colours emphasised in the episodes of Æthelthryth's death and, later, translation, serve as another link to the passions of Roman martyrs: 'In death she was adorned with miraculously preserved linen robes, a white sarcophagus that was a perfect fit for her body and a faint scar marking the place of her healed red tumour. She is both white and red, representing her virginal purity and spiritual martyrdom.'[270]

In particular, Bede may have been attempting to model the 'martyrdom' of Æthelthryth on that of the Roman virgin Agnes, whose role in the transmission of cosmetic theology was discussed in Chapter 1.[271] Agnes was 'one of the three most popular Roman martyrs in Anglo-Saxon England,' whose cult 'appears to have prospered as monastic Christianity established itself in the wake of conversion on the island',[272] and Michael Lapidge has argued on metrical and stylistic grounds that the Northumbrian hymn for St Agnes was composed by Bede himself.[273] This makes Æthelthryth the only other female saint about whom Bede composed a hymn,[274] and there are other notable parallels between the two saints. Æthelthryth's tumour, which feels like *ardor* ('heat' or 'flame') and is later lanced, recalls Agnes's martyrdom by fire and *iugulatio* (the cutting of her

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[268] Bede used a similar technique, for example, in his *In Cantica*, where he interpreted the verse 'Your breasts are better than wine' (Sg. I.2) as referring to Christ, which meant that this text cannot be interpreted literally (*In Cantica* I.47–70, ed. Hurst, p. 191; see also Holder, *On the Song of Songs*, pp. 10–11). It is also worth pointing out that pearls were a common symbol of virginity: Aldhelm frequently described virgins as 'pearls of Christ', presumably because the pearls' whiteness signifies purity, and both Aldhelm and Bede were familiar with Jerome's use of this metaphor, for instance in *Ep.* 22.20 (ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 170): 'Lego de spinis rosas, de terra aurum, *de concha margaritum*' ('I select gold from the earth, the rose from the thorn, *the pearl from the shell*').
[269] *HE* IV.19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 396–97.
[270] MacCarron, 'The Adornment of Virgins', p. 154.
[271] See Chapter 1.
[272] McDaniel, 'Agnes among the Anglo-Saxons', pp. 233, 217.
[273] Lapidge, *Anglo-Latin Literature*, pp. 328–30; the hymn is edited by Lapidge, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, pp. 359–63. See also Williamson, 'Bede's Hymn to St Agnes of Rome'.
[274] The hymn to Æthelthryth immediately follows her *vita*, appearing in *HE*.20, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 397–401. For a detailed analysis of this poem, see Harris, *Bede and Æthelthryth: An Introduction to Christian Latin Poetics*.

throat). And the sarcophagus in which the saint is interred, found almost by chance and perfect for the size of her body, echoes the angelic garment which Agnes receives when she is stripped in a brothel. Moreover, the sarcophagus is Roman, presumably pagan, meaning that 'Æthelthryth's body converts what was once a pagan monument into a site of Christian worship',[275] just like Agnes converts the brothel into a house of prayer.

Thus, the transformation of Æthelthryth's necklaces into a tumour is clearly meant to illustrate the dangers of ornamentation and vanity while simultaneously bringing her into close proximity with the saintly ideals established by the *passiones* of Roman martyrs. But there is an important difference between Agnes and Æthelthryth: while Agnes rejected both sex and ornaments, Æthelthryth rejected only the former. Æthelthryth's repentance for her former luxury therefore relates her to a different saintly ideal: the chaste widow. This model of sanctity, as we have seen, was most famously developed by St Jerome in his *Epistles*, several of which describe the behaviour he considers appropriate for female religious who have been married.[276]

Bede's account of Æthelthryth is especially reminiscent of Jerome's biography of Paula, who embodied the ideal of the repentant widow: she not only strove to conceal her innate beauty but voluntarily neglected and mutilated her physical appearance, wearing nothing but coarse hair-shirts and refusing to take baths unless she was seriously ill. Jerome describes her explaining her extreme asceticism in the following words:

> 'Turpanda est facies, quam contra dei praeceptum purpurisso et cerussa et stibio saepe depinxi; adfligendum corpus, quod multis uacauit deliciis; longus risus perpeti conpensandus est fletu; mollia lineamina et serica pretiosissima asperitate cilicii conmutanda. quae uiro et saeculo placui, nunc Christo placere desidero.'[277]
>
> 'I must disfigure my face which contrary to God's commandment I have often painted with rouge, white lead, and antimony; I must prostrate my body which idled in many pleasures; I must make up for my long laughter by tears; I must exchange my soft linen and costly silks for rough goat's hair. I who have pleased my husband and the world, now desire to please Christ.'

Æthelthryth's speech, with its emphasis on the exchange of comfort and wealth for suffering, is clearly modelled on Paula's, and Bede depicts the abbess engaging in other acts of asceticism that fit the Hieronymian model:

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[275] Karkov, 'The Body of St Æthelthryth', p. 400.
[276] See Chapter 1.
[277] *Ep.* 108.15, p. 326.

> Numquam lineis, sed solum laneis uestimentis uti uoluerit; raroque in calidis balneis, praeter inminentibus sollemniis maioribus […] lauari uoluerit, et tunc nouissima omnium, lotis prius suo suarumque ministrarum obsequio ceteris quae ibi essent famulis Christi; raro praeter maiora sollemnia, uel artiorem necessitatem, plus quam semel per diem manducauerit.
>
> She would never wear linen but only woollen garments and would seldom take a hot bath except just before the greater feasts […] and then last of all, after all the other handmaidens of Christ had washed themselves, assisted by herself and her attendants. She rarely ate more than once a day except at the greater festivals or because of urgent necessity.[278]

Although some scholars have suggested that Æthelthryth's ascetic practices 'serve to focus our attention on the body they were designed to deny',[279] they are not exclusively related to sexuality. Just like the penitential acts of Paula, Æthelthryth's ascetic practices are explicitly connected to the various types of luxury that she would have enjoyed as a queen: expensive fabrics, baths, and feasts.[280] As we saw in the previous chapter, Jerome's depiction of the Roman matron mortifying her flesh 'is a lesson for his patrician contemporaries on the necessity of refashioning the body into a vessel of repentance',[281] and the *vita* of Æthelthryth must have performed a similar function, particularly for Bede's monastic readers. That is, for Bede, the rejection of sexuality alone is not enough. Like Cyprian, he stresses the importance of modesty almost as much as that of virginity. Æthelthryth's transgression, then, is not the wearing of necklaces itself but the attempt to reconcile worldly finery with the consecration of her body to Christ. As Cyprian instructed, 'neque enim virginem fas est ad speciem formae suae comi aut de carne et eius pulcritudine gloriari' ('a virgin must not be adorned to the beauty of her appearance, nor be proud of her body and its attractiveness'[282]). As a nun who rejected worldly finery, then, Æthelthryth becomes a model of humility of the kind Aldhelm encouraged in *De virginitate*:

> Unde [Paulus:] Macero, inquit, corpus meum et servituti redigo, videlicet ne caro contra spiritum tyrannica potestate contumaciter insolescat et protervo libertatis fastu intumescens legitimae servitutis iugo subdere colla contemnat. Ergo pura incontaminatae virginitatis perseverantia Deo mancipatur indefessa cogitationis instantia et ediverso effrenatae iugalitatis libertas efficitur securae immunitatis captiva paupertas.

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[278] *HE* IV.19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 392–93.
[279] Karkov, 'The Body of St Æthelthryth', p. 399.
[280] See Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 39. This passage nevertheless indicates that, like in Paula's *vita*, the presence of servants was not incompatible with personal asceticism. As Fell points out, Æthelthryth walks a fine line between ritualised subservience and class hierarchy: 'Her humility which causes her to wait on others in particular and ritualised circumstances has not caused her to rid herself of personal servants, and the humility of Christ himself washing the feet of his disciples would seem a lesson not fully absorbed' ('Saint Aeðelþryð', 28).
[281] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 108.
[282] Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 5, ed. and trans. Keenan, pp. 46–47.

> Whence [St Paul] says, 'I chastise my body and bring it into subjection' [1 Cor. IX.27], which is to say, so that the flesh does not contumaciously grow insolent with tyrannical power against the spirit and, swelling with the impudent arrogance of liberty, scorn to subject its neck to the yoke of legitimate servitude. Therefore the pure steadfastness of uncontaminated virginity is made a servant of God through the tireless constancy of contemplation; and, on the other hand, the freedom of restrained conjugality is made into a servile poverty of complacent spotlessness.[283]

Thus, Æthelthryth serves as an example of appropriate monastic conduct for both virgins and widows, exemplifying the Aldhelmian ideal. It is clear, then, that Bede's portrayal of Æthelthryth aimed not only to 'shift the emphasis from veneration of virgin martyrs to celebrations of local royal women who could be included in the company of virgins like Agatha and Agnes',[284] but also to promote his reformist agenda. The saintly figures of the *HE*, as Scott DeGregorio argued, 'continue and even intensify the note of contemporary critique',[285] and the contrast between Æthelthryth's asceticism and the monastic corruption Bede observed in the *Letter to Egbert* is self-evident. But Bede's description of Æthelthryth's illness seems to hint not only at contemporary monastic decline but also at its implied cause – that is, bishop Wilfrid and his circle.

As Goffart argued, Bede's *HE* was composed in conscious opposition to Stephen of Ripon's *Vita Wilfridi*,[286] which 'lurks behind the main narrative of the *HE* as the rival to be rectified or contradicted, the mirror whose image must be meticulously reversed'.[287] By naming necklaces as the source of the saint's illness and saying she 'gladly welcomed this sort of pain' (*multum delectata sit hoc genere infirmitatis*), Bede subtly inverted a story from the *Vita Wilfridi* which tells a remarkably similar story about King Ecgfrith's second wife, Iurminburg.[288] After Æthelthryth's departure to monastic life, Wilfrid, her former confessor, was markedly unsuccessful in maintaining a positive relationship with Ecgfrith, whose affections grew so cold as to place the bishop under arrest and confiscate his possessions. Among these was a precious necklace containing holy relics. Queen Iurminburg wore this reliquary on her neck while travelling around the kingdom. When the royal couple reached the monastery of Coldingham, presided over by

[283] *PdV* XVI, ed. Ehwald, pp. 245–46; trans. Lapidge, p. 73.
[284] Blanton, *Signs of Devotion*, p. 22.
[285] DeGregorio, 'Monasticism and Reform', p. 678.
[286] Eddius Stephanus, *Vita Wilfridi* (hereafter *VW*), ed. and transl. Colgrave, *The Life of Bishop Wilfrid by Eddius Stephanus*.
[287] Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 324.
[288] *VW* 39, pp. 78–79.

Æbbe, Ecgfrith's aunt, the queen fell so ill that the abbess feared she would die.[289] The abbess then addressed the king 'in a tearful voice' (*lacrimabili voce*), saying:

> 'Ego scio et vere scio, quod Deo amabilem Wilfrithum episcopum sine alicuius sceleris piaculo de sede episcopatus abiecisti… Et nunc, fili mi, secundum consilium matris tuae fac, disrumpe vincula eius et sanctas reliquas, quas regina de collo spoliati abstraxit et in perniciem sui, sicut arca Dei per civitates ducens, per fidelem nuntium emitte ei.'
>
> 'I know, and know for a fact, that you drove Bishop Wilfrid the beloved of God from his episcopal see for no crime whatever… And now, my son, obey the instructions of your mother; break his bonds, send back to him by a faithful messenger those holy relics of which he was robbed, which the queen took from his neck and carried about from town to town like the ark of God, to her own destruction.'[290]

Ecgfrith, we are told, quickly followed his aunt's advice and the queen recovered. The parallels with Æthelthryth's story are quite clear: a queen is struck down by an illness as punishment for wearing a necklace. Bede even echoed Æbbe's exact phrasing of her explanation (*scio et vere scio*) in Æthelthryth's speech (*scio certissime*). However, where Stephen of Ripon used the necklace as a symbol of authority unlawfully taken from the bishop, Bede, as we saw, made it very clear that luxury and the religious life are incompatible. The final chapter of this thesis will examine Bede's views on episcopal self-presentation in greater detail, but for the present discussion it is sufficient to note that Bede 'was convinced that it was more effective if the teacher lived out the Gospel ideal that he was talking about'[291] rather than enjoy luxury. Thus, Æthelthryth's happiness to be punished for the wealth she enjoyed in the distant past reflects on the bishop as well as the queen. If Æthelthryth is delighted to be punished for having worn necklaces in her secular life, what should one think of Wilfrid and Æbbe's concern for material possessions while in ecclesiastical office?

Bede's implicit disapproval of Wilfrid appears to be at odds with the evident respect accorded to the bishop in the beginning of Æthelthryth's *vita*, where he appears as a witness to the queen's virginity: Wilfrid, Bede tells us, was asked by the king to persuade Æthelthryth to consummate the union, but the bishop did not manage to break the saint's resolve.[292] Virginia Blanton believes that Bede used Wilfrid's testimony to authorise Æthelthryth's virginity 'because Bede consider[ed]

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[289] The necklace, as in Æthelthryth's story, thus has the opposite effect from what an amulet is expected to do. On amulets in Anglo-Saxon medicine, see Whitenack, 'Poison and Disease', pp. 56-59, and Meaney, *Anglo-Saxon Amulets*, pp. 255–59.
[290] *VW* 39, pp. 78–79.
[291] Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy', p. 30.
[292] *HE* IV.19, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 390–93.

the bishop an authority on the saint, as well as a commanding ecclesiastical figure'.[293] However, as Goffart pointed out, Bede's seemingly approving comment presents Wilfrid as a sinister figure, giving 'the curious impression that Wilfrid had taken the king's side: even the prospect of a large bribe did not arouse Wilfrid to enough eloquence to talk [Æthelthryth] into the royal marriage bed'.[294] That is, if Æthelthryth's *vita* is modelled on that of the Roman martyrs, Wilfrid assumes the role of a persecutor – or, in any case, is implied to be a source of corruption which Æthelthryth overcomes through her personal sanctity. In Æthelthryth's *vita*, Bede was extremely reticent about her relationship with the bishop. Stephen of Ripon claimed that Wilfrid was the queen's spiritual mentor,[295] and Bede likewise says that she was known 'nullum uirorum plus illo diligere' ('to love no one more than [Wilfrid] himself'[296]). However, there is no mention of the land she granted him for the foundation of the monastery at Hexham, and neither did Bede provide any explanation for why Æthelthryth's departure to the nunnery coincided with Wilfrid's rapid fall from grace. Æthelthryth's penitential asceticism appears all the more striking in light of her connection to the extravagant bishop Wilfrid and her sojourn at the corrupt monastery of Coldingham,[297] and it is tempting to speculate that Bede's enthusiasm for Æthelthryth was partly due to her transformation from a patron of Wilfrid into an ascetic teacher he himself endorsed. But the exact circumstances surrounding the queen's monastic transformation and Wilfrid's downfall are obscured by Bede's framework of a retrospective golden age, and the significance of the link between Æthelthryth's and Wilfrid's necklaces cannot be fully understood with the sources currently available to us.

As can be seen, cosmetic theology is an important device in Bede's construction of Æthelthryth as a saintly figure. The interpretation of her ornaments *in malo*, whereby her necklaces literally become the cause of the saint's death, clearly reflects the pervasiveness of Bede's association between external adornment and mortality which he developed most prominently in his commentary *In Genesim*. Bede's depiction of the saint's illness and bodily mortification is additionally informed by patristic writings on adornment that viewed external finery and chastity as incompatible. But it is important to stress that, unlike patristic hagiographers, Bede never made the link between adornment and sexuality explicit. His portrait of Æthelthryth nevertheless meets

[293] Blanton, 'Signs of Devotion', p. 36. See also Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 247.
[294] Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 323.
[295] *VW* XIX, ed. and trans. Colgrave, p. 41.
[296] *HE* IV.19, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 392.
[297] *Ibid.*, p. 392–93: 'intrauit monasterium Aebbae abbatissae, quae erat amita regis Ecgfridi, positum in loco quem Coludi urbem nominant, accepto uelamine sanctimonialis habitus a praefato antistite Uilfrido' ('she entered the monastery of the Abbess Æbbe, Ecgfrith's aunt, which is situated in a place called Coldingham, receiving the veil and habit of a nun from Bishop Wilfrid').

the standard of female sanctity set in Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, which stressed that virginity without asceticism is insufficient for the heavenly reward. Besides depicting Æthelthryth's personal sanctity, her *vita* also responds to the crisis of monasticism described in the *Letter to Egbert* by depicting the abbess's rejection of royal privileges in her monastic life. At the same time, by mirroring a similar story about bishop Wilfrid and his necklace, Bede hints at the materialism of the man he perceived as one of the causes of the present crisis – but by focusing on Æthelthryth's attitude to adornment, he was able to give his narrative the tranquil and peaceful appearance of a retrospective golden age, completely remote from his own political concerns.

*Hild (*HE *IV.23)*

The presence of a reformist agenda behind the main narrative of the *HE* may also reveal the innovativeness of Bede's cosmetic theology in his account of Hild, abbess of Whitby, in the twenty-third chapter of the same book. Hild was a royal princess of Northumbria, the great-niece of King Edwin, with whom she accepted baptism among the first in the kingdom. In his account, Bede praises her piety and personal virtues, but most of all her intelligence, saying that 'etiam reges ac principes nonnumquam ab ea consilium quaererent et inuenirent' ('even kings and princes sometimes sought and received her instruction'[298]) and listing five prominent bishops that came out of Whitby's monastic school—though he never specified whether she was personally involved in teaching.[299] Bede did not provide any details of Hild's secular life, either, only recording that she 'xxxiii primos [annos] in saeculari habitu nobilissime conuersata conpleuit, et totidem sequentes nobilius in monachica uita Domino consecrauit' ('spent her first thirty-three years very nobly in secular habit [and] dedicated an equal amount of years still more nobly to the Lord'[300]). Although Bede never said whether Hild had been married, he did not refer to her as a virgin, rather claiming for her the honour of spiritual virginity of the kind advocated by Aldhelm: 'fidem et sacramenta Christi suscepit atque haec […] intemerata seruauit' ('she received the faith and sacraments of Christ and […] preserved [them] inviolate'[301]). Nor did he describe Hild as a notable

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[298] *HE* IV.23, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 408.

[299] Hollis argues that Bede's 'failure to depict Hild as a teacher of scriptural study to the monastic women in her community is explicable only as a reflection of the view that learning is a male province' (*Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 270)—a statement at odds with Bede's inclusion of even secular women in the ranks of *spiritualis magistri* (see note 225 above). It seems more probable to me that Hild, who entered monastic life in her thirties, did not have the appropriate education to act as a scriptural instructor.

[300] *HE* IV.23, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 406.

[301] *Ibid.*. The phrase *intemerata fides* recalls Aldhelm's discussion of 'spiritual virginity' in *PdV*—see Chapter 2. For a discussion of Bede's reticence about Hild's marriage, see Fell, 'Hild, Abbess of Streonæshalch'.

ascetic. Instead, Hild's holiness is marked by a vision in which the saint appears to her pregnant mother, Breguswith, in the form of a necklace:

> Quae cum uir eius Heriric exularet sub rege Brettonum Cerdice, ubi ut ueneno periit, uidit per somnium, quasi subito sublatum eum quaesierit cum omni diligentia, nullumque eius uspiam uestigium apparuerit. Verum cum sollertissime illum quaesierit, extimplo se repperire sub ueste sua monile pretiosissimum, quod, dum attentius consideraret, tanti fulgore luminis refulgere uidebatur, ut omnes Brittaniae fines illius gratia splendoris impleret.

> While her husband Hereric was living in exile under the British king Cerdic, where he was poisoned, Breguswith had a dream that he was suddenly taken away, and though she searched most earnestly for him, no trace of him could be found anywhere. But suddenly, in the midst of her search, she found a most precious necklace under her garment and, as she gazed closely at it, it seemed to spread such a blaze of light that it filled all Britain with its gracious splendour.[302]

As was the case with Æthelthryth's speech, the source for this vision is passed over in silence, but the naming of both of Hild's parents and the details of her father's death point towards an origin within her family. But again, the legend fits into Bede's own literary agenda. By the time of Bede, pre-natal visions had become a firmly established hagiographic staple.[303] Although it was highly unusual for such visions to depict the future saint as an item of jewellery, earlier authors including Prudentius and Aldhelm offer multiple examples of metaphors which depict holy women as jewels or ornaments. In its most basic interpretation, then, Bede's depiction of Hild as a necklace is a direct counterpart to the *vita* of Æthelthryth, with an interpretation of necklaces *in bono* as a mark of the abbess's future holiness. It therefore reveals the same contradiction we observed in Aldhelm's *De virginitate* and Bede's biblical commentaries, whereby the same symbol can convey opposite meanings. However, as noted in the previous section, Bede's writing is anything but straightforward, and his use of conventional tropes of cosmetic theology not only highlights his heroines' personal sanctity but also conceals a commentary about the state of the Northumbrian church. The following analysis will therefore attempt to show that the representation of Hild as a

[302] *Ibid.*, p. 410.

[303] See Lanzoni, 'Il Sogno Presago Della Madre Incinta', esp. 225. Many works relating to dream prognostics survive from Anglo-Saxon England (see Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, and Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*), some of which associate finding jewellery in a dream with good forture: see esp. Liuzza, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics*, pp. 32, 83, 123, on finding rings (cf. also pp. 97, 119, 209 on jewels). However, these prognostic texts do not imagine that a person can be signified by the treasure, so this trope appears to be unique to Bede.

necklace, when considered in the context of Bede's other works, reveals significantly more about Hild's role in the ecclesiastical politics of her day than Bede was able say openly.

Feminist scholarship has long viewed Bede as a misogynist for his apparent reticence about Hild's achievements: among others, Clare Lees and Gillian Overing view Hild as an example of 'how the early emphasis on the public presence and political acumen of the saint later gave way to the promulgation of her domestic virtues,'[304] and Stephanie Hollis likewise argues that Bede sought to deliberately erase the memory of Hild's prominence as a teacher and political advisor.[305] It is certainly true that Bede's account of Hild is brief in comparison with the careers of male saints like Theodore, Aidan or Cuthbert. However, just as Aldhelm had manipulated patristic sources to elevate the status of non-virginal nuns, so Bede's use of cosmetic theology in Hild's *vita* alludes to her great importance for the Northumbrian church.

Since we have mentioned Aldhelm, a crucial thing to be noted about Hild's *vita* is that the use of the 'woman-as-ornament' trope for a saint who was not a virgin is highly unusual. The only other saint depicted in similar terms in the *HE* is Eorcengota, daughter of King Eorcenberht of Kent, a virginal nun who receives a vision foretelling her death:

> [Dicit] uidisse se albatorum cateruam hominum idem monasterium intrare, hosque a se interrogatos, quid quaererent aut quid ibi uellent, respondisse quod ob hoc illo fuerint destinati, ut aureum illud nomisma, quod eo de Cantia uenerat, secum adsumerent'.
>
> [She said] she saw a crowd of men dressed in white enter the monastery; on being asked what they were looking for or what they wanted, they answered that they had been sent to take back with them the golden coin which had been brought thither from Kent.[306]

Apart from this, as Hollis noted, 'the closest analogue to the dream of Hild's mother in the Lives of Roman saints known to the early English church is a dream of a formerly married monk, where the jewel signifies the virginity of his daughter which he urges her to preserve by entering a monastery.'[307] In other words, the vision of Hild as a necklace depicts her as equal to the virginal *Christi margaritae* and *paradisi gemmae* and thus again emphasises her spiritual virginity.

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[304] Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 32. They do not provide any examples of early *vitae* which stress women's political involvement as a virtue, nor could I find any in the course of my research; on the contrary, Bede's account, as we shall see, is the closest to praising a female saint's political acumen of all the *vitae* examined in this thesis.

[305] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 243–70.

[306] *HE* III.8, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 238. Yorke points out that 'the possibility must also be allowed that a gold coin was a conspicuous part of the jewellery [Eorcengota] wore,' since necklaces including a gold coin as a pendant are widely attested during this period ('The Weight of Necklaces', p. 108).

[307] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 253. The *vita* in question is the *Life of Hilary* (c. 1–11) by Fortunatus.

The depiction of holy virgins as ornaments has been described as misogynistic: they are precious, but they are nonetheless objects, 'whereby aristocratic wealth is absorbed into the Christian monastic economy'.[308] It therefore seems that the symbolic equation of Eorcengota and Hild with treasure allows Bede to echo the reformist mindset of the *Letter to Egbert* with its ideal of lay and ecclesiastical collaboration, whereby aristocratic families confer wealth onto the church in the form of their saintly daughters (and presumably their endowments), as opposed to exploiting ecclesiastical wealth for their own benefit by creating bogus monasteries.

In this light, Breguswith's vision, as Fell observes, 'seems unusually linked with the times of violence into which Hild was born'.[309] The story of Hild's mother being separated from her exiled husband, who is later killed by poison, and finding consolation in her future daughter, who appears in the vision as a necklace filling the whole of Britain with its light, is not just a prediction of Hild's sanctity but a poignant comment on the political instability of the Northumbrian kingdom, reflecting the 'assumption that runs across books IV and V of the History that everything that was wrong in the present was the consequence of a long-running failure of royal leadership'.[310] The Christian enlightenment which was to be brought about by Hild therefore becomes a model to be emulated in Bede's present. But the imagery invoked in Breguswith's vision also alludes to a particular conflict in the Northumbrian church that Hild was a key part of.

One of the most important episodes in the history of the English church was the Synod of Whitby (664), at which King Oswiu ruled that Northumbria would calculate Easter and observe monastic tonsure according to Roman customs rather than those of the Irish monks of Iona and its satellite institutions. Hild was the president over the synod and the chief advocate for the Irish side, yet there is no mention of the synod in Bede's version of Hild's life at all. Even in his description of the synod itself in book three of the *HE*, she is only mentioned in passing: 'Hild abbatissa cum suis in parte Scottorum' ('Hild and her followers were on the side of the Irish'[311]). In Hild's *vita*, Bede was equally reluctant to mention her opponent at the Synod, Bishop Wilfrid, mentioned above in his role as Æthelthryth's confessor. While Wilfrid is depicted as one of the key actors at the Synod of Whitby in book three, Hild's *vita* in book four contains no trace of their long-term antipathy, even though we know from the *VW* that when Wilfrid was exiled in 680, Hild sent envoys to plead

[308] Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 25. See also pp. 17 and 46 above.
[309] Fell, 'Hild, Abbess of Streonæshalch', p. 79.
[310] Higham, 'Bede's Agenda', p. 483.
[311] *HE* III.25, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 299.

against him before the pope.[312] A subtle indication of Hild's political alignment in the *HE* is the aforementioned list of bishops who came out of Whitby's monastic school, as all of them were 'ordained in the sees that, in Wilfrid's view, were rightfully his'.[313] Bede also mentions Hild's close bond with bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne. Early in his account, Bede narrates that when Hild was on her way to Francia, where she intended to become a nun, she was 'ab Aidano episcopo patriam reuocata' ('called back home by bishop Aidan'[314]). Aidan then ordained her as a nun and appointed her as abbess (not yet at Whitby), and 'Aidan et quique nouerant eam religiosi, pro insita ei sapientia et amore diuini famulatus, sedulo eam uisitare, obnixe amare, diligenter erudire solebant' ('Aidan and other devout men who knew her visited her frequently, instructed her assiduously, and loved her heartily for her innate wisdom and her devotion to the service of God'[315]). Even from Bede's terse account, we can understand that Hild was very important for Lindisfarne and Irish monasticism – important enough to be deterred from entering a monastery abroad – and that she delivered on the expectations placed on her, eventually unseating Wilfrid, their primary opponent, and replacing him with her own students.

Bede's near-complete silence about Hild's involvement in the ecclesiastical politics of Northumbria has therefore been interpreted as an attempt to erase 'any trace of what we may assume with good reason to be the forceful physical and verbal presence of this politically prominent woman'.[316] Whether Bede's reticence about Hild's involvement in ecclesiastical disputes is motivated by his misogyny or the fact she supported the losing side at the Synod of Whitby is impossible to determine, and one need not exclude the other. But it is important to remember that Bede was a scriptural exegete well aware of the interpretative possibilities of symbols, and his own writings often conceal multiple layers of meaning. Thus, the vision of Hild as a necklace illuminating England with its light, when viewed in the context of contemporary hagiography and exegesis, reveals both her connections to Lindisfarne and her importance as a leader and teacher.

Bede's depiction of Hild as a shining necklace probably owes something to Aldhelm's idea that a (spiritual) virgin 'pulcherrimo *fulgentis* pudicitiae cultu *splendescere* et auratis uirtutum monilibus

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[312] *VW* 10, ed. and trans. Colgrave, p. 117: 'Hyldae religiosae memoriae abbatissae ad [Wilfridum] accusandum huc prius advenerant' ('[envoys] had come thither from the abbess Hild, of pious memory, in order to accuse him').
[313] Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 262; see *VW* 54, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 116–20.
[314] *HE* IV.23, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 406–7.
[315] *Ibid.*.
[316] Lees and Overing, *Double Agents*, p. 27.

rutilare simulque candidis meritorum margaretis decorari desiderat' ('desires to be *radiant* with the most beautiful adornment of *shining* modesty and to gleam with golden necklaces of virtues and at the same time to be decked out with the dazzling pearls of her *merits*'[317]). However, the emphasis on light, which occurs again towards the end of her *vita* in two visions predicting Hild's death, echoes two other Northumbrian hagiographies. As a pre-natal vision depicting the saint emitting a light which 'tanti fulgore luminis refulgere uidebatur, ut omnes Brittaniae fines illius gratia splendoris impleret' ('seemed to spread such a blaze of light that it filled all Britain with its gracious splendour'[318]), Bede's account appears to be a response to the *vita* of Wilfrid, which described a similar sign predicting the saint's destiny:

> De utero enim matris suae valde religiosae ita eum sanctificatum a Deo prodigium demonstravit, sicut Hieremias audivit a Domino dicente: *Priusquam te formarem in utero, novi te; et antequam exires de vulva sanctificavi te; prophetamque in gentibus posui te*. Nam cum mater eius dolore parturientis fatigata in domo sua iaceret et mulieres circa se mansissent, viderunt viri foris stantes domum illam extimplo quasi ardentem et flammam usque ad caelum elevatam […] Et hoc per beatum pontificem nostrum omnibus paene Brittanniae ecclesiis palam effulsit, sicut praesagia futurorum prodiderunt et rei eventus postmodum probavit.
>
> For even from the womb of his most pious mother, a sign from God proved him to be sanctified, even as Jeremiah heard the Lord's word saying, "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee: and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations." For while his mother, worn out by the pain of her travail, was lying in her house with the women about her, some men who were standing outside saw the house apparently on fire, the flames rising to the heavens. […] And through our blessed bishop it has shone openly upon almost all the churches of Britain, even as the omens foretold: and events afterwards gave proof of them.[319]

The vision predicting the birth of Hild, with its claim that she illuminated 'omnes Brittaniae fines' (as opposed to 'omn[es] paene Brittaniae ecclesia[as]' of Stephen's account) is clearly a rebuttal of Wilfrid's authority as the foremost saint of Britain – a bold claim to be made for a female (non-virginal!) saint. As Hollis noted, the vision of Hild's mother 'is not merely a generalized sign of saintly destiny, but signifies election to a conversionary role.'[320] But where Stephen of Ripon explained Wilfrid's conversionary destiny openly to the reader, with appropriate biblical passages

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[317] *PdV* XVII, ed. Ehwald, p. 246; trans. Lapidge, p. 73 (my emphases).
[318] *HE* IV.23, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, pp. 410–11.
[319] *VW* 1, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 4–5.
[320] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 253. She notes further that 'evidence of divine sanction for a conversionary role appears to have been required chiefly by female saints', without considering the *VW* as a parallel. It is also interesting to note that the vision of Wilfrid as a fire is seen by a group of men rather than his mother, revealing a bias for male evidence that Bede is frequently accused of.

supplied, Bede's operating mode was more subtle. By replacing fire with light in his version, Bede echoed one of his own works, the metrical *Vita Cudbercti*, which opens with the following statement:

> Multa suis Dominus fulgescere lumina saeclis
> donauit, tetricas humanae noctis ut umbras
> lustraret diuina poli de culmine flamma.
> Et licet ipse Deo natus de lumine Christus
> lux sit summa, Deus sanctos quoque iure lucernae
> ecclesiae rutilare dedit, quibus igne magistro
> sensibus instet amor, sermonibus aestuet ardor.
>
> The Lord bestowed many luminaries to shine on His world, in such a way that the divine flame from the summit of heaven should illuminate the dark shadows of human night. And although Christ Himself, born of God, is the loftiest light from light, God also duly arranged it that holy men should shine for the Church in the manner of a lantern, in whose minds love would be ever-present and in whose words fire would burn, taught by the (heavenly) flame.[321]

The poem then enumerates these holy teachers, each illuminating their own part of the world, such as Peter and Paul in Rome, Cyprian in Africa, John Chrysostom in Constantinople, and finally:

> Nec iam orbis contenta sinu trans aequora lampas
> spargitur effulgens, huiusque Britannia consors
> temporibus genuit fulgur uenerabile nostris,
> aurea qua Cudberctus agens per sidera uitam
> scandere celsa suis docuit iam passibus Anglos.
>
> And this radiance, no longer content in the lap of the old world, is shed gleaming across the water, and Britain, now participating in it, gives birth in our own days to a venerable splendour by which Cuthbert, living his life among the golden stars, teaches the English to ascend on high by (following in) his footsteps.[322]

In other words, by describing Hild as a necklace illuminating all of Britain with its light, Bede likened her to Cuthbert, another Lindisfarne bishop, whose cult was promoted by Bede and others in opposition to that of Wilfrid.[323] Moreover, the image of the light coming from a necklace, though undoubtedly influenced by the 'virginity-as-ornament' trope, also hints at Hild's role as a teacher of the Scriptures. That is, the image of a shining necklace recalls Bede's exposition of Sg 1:10–11: according to Bede, the Bride's neck is adorned with necklaces

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[321] Bede, *Vita Metrica S. Cudbercti*, ll. 1–5, ed. and trans. Lapidge, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, pp. 187–89.
[322] *Ibid.*, ll. 25–29, ed. and trans. Lapidge, pp. 191–93.
[323] See Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy'.

> quia doctorum spiritalium constantia caelestium uirtutum munitur simul et decorator insignibus utpote qui ea quae uerbo docent operibus ostendant [et] apte contextum diuinarum significant scripturarum quibus sanctae ecclesiae uenustas augescit cum singuli quique fidelium perspectis patrum dictis atque acribus magis magisque etiam ipsi uirtutibus fulgere contendant.
>
> because the constancy of spiritual teachers is protected and at the same time adorned with the insignia of heavenly virtues, inasmuch as they show forth in deeds what they teach in words [and] aptly signify the weaving together of divine scriptures through which the loveliness of the holy church increases when every single one of the faithful strives to shine with virtues by observing the words and deeds of the fathers more and more. [324]

Thus, the representation of Hild by her mother's necklace is not only a complement to her sanctity, which is implied to be equal to that of virgins, but also a subtle hint at her involvement in the politics of the Northumbrian church: she is an ally of Cuthbert and a contrast to Wilfrid.

By depicting Hild as a shining necklace, Bede reveals the great importance of this abbess, which would have been understood by readers familiar with recent political events and the key works of hagiography and exegesis produced in the decades preceding the composition of the *HE*. For readers incapable of this level of interpretation, however, Hild is presented as an acceptable model of sanctity for non-virginal women, the necklace becoming a symbol of productive collaboration between the aristocracy and the Church.

*The Nuns of Coldingham (*HE *IV.25)*

Having thus offered an interpretation of jewellery *in bono*, as a mark of Hild's holiness, in the last episode involving cosmetic theology in the *HE* Bede once again invoked the association between adornment and worldly concerns, which he viewed as a principal cause of the dissolution of true monastic values. The twenty-fifth chapter of the *HE*'s fourth book describes the destruction of the monastery of Coldingham by fire 'a malitia inhabitantium in eo' ('because of the wickedness of those who dwelt there'[325]). A prophecy of Coldingham's demise, Bede reports, was revealed by an angel to one of the few pious brothers of the monastery, an Irishman called Adamnán, who hurried to warn the abbess, Æbbe, of the impending doom:

> 'Nam et domunculae, quae ad orandum uel legendum factae erant, nunc in comessationum, potationum, fabulationum, et ceterarum sunt inlecebrarum cubilia conuersae, uirgines quoque Deo dicatae, contemta reuerentia suae professionis, quotiescumque uacant, texendis subtilioribus indumentis operam dant, quibus aut se

[324] Bede, *In Cantica* I.497–507, ed. Hurst, pp. 202–03; trans. Holder, p. 54.
[325] *HE* IV.25, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 420–21.

> ipsas ad uicem sponsarum in periculum sui status adorent, aut externorum sibi uirorum amicitiam conparent. Unde merito loco huic et habitatoribus eius grauis de caelo uindicta flammis saeuientibus praeparata est.'
>
> 'And the cells that were built for praying and for reading have become haunts of feasting, drinking, gossip, and other delights; even the virgins who are dedicated to God put aside all respect for their profession and, whenever they have leisure, spend their time weaving elaborate garments with which to adorn themselves as if they were brides, so imperiling their virginity, or else to make friends with strange men. So it is only right that a heavy vengeance from heaven should be preparing for this place and for its inhabitants in the form of raging fire.'[326]

Here Bede echoes a patristic commonplace that has been so insistently repeated as to absorb the double indignity of sexism and banality: that adornment is equal to sexual provocation. Bede would have been familiar with the association between adornment and sexuality from the works of Aldhelm, Ambrose, Jerome, Cyprian and even Pelagius, all of whom have in one way or another distinguished between the ostentatious dress of sexually active women and the modest attire of virgins. Bede's statement that the nuns who dress elaborately imperil their virginity is particularly reminiscent of Cyprian, who cautioned that ostentatious dress may become virginity's undoing, as it attracts rumours of indecent conduct and incites the desires of men: 'Sic dum ornari cultius, dum liberius euagari uirgines uolunt, esse uirgines desinunt' ('hence virgins in desiring to be adorned more elegantly, to go about more freely, cease to be virgins'[327]).

Hollis believes that by giving currency to the patristic arguments against womanly adornment, Bede tried to show that 'women were much too dangerous to share a monastery with,'[328] and aimed 'to assist in the creation of a climate of opinion that favoured segregated monasticism – and the stricter enclosure of the female religious'.[329] But if Bede's goal was to promote monastic segregation, it is difficult to reconcile with the approval of Hild's double monastery at Whitby; and if Bede espoused 'the view that women embody the temptations of the flesh,'[330] why was he so hesitant to link feminine adornment to sexual temptation anywhere else in his works, even where the Scripture invited such interpretation? Given Bede's use of cosmetic theology to point out ecclesiastical corruption and the need for reform in the two chapters discussed above, the ecclesiastical politics of Northumbria offer a more plausible point of departure for his attack on the nuns of Coldingham than a spontaneous desire to warn his readers against the dangers of

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[326] *Ibid.*, p. 425.
[327] Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* 20, ed. and trans. Keenan.
[328] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 102.
[329] *Ibid.*
[330] *Ibid.*, p. 103.

feminine seduction. The rest of this chapter therefore aims to place the Coldingham episode in the broader context of Northumbria's ecclesiastical crisis in order to demonstrate that the patristic commonplace about the dangers of womanly adornment was part of Bede's overall condemnation of monastic corruption.

An obvious counter to Hollis's argument that Bede saw the presence of women in monasteries as a danger to men is one she points out herself: in Bede's account of Coldingham, 'the culminating debauchery is not the union, carnal or otherwise, of monastic men and women, but monastic women's involvement with secular society.'[331] That is, the nuns adorn themselves not for the seduction of monks but so that they 'externorum sibi uirorum amicitiam conparent' ('might acquire for themselves the friendship of men from outside [the monastery]'[332]). If Bede's aim in relating this scandal was to promote monastic segregation, this was certainly not the best example. Moreover, the luxurious dress and sexual promiscuity of the nuns is paralleled (if not exactly matched) by the inappropriate behaviour of the monks. Before describing the misdemeanour of the virgins, Adamnán states that 'domunculae, quae ad orandum uel legendum factae erant, nunc in comessationum, potationum, fabulationum, et ceterarum sunt inlecebrarum cubilia conuersae' ('the cells that were built for praying and for reading have become haunts of feasting, drinking, gossip, and other delights'[333]). This description does not make it clear who this accusation is directed at, but the use of *quoque* when he moves on to the virgins implies that it is describing the monks alone and not the women. In other words, it is not only the nuns who have betrayed their vocation in pursuit of sexual relationships, but also the monks who have abandoned the values which Bede saw as key for the religious life. As he explained to Egbert:

> Ante omnia sane tuae sanctae paternitati suadeo, ut ab otiosis te confabulationibus obtrectationibus ceterisque linguae indomitae contagiis pontificali dignitate coerceas; diuinis autem eloquiis ac meditationibus scripturarum linguam simul et mentem occupies […] Quod non ita loquor, quasi te aliter facere sciam, sed quia de quibusdam episcopis fama uulgatum est, quod ita ipsi Christo seruiant, ut nullos secum alicuius religionis aut continentiae uiros habeant; sed potius illos qui risui iocis fabulis commessationibus et ebrietatibus ceterisque uitae remissioris illecebris subigantur, et qui magis cotidie uentrem dapibus quam mentem sacrificiis caelestibus parent.
>
> Above all then I urge you, holy father, to keep yourself away from storytelling, gossip, and other plagues of an unbridled tongue, in conduct proper for a bishop; instead you should keep both tongue and mind busy with the divine declarations and meditations of the

[331] *Ibid.*, p. 245.
[332] *HE* IV.25, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 425. I prefer to translate *externorum sibi virorum* as 'men from outside the monastery' instead of 'strange men' provided by Colgrave and Mynors.
[333] *Ibid.*.

> Scriptures […] I do not speak like this as though I know you do otherwise but because it is common gossip about some bishops that they serve Christ in such a way that they have no men with them of any kind of religion or restraint, but rather those who are steeped in mockery and pranks, made-up stories, feasting together, and drunkenness and other wanton pursuits of a rather lax way of life, and who feed their stomachs with daily banquets more than their minds with heavenly sacrifices.[334]

The nuns' fondness for luxurious clothing, then, is the feminine counterpart of the monks' gluttony, drunkenness and fondness for idle storytelling[335]—a parallel already noted in the previous chapter of Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, but in this case probably reflecting something of Northumbria's monastic reality. In other words, the debauchery at Coldingham is not its members' illicit relationships but their refusal to abandon secular customs, the men engaging in feasting and storytelling while the virgins adorn themselves to seek a husband—a striking parallel to the establishments Bede described in the *Letter to Egbert*, which he saw as monasteries only in name.

The fact that Bede reported no scandals from any of the other double monasteries featured in the *HE* is also worth emphasising, as it points to the fact that it was Coldingham specifically that drew his ire. As elsewhere in the *HE*, Bede added a few ambiguous statements hinting at the source of Coldingham's corruption: the abbess Æbbe, whom we have already encountered in the discussion of Æthelthryth, and whom Stephen of Ripon painted as a close friend and advocate of Wilfrid. In his account of Coldingham's corruption, Bede is perfectly respectful to the abbess, allowing her the honour of plausible deniability. When Adamnán made his report of her subordinates' misconduct, Bede tells us, Æbbe asked: 'Et quare non citius hoc conpertum mihi reuelare uoluisti?' ('Why were you unwilling to reveal these facts to me earlier?'[336]). The fact that Æbbe was unaware of the debauchery going on under her roof absolves her of direct responsibility for it but implies a major failure of pastoral leadership, as she has failed to notice a very significant misdemeanour. The corruption at Æbbe's monastery also reflects on the narrative of Æthelthryth, who had spent a year there before moving south to Ely, where she went on to become a model of asceticism—in contrast, perhaps, to the luxury of Æbbe's nuns?

As DeGregorio observed, then, 'the Coldingham episode takes the form of an outright condemnation of the sins responsible for subverting the rules upon which the monastic life must

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[334] Bede, *Letter to Egbert* §3–4, ed. and trans. Grocock and Wood, pp. 126–29.

[335] Drinking and storytelling frequently crop up together in Anglo-Latin moral literature. Foot, *Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 238–41, notes that the problem of drunkenness was seen as part of the question of frivolity more generally. Wormald, 'Bede and Benedict Biscop', pp. 54–55, moreover, notes that Bede's emphasis on drinking and storytelling might also be a specific reference to Wilfrid, whose retinue Bede had described as drunkards in the *Letter to Plegwin*, c. 17 (ed. Jones, *Opera de temporibus*, pp. 307–15).

[336] *HE* IV.25, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 426.

be modelled. In both the letter [to Egbert] and the Coldingham episode it is the aristocratic sphere with its elite pursuits that he singles out as a principal cause for the dilution of true monastic values',[337] – not exclusively, or primarily, women's preoccupation with appearances. This is not to dismiss the fact that the charge laid against the nuns (that they adorn themselves to seek illicit relationships) far exceeds the criticism of the monks. Nor should we disregard the effect Bede's depiction of Coldingham would exert on the female religious, since it did, in fact, go on to be used by later proponents of gender segregation.[338] It is important to emphasise, however, that Bede never depicted feminine adornment as a danger to men's sexual purity, despite multiple precedents he had in the scripture and patristic literature. His condemnation of ostentatious dress here, as in the biblical commentaries, reveals a general tendency towards a worldview that abhorred fleeting, worldly pursuits, of which adornment is a significant but not exclusive example.

CONCLUSION

In the *HE*, adornment appears as a complex and multivalent image, informed by well-established patristic ideas, such as the association between virginity and modesty or the representation of holy women as items of jewellery. These ideas, however, are modified under the influence of Aldhelm, and Bede's treatment of both Hild and Æthelthryth reveals that his cosmetic theology was heavily influenced by *De virginitate*, where spiritual virginity, represented by spiritual adornment, is no less significant that physical purity, and virginity itself is worthless if the virgin takes pride in her appearance. A point on which Bede significantly diverges from his predecessors both here and in the biblical commentaries, however, is his comparative lack of interest in the connections between adornment and sexuality. As is evident from the biblical commentaries, Bede used adornment primarily as a metaphor for questions of spirituality. In the good interpretation, jewellery and precious textiles signify the elaborate workings of Scripture and the virtues of those who unravel them; in the bad interpretation, clothing and ornaments signify preoccupation with the material world, which hinders spiritual progress. At the same time, the three case studies from the *HE* demonstrate that Bede's the rhetoric of adornment was one of his 'devious tactics'.[339] Through

[337] DeGregorio, 'Monasticism and Reform', p. 686.
[338] The most obvious example is Symeon of Durham (d. c. 1129), who wrote that St Cuthbert was so appalled by the behaviour of the nuns of Coldingham that he forbade women to enter his church at Lindisfarne (Symeon, *Historia Ecclesiae Dunelmensis* c. VII, ed. Arnold, *Symeonis Opera*, pp. 58–59). Other repercussions of Bede's depiction of female sanctity will be discussed in the next chapter.
[339] Goffart, 'Bede's History in a Harsher Climate', p. 213.

depictions of dress, he is able to comment on the crisis of the Northumbrian church and even point to certain ecclesiastics who may be seen as a cause of the source of corruption.

Just as Bede adapted earlier cosmetic discourse for his own aims, so his depictions of saintly women would go on to shape the perception of women's role in the English church in subsequent centuries.[340] As the particular details of the intramural conflict in the Northumbrian church vanished from his readers' memory, Bede's heroines became models for segregated monasticism, and his cosmetic theology shaped the later hagiographers' attitudes to adornment, which are the subject of the following chapter.

[340] Bede's depiction of Æthelthryth was especially important for Ælfric of Eynsham's depictions of the suffering female body as proof of inner sanctity: see Davis-Secord, 'Holy Women on Display', pp. 254–57.

Chapter 4:
Goscelin of Saint-Bertin:
Adornment and Female Reclusion

The previous chapters examined Aldhelm's and Bede's adaptations of cosmetic theology for their English audiences, revealing a definitive shift away from practical instructions about dress towards a spiritual use of adornment imagery. This chapter turns to the last author active in early medieval England who devoted considerable attention to this subject. Goscelin of Saint-Bertin (c. 1040–c. 1106) came to England from Flanders and spent most of his career as a hagiographer in multiple monasteries. Although separated from Aldhelm and Bede by a gulf of over three hundred years, Goscelin developed his cosmetic theology under their influence, and his rhetoric of spiritual adornment is a natural progression of the developments outlined in the previous chapters.

Like Bede, Goscelin did not express his views regarding feminine ornamentation in a single work: references to adornment are scattered throughout numerous *vitae* of holy women, as well as a highly unusual letter he wrote to a former pupil who became an anchoress. Consequently, Goscelin frequently appears self-contradictory, denouncing adornment as a mark of vanity and worldly attachment in some texts yet praising women who dressed beautifully in others. But Goscelin's conflicting depictions of adornment are united by a single objective. This chapter will show how Goscelin reimagined spiritual adornment and created a rhetoric that was uniquely suited to the changed circumstances of the eleventh century. Writing in the aftermath of the Norman Conquest and the Benedictine reform, Goscelin used cosmetic theology to present English holy women of the past as models of new female spirituality: as contemplatives striving for a solitary union with Christ.

FEMALE SANCTITY BETWEEN BEDE AND GOSCELIN

To understand the changes in female monasticism that had taken place by the time Goscelin began writing in the eleventh century, we must consider the cultural changes that occurred in the three centuries after Bede. Bede's *HE* ends in 731, which also marks the period when Latin works on women's adornment become sparse.[341] A few inferences can be made from later eighth-century letters to women by Alcuin and Boniface, both writing on the Continent. Alcuin (c. 735–804), working at the Carolingian court, occasionally mentioned the need for restraint in dress to his female correspondents, in words echoing patristic commonplaces. Thus, he urged Abbess Gisela, Charlemagne's sister:

> Inclitus est valde et gloriosus sponsus tuus, qui alium ornatum in te non quaerit, nisi spiritalem; non tortas crinium alligationes, sed rectas morum bonorum conligationes: nec vestimentorum vanum exterius nitorem, sed sanctitatis et castimoniae nobilem interius splendorem; cave, ne aliquid in te inveniat, quod oculos illius offendat; et si forsan, ut solet humanae fragilitatis conditio afferre, aliquam neglegentiae maculam in te malignus spiritus infigat, citius paenitentiae lacrimis abluere memento, ne diu sine sponsi tui maneas amplexu.[342]
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> Your bridegroom is highly renowned and glorious, and seeks no other adornment in you than that of the spirit; not twisted plaits of hair, but straight bonds of good conduct; not vain outward lustre of garments, but the inward noble splendour of holiness and chastity. Take care that he does not find anything in you that offends his eyes; and if perhaps, as the frailty of our human condition occasions, an evil spirit instils in you some sort of negligence, remember to wash it at once with tears of repentance, so that you may not remain long without the embrace of your spouse.

Alcuin's words are reminiscent of Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, itself referring to Timothy 2. 9–10, as well as the bridal imagery of Jerome, Augustine and especially Ambrose. Alcuin wrote in a similar way to one of Charlemagne's daughters, once again repeating the patristic trope of spiritual adornment without adding anything new.[343] Women's adornment was apparently not a grave concern for Alcuin: out of 300 surviving letters, he addressed women about clothing only on these

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[341] At the same time, cosmetic theology continued to develop in vernacular works, such as the early ninth century *Old English Martyrology* and Ælfric's lives of saints (see p. 165 below).

[342] Alcuin, *Letter* 15, ed. Dümmler, MGH *Epp.* 4, p. 41.

[343] Alcuin, *Letter* 164, ed. Dümmler, p. 266: 'Tu vero, filia karissima, honestis moribus, misericordiae operibus, vitae sanctitate orneris. Memento dignitatem tuam, ut magis probitas laudetur conversationis quam species auri fulgentis' ('But you, dearest daughter, should be adorned by proper conduct, works of mercy, holiness of life. Remember your rank, so that you may be praised more for your righteous way of life than a display of shining gold').

two occasions, yet at the same time wrote extensively about the luxurious dress of men and its corrupting effect on the church and government.[344]

An earlier collection of letters, pertaining to the missionary work of St Boniface (c. 675–754) and St Lull (c. 710–786), likewise says little about eighth-century attitudes to women's adornment. Although several letters refer to clothing, it is not for instruction but to ask women for assistance with or express gratitude for providing the male clergy with clothing.[345] From the requests and promises of gifts throughout the Boniface letters, we get a sense of women's importance as makers of garments. Elite women who had the skill and resources to produce beautiful textiles for the church are a group that emerges prominently from available material and written evidence for the early medieval period.[346] As Griffiths has pointed out, liturgical textiles were a way for these women to be present at the altar, and the gift for needlework was often seen as a mark of holiness.[347] The earliest surviving example of gold embroidery in western Europe are two relics which were kept at Aldeneik (and are now at the church of St Catherine in Maaseik, Belgium) and attributed to St Harlindis and St Renula, abbesses of a convent they founded with St Boniface.[348] The *Vita sanctarum uirginum Harlindis et Renulae*, which Rosalind Love has linked to the tenth-century English hagiographer known as 'B.', 'draws these relics into its story by specific reference not only to the women's work as scribes … but also their wonderful needlework, attested by "quaedam palliola" (certain veils, or cloths) still on display in the hagiographer's day.'[349] The sister-abbesses' craftsmanship marks them out as saints: 'Harlindis and Renula shun idleness like a pestilence and signs of their industry remain at Aldeneik after them.'[350]

The increased prominence of textile work as a saintly virtue from the eighth to the tenth century may be explained by changes in religious women's lives which followed the ecclesiastical reforms spearheaded by Alcuin in Francia and later followed in England. The second half of the ninth century brought about a renewed emphasis on celibacy and strict adherence to the St Benedict's rule, and the reformers insisted on the strict claustration of female religious as the surest way to

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[344] See Chapter 5.
[345] The letters are ed. by Tangl, *Die Briefe*. See, for example, *Ep.* 27 (Tangl p. 48), where Boniface thanks his relative Bugga for providing him garments and *Ep.* 35, p. 60, where Boniface gives similar thanks to Abbess Eadburga. There must have been many more letters of this kind exchanged in the missionary circle which were not considered worthy of preservation—see Garrison, '"Send More Socks"', pp. 73–78.
[346] See Griffiths, '"Like the Sister of Aaron"'.
[347] *Ibid.*, p. 351.
[348] See Budny and Tweddle, 'The Maaseik Embroideries'; and Owen-Crocker, 'Revisiting the Maaseik Zoomorphic Embroideries'.
[349] Love, 'B. and the Vita Harlindis et Renulae', p. 139.
[350] *Ibid.*, p. 146.

avoid carnal temptation. 'The physical arrangement of the double monastery, with its close association of male and female religious, came under attack by the reformers,' Schulenburg writes. 'The reform councils also strictly excluded women from sacred space, which again worked to restrict their activities and visibility.'[351] The reform period thus saw a change in the ideal of female sanctity. St Odo of Cluny (c. 878–942), the principal reformer on the Continent, claimed that the highest virtue in a woman was not to wish to be seen, and this virtue was also promoted by English Benedictine reformers.[352] The reform movement thus presented a new ideal of sanctity for women, one which denigrated female participation in the public sphere while it glorified the private, inward spirituality of enclosed monasticism.[353] As Smith observes, this resulted in an acute problem for representations of female sanctity:

> Women could not perform miracles where they would be seen and noticed. Their world was the world of kin and cloister, not of politics and power. […] Here, then, was the crux of the matter. Could women be regarded as saints in the same way that so many men were? Or was there a way of expressing women's search for religious identity that turned their energies inwards, that side-stepped the need for audience and the attraction of the miracle-worker?[354]

The change in the kind of women who could attain sanctity in the Benedictine period is evident in the ninth-century *vita* of St Leoba by Rudolf of Fulda. Leoba (c. 710–82) was a nun from Wessex, a younger relative of St Boniface, whom she joined on his mission to the German people in 746. The letters that survive from Boniface's missionary circle (including Leoba's own) indicate that she was a skilled writer and a lynchpin of the continental mission, and her *vita* mentions that she represented the English missionaries at Charlemagne's court.[355] But if we read the account of Leoba's life as that of a prominent public figure, we do so to some extent against the emphasis of her hagiographer. As Hollis argues, 'Rudolf rewrites Leoba's role as a partner in Boniface's missionary labours, refashioning her life in order that it may serve as an exemplar for monastic women in an age of segregated enclosure.'[356] Although Rudolf could not pass over Leoba's missionary activity in silence, his account is notably partial towards her life before she left the

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[351] Schulenburg, 'Female Sanctity', p. 115.
[352] Odo of Cluny, *Collationes* §2, ed. Marrier and Quercetanus, *Biblioteca Cluniacensis*, p. 192. For similar views of English Benedictine reformers, see Cubitt, 'Virginity and Misogyny'.
[353] See Wemple, *Women in Frankish Society*, p. 171.
[354] Smith, 'The Problem of Female Sanctity in Carolingian Europe', 36.
[355] Leoba's letter asking Boniface to join the mission is edited by Tangl, MGH *Epp.* 6, *Epistle* 29 (trans. Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, pp. 37–38; the letters from Boniface to Leoba are *Epistle* 67 (Emerton pp. 149–51), *Epistle* 96 (Emerton pp. 150–51). On Leoba at Charlemagne's court, see Rudolf of Fulda, *Vita Leobae abbatissae Biscofesheimensis* [hereafter *VL*] c. 18–19, ed. Waitz, pp. 129–30.
[356] Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, p. 273.

convent. Of a twenty-three-chapter *vita*, the first six chapters are dedicated to the strict enclosure of Leoba's home convent at Wimborne, and before she receives her missionary calling, she is depicted as an exemplary follower of the rule of St Benedict. Leoba's missionary activity is then justified by a prophetic dream, in which she sees herself drawing a purple thread out of her mouth:

> His igitur et aliis huiusmodi virtutum studiis cum per dies singulos animum ad caelestia roboraret, quadam nocte per somnium vidit quasi purpureum filum de ore suo descendere. Quod apprehensum manu cum extrahere conaretur, prolixius coepit extendi, et velut ex interioribus viscerum procederet, paulatim crescebat in maius et augmenta sui capiebat. Cum autem exuberante materia colligendo manum impleret et filum nihilominus ex ore dependeret, globum ex eo rotundo scemate volvendo formavit. In cuius confectione cum nimis laboriose desudaret, prae angustia somno soluta est; coepitque intra se tacita cogitare, cupiens somnii cognoscere discretionem.
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> When she had succeeded in fixing her attention on heavenly things by these and other practices in the pursuit of virtue, she had a dream in which one night she saw a purple thread issuing from her mouth. It seemed to her that when she took hold of it with her hand and tried to draw it out there was no end to it; and as if it were coming from her very bowels, it extended little by little until it was of enormous length. When her hand was full of thread and it still issued from her mouth she rolled it round and round and made a ball of it. The labour of doing this was so tiresome that eventually, through sheer fatigue, she woke from her sleep and began to wonder what the meaning of the dream might be.[357]

As Cotter-Lynch observes, 'Rudolf uses the hagiographic convention of the divinely inspired dream and the theology of prophesy to mitigate the potential conflict between historical fact and the institutional orthodoxy of his time by figuring Leoba's less conventional activities as admirable but not imitable.'[358] The image of the purple thread, moreover, helps Rudolf to present Leoba's missionary work as acceptable, as it is likened to the domestic, private virtue of textile production: 'Spinning thread is something nuns like the young Leoba would have done on a daily basis: monastic houses such as the Wimborne in which she was raised produced altar cloths and vestments as well as more mundane textiles for daily use.'[359]

Thus, by the time Goscelin composed his hagiographies in the eleventh century, strict enclosure was expected of all female communities, and new cults of female saints tended to favour private, domestic virtues.[360] Although Goscelin followed in the footsteps of Aldhelm and Bede, his works

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[357] *VL* §8, ed. Waitz, p. 125; trans. Talbot, *The Anglo-Saxon Missionaries*, via *Internet Medieval History Sourcebook*: https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/leoba.asp [accessed 9 March 2024].

[358] Cotter-Lynch, 'Rereading Leoba', p. 23. See also Brasington, '*Non imitanda sed veneranda*'.

[359] Weston, 'Embodied Literacy,' p. 62.

[360] This does not mean, of course, that women who had been previously recognised as saints ceased to be venerated, and many late antique figures who did not fit this standard gained popularity in this period (for instance St Eugenia and St Mary of Egypt). But for local women who lived in times less distant, reclusion was an essential criterion for sanctity from this point onwards.

were addressed to strictly segregated communities. The emphasis on enclosure for women brought about new ideas of female sanctity, as well as religious experimentation, as many women attempted to fashion new and often independent ways to act out their personal religiosity. These changes are reflected by Goscelin's cosmetic theology in his *vitae* and the *Liber Confortatorius*. Goscelin's saints strive ever inward and up, focusing on solitary spiritual progression, which is emphasised by the patristic rhetoric of adornment adapted for the spirituality he espoused.

Goscelin was a monk of Saint-Bertin who came to England in the early 1060s under the patronage of Herman, who had been appointed as bishop of Sherborne (the see that had belonged to Aldhelm). During his service under Herman, Goscelin worked as a hagiographer and a chaplain at the prestigious nunnery of Wilton, one of the few female communities that had retained its wealth and aristocratic connections: Wilton served as a centre of learning for daughters of the nobility.[361] After Herman's death in 1078, Goscelin was forced to leave Wilton because he did not find favour with the new bishop, Osmund, and spent the rest of his life moving between various monasteries, including Ely, Barking, and St Augustine's, Canterbury.[362] During these years, Goscelin produced a remarkable number of hagiographies. The decades after the Norman Conquest, as Otter notes, 'were a period of upheaval, transition, and reorganization for many religious houses, and many saw a need for updating their records, including the materials pertaining to their most important saints: scattered materials were collected, oral traditions were put into writing, old *vitae* […] were rewritten in a form more pleasing to modern tastes. Goscelin was entrusted with this work by several of the religious houses where he stayed.'[363] The localised nature of Goscelin's hagiographies means, as Love cautions, that 'many of Goscelin's writings had a relatively limited and localised circulation: they were, after all, written primarily to serve the interests of specific communities. Just a few texts stand out as gaining wider popularity.'[364] Nevertheless, the demand for Goscelin as a hagiographer indicates that his depictions of female sanctity reflect the expectations and desires of eleventh-century communities.

Goscelin's Flemish education and his many connections to English monasteries provided him with knowledge of a wide array of patristic and Insular works. As van Rossum points out, in the early

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[361] See Hollis, 'Wilton as a Centre of Learning'.

[362] See biography in Barlow, *The Life of King Edward*, Appendix C, pp. 133–49. See also A. Wilmart, 'Ève et Goscelin'. Barlow and Wilmart believe that Goscelin eventually settled at St Augustine's, but it has more recently been argued that he may have moved on from there to East Anglia at the end of his life: see Licence, *Herman the Archdeacon*, pp. cix-cxxvii; and Love, 'Goscelinus', p. 229.

[363] Otter, *Goscelin of St Bertin*, p. 5.

[364] Love, 'Goscelinus', p. 230.

eleventh century, the library of Saint-Bertin contained over three hundred books: 'The booklist shows that there was a substantial part of Augustine's corpus and also that of the other Fathers of the Church available to the monks of Saint-Bertin. It is interesting to note, however, that Anglo-Saxon as well as Carolingian authors are well represented. Eight works by Bede are listed, three by Aldhelm, including the *Liber de laude virginitatis*.'[365] The list of Augustine's works present at Saint-Bertin includes the *Confessions*, which, as Webber points out, was very rare in England before the 1080s.[366] Goscelin was evidently familiar with this text, which he praised for its power to instil *divinum affectum*, 'divine affection', and his knowledge of this work sets him apart from Aldhelm and Bede.[367]

Goscelin's innovative spirituality, centred on the celebration of the soul's union with Christ in his suffering humanity, bears striking resemblance to that of his eminent contemporary Anselm, who accelerated similar spiritual developments on the Continent.[368] St Anselm of Aosta (1033–1109) was a reluctant Benedictine monk (he reputedly found it difficult to choose between coenobitism and eremitism), who later became abbot of Bec and, in 1093, succeeded Lanfranc to the archbishopric of Canterbury.[369] By the time he authored the three Latin letters for solitaries to be explored here, Richard Sharpe argues that 'he was an established author, whose books were known in monasteries scattered over much of France'.[370] However, the identification of Goscelin's sources has not yielded definitive evidence that he was influenced by Anselm or his older contemporaries, but it is possible that Goscelin developed similar ideas through shared reading and encounters with other continental thinkers such as Archbishop Lanfranc.[371] The question still stands, moreover, whether Goscelin's Flemish contemporaries, such as Folcard of Saint-Bertin and Drogo of Saint-Winnocksbergen, were in the same place in their understanding of sanctity and

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[365] van Rossum, 'Adest Meliori Parte', p. 31. Eleventh-century English monasteries were likewise well-stocked with the works of Jerome, Augustine, and Ambrose, as well as Aldhelm and Bede: see Lapidge, *Anglo-Saxon Library*, pp. 313–16, 282–91, 276–80.

[366] Webber, 'The Diffusion of Augustine's *Confessions* in England,' p. 30. She suggests that one of the exemplars of the copies made in England in the late eleventh century derived from a copy that Goscelin had read at Saint-Bertin. There are verbal similarities to Augustine's *Confessions* in Bede's *Martyrology* (see Love, *Bede: Martyrologium*), but this text does not appear to have influenced the *HE* or Bede's biblical commentaries.

[367] *Liber confortatorius* III, ed. Talbot, p. 80: 'Nec librum inter cetera postponas Augustini confessionum, qui tibi diuinum altius instillet affectum' (trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 163: 'Nor should you neglect, among other things, the book of Augustine's *Confessions*, to instil divine affection in you more deeply'). See also *Liber conforatorius* I (ed. Talbot, p. 33; trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 108), where he recalls (inexactly) an episode from the *Confessions*.

[368] On Anselm's life and influence, see Southern, *St Anselm*.

[369] See Eadmer, *The Life of St Anselm, Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. and trans. Southern.

[370] Sharpe, 'Anselm as Author', 43.

[371] See Hollis, 'Edith as Contemplative', pp. 284–85.

eremitism.[372] What is clear is that Goscelin's view of sanctity is influenced by the late antique and Insular works discussed in previous chapters but has a stronger emphasis on solitary spiritual progression. However, as will be seen, Goscelin's ideal of the female saint as a solitary was not the result of misogyny. Authors like Jerome wrote for women whom they professed to admire, yet, as van Rossum observes, 'their approach in boosting their addressees' religious fervour is through the depreciation of women by using negative examples and stereotypes.'[373] Goscelin, conversely, rarely used women as examples of vice and did not suggest that he disparaged women as a class or that he himself viewed them as a source of temptation.[374] This is partly due to the impetus for Goscelin's writing, as he wrote at the bequest of female communities. As Maude observes, 'the nuns of Wilton and Barking abbeys use[d] Goscelin's ability to build relationships with powerful men in order to ingratiate themselves with their new post-Conquest bishops'.[375] Moreover, when Goscelin promoted female reclusion, it seems to be because this is a way of life he wished to pursue himself (see section on *Liber confortatorius* below).[376]

The rest of this chapter will demonstrate how the rhetoric of adornment helped Goscelin to promote the image of the contemplative recluse as his ideal of female sanctity – and how the idea of reclusion shaped his cosmetic theology.

VIRGINS REJECTING ADORNMENT (ST EDITH, ST MILDRYTH, ST MILDBURH)

As noted earlier, Goscelin may appear self-contradictory as he both denounced elaborate dress and praised women who wore it. Indeed, most of Goscelin's depictions of dress are entirely conventional. Like Jerome, Ambrose, Aldhelm, and late antique hagiographers, Goscelin repeated the key principles of cosmetic theology: that external adornment is unnatural and seductive and that chaste women should strive to be adorned by virtues and not ornaments. This traditional usage of spiritual adornment is most apparent in his *vitae* of holy virgins. Goscelin 'had drunk

[372] On the eleventh-century interest in the solitary life, see Licence, *Hermits and Recluses*, with a discussion of Goscelin's interest in hermits and anchorites at pp. 60–63.
[373] van Rossum, p. 217.
[374] One point where Goscelin does reveal some element of misogyny is in his discussion of the haughty daughters of Zion (see below).
[375] Maude, *Addressing Women*, p. 129.
[376] This attitude differs subtly from that expressed by writers such as Jerome, Cyprian, or Odo of Cluny, who believed seclusion to be the best way to guard women against the male gaze – but did not apply the same logic to men, who could safely pursue sanctity in the public eye.

deep of the old tales of the passions of the female martyrs,'[377] and in his hagiographies deliberately aligned his subjects with the martyred virgins of late antiquity, such as Agnes, whose speech on spiritual adornment echoed through the centuries. But 'he was conscious too of the solitary contemplative tradition and perhaps experimented with different ways of fusing these two strands in his hagiography.'[378] This section will therefore show how Goscelin's *vitae* of virgin saints draw on the rhetoric of spiritual adornment but put a new emphasis on the solitary union of the virgin-bride with Christ as the goal of ascetic dress.

Like his predecessors, Goscelin disparaged adornment as unnatural and therefore displeasing to God. In the *Legend of Edith* (composed c. 1080), which will be discussed in detail later, Goscelin echoed late antique works on modesty as he praised Edith's mother for preserving the saint's natural beauty, which is a likeness of the *imago Dei*:

> Pulchra scilicet filia solis pulcherrimi soli placere et imaginari suo contendebat auctori. Mater illi non auro rutilos crines impedire, non aurea lammina uel gemmis in fronte dependentibus arcem crucis obnubilare, non redimire pompis matrimonii, nec addere quicquam naturali decori; sed his tantum decertabat qualia decebant thalamum Domini. Pro purpurisso, pro cerussa, pro stibio pudorem docebat; pro uariis ornatibus litterarum ac uirtutum decore hanc preparabat, quo in ecclesie ornari malebat, quo in ecclesie splendorem altius resplendeat, ornamentum altius refulgeat.
>
> Indeed that beautiful daughter of the most beautiful Sun strove to please and to be fashioned in the likeness of her Creator alone. Her mother did not desire to load her reddish hair with gold, nor to obscure the stronghold of the cross with a gold plate or jewels hanging over her forehead, nor to crown her with the finery of the married state, nor to add anything to her natural gracefulness; but she strove only for those things which were fitting for the marriage chamber of the Lord. In place of purple, in place of cosmetics for the face and eyes, [lit.: white lead for the face, antimony for lashes] she taught her modesty; in place of a range of adornments she preferred to adorn her with the splendour of learning by which she might gleam more brightly to the adornment of the Church.[379]

The reference to *cerussa*, 'white lead', and *stibium*, 'antimony', indicate that Goscelin's description owes more to patristic writings than to reality, as lead- and antimony-based cosmetics were not in use in eleventh-century England.[380] This passage illustrates that it was not as important for

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[377] Love, '"Et quis me tanto oneri parem faciet?"', p. 239. On Goscelin's tendency to see all female saints in these terms see also Stephanie Hollis, *Anglo-Saxon Women*, pp. 71, 101.

[378] Love, '"Torture Me, Burn Me, Rend Me, Kill Me!"', p. 300.

[379] *Vita S. Edithe* 6–7, ed. Wilmart, 'La légende', 49; trans. Wright and Loncar, 'The *Vita* of Edith', p. 32. This translation renders *imaginari* as 'be fashioned in the likeness', but can also mean 'to imagine', emphasising Edith's contemplative relationship with Christ rather than a reference to the *imago Dei* of Genesis.

[380] Cf. Jerome, *Ep.* 127.3, ed. Hilberg, vol. 3, p. 147: 'Illae enim solent purpurisso et *cerussa* ora depingere' ('Some have the custom to paint their faces with rouge and white lead'); *Ep.* 117.4, p. 426: 'amat divitias, ignorat ieiunium, oculos *stibio* linit' ('she loves riches, she does not observe fasts, she lines her eyes with antimony').

Goscelin to give an accurate description of the saint's habits as it was to show that she rejected adornment that was unnatural (*nec addere quicquam naturali decori*) and better fit for a married woman than a virgin (*non redimire pompis matrimonii*).[381] Not an earthly bride but a bride of Christ, Edith learned to be adorned with virtues, not ornaments.

Goscelin used the metaphor of spiritual adornment in many other *vitae* to distinguish between brides of Christ and worldly women. In his *vita* of Mildryth (c. 1090), a seventh-century Kentish princess, Goscelin emphasised the virgin's rejection of earthly adornment as a sign of her higher calling:

> Hec enim non ut terrigena sed ut celigena id est non quasi in terris sed in celo nata, ita a tenera etatula spernebat infima et anhelahat ad superna. […] Hanc preclara genitrix non aurotextis uel gemmatis purpuris, sed uirtutum monilibus et diuinis dotibus adornare atque ad ardentem lampadem ipsius oleum indeficiens amministrare satagebat.
>
> For she, less like one earth-born more like one heaven-born, that is, like one born not on earth but in heaven, from her tenderest infancy scorned base things and strove for (lit. panted for) things heavenly. […] Her noble mother took pains to adorn her not with gold-woven or bejewelled purple silks, but with the necklaces of the virtues and divine dowries and unceasingly to pour oil on her burning lamp [Matt. XXC.1–4].[382]

This passage closely resembles his description of Edith, crediting the saint's mother for her modesty and depicting physical and spiritual adornment as incompatible.

The reference to the parable of the wise and foolish virgins resembles Aldhelm, who used it to describe holy virgins waiting for union with Christ.[383] By comparing Mildryth to the wise virgins who prepared oil for their lamps in anticipation of the arrival of Christ the Bridegroom, he implied that adornment prevents virgins from attending to spiritual matters while they wait for their union with Christ. Goscelin further emphasised the importance of spiritual adornment for a bride of Christ in a later passage of this *vita* which describes Mildryth's veiling ceremony:

> Sed nimirum sicut filias Eth nurasque alienigenas quondam improbabat Rebecca, sic uestes seculares quamuis mediocres, quibus adhuc sanctitatem tegebat celica Mildritha, mutare in diuinum cultum certabat Domneua. Que iam spiritualis mater ex carnali facta

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[381] However, as will be shown below, Edith was not a model of patristic modesty.

[382] Goscelin, *Vita S. Mildrethe* 5, ed. Rollason, *The Mildrith Legend*, p. 94; trans. Love (unpublished).

[383] Cf. Aldhelm, *PdV* XLVIII, ed. Ehwald, p. 302, where Roman virgins 'unamquamque spreto nuptiali thalamo et maritali luxus commercio caelestis sponsi amplexus enixius satagere et inter virgines sapientes cum limpidis lampadibus properare ducta crebro suspiria faterentur' (trans. Lapidge, p. 115: 'confessed that each one, rejecting their marriage bed and the self-indulgent intercourse of wedlock, yearned more eagerly for the embraces of a heavenly bridegroom, and were hastening, with shining lamps and frequently uttered sighs, among the wise virgins'). Cf. *PdV* XV, ed. Ehwald, p. 244, where Aldhelm warns that vanity will be punished 'cum fatuis virginibus extinctas lampadas gestantibus' (trans. Lapidge, p. 71: 'along with the foolish virgins carrying burned-out lamps').

> hortatur hanc, ut armatura Dei induta tota transeat in Christi federa. […] Venit ergo paranymphus Christi Theodorus […] Accedit regia sponsa ad perhennia regis sui pignera et cum ea turba decies septena septiformis spiritus gratia in Decalogum testamenti Dei federanda. Ardebant in singulis dextris, ut nuptiales facule, ut uirginales lampades, sua luminaria.
>
> But just as once Rebecca derided the daughters of Heth [Genesis 27. 46], the foreign daughters-in-law, so Lady Æbba strove to change into divine garb the secular clothing, albeit modest, with which the heavenly Mildthryth still covered her sanctity. Already turned from fleshly mother to spiritual, she urged her to be clad in God's armour and pass over to Christ's covenants. […] So Christ's groomsman, Theodore, comes […] The royal bride approaches her King's everlasting pledges and with that crowd of 70 is, by the sevenfold Spirit's grace, to be bound into the Decalogue of God's testament. Candles burned in their right hands, like nuptial torches, like virginal lamps.[384]

Mildryth's consecration is presented as a wedding ceremony, with Archbishop Theodore likened to a groomsman of Christ, and again recalls the wise virgins from the Gospel parable. Bridal imagery, including the parable of the virgins, was common in descriptions of consecration, but Goscelin's passage puts special emphasis on cosmetic theology. Compare it with a description of the same event by the tenth-century hagiographer B.:

> Non post multum autem tempus, beata et gloriosa uirgo Miltrudis, celesti sponso cupiens inherere et penitus ponere in domino deo spem suam seque uni uiro uirginem castam exhibere Christo, accepit a beato Theodoro, sancte Dorobernensis ecclesie archiepiscopo, sacri ordinis uelamen una cum aliis septuaginta uirginibus; et ita se cum exultacione et leticia in templum regi domno offerebant quatinus in nouissimo iudicii die non cum fatuis uirginibus, quarum lampades superna luce priuantur, set cum dei genitrice Maria uirginum uirgine prudentes uirgines adducerentur regi Christo et sapientes.
>
> After not much time, the blessed and glorious virgin Mildthryth, desiring to cleave to the heavenly bridegroom and to place her hope completely in the Lord God, and to show herself to her one husband, Christ, a chaste virgin, received from blessed Theodore, archbishop of the holy church of Canterbury, the veil of the holy order, together with seventy other virgins; and thus with joy and rejoicing they offered themselves to the Lord King as a temple, so that on the last day of judgement they would be brought to Christ the King not with the foolish virgins, whose lamps were deprived of heavenly light, but as prudent virgins, and wise ones, along with the Mother of God, Mary, virgin of virgins.[385]

Like Goscelin, B. depicted Mildryth's consecration as a wedding ceremony, with an overt reference to the wise and foolish virgins. But Goscelin's version not only heightens the emotional intensity of the scene but also contrasts earthly and heavenly marriage with the help of adornment imagery.

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[384] *Vita S. Mildrethe* 25, ed. Rollason, p. 134; trans. Love.

[385] B., *Vita SS. Miltrudis et Edburgis*, c. 10, ed. and trans. Love, 'St Eadburh of Lyminge', p. 62. I draw this comparison from Love's unpublished conference paper, 'St Mildthryth's Journey from Abbess to Persecuted Virgin in her Tenth- and Eleventh-Century Hagiography', presented at Understanding Hagiography and its Textual Tradition (University of Lisbon, 2018).

Goscelin's somewhat surprising reference to Genesis XXIV.46 helps him establish this contrast: the Genesis narrative describes Rebecca, the wife of Isaac, trying to ensure that her son Jacob makes a better marriage than his brother Esau. Esau's two Hittite wives are apparently displeasing to her for their immorality. By comparing Mildryth's mother Æbba to Rebecca, Goscelin showed that she wished her daughter to enter a better marriage than an earthly one. The metaphor of spiritual adornment once again helped Goscelin to contrast the two marriages, as we are told that Mildryth's secular garments, modest though they may be, were not suited to her heavenly marriage and needed to be changed into divine garb (*mutare in divinum cultum*). In other words, for Goscelin, even modest attire is insufficient for a holy virgin unless she withdraws from the world in search of a more private spiritual union with Christ.

This is especially evident from the *vita* of Mildryth's sister Mildburh (1090s?).[386] According to Goscelin, Mildburh, like her sister, despised both earthly ornaments and earthly marriage:

> Inclita siquidem uirgo Milburga tota sponsi celestis in amorem transfusa, et celestibus concupiscenciis fecundata, regie generositatis qua pollebat et formositatis qua generositati respondebat appetitores uirginali pudicicia repellebat, nequaquam ullius nisi Christi solius amorem admittens, cui soli uoto ardenti nubere iam elegerat. […] Non captabatur specie nitencium gemmarum non dissoluebatur mollicie uestium preciosarum. Sese magis exornabat uirtutum monilibus quam purpureis uel aurotextis uestibus. Vilescebat sibi uita mundialis sponsus mortalis, proles carnalis, dos maritalis. Hinc natale palacium et affectus natalium respuit et obliuiscitur, unde supernus rex decorem eius concupiscit et amplectitur.
>
> Indeed, the noble virgin Mildburh was filled to the brim with love for her heavenly spouse and made fruitful by heavenly love-making and turned away with virginal modesty those who came courting the royal nobility with which she flourished, and the comeliness which matched that nobility. […] She was not captivated by the sight of glittering gems, she was not weakened by the softness of precious clothing. She adorned herself with the necklaces of the virtues rather than purple or garments shot with gold. The earthly life, the mortal bridegroom, bodily offspring, the marital dowry became cheap to her. So she spurned and forgot the palace she was born in and the affection of her family, and accordingly the heavenly king desired and embraced her beauty [Psalm 44. 10–11].[387]

But Goscelin gave another reason for Mildburh's modesty—she is not enticed by adornment because she rejects everything that connects her to the transitory world:

> Igitur ut ipsa iam celestis sponsa secretius audiret celestium nuptiarum epithalamium utque liberius uideret quam sit celestis sponsus forma speciosus pre filiis hominum et humilius inclinaret cordis aurem ad discendam Domini uoluntatem, funditus omni

[386] The attribution of this text to Goscelin is not secure, but there are sufficient parallels between the *Vita S. Milburge* and Goscelin's other works for an argument to be made—see Love, 'Goscelinus', pp. 259–61.
[387] Goscelin, *Vita S. Milburge* 13, ed. and trans. Love (forthcoming).

> subacto mundi supercilio, sese contulit cenobiali domicilio. […] Pauper uestitura pro regali purpura. Pro insigni diademate regni gestatur humile uelum cenobii.
>
> Therefore that the celestial bride might listen more intimately to the love-song of the celestial marriage-rite, and that she might more freely see how her celestial bridegroom was in form more comely than the sons of men [Psalm 44. 3], and that she might the more humbly inclined her heart's ear to learning the Lord's will, utterly putting aside all the world's pride she betook herself to live in a convent. […] For poor clothing she exchanged royal purple, instead of a noble crown of the kingdom she wore a humble veil of the convent.[388]

Thus, while Goscelin followed Aldhelm in associating adornment with marriage and praising women who rejected both, he put greater emphasis on renunciation of the world than sexual restraint. This is true even in cases where Goscelin explicitly emulated the plot of martyrdom for virginity, such as the *Vita S. Wulfhilde*, written c. 1086 about a saint who lived just over a century before.[389] The plot of this *vita* revolves around King Edgar's pursuit of the virgin Wulfhild, who bears a great deal of resemblance to Aldhelm's chaste heroines as she defends her chastity and shows little regard for adornment. Wulfhild, we are told, left her nunnery to visit her sick aunt only to find out that she had been tricked, and the aunt had set her up to join a feast with the king, Edgar, who intended to seduce her: 'Ita alterutro formae et auratarum uestium decore radians adducitur, qualis ab omnibus digna regno clamaretur' ('Thus radiant with beauty of both form and gilded clothing she is brought in, to be acclaimed by all as fit for the kingdom [i.e. to marry the king]'[390]). The virgin attempted to escape by going 'ad humanos secessus' ('to answer the call of nature'[391]) but bodyguards were sent to follow her:

> Igitur presentibus duabus pedissequis suis exuta pompa ornamentorum et monilium ut ille euangelicus perfuga reiecta sindone per meatum cuniculi excessit.
>
> Therefore, with her two bodyguards present, having taken off the ostentation of her adornments and necklaces, like that fugitive in the Gospel who left his tunic behind, she went out through the sewer [Mark XIV.51].[392]

Goscelin then compared Wulfhild's escape to the virginal defence of Lucy, who likewise resisted both threats of violence and seduction by gifts. Thus, the *Vita S. Wulfhilde* repeats the association of ornaments with marriage that we observed in Aldhelm and late antique hagiography, and

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[388] *Ibid.*.
[389] Goscelin, *Vita S. Wulfhilde*, ed. Colker, 'Texts of Jocelyn', pp. 431–4.
[390] Goscelin, *Vita S. Wulfhilde*, ed. Colker, p. 132; trans. Love (unpublished).
[391] *Ibid*.
[392] *Ibid.*

Wulfhild shows that she quite literally prefers 'spurca latrinarum purgamenta' ('the foul excrement of the latrine'[393]) to both adornment and matrimony.

On their own, these passages indicate that Goscelin shared the patristic view of adornment as unnatural and seductive, linking it to sexuality and marriage. But the description of Wulfhild's escape points towards Goscelin's other key concern. Wulfhild, we are told, took off her adornments *ut ille euangelicus perfuga reiecta sindone*, 'like that fugitive in the Gospel who left his tunic behind.' The image in Mark XIV.51 of a young man abandoning his tunic had been interpreted as an exhortation to turn away from material concerns by Bede:

> Iste adulescens qui reiecta sindone nudus profugit ab impiis illorum et opus designat et animum qui ut securiores ab incursibus hostium fiant quicquid in hoc mundo possidere uidentur abiciunt ac nudi potius domino famulari quam adhaerendo mundi rebus materiam temptandi atque a Deo reuocandi aduersariis dare dididicerunt.[394]
>
> This young man who fled from wicked persons naked, leaving his tunic behind, represents the deed and thought of those who, in order to be safer from the attacks of enemies, abandon whatever they seem to own in this world and have learnt rather to serve the Lord naked than give their adversaries a means tempting them or calling them away from God by clinging to the things of this world.

The reference to Mark 14. 51 in the *Vita S. Wulfhilde*, then, reveals that Goscelin saw adornment as a link to the transitory world, which prevents the virgin from embarking on her spiritual journey. As Love writes, Goscelin's 'marked emphasis upon the detachment from the world and the flesh which is the contemplative eremitic ideal suggests another reading of the virginity-pursued scene, as an encouragement to his readers and listeners to fight off the hounding of temptation or the oppression of those to whom one is obliged to owe trustful obedience,'[395] rather than simply an indication that a woman's greatest virtue is her virginity.

As can be seen, Goscelin repeatedly stated that earthly adornments were inappropriate for the virgins of God. But unlike Cyprian, Jerome or Aldhelm, who saw beautification as seductive, Goscelin indicated that he also disparaged adornment because it anchors the virgin to the transitory world, which prevents her from devoting all her thoughts to the contemplation of her bridegroom.

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[393] Aldhelm, *De virginitate* XL, ed. Ehwald, p. 292; trans. Lapidge, p. 107.
[394] Bede, *In Marci evangelium expositio*, ed. Hurst, p. 620 (my translation).
[395] Love, '"Torture Me, Burn Me, Rend Me, Kill Me!"', 303.

MARRIED WOMEN ESCAPING ADORNMENT (ST SEAXBURH, ST EORMENHILD, ST WULFTHRYTH)

The implication that adornment is a barrier to solitary union with Christ also underlies Goscelin's *vitae* of holy women who had been married or had children. In these *vitae*, Goscelin echoed Jerome's portraits of remorseful widows like Paula and Fabiola, who destroyed their natural beauty with fasting and vigils to repent for the luxuries of married life. But, as we will see, Goscelin's ideal of sanctity as a life of solitary contemplation drew the focus away from penitential besmirching of female beauty to the widows' new freedom to act out their personal religiosity away from the world.

Goscelin's transformation of Jerome's 'penitent widow' trope can be exemplified by his biographies of St Seaxburh and her daughter Eormenhild, which were composed for the community of Ely.[396] Seaxburh (d. ca. 699) was the eldest daughter of Anna, king of the East Angles, and had been given in marriage to Earconberht, king of Kent, by whom she had two sons (Ecgberht and Hlothhere), and two daughters (Earcongota and Eormenhild). On her husband's death in 664, Seaxburh withdrew from the world and eventually arrived at Ely, where her sister Æthelthryth served as abbess.[397] Seaxburh is mentioned in the *Historia Ecclesiastica* III.8 where Bede included a biography of her daughter Eorcengota, but we are told nothing of Seaxburh's life except that she was the queen of Kent.[398] We next meet her in *HE* IV.19 when she succeeds Æthelthryth as abbess of Ely and arranges the translation of her sister's relics – but once again, Bede did not provide any additional information about her married life or her work as an abbess. Goscelin, then, was tasked with creating a more detailed account of Seaxburh, depicting her as a pious virgin, a faithful wife, and an ascetic widow and abbess. His account is presumably based on the Ely tradition,[399] but his description of Seaxburh's attitudes to adornment draws on earlier cosmetic theology, such as the letters of Jerome. This section, then, investigates how Goscelin built on Jerome's instructions on modesty yet created a more positive image of adornment which was aligned with his views on female spirituality.

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[396] Goscelin, *Lectiones in festivitate Sancte Sexburge* and *Lectiones in natale Sancte Eormenhilde*, ed. and trans. Love, *Female Saints of Ely*, pp. 1–9 and 11–23. We have almost no evidence for the date of these texts: no reference is made to the translation at Ely in 1106, which marks the *terminus ante quem*, but there are no other chronological identifiers in the work.

[397] See Love, *Female Saints of Ely*, p. xiv.

[398] Bede, *HE* III.8, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 237–41.

[399] Goscelin's account also seems to incorporate traditions coming from Kent, possibly via St Augustine's, Canterbury—see Love, *Female Saints of Ely*, pp. xxvi–xxxii.

Goscelin's account begins with a portrait of Seaxburh as a young virgin: 'Nota erat late non tam aspectu quam fama, quia pretium eius obumbrabat parentum diligentia ac propria casto pudore reuerentia' ('She was widely known, not so much by sight as by reputation, since her parents' carefulness and her own reverence for chaste modesty kept her worth well hidden'[400]). By describing Seaxburh as being beautiful and wishing to keep her beauty hidden, Goscelin was keen to present her as an exemplary virgin whose piety was aligned with contemporary strictures of enclosure. But while Seaxburh, like Goscelin's other exemplary virgins, 'mallet monasterium quam palatium, ecclesiam quam matrimonium, Christi seruitium quam mundiale imperium' ('preferred the monastery to the palace, the church to marriage, the service of Christ to worldly dominion'[401]), she was obliged to marry a king and live in the luxury of the royal household. But Goscelin's cosmetic theology diverges from Jerome's, as we are told that as a married woman, Seaxburh already desired to be united with Christ, despite dressing in royal ornaments: 'In his uero speciosior erat piis oculis sancta miseratio, quam in splendido ornatu diuitum uana ambitio. […] Rara in turba, frequens in ecclesia ut uideretur post regni negotia non tam marita quam monacha' ('But in these matters her holy pity was to pious eyes more beautiful than empty ambition in the splendid array of the wealthy. […] Rarely seen in the crowds, often in church, she seemed, after the business of the kingdom was done with, not so much a married woman as a female monk'[402]).

Seaxburh's wish for a contemplative life is finally fulfilled upon the death of her husband, and her departure to the monastery is accompanied by a dramatic change of attire:

> Continuo regalia ornamenta cum pompa et luxu seculi abiciuntur et diuina arma in humili cultu quibus et femine tumidum draconem allidunt suscipiuntur. Vetus homo cum actibus suis exuitur, et nouus in Christo induitur. Tum se fortissima uirago in omnem uirtutem erexit, decertans preteritas negligentias et moras acsi tunc demum cepisset ieiuniis, uigiliis, ac uariis laboribus punire uoluptatum maculas igne amoris Dei decoquere, lacrimarum fluuiis abluere, omnique continentia et humilitate emulari sanctimoniam castissime sororis Ætheldrithe.
>
> Straightaway the royal trappings with all the pomp and luxury of the world are cast aside and in humble garb the weapons of God are taken up, with which even women crush the raging serpent. The old man is put off with his deeds and the new is put on in Christ [Col. III.9–10]. The mighty heroine raised herself up in all power, battling against past omissions and hesitations as if she was only then at last able with fastings, vigils, and various toils to begin to punish them, to burn away the stains of lust with the fire of love for God, to wash

[400] *LectSex* 2, ed. and trans. Love, pp. 2–3:
[401] *Ibid.* 3.
[402] *Ibid.* 4, ed. and trans. Love, pp. 4–5.

> them away with floods of tears, and with all continence and humility to emulate the sanctity of her most chaste sister Æthelthryth.[403]

Once again, the description of Seaxburh's way of life follows the patristic tradition. The image of the holy woman as a *virago* overcoming vices and exchanging adornments for *diuina arma* echoes Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, and the contrast between royal silks and penitential asceticism recalls the transformations of Fabiola, Paula and Marcella described by Jerome.[404] Like Jerome, Goscelin once again connected adornments with lust, praising Seaxburh for chastising the body that was once given to her husband. But while Jerome used Paula's ascetic transformation to denounce the fashions of worldly women and showed that she imposed the same strict rules of modesty on her nuns, Goscelin emphasised Seaxburh's desire for solitary, contemplative life: 'mallet in Christi pace requiescere solitaria quam tot animarum fore tributaria' ('she would have preferred to be at rest in Christ's peace as a solitary, rather than being the tributary of so many souls'[405]).

Thus, while Goscelin description of Seaxburh draws on Jerome's accounts of penitent widows, his denunciation of elaborate garments once again emphasises detachment from the world and the flesh.

Goscelin's stories of other holy women who had been married follow a similar pattern. Seaxburh's daughter Eormenhild, who chose to follow her mother into the religious life after her own husband died, is described in similar terms:

> [A]d precellentissimum Elig monasterium confugit, ubi genitrix sua sanctissima Sexburga choris uirginum ut luna inter sidera preluxit, ubi filia ipsius Werburga ut monile aureum uirginitatis emicuit. Hanc sibi sane lucernam perpetuam Domini gratia parauit, hanc uirginem pro uirginitate, hanc coronam glorie pro humilitate reposuit. Hic ergo omnem spem et amorem seculi cum regalibus ornatibus deposuit, Christique mancipatum et armaturam in humillimo habitu monastice religionis induit.
>
> She flew to the excellent monastery of Ely, where her most holy mother Seaxburh shone out over a host of virgins, like the moon amongst the stars, where her daughter Wærburh glittered like a golden necklace of virginity. The Lord's grace surely stored up for Himself this everlasting light, preserved this virgin because of her virginity, this crown of glory because of her humble estate. Here therefore she put aside all the world's hope and love with her royal trappings, and put on the service and armour of Christ in the humble habit of the monastic calling.[406]

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[403] *Ibid.* 7, ed. and trans. Love, pp. 6–7.
[404] Jerome, *Ep.* 77.4, ed. Hilberg, vol. 2, pp. 40–41; *Ep.* 108.15, ed. Hilberg, vol. 2, p. 326; *Ep.* 38.3, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, pp. 290–91 (see Chapter 1).
[405] *LectSex* 8, ed. and trans. Love, pp. 8–9.
[406] *LectEorm* 6, ed. and trans. Love, pp. 16–19.

This passage emphasises the exchange of royal finery for the modest attire of a nun, but Goscelin also indicates that the widow had always desired to be united with Christ:

> Tunc, inquam, in luce apparuit, qualis sub coniugali nexu in oculis Domini uixerit, quibus estibus, crucibus, gemitibus, suspiriis, uitam beatissime germane sue Erkengode uirginis Christi in se zelata sit.
>
> Then, I say, it came to light in what manner, under the obligation of marriage, she had lived in the eyes of the Lord, with what burnings, tortures, groans, sighs, she yearned for the mode of life of her blessed sister Earcongota, virgin of Christ, for herself.[407]

Even more indicative of Goscelin's vision of sanctity as a life of solitary union with Christ is his brief description of Wulfthryth, the mother of the holy virgin Edith. As a girl, Wulfthryth was a member of the Wilton convent (though it is uncertain whether she had taken monastic vows) and eloped with King Edgar, whose unsuccessful pursuit of her cousin Wulfhild was discussed above. Shortly after leaving Wilton, Wulfthryth gave birth to Edgar's daughter Edith and both mother and child returned to the convent. 'This indecorous episode in Edgar's life,' O'Brien O'Keeffe observes, 'so unbecoming the royal pillar of the Benedictine Reform, is, nonetheless, grist for Goscelin's hagiographic mill, permitting him to dramatize a woman's entrance into the religious life as a sacrificial and heroic choice.'[408] 'Adolescentula, adolescentis regis dulces affectus et florentisssimum decorem ut fortis Iudith abscidit,' Goscelin writes, 'et de medio flamme ad fontem uiuum refugit' ('Although she was a young woman, like Judith the valiant she cut through the sweet affection of the young king and her most flourishing glory, and fled from the midst of flame to the living water'[409]). Wulfthryth's return to Wilton is accompanied by a change of dress typical of Goscelin's other *vitae*, but unlike Seaxburh, she is described not as a penitent but as a pilgrim journeying to the heavenly homeland by, paradoxically, secluding herself in one place for solitary contemplation:

> Pro aurotexta purpura induitur *nigra peregrinantis a Domino tunica*, pro aureis monilibus ornatur pudore, pro regali diademate fusco uelatur flammeolo, obumbrata caput in die belli diuino umbraculo.
>
> In place of the gold-embroidered purple she was clothed in *the black tunic of one who was a pilgrim of the Lord*; in place of gold jewellery she was adorned by modesty; in place of a regal diadem she was covered with a dark veil, her head shaded with divine protection in the day of battle [Ps. CXXXIX.8].[410]

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[407] *Ibid.* 5, ed. and trans. Love, pp. 16–17.
[408] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Edith's Choice,' p. 255.
[409] *Vita S. Edithe* §4, ed. Wilmart, p. 42; trans. Wright and Loncar, p. 27.
[410] *Ibid.*.

These examples demonstrate that Goscelin drew on Jerome's portraits of ascetic widows, but his reason for encouraging modest dress was slightly different. Although the *vitae* discussed in this section conventionally depict adornment as an attribute of married women and a source of vanity, Goscelin additionally presented elaborate attire as a burden that anchored the wearer to the transitory world, impeding spiritual progress. But Goscelin did not deny that virtue could exist beneath expensive garments, nor did he demand penitence for former luxury. For him, Seaxburh, Eormenhild, and Wulfthryth were contemplatives in the making who were only burdened, but not corrupted, by their earthly adornments.

VIRGINS EMBRACING ADORNMENT (ST. EDITH)

Unlike the patristic authors we examined in Chapter 1, then, Goscelin did not claim that adornment was a symptom of spiritual corruption. This allowed him to crucially depart from earlier tradition by stating that women could attain sanctity without ever donning ascetic dress. Goscelin did this in his *vita* of St Edith (c. 961–84), the daughter of Abbess Wulfthryth and King Edgar, which he was commissioned to write for the Wilton community c. 1080. The *Vita S. Edithe* is, in a way, a sequel to the *Vita Wulfhilde*: although Edgar was unsuccessful in his pursuit of the consecrated virgin Wulfhild, the saint's cousin, Wulfthryth, a secular inmate of the same convent, left with Edgar and became the mother of his daughter Edith.[411] Shortly after Edith was born, Wulfthryth retired to Wilton with the baby and took the veil. Both mother and daughter proceeded to lead lives of exemplary virtue. Edith died young, at the age of twenty-three, and was translated thirteen years later at the instigation of her half-brother, King Æthelred, thus affirming her status as a saint.

Although the *Vita S. Edithe* was originally commissioned by the Wilton community, Goscelin dedicated his work to Lanfranc, the Archbishop of Canterbury, presumably in the hopes of gaining his approval of Edith and her community. Consequently, Goscelin was faced with the challenging task of depicting Edith as a saint who met the standards of Benedictine monasticism—even though many episodes of her life indicate that she did not. Notably, the Wilton tradition (as far as we can infer from Goscelin's account) maintained that Edith habitually dressed in royal finery, which was difficult to reconcile with the requirements of the Benedictine rule. As Hollis observes, 'tensions, contradictions even, inevitably arise from Goscelin's attempt to recommend Edith and her

[411] It is unclear whether Edgar married Wulfthryth: see O'Brien O'Keeffe, 'Edith's Choice'.

community to the protection of Lanfranc while, at the same time, presenting a portrait that was acceptable to the community—he could scarcely have omitted entirely or revised out of all recognition the oral traditions of the nuns, even though their memories of Edith's life were distinctly unorthodox.'[412] The following section, then, demonstrates how Goscelin's cosmetic theology helped to ease (if not entirely resolve) the tension between Edith's aristocratic habits and the expectations of a Benedictine reformer such as Archbishop Lanfranc.

Vita S. Edithe, like Goscelin's other female hagiographies, employs many of the conventions of earlier cosmetic theology. Indeed, in the first nine chapters of her *vita*, Edith is depicted as an ascetic virgin in the patristic mould, with an additional emphasis on her spiritual quest conceived throughout in terms of bridal mysticism. Goscelin followed the patristic rhetoric of spiritual adornment by depicting Edith as a devoted bride of Christ who rejected worldly marriage and worldly attire alike, beginning his account with two-year-old Edith's dramatic adoption of the nun's habit:

> Pretenditur pauimento insigne pallium ad gradus autentici altaris summe Dei genitricis, quasi ante tronum et pedes diuine maiestatis. Diuersa infunditur opulentia, temporalis et eterna. Regalis dignitas et matronarum ambitus coronulas aureas, aurotextas clamides, gemmatas trabeas, armillas, anulos, monilia uarieque radiantia rerum ornamenta, – materna fides apponit nigrum sanctimonie uelum, calicem et patenam dominice passionis ferculum, celestis oraculi psalterium. […] Sistitur ergo bima infantula ut in florido prato hostia lactea, ut in diuina libra dragrna aurea. Que, ut arca Dei a dextris et a sinistris inreflexa, recto impetu de medio splendencium colorum solum uelum excipit et pro corona capiti imponit, […] premonstrans in cultu castitatis expectaturam se filium uirginis, et *peregrinam* in terris sponsum quesituram in celis. Iam cantitare gestit epythalamium suum: "Nigra sum, sed formosa, filie Ierusalem. Ideo dilexit me rex et introduxit me in cubiculum suum".
>
> A splendid robe was laid out at the steps of the true altar of the highest Mother of God, as if before the throne and feet of the divine majesty. Riches of different kinds were spread upon it, temporal and eternal. Royal dignity and women's ambition placed there golden garlands, gold-embroidered cloaks, bejewelled purple, bracelets, rings, necklaces and the varied splendour of ornamental objects; her mother's faith placed there the black veil of holiness, the chalice and paten, the dish of the Lord's passion, the psalter of heavenly prophecy. […] The little two-year-old girl was put down therefore like a milk-white sacrificial victim in a flowery meadow, like a golden drachma on a divine pair of scales. She, like the Ark of God turning aside neither to the right nor to the left [1 Kings VI.12], with unwavering purpose picked out only the veil from the midst of splendid colours and put it on her head as a crown. […] showing beforehand that in the cultivation of chastity she was going to await the son of the Virgin, and as a solitary on earth was to seek her spouse in heaven. Already she prepared to sing her bridal song: 'I am black but beautiful,

[412] Hollis, 'St Edith and the Wilton Community', p. 258. See also her 'Goscelin's Writings and the Wilton Women,' pp. 224, 233, 236, 238–42.

daughters of Jerusalem [Sg I.4]. The king has loved me and brought me into his bedchamber.'[413]

The scene of Edith's dedication directly contrasts earthly and heavenly marriage, symbolised by colourful royal garments and the black veil of a nun. By forsaking royal attire, Edith (like the saints examined in the previous section) symbolically rejected marriage to pursue a deeply inward and private relationship with her heavenly bridegroom: 'By an ingenious twist to the words of the woman speaker in the Song of Songs, the nun's habit chosen by Edith becomes a wedding dress that befits a bride of Christ.'[414]

The inward and individual nature of Edith's spiritual union with Christ colours Goscelin's cosmetic theology throughout this *vita*. Like other authors who espoused bridal imagery, Goscelin claimed that Edith was sufficiently beautiful without cosmetics or ornaments, as she was adorned by virtues.[415] But unlike his patristic predecessors, Goscelin yet again underscored the fervour of Edith's relationship with Christ by describing her 'spiritual cosmetics' in words derived chiefly from the Song of Songs:

> Candida quoque corporis toga candidior uestiebatur anima. Speciosa in aula, speciosior intus sedebat regina. Facies similior erat patri, reuerentia matri; statura mediocritate decentissima, que et ante assumta est quam peradulta. Oculorum sidera ab intima splendore radiantia oculis columbarum suffuserat sanctus pudor et ales Christi niuea. Fauus distillans et gratia diffusa in labiis suis: mel et lac ex ore Domini susceptum saporabat. Decus capitis ceteramque sui artificis armoniam a sole Ethiopum obumbrabat; et diem hominis non desiderans, in diem resurrectionis et reuelationis gloriae filiorum Dei se reseruabat, qua lampas sua indeficienti perpetuitate resplendeat. Pulchra scilicet filia salis pulcherrimi soli placere et imaginari suo contendebat auctori.
>
> In the gleaming garment of her body was clothed her soul, more gleaming still… She was of well-proportioned medium height, which she reached before she was an adult. Her holy modesty and the snow-white bird of Christ had given those stars, her eyes—which shone from her inner radiance—the likeness of doves' eyes [Sg. IV.1]. Sweetness dropped down and kindness poured from her lips [Sg. IV.11]; honey and milk, received from the mouth of the Lord, gave their flavour. She protected the glory of her head and the rest of the harmonious work of her Creator from the Ethiopian sun, and not desiring the day of man, she reserved herself for the day of the resurrection and the revelation of the glory of the

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[413] *Vita Edithe* §5, ed. Wilmart, pp. 44–45; trans. Wright and Loncar, pp. 28–29.

[414] Hollis, 'Edith as Contemplative,' p. 291. Goscelin's reading of this verse is strikingly different from earlier English commentators: both Bede and Alcuin interpreted the colour black as a metaphor for persecutions against the church (see Bede, *In Cantica* I.202–13, ed. Hurst, p. 195, and Alcuin, *Compendium in Canticum Canticorum, PL* 100, col. 643).

[415] I have already noted Goscelin's disapproval of cosmetics above; also, note the prevalence of descriptions of Edith herself as an ornament, which are reminiscent of Aldhelm's treasury of virgins in *De virginitate*: Edith is an *angelica rosa*, *clarissima gemma*, *deuotionis margarita* (*Vita S. Edithe* §2 (Wilmart p. 41), §10 (Wilmart p. 62), §12, (Wilmart p. 70): 'angelic rose, most brilliant jewel, pearl of devotion'.

> children of God [Rom. VIII.19–23], in which her lamp might shine out in ceaseless eternity. Indeed that beautiful daughter of the most beautiful Sun strove to please and to be fashioned in the likeness of her Creator alone.[416]

The spirituality envisaged here and in the previous passage is clearly modelled on Goscelin's ideal of searching out a solitary union and identification with Christ through contemplation and prayer. 'Goscelin presents the black garments of the bride of Christ which she instinctively put on at the age of two as the material sign of her progressive attainment of the conformity of her whole being to the likeness of her heavenly bridegroom.'[417] As a virgin dedicated to the Christ, Edith was free from the constraints of marriage and the burden of a married woman's finery, thus able to focus her energies on inwardly seeking a foretaste of heavenly union with her Bridegroom.

But the memories of Edith's community at Wilton were clearly at odds with Goscelin's ideal, as the saint was remembered for having a splendid wardrobe of the more transitory kind, kept in a chest that was still preserved at Wilton.[418] Having painstakingly depicted Edith as a bride of Christ who had forsaken all worldliness, Goscelin then wrote that Bishop Æthelwold once rebuked Edith for her luxurious attire:

> At beatus presul Aetheluuoldus iam benigne deuotionis margaritam cum ornatiore habitu sic aliquando premoneret: 'O filia, non his itur ad talamum Christi induuiis, nec exteriori cultu delectatur sponsus celestis.'
>
> But the blessed bishop Æthelwold once warned this pearl of such sweet devotion, with her rather ornate habit, thus: 'O daughter, not in these garments does one approach the marriage chamber of Christ, nor is the heavenly bridegroom pleased with exterior elegance.'[419]

Æthelwold's statement, so similar to patristic teachings and to Goscelin's own pervasive association of elaborate dress with earthly marriage, paradoxically provided him with the opportunity to showcase Edith's inward, contemplative spirituality:

> Illa interni conscia habitatoris, conscia forte asperioris interule, tali memoratur elogio respondisse: "Crede, o pater *reuerende*, nequaquam deterior mens Deo aspirante sub hoc habitabit tegmine quam sub caprina melote. Habeo Dominum meum, qui non uestem, sed mentem attendit. Hic dedicatum est uerbum Domini: Secundurn fidem tuam fiat tibi." Sensit uir Deo afflatus *presidentis* in uirgine gratie auctoritatem, nec ausus contristare supernum in illa presidem, letatur magis Dominum in sanctis suis omnia prout amasse uult operantem. <Animadvertens etiam nil differre in purpura an in sacco mens munda

[416] *Vita Edithe* §6, ed. Wilmart, pp. 48–49; trans. Wright and Loncar, p. 31.
[417] Hollis, 'Edith as Contemplative,' p. 295.
[418] *Vita Edithe* §13, ed. Wilmart, pp. 71–73. On the Wilton community's patronage of Goscelin, see Whalen, 'Patronage Engendered'.
[419] *Vita Edithe* §12, ed. Wilmart, p. 70; trans. Wright and Loncar, p. 42.

> uersetur, nec dampnum adeo esse auro quoquo uase seruetur> cessit diuine libertati, studuitque sanctum eius propositum uenerari, quam credimus plus amasse mattam anachorite Pauli quam trabeam paterni imperii.
>
> She, conscious of her indwelling guest, and conscious perhaps of her harsh inner garment, is reported to have replied in these words: 'Believe, reverend father, a mind by no means poorer in aspiring to God will live beneath this covering than beneath a goatskin. I possess my Lord, who pays attention to the mind, not to the clothing. Here the word of the Lord is declared: "According to your faith, be it done unto you" [Mt. IX.29].' The man inspired by God recognized the authority of grace excelling in the virgin, and not daring to distress the heavenly guardian within her, rejoiced rather at the Lord working in his saints all things according to his will. Recognizing also that it makes no difference whether a pure mind lives in purple or in sackcloth, nor is there any harm in keeping [a thing] in a golden vase, he yielded to the divine liberty, and took care to reverence the holy purpose of one who, we believe, loved the rush mat of the anchorite Paul better than the robe of her father's royal power.[420]

Edith's response exposes the inconsistency that lies at the heart of cosmetic theology: if Christ values spiritual beauty above outward appearances, why is it so important to reject worldly finery? In this way, Goscelin's *Vita S. Edithe* works as the logical continuation of *De virginitate*, where Aldhelm, who gave such importance to spiritual adornment, admitted: 'superflue de peplorum amiculo rethoricamur… Omne etenim purae virginitatis privilegium potius in solo liberae mentis praesidio servatur' ('I began to harangue unnecessarily about the covering of garments […] For every privilege of pure virginity is preserved only in the fortress of the free mind'[421]). And if Edith's argument was deemed insufficient, Goscelin also claimed that she donned rich garments to conceal her bodily mortification, so as not to appear arrogant:

> Cilicio testantur conscie matres asperatam, quod delicata interula et exteriori dissirnulauerat purpura, que tarnen religioni pareret nigra. Gloriosiorem nimirum humilitatem fecerat publica elegantia, ut cum aurotexta Cecilia soli patri uidenti in abscondito abscondita placeret margarita, et spectate facecie archana conderent martyria.
>
> The senior nuns who knew about it testify that she was afflicted by a hairshirt which gave a false appearance of inner delicacy by a purple exterior, although observance of the rule would have required black. Without doubt she made her humility more glorious by public elegance, so that together with the gold-clad Cecilia she might please the Father, who alone sees in secret [Mt. VI.4], with her hidden pearl, and that visible frivolities might conceal hidden martyrdom.[422]

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[420] *Vita Edithe* §12, ed. Wilmart, pp. 70–71; trans. Wright and Loncar, p. 43.
[421] *PdV* LVIII, ed. Ehwald, p. 319; trans. Lapidge, p. 129.
[422] *Vita Edithe* §12 (§10 in Wright and Loncar's translation), ed. Wilmart p. 70; trans. Wright and Loncar, p. 38. Cf. Jerome's instruction to Eustochium not to show off her bodily mortification in *Ep.* 22.27 (ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 183): 'Nec satis religiosa velis videri nec plus humilis, quam necesse est, ne gloriam fugiendo quaeras' ('Do not strive to appear more devout or humble than necessary, lest you chase after praise by abstinence').

Edith's relationship with God 'was therefore even more inward and private, because he alone could see the inner beauty of her soul'.[423] Goscelin's portrayal of Edith as a contemplative passionately seeking solitary and interior union with her bridegroom was evidently difficult to reconcile with her life as a highly privileged member of an elite monastic community. But, paradoxically, Goscelin was able to justify Edith's luxurious attire precisely because he depicted her as a contemplative focused on the inner, rather than outer, life. Just Goscelin did not see the need to show Seaxburh, Eormenhild and Wulfthryth repenting for their royal adornment – because they wore it while striving for the contemplative life – so Edith's manner of dress could be excused on the grounds of her deeply inward spirituality, which Goscelin carefully established in the first nine chapters of the *vita* by combining conventional elements of cosmetic theology with a greater emphasis on bridal imagery from the Song of Songs.

It is highly doubtful that either Edith or other holy women Goscelin wrote about conformed to his contemplative ideal. As royal women and members of eminent religious communities, Edith, Wulfthryth, Seaxburh, Eormenhild, and Wulfhild were hardly withdrawn from the world. But by depicting them as contemplatives in search of solitude, Goscelin was able to adapt their biographies to new, post-reform sensibilities. The patristic rhetoric of adornment, enhanced with the exegetical interpretation of the Song of Songs as an expression of the relationship between God and the individual soul, was a valuable tool for Goscelin to promote Edith and other holy women of the past as models of this new spirituality.

INSTRUCTION FOR A RECLUSE (*LIBER CONFORTATORIUS*)

As can be seen, sanctity was very much a case of mind over matter for Goscelin. The same attitude underlies his rhetoric of adornment in the *Liber confortatorius*, a letter he wrote to an anchoress, called Eve, instructing her on spiritual progress and the challenges of her new way of life. Composed around the same time as the *Vita S. Edithe*,[424] the *Liber confortatorius* has a similar focus on spirituality over materiality, and adornment is one of the images Goscelin used to direct Eve's mind to heavenly things. Goscelin's relationship with Eve has been the subject of much speculation, which this chapter cannot cover in detail.[425] What we know is that Eve, much like

[423] Hollis, 'Edith as Contemplative,' p. 297.
[424] I.e. in 1082 or 1083. The dating depends on one of Goscelin's references to contemporary events: the marriage of the Flemish princess Adela to the Danish king Knut IV in 1081 or 82 (Wilmart, "Eve et Goscelin (II)," 62 n. 1)
[425] See Hayward, 'Spiritual Friendship,' pp. 341–48, for an overview of scholarship on this issue.

Edith, was a girl of noble birth given to the Wilton community by her aristocratic parents to be educated and probably took her vows there while still quite young. Goscelin, Wilton's chaplain, became her tutor and spiritual advisor, and the *Liber confortatorius* describes their relationship as a close and affectionate friendship. But shortly after Goscelin was forced to leave Wilton after the death of his patron, bishop Herman, in 1078, Eve suddenly left the community and went to France to live as an anchoress at Angers. She would have been in her early twenties, and we know from other sources that she spent the rest of her life as a recluse, never returning to her homeland.[426] The *Liber confortatorius*, written shortly after Eve's departure, is thus both a letter of advice on spiritual discipline and a highly personal expression of Goscelin's feelings of love and loss.

As a letter of advice written by a male religious to a young woman pursuing ascetic life, the *Liber confortatorius* bears obvious similarities to the letters of Jerome and to the later medieval instructions for anchoresses, such as Aelred of Rievaulx's letter to his sister (c. 1160) and the thirteenth-century Middle English *Ancrene Wisse*. But unlike these works which pre- and post-date it, the *Liber confortatorius* is not an 'instructional' text in the conventional sense: Goscelin did not describe Eve's virtues to set an example for other women, nor did he advise her on the practical aspects of her daily life, including dress.[427] As van Rossum notes, 'although the educational contents of the *Liber* could appeal to a wider audience, the *personal* contents which may be inferred from a closer reading of the text indicate that it was not a general letter of instruction.'[428] In other words, the *Liber confortatorius* offers us the rare opportunity to see Goscelin's rhetoric of adornment at work in a private letter addressed to a female recluse he personally knew and admired.

Throughout the *Liber confortatorius*, Goscelin used adornment imagery in a way that appears consistent with his hagiographies discussed above. In the beginning of the letter, Goscelin praised

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[426] Most importantly, we have a letter by Abbot Geoffrey of Vendôme and a commemorative biographical poem by Hilary of Orléans, written shortly after her death: see Latzke, 'Robert von Arbrissel, Ermengard und Eva'.

[427] As Hayward observes, 'the regulation of [Eve's] conduct [did] not fall within his purview, except for a passing prohibition on gossip and companion animals' (Hayward, 'Spiritual Friendship', p. 383). The only other area of Eve's daily life Goscelin is concerned with is the books she should have to hand. Goscelin only mentioned Eve's clothing once, in the context of encouragement rather than instruction—see *Liber confortatorius* III, ed. Talbot, p. 78: 'Lapis puluinar, terra lectica, cilicium toga, crassa pellis frigori obuia, panis sobrius, pura legumina, vitrea unda cum munda conscientia Christique gratia; hec sunt tua subsidia imperatoribus tutiora' (trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 161: 'A couch of stone, a litter of earth, a hair shirt as a toga, a thick hide to keep out the cold, sober bread, pure vegetables, clear water, with a clean conscience and the grace of Christ; these are your resources, safer than those of emperors').

[428] van Rossum, '*Adest meliori parte*', p. 217. However, Goscelin's preface to the *Liber*, which purports to ward off the eyes of those for whom it is not written, reveals his awareness that Eve would not be his only reader.

Eve's dedication to the monastic life, highlighting that her modesty (in dress and conduct) instilled religious fervour in him:

> Vbi uero inter quattuordecim uirgines, coruscantibus cereis tanquam syderibus et lampadibus supernis, ad dominicas nuptias trepida et penultima accessisti ac, populosa caterua sollemniter expectante, *pignus fidei diuine cum sacrata ueste induisti*, ille *humilis habitus*, ille tremebundus accessus, ille suffusus uultus […] altius uiscera me percussere.
>
> But when indeed among fourteen maidens, with candles shining like stars and the heavenly torches, you approached your marriage with God nervously and second to last, and with a thronging crowd waiting in solemn expectancy, you *put on the pledge of divine faith with your holy clothes*, I was stuck more deeply by *your humble habit*, your trembling approach, your blushing face…[429]

Later in the passage, he used bridal imagery to stress her rejection of worldly finery and worldly marriage:

> non purpurata, non gemmata, non auro texta, non facie prestantia puellarum agmina, sed te, ea specie quam concupiuit rex castitatis, attendebam, ut filiam ierusalem habitu nigram, sed fide formosam.
>
> I did not watch the groups of girls with robes of purple, decked with gems and gold embroidery, outstanding in beauty, but you, with that beauty that the king of chastity has desired, like the daughter of Jerusalem, dressed in black but beautiful in faith.[430]

The reference to Song of Songs 1. 4 directly echoes the description of Edith's dedication, where the black veil of a nun chosen by Edith becomes a wedding dress that befits a bride of Christ rejecting worldliness to pursue a solitary union with her bridegroom. Goscelin made the connection between spiritual adornment and the contemplative life even more explicit:

> Quanto magis anima Christum tota mente ac perpetua caritate secuta debet obliuisci populum suum et domum patris sui, ut concupiscat rex decorum, que induet sibi mater dilectionis pulchre, de Christi scilicet dilectionis pulchritudine.
>
> How much more should the soul, following Christ with a single mind and perpetual love, forget her people and her father's house, so that the king may desire her beauty (Ps 45.10–11), in which she will be clothed by the mother of beautiful love, beautiful that is from the beauty of the love of Christ?[431]

This passage follows the patristic tradition which encouraged virgins to adorn themselves with virtues but differs from conventional uses of spiritual adornment in one crucial aspect. Unlike

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[429] *Liber confortatorius* I, ed. Talbot, p. 28; trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 102.
[430] *Ibid.*; trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 104.
This passage also explains why Goscelin did not tell Eve what she should wear, since she had already been accustomed to dress as a nun before becoming an anchorite.
[431] *Ibid.*, ed. Talbot, p. 41; trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 117.

Ambrose, Jerome and Aldhelm, Goscelin did not use spiritual adornment to prescribe physical modesty to the 'bride of Christ'. In Goscelin's work, the rhetoric of spiritual adornment is used to depict Eve as an exemplary bride of Christ preserving virginity for her heavenly marriage and to encourage her to persevere in the contemplative life—but never to prohibit particular garments. Even when Goscelin used scriptural passages which directly chastise female vanity, he gave them only a spiritual interpretation:

> Quam feda uero sit coram excelso terrena extollentia, semper patet ex ruina. Hinc interminatur Dominus per prophetam animabus statu libertatis abutentibus. *Proeo*, inquit, *quod eleuale sunt filie Syon, et ambulauerunt extento collo, et nutilibus oculorum ibant, et plaudebant manu, et in pedibus suis composito gradu incedebant, decaluabit Dominus uerticem filiarum Sion, et Dominus crinem earum nudabit. In die illa auferet Dominus ornatum calciamentorum, et lunulas, et torques, et monilia, et armillas, et discriminalia, et periscelidas, et murenulas, et olfactoriola, et inaures, et an(n)ulos, et gemmas in fronte pendentes, et mutatoria, et pallia, et linteamina, et acus, et specula, et sindones, et uittas, et t(h)eristra. Et erit pro suaui odore fetor et pro zona funiculus, et pro crispanti crine caluitium, et pro fascia pectoral cilicium. Et merebunt atque lugebunt porte eius, et desolata in terra sedebit*. […] Hec adhuc fiunt plerumque dum filie Syon, id est uirginales anime, que per innocentiam et naturalem integritatem erant filie, et puritatis pulchritudine ornate et composite, non ferentes suam felicitatem nec reuerentes creatoris maiestatem, ludentes, plaudentes, typo elationis extento collo incedentes, incidunt precipites in laqueum, ac decaluantur rapta pudicitia, detractis ornamentis uirtutum. Nam feminea ornamenta, que numerat propheta, uirtutum sunt insignia.
>
> But the foulness of earthly exultation, in the sight of God on high, is always evident from its fall. Hence the Lord threatens, through the prophet, souls which abuse their condition of freedom. He says: 'Because the daughters of Zion were haughty, and have walked with stretched-out necks, and wanton glances of their eyes, and clapped their hands, and moved in a stately tread with their feet, the Lord will make bald the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will strip their hair. In that day the Lord will take away the ornaments of shoes, and little moons, and chains, and necklaces, and bracelets, and head-dresses, and anklets, and tablets, and scent-bottles, and earrings, and rings, and jewels hanging on the forehead, and changes of apparel, and short cloaks, and fine linen, and pins, and looking-glasses, and lawns, and headbands, and fine veils. And instead of a sweet smell there shall be stench, and instead of a girdle, a cord, and instead of curled hair, baldness, and instead of a stomacher, hair-cloth. And her gates shall lament and mourn, and she shall sit desolate on the ground (Is. 3.16–24, 26).' […] These things still happen generally when the daughters of Zion, that is, virginal souls, which by innocence and natural integrity were daughters, and were adorned and ordered with the beauty of purity, not bearing their felicity nor revering the majesty of the Creator, playing, clapping, moving with necks stretched out in a type of pride, fall headlong into the snare, and are shorn of their hair, when they lose their chastity and are stripped of the ornaments of virtues. For the feminine ornaments that the prophet numbers are the outward signs of virtues.[432]

[432] *Ibid.*IV, ed. Talbot, pp. 95–96; trans, Barnes and Hayward, p. 181.

This passage resembles Aldhelm's *PdV* XV and Pelagius's *Ad Demetriadem* X.2, which warn virgins not to take pride in chastity alone but to adorn themselves with ornaments of virtues.[433] But Goscelin did not use this occasion to warn Eve about the seductiveness of worldly finery, nor did he describe the virgins' virtues as bridal ornaments to be put on for Christ. As Hollis notes, 'despite the bridal mysticism which frames the *Liber confortatorius*, culminating in Eve's union with the heavenly bridegroom by means of her incorporation in Edith, Eve's spiritual progress in the *Liber confortatorius* is not conceived in bridal terms.'[434] Eve's spiritual beauty comes from her virginity but is sustained by her inward, prayerful identification with Christ.

Goscelin's other metaphorical uses of adornment make this even more apparent. Similarly to Bede's biblical commentaries, in the *Liber confortatorius* clothing acts as a metaphor for transitory, mortal things. For instance, encouraging Eve to 'trample the vanity of the world' (*mundi vanitate[m] calca[re]*), Goscelin described spiritual renewal as clothing being made pure by tears:

> Fode tibi puteos patriarcharum Abraham, Isaac et Iacob, eiciens molem terrene concupiscentie cum omni spe terrena […] ut de profundo cordis et de abysso desiderii celestis, in omni genere compunctionis facias aqueductum lacrimarum, quibus *lota et candidata ueste*, benedicas Domino de fontibus Israel uidentis Deum.
>
> Dig for yourself the wells of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob [Gn. XXI.25–32, XXVI.15–33, XXIX.2–11], throwing away the mass of earthly desire with all earthly hope […] so that from the depths of your heart and from the abyss of heavenly desires, in all kinds of compunction you may make an aqueduct of tears, in which *you may wash and whiten your clothing*, and you may bless the Lord from the fountains of Israel [Ps. LXVII.27], seeing God.[435]

Similarly, describing Saint Augustine's conversion, Goscelin underscored the need for identifying with Christ in the virtue of love by using adornment imagery: 'Fit repente aurum de luto, fit de sordida lana coccus precioso murice spiritus sancti bis tinctus, dilectione Dei et proximi totus inebriatus' (Gold was made suddenly from mud; from dirty wool was made scarlet cloth, double-dyed with the precious purple of the Holy Spirit; namely, he was totally infused with love for God and neighbour'[436]). Having thus compared life without the love of Christ to 'dirty wool', Goscelin

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[433] The word *plaudentes*, which Barnes and Hayward translate as 'clapping', recalls Pelagius's description of the virgins *in sola castitate plaudentes* 'applauding themselves for chastity alone' (see Chapter 2).
[434] Hollis, 'Introduction,' p. 9.
[435] *Lib. conf.* IV, ed. Talbot, p. 106; trans. Barnes and Hayward, pp. 193–94 (my emphasis).
[436] *Ibid.* I, ed. Tabot, p. 33; trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 109. Cf. Bede, *De tabernaculo,* ed. Hurst, pp. 100–1: 'semper cocco bis tincto geminae dilectionis flammeus… debet esse' ('[a priest] should always be… inflamed with the scarlet twice dyed of a double love [of God and neighbour]').

later used a similar metaphor for the entirety of earthly existence. Writing on the afterlife, he assured Eve:

> Conscidet saccum tuum et circumdabit te laetitia, ut cantet ei gloria tua et noncompugna(be)ris prioribus doloribus, quoniam priora transierunt.
>
> [God] will tear your garment of sackcloth, and will surround you with joy, so that your glory may sing to him and you will not feel the pain [Ps XXIX.12–13] of your earlier suffering.[437]

The reference to sackcloth, which in the Old Testament is usually linked to exile or mourning, thus serves to depict the entirety of earthly existence as a period of separation from God and to encourage Eve to persevere in her rejection of all worldly affairs to seek her heavenly homeland.

Thus, although instructional works for religious women were a prime *locus* for cosmetic theology in the patristic period, Goscelin's treatise for a female recluse offers the most striking departure from traditional rhetoric of adornment. Although Goscelin depicted Eve as a bride of Christ rejecting worldly finery in favour of spiritual beauty, the reasons for this rejection are markedly different from those given by the church fathers. Goscelin's *Liber* uses the language of adornment to link earthly life to mortality and transience, in contrast to the everlasting beauty achieved in heaven. Rather than encouraging Eve to preserve her virginity for her heavenly bridegroom, Goscelin used the rhetoric of adornment to inspire her to a single-minded pursuit of a fervently interior spiritual life centred around identification with Christ in his divine love.

CONCLUSION

Paradoxically, then, although Goscelin's cosmetic theology was inspired by Jerome and Aldhelm, his ideal of the contemplative life rendered women's dress less important than their ardent desire for a solitary religious life. Writing at a time when strict enclosure and adherence to an ascetic dress-code were expected of all women in religious orders, Goscelin depicted the heroines of his *vitae* as aspiring recluses in search of a close and private union with Christ. It is unlikely, as noted above, that any of the women he wrote about actually adhered his ideal of the contemplative recluse, since all of them were members of distinguished religious communities. But by turning cosmetic theology inward, Goscelin was able not only to promote his own idea of spirituality but

[437] *Ibid.*, p. 35; trans. Barnes and Hayward, p. 111.

also to make saints like Seaxburh, Wulfthryth and Edith more palatable for the Benedictine sensibilities of the eleventh century.

Cosmetic theology was, of course, not the primary reason for increased female reclusion: other factors, such as invasions, political instability and changes in the structure of the church, undoubtedly had greater effect. Neither was Goscelin himself eager to depict women as potential temptresses whose beauty had to be concealed from the eyes of men. But Goscelin's ideal of female spirituality as a deeply inward and private relationship with Christ, focused on solitary contemplation, clearly reflects the changes in the kinds of sanctity an eleventh-century woman could aspire to. When women are excluded from public life and sacred spaces, women's space becomes defined as private space, women's virtues become defined as private virtues, – and seeking a private as opposed to public life in service of Christ is exactly what defines virtue in Goscelin's *vitae* and *Liber confortatorius*.

Chapter 5:
The Male Theology of the Cosmetic

The previous chapters explored the adaptations of cosmetic theology in texts about holy women. They have shown that problems of theology and the gendered status of women were being debated through the rhetoric of adornment. But it is clear that clothing was a moral issue for men, too. This chapter turns to the rhetorical uses of male attire in Anglo-Latin literature. It asks what kind of significance early English authors ascribe to the personal appearance of men and to what end.

This chapter follows a similar structure to the thesis itself. I begin with some background considerations and present three case studies centred around Aldhelm, Bede, and Alcuin, with a final look at the changes that took place in male cosmetic theology by the eleventh century. The nature of the primary sources means that the chapter is concerned chiefly with the dress of male religious. But the fashions of the laity also make important if less frequent appearance. From these specific examples, we can reconstruct the story of a crucial shift in Christian ideas about male dress. The ideal for women, as we have seen, gradually shifted towards the ultimate expression of modesty: complete withdrawal from the world. At the same time, men eventually came to embrace ornamentation as a mark of authority. This change, as we will see, was not uncontested. But from our sources, a picture emerges in which male adornment was linked to power and divorced from sexuality, demonstrating an important difference in the theologians' understanding of men and women's place in the world.

BACKGROUND

Both Classical and biblical texts repeatedly articulate what forms of dress are appropriate for men, particularly men in positions of authority. Qualities such as masculinity, citizenship or ethnicity, personal virtues, and aptitude for governance or religious service are frequently reflected and challenged by prescriptions on dress and grooming.

In Roman literature, the connection between appearance and character that underlies the discourse of modesty intersected with the discourse of political authority. Roman writers and politicians frequently referred to the concept of *modestia* (modesty or moderation) in connection to *Romanitas*, 'Romanness', and concluded that moderation in dress and grooming reflected one's ability to act as a political leader.[438] 'The effective performance of masculinity,' Daniel-Hughes writes, 'was a complex negotiation that demanded a man agonize over his posture, gait, voice, and most especially, his dress.'[439] Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria* is a vivid illustration of this, as the rhetorician goes into great detail about the amount of jewellery a public man should wear, the gestures he should use, as well as the length and style of his toga.[440] The toga has a special prominence in Roman cosmetic theology, as only citizens could wear it, which gave Roman political ideals visible expression.[441] The discursive association between moderation, *Romanitas*, and virtue made a well-groomed appearance a means to showcase a man's political and moral authority through strategic visual displays.

Even among Stoic philosophers, who championed the imitation of nature as a rule for ethical behaviour, were some who admitted that care for one's looks may be necessary. Thus, Seneca urged: 'Asperum cultum et intonsum caput et neglegentiorem barbam et indictum argento odium et cubile humi positum, et quicquid aliud ambitio nempe perversa via sequitur, evita'[442] ('Avoid rough dress, uncut hair, ungroomed beard, unspeakable dislike for silver, bed placed in dirt, and other perverse ambitions'). In his view, a sage should seek to promote his philosophy but appear presentable in doing so: 'Deliberate bad grooming,' Colish observes, 'would be imprudent as a missionary tactic because it would alienate the audience that the philosopher wishes to attract.'[443] In other words, the Roman tradition associated self-restraint and decorum, particularly in dress, with political and intellectual authority.

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[438] The elite Roman man was to be better groomed than the rustics and the barbarians but more modest in dress than the 'effeminate' Greeks: see Williams, *Roman Homosexuality*, p. 136. Accusations of immorality, which was often tied to one's manner of dress, were a staple of political discourse in the Augustan period—see Edwards, *The Politics of Immorality in Ancient Rome*, p. 26.

[439] Daniel-Hughes, 'Dress as Embodied Theology', p. 122.

[440] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* 11.3.131, 139ff. See Fritz Graf, 'The Gestures of Roman Actors and Orators'.

[441] Stone, 'The Toga'; Vout, 'The Myth of the Toga'.

[442] Seneca, *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* 5.2.

[443] Colish, 'Cosmetic Theology', p. 5.

Biblical texts likewise created a discursive connection between male dress and power. The books of Exodus, 1 Kings, and Ezekiel include detailed instructions concerning the sanctification of priestly garments and the consecration of those who wear them, alongside regulations for other material objects in the sacred space. In Exodus, God instructs the Israelites to make for the male priests 'a breastpiece, an ephod, a robe, a chequered tunic, a turban, and a sash' (28. 4) and specifies the colours, fabrics, decorations, and shape of each garment.[444] The description of the priest's attire in Exodus is exquisitely detailed. We learn the exact dimensions of the breastpiece, or rationale; its fastening with golden chains, hooks, rings, and purple fillets; and the names of the twelve gemstones to be affixed in it to commemorate the twelve tribes of Israel. Another descriptive detail is the hemming of the priest's tunic with bells: Exodus recounts that the tunic was a deep blue, the bottom bordered with bells and decorative pomegranates. God also warns Aaron and his sons that those priests who do not wear consecrated vestments when they approach the altar will be punished by dishonour and death (28. 43). Moreover, the bodies of the priests themselves must be ritually pure in order not to besmirch these garments (29. 4, 40. 30–32), nor are the ritual garments to be profaned by being worn in public (Ezekiel 44. 19). In other words, ritual garments symbolised the divine sanction of the Hebrew priesthood.

By contrast, New Testament narratives provide little information about the dress of Christ and his disciples. From the few references in the Gospels and the Acts, we gather that they wore the simple clothing of working men in the Mediterranean: a tunic, sandals, and a woollen cloak called *pallium* (John 19. 23; Acts 12. 8).[445] The most detailed description of dress in the Gospels is that of John the Baptist with his camel tunic and leather girdle (Mark 1. 6), which equates him with the prophet Elijah. John's garments, like those of Elijah, indicate that his prophetic vision would be in opposition to those 'clothed in soft raiments' and 'gorgeously apparelled' (Luke 7. 25), and thus act as a kind of condemnation of the earlier priesthood's ornamentation.

Indeed, as noted in the Introduction, when the Gospels do mention clothing, it often acts as a symbol of material, worldly concerns. Jesus commands in Luke 12. 22–23: 'do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more

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[444] For the symbolic garments of ancient Hebrew priests, see Greenberg, *Lessons on Exodus*, pp. 328–46; Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, p. 244.

[445] However, Jesus and the apostles began to be depicted in much more visually striking garments from early on in the development of Christianity. For a discussion of artistic depictions of Jesus' dress, see Mathews, *The Clash of Gods*, pp. 28, 38, 101.

than food, and the body more than clothing' (cf. Matthew 6. 25). Thus, Christ's unadorned disciples are a visual representation of new values. While the elaborate ornamentation of the priestly robes in Exodus and Ezekiel evokes the unique and superior status of the priests, the followers of Jesus 'appear as ordinary members of the human communities they serve. Their uniqueness stems not from ritual garments but from unblemished spirituality.'[446] Thus, for the leaders of the Jesus movement, the simplicity of their garments highlights a conscious rejection of the old priestly hierarchy. It is not ceremonial costume but self-denial, made evident by their simple apparel, that demonstrates the spiritual authority of these new holy men.

Dressing the Holy Man in Late Antiquity

For the first few centuries of the church's existence, the dress of its leaders remained undistinctive. Nevertheless, the early Christians' attitudes to male dress and adornment began to be contested and changed during late antiquity. Like the formation of the early church itself, this was a complex process of innovation and amalgamation shaped most strongly by Roman culture. As the Latin theologians who wrote against adornment were chiefly preoccupied with the appearance of women, little evidence survives for the moral writings about male dress in the West.[447] What is notable, however, is that Western Christian moralists rarely attributed seductive potential to male adornment, nor did they discuss male dress in the context of sexuality.[448] Instead, their focus was on creating a new hierarchy based on Christian values.

Tertullian, who had passionately argued about the dangers of women's attire for the created order, directed his criticisms of male dress to the symbolism of imperial power. In his only treatise on the apparel of men, Tertullian opposed the wearing of the toga by Christians and, instead, valorised the *pallium* as the attire of men who exist outside of Roman imperial institutions. In a highly unusual rhetorical moment, Tertullian lets the *pallium* 'speak for itself', enumerating the following virtues:

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[446] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 56.

[447] In the Greek-speaking regions, however, the morality of male dress was discussed more frequently, chiefly under the influence of Clement of Alexandria—see Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* II.XI.1518.

[448] The only exception to this is Jerome, who warned the virgin Eustochium (*Ep.* 22.28, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, p. 185) against trusting fashionably dressed clerics: 'qui ideo ad presbyterium et diaconatum ambiunt, ut mulieres licentius videant' ('who only seek the office of presbyter and deacon to be able to visit women freely').

> Ego nihil foro, nihil campo; nihil curiae debeo [...] causas [...] non iudico, non milito, non regno. [...] In me unicum negotium mihi est; nisi aliud non curo quam ne curem. Vita meliore magis in secessu fruare quam in promptu.[449]
>
> I owe nothing to the forum, nor the battlefield, nor the senate house […] I do not judge cases, or do battle, or govern […] My only work concerns myself. I have no other care except this: to have no care. A better life can be enjoyed in seclusion than in the open.

The *pallium* rejects political life, but also condemns the 'lazy' pagan philosophers with whom it might be mistakenly associated.[450] The garment finally proclaims that its contemplative way of life is best suited to the *Christiani*.[451] In *De Pallio*, as Daniel-Hughes observes, Tertullian used dress to visualise the separation of the Christian community from Roman power structures and its replacement by the 'natural hierarchy' of individual virtue.[452]

A similar issue preoccupied Jerome. As we observed in his *vitae* of holy women, Jerome frequently used change of attire as a visual manifestation of a changed spirit. This trope also appears in his writings about holy men, albeit with a different emphasis. Thus, just as the aristocratic widow Paula had exchanged her aristocratic finery for a hairshirt, her son-in-law Pammachius abandons his senatorial toga in favour of the *toga pulla*, reserved for mourning or dishonoured men. But the role of this ascetic transformation is decidedly different from Paula's. Paula's *vita* serves to exhort aristocratic women to penitence for past luxuries and discursively connects indulgence in adornment to indulgence in sex.[453] Pammachius's *toga pulla* carries a penitential element too but has a much more important role as a political statement. Pammachius violates the inner sanctum of Roman power by wearing inappropriate dress and thus demonstrates the incompatibility of Christian virtue with traditional expressions of authority. It is important to point out that Pammachius is praised for his violation of senatorial *dress-code*: Jerome does not expect him to abandon his office as a senator or his relinquish his high social

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[449] Tertullian, *De Pallio* 5.4, ed. Gerlo, *Opera II*, p. 748.
[450] *Ibid.*
[451] *Ibid.* 6.1.5, ed. Gerlo, p. 750.
[452] See Daniel-Hughes, 'Dress as Embodied Theology', pp. 169–98, for a detailed discussion of Tertullian's cosmetic theology in this treatise.
[453] Jerome, *Ep.* 108.15, reports Paula's 'own' explanation of her asceticism: 'Turpanda est facies, quam contra dei praeceptum purpurisso et cerussa et stibio saepe depinxi; adfligendum corpus, quod multis uacauit deliciis; longus risus perpeti conpensandus est fletu; mollia lineamina et serica pretiosissima asperitate cilicii conmutanda. quae uiro et saeculo placui, nunc Christo placere desidero' ('I must disfigure that face which contrary to God's commandment I have painted with rouge, white lead, and antimony. I must mortify that body which has been given up to many pleasures. I must make up for my long laughter by constant weeping. I must exchange my soft linen and costly silks for rough goat's hair. I who have pleased my husband and the world in the past, desire now to please Christ.') This passage implies a reversal of the lifestyle of Roman nobility, but also aligns Paula with Jerome's instructions on asceticism as a demonstration of chastity —see Chapter 1.

standing.[454] Rather, Jerome's aim is to replace the Roman imperial hierarchy with a 'hierarchy of piety', as Salzman calls it.[455] That is, while Jerome and other Christian moralists were careful not to advocate for the complete dismantling of the Roman social order, they sought to create a new notion of *nobilitas* which was based in Christian virtue. Ascetic dress, for both the laity and the clergy, became for Jerome a mark of this new nobility.

But not all Christians, including clergy, viewed poverty of dress as a way of demonstrating this new kind of authority, and the dress of ordained clergy gradually became more elaborate and expensive.[456] Papal letters and church councils from the fourth century onwards designated particular items of clothing for use during liturgy and prohibited their use in other contexts.[457] Although most of them derived from common garments, they gradually became more ornamented and acquired a symbolic significance like that of the ritual vestments of the Hebrew priesthood.[458] Another key development in the Christian West in the end of late antiquity was the tonsure, which became the most prominent visual distinction for men in religious orders.[459]

The transition from late antique ascetic ideals to accepting adornment as an expression of male sanctity can be exemplified by the *Vita Sancti Martini* of Sulpicius Severus and its reception. One of the most treasured stories from medieval hagiography was that of St Martin clothing a beggar by dividing his soldier's cloak, only to discover later that he had bestowed his garment on Christ himself.[460] As Coon observes, 'Martin's *chlamys* is no ordinary cloak, for it was worn by the most important Roman secular officials, emperors, and military officers, and never by Christian officials.'[461] That is, Martin's rending of his cloak, like Pammachius's violation of senatorial

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[454] van't Westeinde, 'Jerome and the *Christianus Perfectus*, a transformed Roman noble man?'.
[455] Salzman, 'Competing Claims to "Nobilitas"', 363.
[456] Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, pp. 13–23.
[457] The designation of male dress as uniform for the liturgy also served as an additional barrier for women's participation in liturgical service.
[458] The Christian reception of the Exodus prescriptions on priestly attire will be discussed in the section on Bede below. For a broader study of how luxury items became acceptable in the church, see Janes, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity*; for the changing attitudes to wealth in early Christianity more generally, see Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle*.
[459] See the section on Bede below.
[460] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini*, 3, ed. and trans. Burton, pp. 96–98: 'nihil praeter chlamydem qua indutus erat habebat: iam enim reliqua in opus simile consumpserat. arrepto itaque ferro quo accinctus erat mediam dividit partemque eius pauperi tribuit, reliqua rursus induitur. […] mox ad angelorum circumstantium multitudinem audit Iesum clara voce dicentem: Martinus adhuc catechumens hic me veste contexit' ('He had nothing but the cloak with which he was clad, having spent the rest on similar works. So, drawing the sword with which he was girt, he cut the cloak in two and gave half to the beggar, and clothed himself again in what was left. […] Then he heard Jesus saying in a clear voice to the multitude of angels that stood about, "Martin here, though still a cathecumen, covered me with his cloak."').
[461] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 67.

dress-code, is a sign of his rejection of secular institutions in favour of a 'hierarchy of piety'. And like Pammachius, Martin accomplishes his ascetic transformation without the sacrifice of active political power. Conversely, the extreme asceticism he adopts grants him charismatic authority: local noblemen in Gaul join his monastery and emulate his poverty-stricken clothing,[462] and his ugliness frightens local officials.[463] As Coon observes, 'Martin's popular image as a prophet and bishop… marks a transitional period in the history of Christian dress and institutional power.'[464] Martin embodies the ideal of a monk-bishop, whose prophetic authority is made known by his unkempt appearance. But later centuries would 'bury the image of St. Martin the monk in favour of a revised image of St. Martin the bishop.'[465] So during the sixth century Martin would appear in art and visionary accounts wearing a splendid episcopal robe.[466] And by the Carolingian era, Martin's charismatic asceticism was so out of vogue that St Hathumoda envisioned him to be majestic and beautiful—despite the fact that Sulpicius Severus had described him as being *deformis*.[467]

By the time Christianity arrived in England, the church was still divided between those who embraced splendour and solemnity in male attire as a mark of authority and those who believed that all Christians should imitate the ideal of Christ's poverty. The issues raised in this section will therefore be crucial for the rest of the chapter.

Men's Dress in Early Medieval England

As we have noted in previous chapters, in early medieval England, there existed a long tradition of material display. While costly adornments were an important marker of status for elite women, 'the concentration and display of wealth in personal ornament,' Campbell observes, 'was something which for much of the past was just as important for men.'[468] Consequently, the

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[462] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita S. Martini* 10, ed. and trans. Burton, pp. 106–7: 'Plerique camelorum saetis vestiebantur: mollior ibi habitus pro crimine erat. Quod eo magis sit mirum necesse est, quod multi inter eos nobiles habebantur, qui longe aliter educati ad hanc se humilitatem et patientiam coegerant' ('Most were clad in camel-hair; softer dress was there considered reprehensible. This must needs be the more remarkable, as many of them were accounted of noble rank; otherwise indeed had they been brought up, yet they submitted themselves to this degree of humility and patience').

[463] Sulpicius Severus, *Dialogorum libri* II.2.3, ed. Fontaine.

[464] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 67.

[465] Van Dam, *Saints and Their Miracles*, p. 18.

[466] *Ibid.*

[467] Agius, *Vita Hathumodae* 13–14 (ed. Pertz, p. 171); Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Martini* 3 (ed. Burton, pp. 98–99). See also Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, p. 38.

[468] Campbell, 'Elements in the Background to the *Life of St Cuthbert*', p. 9.

ideal of Christian austerity came into conflict with the aristocratic background of the new religious recruits.

During the conversion period, the church in England had particularly close ties with the aristocracy. Noble families supplied churches and monasteries with both funds and members. Consequently, 'if models affecting the first aspiring religious were largely those of familial and noble community, not separate solitary asceticism, these inevitably shaped communities on the lines to which their members were accustomed.'[469] As Barbara Yorke points out, royal families often acted as patrons of monasteries, and monasteries, in turn, became a refuge for retiring, withdrawing, or deposed kings.[470] Because of this, the way of life in many foundations 'was not necessarily particularly ascetic nor lacking in many of the luxuries and pastimes of the royal court.'[471] These included horse-racing, secular poetry, and feasting, as well as luxurious attire, and we may safely assume that similar recreations were available to the secular clergy as well. Patrick Wormald summarises this point effectively: new religious recruits 'had taken with some enthusiasm to the professions of monk and bishop, but without bothering to abandon traditional patterns of behaviour.'[472] The demands for a uniformity dress voiced by Aldhelm, Bede, Alcuin, and other sources from this period, shares the motivation which characterises uniforms to this day. As Joseph and Alex observe, a military or police uniform is a visual assurance that the wearer's behaviour 'will be consistent with the needs and functions of the [organisation] instead of the result of personal whim or affiliation with a political party, social class, or other group'.[473]

In this chapter, I therefore analyse the clerical critiques of male ostentation, from Aldhelm to Alcuin, who dealt with both lay and ecclesiastical attire. As will be shown, despite the variation in interests and strategies, all three authors use cosmetic theology to negotiate problems of power, political allegiance, and their displays. The final section, looking forward into the eleventh century, will demonstrate that despite clerical criticism, extravagant male attire gradually came to be seen as an appropriate manifestation of authority and sanctity for men in both ecclesiastical and lay contexts.

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[469] Foot, 'The Role of the Minster', pp. 57–58.
[470] On royal patronage of monasteries, see Yorke, *Nunneries*; on kings entering monasteries, see Yorke, 'The Adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon Royal Courts to Christianity'.
[471] Yorke, 'The Adaptation of Royal Courts', 247.
[472] Wormald, 'Bede, "Beowulf" and the Conversion of Anglo-Saxon Aristocracy', p. 51. See also Tormey, 'Understanding Monastic Recreations'.
[473] Joseph and Alex, 'The Uniform', 719.

ALDHELM

We begin with Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, the earliest response to the problem of male adornment in England. Aldhelm clearly found aristocratic habits to be at variance with the rigid discipline expected of monastic life. His treatise *De virginitate* therefore addresses both male and female religious with a rebuke against luxurious dress:[474]

> Pudet referre quorundam frontosam elationis impudentiam et comptam stoliditatis insolentiam, quae in utroque sexu non solum sanctimonialium sub regimine coenubii conversantium, verum etiam ecclesiasticorum sub dicione pontificali in clero degentium contra canonum decreta et regularis vitae normam deprehenduntur usurpatae ob id solum, ut crustu interdicto faleratagque venustate carnalis statura comatur et habitudo corporea membratim ac particulatim perornetur.
>
> It is a disgrace to mention the shameless impudence of vanity and the sleek insolence of stupidity which are to be discerned in those of both sexes, not only those living cloistered under the discipline of the monastery but even the ecclesiastics whose clerical sphere of duty is under the control of a bishop, contrary to the decrees of canon law and of the norm of the regular life: which (*scil*. vanity and insolence) are adopted for one purpose only, that the bodily figure may be adorned with forbidden ornaments and charming decorations, and that the physical appearance may be glamorized in every part and every limb.[475]

This passage prohibits luxury for 'either sex', specifically addressing monks and secular clerics in addition to nuns. My aim, then, is to explore how Aldhelm's concern about male dress manifests in his spiritual guidance and saintly *exempla*. As the earlier chapter has shown, Aldhelm carefully manipulated patristic teachings to achieve his own aims.

In *De virginitate*, therefore, he attempted to educate the male members of double monasteries about cosmetic theology, although his instructions about the dress of men are not nearly as prominent as those for women. This section will investigate Aldhelm's attitude to masculine adornment to identify how his teachings on the dress of men respond to his conceptions of gender and holiness, as well as the cultural experiences of his addressees.

*Hortatory sections (*PdV *c. I–XIX, LV–LX)*

[474] Pettit, 'Holiness and Masculinity', shows that Aldhelm's treatise was meant to supply spiritual instruction for the male religious.
[475] *PdV* LVIII, ed. Ehwald, p. 317; trans. Lapidge, p. 127.

It is difficult to draw a firm line between Aldhelm's advice for women and men. Certain passages, such as his comparison of wives' and virgins' adornment or his borrowings from Cyprian, are explicitly addressed to the female audience and describe feminine ornamentation. But for others, where he discusses virginity in general terms, it is harder to assign a gendered audience. A particular difficulty in this regard is the terminology of chastity that Aldhelm uses. The word *virgo*, although mostly applied to female virgins, sometimes describes men in *De virginitate*.[476] In addition, Aldhelm probably chose to describe the second grade of purity by the term *castitas* instead of *viduitas*, which only applied to women, to make the category applicable to men. Thus, it is reasonable to assume that Aldhelm expected the general statements he makes about chastity to resonate with the male audience, too.

There are also specific examples Aldhelm uses which indicate that men, too, often covet forbidden adornments. This is especially evident in his second section of spiritual guidance. Aldhelm begins by reminding his readers that external adornment and virginity are incompatible, applying it specifically to the monastic context:

> Si enim exterior pretioso indumentorum comptus ornatu saeculariter gloriatur, frustra interior de pulchritudine propria inaniter gratatur. […] 'Ob quam rem […] virgines Christi coenubii famulatu conversantes ornamentis vestium dilicatis decorari satagunt?'[477]
>
> If the exterior, adorned with the precious finery of clothing, flaunts itself in a worldly manner, in vain does the interior rejoice uselessly over its own beauty. […] For what reason do the virgins of Christ, living in the servitude of the [monastery], bother about adorning themselves with a luxurious gaudiness of dress?

As noted above, *virgines* could refer exclusively to women, but may also include men – and here the latter is more likely. If Aldhelm's aim was to demonstrate the dangers of *female* vanity, the example that follows is an odd choice, as he illustrates his statement with the Old Testament story of Achar, a soldier who was stoned to death for stealing an ingot of gold and an ornate garment:

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[476] Out of the sixty-seven occurrences of the word *virgo* across the double treatise, twelve times it applies to men, namely: *Prosa de Virginitate* VII (Jesus and John the Evangelist), XXIII (John the Baptist), XXVII (St Basil), XXXIX (Jesus), LIII (Jesus). *Carmen de Virginitate* ll. 1 (ambiguous, possibly referring to Christ), 248 (Elijah), 307 (Jeremiah), 323 (Daniel), 414 (John the Baptist), 707 (St Martin of Tours), 750 (St Basil).
[477] *PdV* LV, ed. Ehwald, p. 313; trans. Lapidge, p. 124 (though note that Lapidge's translation translates *coenubium* as 'convent').

> Nonne Achar, filius Charmi, qui de anathemate municipii septeno murorum ambitu vallati pallium coccineum et legulam auri sibi usurpans contra decretum ducis clandistina fraude surripuit, cum totis parentelae, contribulibus et domesticis clientelae sodalibus saxorum imbribus obrutus horrendum mortis spectaculum Ebreorum falangibus praebuit?
>
> Did not Achar, son of Carmi, who with secret treachery had "taken of the anathema" of the city fortified with a seven-fold circling of walls [i.e. Jericho], against the commandment of his leader, a cloak of scarlet and a wedge of gold, keeping them for himself, provide a horrendous spectacle of death for the crowds of Hebrews when he was buried by showers of stones? [Josh. VII.11][478]

Aldhelm connects this episode to St Peter's prohibition of womanly adornment in 1 Petr. III:3–4, but interprets the apostolic passage with the help of Gregory the Great, who applied it to men:

> Nemo ergo existimet, in studio vestium peccatum deesse, quia, si hoc culpa non esset, nequaquam Petrus apostolus per epistolam suam feminas a pretiosarum vestium appetitu compesceret dicens non in veste pretiosa; quia, si hoc culpa non esset, nullo modo Iohannem dominus de vestimenti asperitate laudasset. Pensate, quae culpa sit, hoc etiam viros appetere, a quo curavit pastor ecclesiae et feminas prohibere!
>
> Let no one think, therefore, that sin is absent from the concern for fine clothing, since, if this were not a fault, Peter the apostle in his letter would not have constrained women from the longing for precious garments… Consider what a fault it would be for men to want what the shepherd of the Church took care to avert even women from![479]

Even *PdV* LVI, where Aldhelm inserts a series of quotations from Cyprian's *De habitu virginum* which implore female virgins not to endanger the souls of men by their 'meretricious' dress, the additional examples he gives indicate that he had the male audience in mind too. In his habitual manner, Aldhelm illustrates Cyprian's argument with two verse citations. The first, from Virgil's *Eclogue* 4, describes a golden age when nature will provide for man's every necessity, so that 'sponte sua sandyx pascentis vestiet agnos' ('a vermillion colour of its own accord will clothe the grazing lambs'[480]). The second quotation comes from the *Aeneid*:

> Vobis picta croco et fulgenti murice vestis
> et tunicae manicas et habent redimicula mitrae.
>
> Your clothes are embroidered with saffron and shining with purple,
> Your tunics have sleeves and your turbans necklaces![481]

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[478] *Ibid.*
[479] *Ibid.*, trans. Lapidge, p. 125 (referring to Gregory the Great, *Hom. in evang.* I.vi.3).
[480] *Ibid.* LVI, ed. Ehwald, p. 316, trans. Lapidge, p. 126 (referring to Vergil, *Eclogues* 4.45).
[481] *Ibid.* (referring to Vergil, *Aen.* IX.612, 614).

Aldhelm's ostensible motivation for quoting Virgil in these two instances was to show that even pagans understood the immorality of elaborate clothing. But if Aldhelm's intention in this passage was to warn *women* against the dangers of adornment, his example from the *Aeneid* is once again an odd choice. The story of Camilla, a proud virgin huntress who meets her death while attempting to rob a priest of Cybele of his beautiful clothes, would have been a lot more suitable.[482] But the two lines he quotes are excerpted from a speech delivered by the Italian hero Numanus, who taunts the Trojans by saying their dress is womanish: 'o vere Phrygiae, neque enim Phryges, ite per alta / Dindyma, ubi adsuetis biforem dat tibia cantum' ('Phrygian women, indeed, not Phrygian men, go you over the heights / of Dindymus, where to accustomed ears the double-mouthed flute will offer music').[483]

Although the quotation as it appears in Aldhelm could be about either men or women, any reader capable of understanding Aldhelm's Latin was surely familiar with the Vergilian context. It is interesting that Aldhelm omits the lines which link male adornment to effeminacy: the vice that Aldhelm illustrates with the Vergilian passage is not sexual deviance but vanity.

Thus, while Aldhelm's cosmetic theology is most often applied to women, *De virginitate* indicates that desire for adornment is a male vice too, and warns the male audience against dressing elaborately, though his comments for men are less explicit than those for women. Another notable difference between the cosmetic instructions for women and men is that men face no accusations of promiscuity. While figures like Judith and the proverbial harlot deck themselves out in splendid ornaments to seduce men, there is no indication that male adornment can be dangerous to women (or other men). Nowhere in *De virginitate* does male adornment appear connected to male sexuality, whether in negative terms, as a source of sexual temptation, or more positively, as the 'spiritual adornment' of virtues. The separation of male adornment from sexuality is especially clear from Aldhelm's saintly *exempla*.

Lives of virgin saints (PdV *c. XX–XXXVIII)*

That adornment was a gendered and sexualised concept for Aldhelm becomes apparent when we compare its usage in the *vitae* of female saints to those of men.

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[482] *Aen.* XI.768–793. This episode is discussed in detail in Thomas G. Rosenmeier, 'Virgil and Heroism: *Aeneid* XI', *The Classical Journal* 55, No. 4 (1960), 159–64 (161).
[483] *Aen.* IX.612–18.

In Chapter 2, I concluded that spiritual adornment appears in the lives of female virgins as a reward for chastity, which often includes rejection of actual ornaments offered to these holy women by their suitors. Of the twenty-two female saints in the prose treatise, five reject both luxuries and marriage; in the verse, the number is even higher—eleven out of twenty. This is out of a total of twelve marriage rejections in the prose and fourteen in the verse. In other words, the majority of Aldhelm's female *exempla* equate rejection of adornment with rejection of marriage.

By contrast, only one in thirty-nine male saints in the prose version rejects both luxurious ornaments and marriage (one in thirty-four in the verse). That saint is Chrysanthus, whom we encountered in Chapter 2. Chrysanthus resists the appeal of beautiful clothing, one of several worldly temptations he faces, the others being feasting, women, and, notably, pagan philosophy. Thus, Chrysanthus is hardly comparable to a saint like Agnes, whose *vita* firmly links adornment to marriage. The only other male virgin in Aldhelm's collection who resists an unwanted marriage is Malchus, forced to marry by his enslavers. Adornment does not figure in his story at all.

That is, the association of adornment with marriage is a trope that appears predominantly if not exclusively in the lives of female virgins. This is partly due to Aldhelm's sources, and partly due to cultural practice. In late antiquity and Anglo-Saxon England alike, men gifted ornaments to virgins as engagement presents, and women played an important part in displaying their husband's status through their jewellery.[484] To see a male saint tempted into marriage by expensive gifts might therefore have seemed odd to Aldhelm's readers. But there was another, socially acceptable context for men to receive gifts of clothing and jewellery: the lord-retainer relationship. The image of Christ as a lord bestowing gifts on his retainers for loyal service is attested in Old English literature and would have reflected Aldhelm's idea of spiritual adornment.[485] But Aldhelm never draws on this metaphor. In fact, he is remarkably reluctant to mention dress in any way in the *vitae* of the male virgins, even as spiritual adornment. On the contrary, throughout his list of exemplary virgins, Aldhelm removes any references to clothing, grooming or appearance even where the original emphasised that element.

Thus, Elisha punishes wicked children for mockery, but Aldhelm fails to mention that they were making fun of the prophet's baldness;[486] Elijah's camel tunic and leather belt are never

[484] See North, 'Gold and the Heathen Polity', on this cultural practice in *Beowulf*.
[485] Cf. the *Dream of the Rood*, where the cross is presented as Christ's retainer and rewarded for its service by being encrusted with gems, and Exeter Book Riddle 20, where an ornate sword is compared to a retainer.
[486] *PdV* XX, ed. Ehwald, p. 249; trans. Lapidge, p. 76. Cf. 2 Kings II.23.

mentioned, and neither is the clothing of John the Baptist.[487] St Martin's famed act of clothing a beggar with his cloak is likewise omitted.[488] But strangest of all is Aldhelm's account of the patriarch Joseph. In the biblical story, Joseph's cloak plays an important role in his encounter with his master's wife, who is trying to seduce him:

> One day, however, when he went into the house to do his work, and while no one else was in the house, she caught hold of his garment, saying, 'Lie with me!' But he left his garment in her hand, and fled and ran outside. When she saw that he had left his garment in her hand and had fled outside, she called out to the members of her household and said, 'See, my husband has brought among us a Hebrew to insult us! He came in to me to lie with me, and I cried with a loud voice; and when he heard me raise my voice and cry out, he left his garment beside me, and fled outside.' (Gen. XXXIX.11–15)

The image of Joseph running away and leaving his garment in his seductress's hand is remarkably similar to the stories of female virgins pursued by pagan suitors that Aldhelm was so fond of. It could have been a great example of disregard for clothing as an aid to preserving virginity, yet Aldhelm writes Joseph's cloak entirely out of the story:

> dum in pulcherrimo pubertatis decore et formosi vultus florens venustate multo formosiore fretus virginitate strofosam muliebris audaciae muscipulam parvi pendens callidae deceptionis decipulam declinavit simulque fraudulenta femineae titillationis lenocinia ac blanda sermocinationis incitamenta velut lentescente nectaris defruto seu mulso mellitae potationis oblectamento atrum veneni virus infundentia et incautos quosque sine lorica fidei armaturaque militari repertos truculente ad tartarum trudentia sprevit, vicit, contempsit et cum palma virginitatis aufugit.
>
> (when he was) flowering in the exquisite beauty of youth and the loveliness of his handsome face, sustained by his yet more beautiful virginity, he disparaged the deceitful snare of feminine boldness and spurned, overcame and scorned the seductive inducements of its prattle (which) – as if with the sticky nectar of wine or the saccharine delight of honeyed mead – pours out the black virulence of its poison and viciously hurls to hell those who are unprepared and who are caught without the breast-plate of faith or any other military armament: from these Joseph fled with the palm of his virginity.[489]

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[487] *Ibid.* XX, XXIII, ed. pp. 249, 253; trans. Lapidge, pp. 76, 79. Cf. 2 Kings I.8 and Matt. III.4.
[488] *Ibid.* XXVI, ed. Ehwald, p. 260; trans. Lapidge, p. 85. The closest thing we have to a description of Martin clothing the beggar is Aldhelm's description of Martin as 'pauperculis porrigen[s] agapemque egentibus erogan[s]' ('offering alms to the poor and distributing charity to the needy'), which is quite vague. One might argue that this part of Martin's story was so well-known that Aldhelm did not feel the need to reiterate it. But Martin's *vita* in the *PdV* is still double the length of the lesser-known life of Ambrose which comes before it, and Aldhelm still lists Martin's other well-known acts like destroying pagan shrines and raising the dead.
[489] *PdV* LIII, ed. Ehwald, p. 310; trans. Lapidge, p. 122.

Clearly, Aldhelm's omissions of clothing are deliberate. Moreover, spiritual ornaments in the *vitae* of holy men frequently give way to spiritual armaments, like the *lorica fidei*, 'breast-plate of faith', in the passage above.

In other words, Aldhelm's treatment of dress reflects a gendered view of sanctity. As Maud McInerney puts it, 'His male examples are generally and often even primarily associated with virtues and abilities that may be grounded in sexual purity but which transcend it,' whereas 'what women do best is to arouse the lust of pagan persecutors and die in defence of their chastity'.[490] She explains:

> '[T]hese men are more than simply virgins; some are martyrs, some are hermits, some are bishops, and a few combine all of these roles; some, like Ambrose, Jerome, and Basil of Caesarea, are Fathers of the Church and precursors of Aldhelm in the literary pursuit of virginity. […] On the women's side, there are twenty-two virgins and one Old Testament nonvirgin, Judith, who is cited as an example of how alluring and dangerous female adornment can be (albeit in a good cause); fourteen of these women, or almost two-thirds of them, are martyrs. What is more, they are all martyrs for virginity, by which I mean that their virgin state is the proximate cause of their martyrdom.'[491]

Emma Pettit likewise observed that 'whereas saints of both sexes endure persecution and are martyred, the males typically achieve holiness through zealously proselytizing, the females by rejecting their pagan suitors.'[492] Often the extraordinary powers of the male saints are presented as resulting from their bodily purity. The ability of St Martin, Cosmas and Damian, and Julian to raise the dead is presented implicitly as the result of virginity; and in the case of Daniel (and Jeremiah in the verse) prophetic power is explicitly said to be the reward of virginity. The female virgins, conversely, usually act as channels of divine power when they perform miracles. 'Miracles, essential qualifiers of sanctity, are overwhelmingly a male activity in the double treatise,' whereas 'female saints are aligned with culturally feminine characteristics,'[493] which includes being adorned – even if by virtues.

Pettit relates this difference between male and female saints' miracles to the fact that male members of the convent would have suffered a more significant break with their secular lifestyle than women. They had to leave military service and, if they belonged to a double monastery, lived under the authority of a woman: 'Aldhelm thus reassured men by demonstrating that even

[490] McInerney, *Eloquent Virgins*, pp. 90, 92.
[491] *Ibid.*, pp. 90–91.
[492] Pettit, 'Holiness and Masculinity', p. 11.
[493] *Ibid.*, p. 13.

as monks they were still masculine and that the spiritual life of the cloister presented an alternative, yet equally authoritative form of masculinity.'[494]

In other words, spiritual adornment never appears in the lives of the male virgins because they receive rewards of a different kind. As shown in the earlier chapter, the *vitae* of holy women frequently describe adornment as gifts they receive from their divine Bridegroom. Therefore, Aldhelm deliberately avoids discussion of clothing in the *vitae* of male saints to separate them from the women and emphasise that male virginity earns a different reward. This difference is especially apparent if we compare the *vita* of Agnes to that of Joseph. Agnes's purity earns her spiritual rings, gems and garments; but Joseph is rewarded by God in a different way: 'pro incontaminata adolescentis continentia eidem Memfiticae gentis gubernacula tradidit et florentis imperii moderamen regendum commisit' (because of the unstained continence of (Joseph's) youth, [God] gave the government of the Egyptian people and entrusted him to rule the dominion of its flourishing empire'[495]).

That is, although concern for external finery is deemed inappropriate for both sexes, women may be adorned with spiritual ornaments – but not men. Although Aldhelm theorises that virginity bestows a transcendence of gender 'in the oneness of Christ', his saintly *exempla* show that the way virginity will be rewarded is still gendered. The reward for female virginity is adornment; the reward for male virginity is power.[496]

BEDE

The problem of ecclesiastical ostentation which had troubled Aldhelm was equally disturbing to his younger contemporary Bede in Northumbria. As discussed in Chapter 3, for Bede fine clothing signified preoccupation with worldly matters. He blamed the aristocratic habits of certain monks and priests (explicitly in the *Letter to Ecgbert* and implicitly in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*) for the failure of the church to provide adequate pastoral care. As Warren Tormey put it, Bede viewed the Northumbrian church as 'a fallen institution, one inclining back toward its aristocratic origins and increasingly at variance with its ethos of austerity and primary

[494] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[495] *PdV* LIII, p. 310, trans. Lapidge, 122.
[496] Note that medieval etymology connected heroism (*virtus*) with the word for 'man' (*vir*) – see Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, XI.ii.21.

missions of ministry and service.'[497] Moreover, the Northumbrian church of Bede's day was still not fully recovered from the mid-seventh century conflict between its Irish foundations and the 'Roman' movement spearheaded by Bishop Wilfrid. Although the reason for the conflict was chiefly doctrinal (the calculation of Easter), it also reflected on the practices of ecclesiastical dress, as the Ionan religious placed high value on asceticism and wore a different style of tonsure from that of the Wilfridians. Thus, the dress of male ecclesiastics, whether aristocratic Northumbrians or Irish ascetics, was for Bede a subject which bore on ecclesiastical politics.

This section will show that Bede's presentation of religious men's attire throughout his works is a conscious aid to his reformist vision. From interpreting the garments of Old Testament priests to discussing the tonsure problem to valorising Cuthbert as a model bishop, Bede used the symbolism of clothing to present his ideal church as unified and ascetic, concerned with spiritual service rather than worldly ostentation.

Interpreting Old Testament Priestly Vestments

As discussed in Chapter 3, Bede's interpretation of garments in the Bible was predominantly spiritual. He did not use biblical passages to comment directly on contemporary dress but allegorised garments as virtues and vices. In interpreting the priestly vestments described in Exodus 28, Bede followed a long-established patristic tradition. Jerome had written a letter to Fabiola commenting on Aaron's vestments, which provided detailed if literal interpretation, and Isidore's *Etymologies* also offered descriptive and etymological material, though he did not connect the Levitical to the Christian priesthood.[498] Bede drew on both these sources, but the moral and allegorical interpretation in *De tabernaculo* is borrowed from Gregory the Great's *Regula pastoralis*. Written in the sixth century, this work made a crucial association between the vestments of Aaron and the virtues to be cultivated by Christian priests. For instance, according to Gregory, the ephod was to be made of gold, hyacinth, purple and scarlet

> ut quanta sacerdos clarescere uirtutum diuersitate debeat demonstretur. In sacerdotis quippe habitu ante omnia aurum fulget, ut in eo intellectus sapientiae principaliter emicet. Cui hyacinthus, qui aereo colore resplendet adiungitur, ut per omne quod intellegendo penetrat non ad fauores infimos, sed ad amorem caelestium surgat […] Auro quoque et hyacintho purpura permiscetur; ut uidelicet sacerdotale cor, cum summa quae praedicat sperat, in semetipso etiam suggestiones uitiorum reprimat […] Auro

[497] Tormey, 'Monastic Recreations', p. 267.
[498] Jerome, *Epistle* 64, ed. Hilberg, vol. 1, pp. 586–615; Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, ed. Valastro Canale, vol. 2, pp. 584–91.

> autem, hyacintho ac purpurae bis tinctus coccus adiungitur, ut ante interni iudicis oculos omnia uirtutum bona ex caritate decorentur, et cuncta quae coram hominibus rutilant, haec in conspectu occulti arbitris flamma intimi amoris accendat. Quae scilicet caritas, quia deum simul ac proximum diligit, quasi ex duplici tinctura fulgescit. […] Sed cum mens ad praecepta caritatis tenditur, restat procul dubio ut per abstinentiam caro maceretur. Vnde et bis tincto cocco torta byssus adiungitur. De terra etenim byssus nitenti specie oritur. Et quid per byssum, nisi candens decore munditiae corporalis castitas designatur?
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> so that it may be evident with what great variety of virtues the priest should be conspicuous. Thus, in the vesture of the priest the gold is resplendent beyond all else; so should he especially shine beyond all others in the understanding of wisdom. Hyacinth is added, brilliant with the colour of the skies, that by every matter which he penetrates with his understanding, he may not stoop to the base favours of earth, but rise up to the love of heavenly things [...] With the gold and blue of the vesture, there is also mingled purple. That is to say, the heart of the priest, while hoping for those high matters about which he preaches, should repress in itself the remotest suggestions of vice [...] Now, to gold, blue, and purple is added twice-dyed scarlet, to signify that in the eyes of the Judge of the heart all that is good in virtues must be adorned with charity, and that everything that is resplendent in human eyes must in the sight of the Judge within be lit up with the flame of love coming from the heart. Moreover, because this charity embraces both God and neighbour, its radiance is, as it were, of a double hue [...] But while the mind is intent on the precepts of charity, it remains, beyond doubt, that the flesh must be mortified by abstinence. Consequently, fine-twisted linen is joined with the twice-dyed scarlet. Now, fine linen comes from the earth with radiant hue. And what else is designated by linen but chastity, radiant in the comeliness of bodily cleanness? [499]

Following Gregory's lead, Bede provided an allegorical exegesis of Exodus 28, with detailed discussion of each element of Old Testament priestly attire, connecting their names, shapes and colours to Christian virtues:

> Vestes sanctae Aaron quas illi Moyses fecit opera sunt iustitiae et sanctitatis quae scriptura sacrae legis rectoribus habenda commendat.
>
> The sacred vestments of Aaron which Moses made for him are the works of righteousness and holiness which the Scripture of the sacred law recommends [the Church's] rulers to possess.[500]

Thus, the ephod, also called *superhumerale* ('over-shoulders'), is 'labores bonorum operum quae iugiter coram domino ferre debet' ('the labours of good works which he ought to bear continually before the Lord'[501]), and its colours indicate that the priest

> auro sapientiae lucidus semper hyacintho spei in superna erectus semper regni caelestis purpura aduersus uitiorum bella magnanimis semper cocco bis tincto geminae

[499] Gregory the Great, *Regula pastoralis* 2.2–4, ed. Rommel, vol. 1, pp. 176–78; trans. Davis, pp. 46–54.
[500] Bede, *De tabernaculo* 3.3–10, ed. Hurst, p. 97; trans. Holder, *On the Tabernacle*, p. 111.
[501] *Ibid.*, ed. Hurst, p. 98; trans. Holder, p. 112.

> dilectionis flammeus semper retorta bysso castigatae carnis sacerdos siue doctor fidelium debet esse nitidus.
>
> should always be luminous with the gold of wisdom; he should always be lifted up to higher things with the blue of hope; he should always be courageous against the onslaughts of vices with the purple of a heavenly kingdom; he should always be inflamed with the scarlet twice dyed of a double love [of God and neighbour]; he should always be shining with the fine twisted linen of flesh that has been kept under restraint.[502]

Similarly, the diversity of gems on the priest's breastpiece 'multiplicem uariarum uirtutum gratiam designat quae concordi serie disposita in sacerdotis debet corde semper apparere' ('designates the manifold grace of the various virtues which should always appear in the heart of a priest, arranged in harmonious succession'[503]), while its size 'conatum infatigabilem ac perpetuum piae intentionis ostendit' ('indicates the indefatigable and constant effort of pious intention'[504])—to name only a few examples.

Naturally, Bede also acknowledged the reality of these items, but he believed that 'nos magis in eis quae ad significantiam nostrae in domino piae conuersationis pertineant quaeque ad correctionem nostrorum respiciant morum decet intueri' ('it is more fitting for us to contemplate in them the meanings that pertain to our pious manner of life in the Lord and that have reference to the correction of our character'[505]).

In other words, when Bede emphasised the allegorical meaning of Aaron's vestments rather than seeing them as a model for contemporary priestly dress, he wished to highlight that the focus of the church should be on spiritual rather than material splendour. This is in contrast, for example, to later Carolingian interpretations, which sought to connect the Levitical garments with the real-life splendour of contemporary priestly attire.[506] Bede's allegorical interpretation is typical of his biblical exegesis and follows Gregory's *Regula Pastoralis*, but this view also fits in with the subtle reformism of his works.

As Stancliffe notes, 'Bede consistently gives allegorical interpretations to the building and ornamentation of the tabernacle and temple in his *De Tabernaculo* and *De Templo*, rather than seeing them as precedents for the building and adornment of fine church buildings in his own

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[502] *Ibid.*, ed. Hurst, pp. 100–1; trans. Holder, pp. 115–16.
[503] *Ibid.*, ed. Hurst, p. 103; trans. Holder, p. 119.
[504] *Ibid.*
[505] *Ibid.*, ed. Hurst, p. 97; trans. Holder, p. 111.
[506] See Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, pp. 55–58.

day,'[507] and the same can be said about his allegorising of priestly garments. This is in stark contrast to the champions of the 'Roman' movement in Northumbria, St Wilfrid and Acca of Hexham, who are said to have embellished their churches with purple and silk and dressed in a manner that would impress the nobility.[508] Stancliffe therefore believes that Bede tended to interpret Old Testament splendour allegorically because his aim was to promote an ascetic model for Christian leadership.

The two models of episcopacy that emerged in late-seventh-century Northumbria have been sketched out by Mayr-Harting, who labelled the contrasting viewpoints 'Gaulish' and 'Gregorian', though Stancliffe's 'clerical' and 'monastic' are clearer.[509] The clerical model is exemplified by St Wilfrid, whose hagiographer, Stephen of Ripon, presents episcopacy as a calling that is very distinct from monasticism and requires grandeur. The monastic model, heavily inspired by Gregory the Great, is championed by Bede, who was particularly concerned with the provision of preaching and teaching, and 'was convinced that it was more effective if the teacher lived out the Gospel ideal that he was talking about, as did monk-bishops like Cuthbert.'[510] But before we analyse Bede's presentation of Lindisfarne's monk-bishop as a model for episcopacy, we must discuss how he addressed a more acute issue that arose from Wilfrid's conflict with Iona and Lindisfarne: that is, the tonsure problem.

The Tonsure Problem

When the 664 Synod of Whitby ruled that the Northumbrian church would calculate the date of Easter in accordance with the customs of Rome rather than those of the Irish, it also resolved a seemingly unrelated question, that of the tonsure: 'nam et de hoc quaestio non minima erat' ('for there was no small argument about this too').[511] The Synod ordered the Irish custom of shaving the top and back of the head to be abandoned in favour of the crown-shaped 'Petrine' tonsure favoured by Rome and familiar to us today.

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[507] Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy', p. 31. This is typical of Bede's biblical exegesis: his commentary on 1 Samuel, for example, links all its discussions of kingship to Christ as King, and never to contemporary kings (I owe this observation to Rosalind Love).
[508] *Ibid.*; see also Stancliffe, 'Bede and Bishop Acca', pp. 175, 186.
[509] Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, pp. 130–9. Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy', p. 30.
[510] Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy', p. 30.
[511] *HE* III.26, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 308.

Bede explained the reasoning behind this decision in *HE* V.21, nearly seventy years after the Synod of Whitby, by quoting a letter from abbot Ceolfrith to king Nechtan of the Picts. The letter begins by asserting the harmlessness of variety in ecclesiastical practice[512] but affirms that the tonsure of Peter is to be preferred to the Irish style, which resembles the tonsure of Simon Magus:

> Verum etsi profiteri nobis liberum est, quia tonsurae discrimen non noceat, quibus pura in Deum fides et caritas in proximum sincera est … quia Petrus in memoriam dominicae passionis ita adtonsus est, idcirco et nos, qui per eandem passionem saluari desideramus, ipsius passionis signum cum illo in uertice, summa uidelicet corporis nostri parte, gestamus. … Ceterum tonsuram eam, quam magum ferunt habuisse Simonem, quis rogo fidelium non statim cum ipsa magia primo detestetur et merito exsufflet aspectu? Quae in frontis quidem superficie coronae uidetur speciem praeferre, sed ubi ad ceruicem considerando perueneris, decurtatam eam, quam te uidere putabas, inuenies coronam, ut merito talem simoniacis et non Christianis habitum conuenire cognoscas; qui in praesenti quidem uita a deceptis hominibus putabantur digni perpetuae gloria coronae, sed in ea quae sequitur uitam non solum omni spe coronae priuati sed aeterna insuper sunt poena damnati.
>
> But though we freely admit that a difference in tonsure is not hurtful to those whose faith in God is untainted and their love for their neighbour sincere … because Peter wore the tonsure in memory of the Lord's Passion, so we, who desire to be saved by His Passion, wear with Peter the sign of the Passion on our crown, that is to say, on the highest part of the body. … But as for the tonsure which Simon Magus is said to have worn, what believer, I ask you, will not, at the very sight of it, detest and reject it together with his magic? And rightly so. In the front of the forehead it does seem to bear the resemblance to a crown, but when you come to look at the neck, you find that the crown which you expected to see is cut short; so that you recognize this as a fitting fashion for simoniacs but not Christians. For in this present life those whom they deceived thought that they were worthy of the glory of the everlasting crown; but in the life to come they are not only deprived of any hope of a crown but moreover are condemned to eternal punishment.[513]

The letter continues to say that there have been many holy and worthy men, such as Adamnán of Iona, who wore the 'wrong' type of tonsure out of ignorance. Nevertheless, although tonsure is said to be irrelevant to individual salvation, the adoption of the crown-shaped tonsure is envisioned as a symbol of the church's unity under St Peter. This style, much like the tonsure itself, was a relatively new development in the Western church. The claim that the tonsure had apostolic origins is certainly spurious. As Trichet's thorough study makes clear, in late antiquity,

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[512] *HE* V.21, ed. and trans. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 546: 'scimus, quia neque apostoli omnes uno eodemque sunt modo adtonsi' ('we know that the apostles did not all use the same form of tonsure').
[513] *Ibid.*, pp. 546–48.

the term *tonsura* meant simply cutting the hair short. By the fifth century, it became associated with entry into clerical status, but the practice of shaving the top of the head to create a 'crown' emerged later, in sixth-century Gaul.[514] The origins of the Irish style are less clear. Colgrave and Mynors believe that it may have imitated the hairstyle worn by druids,[515] but evidence of this 'druidic' tonsure is sparse and late, so it is more likely, as Plummer wrote, that 'here, as in their Easter practice, the Celts were merely perpetuating an older system which had long been obsolete elsewhere.'[516]

But the association of the Irish style with Simon Magus is the key reason for Bede's tonsorial anxieties. Just as Ceolfrith's letter states, Bede did not believe that the style of tonsure reflected on the individual's holiness: elsewhere he describes how Theodore, a Syrian monk, had to wait for four months until his hair grew long enough for it to be cut into the shape of a crown because his head had been completely shorn, 'more orientalium' ('after the Eastern manner'[517]). But Theodore's oriental tonsure was not politically charged like the Irish one. As Stancliffe observes, '[The Synod of] Whitby ushered in a half century during which at least some English churchmen regarded Christians of the Iona tradition as schismatics, or even heretics.'[518] In these circumstances, the tonsure came to be seen by both sides as a way of publicising their allegiance. The emphasis on the Petrine tonsure, then, 'was born out of a need for church unity, out of a need to find a symbol of orthodoxy in a church that was threatened by rival beliefs. Just as the adoption of a particular hairstyle might signify membership of a class or an ethnic group, so the adoption of a particular tonsure was the outward expression of membership of a single unified church.'[519]

We will return to the role of hair as a marker of religious (as well as ethnic) identity in our discussion of Alcuin. But for now, it is crucial to note that whether the author of the letter was Ceolfrith or Bede himself, the inclusion of this document in the *HE* reflects on Bede's own views. While it is unlikely that the Irish style of tonsure persisted until the time Bede composed the *HE*, the discussion of the tonsure in Ceolfrith's letter is aligned with Bede's aims elsewhere to create a vision of a unified, orthodox church. In other words, just as early theologians urged women to

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[514] Trichet, *La tonsure*, pp. 33, 41–85. See also Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, p. 23.
[515] Colgrave and Mynors, *Ecclesiastical History*, p. 548 n. 5: 'It is known that the druids wore a tonsure and the descriptions which have survived point to the fact it was not unlike the Celtic tonsure. Hence it was easy for its opponents to associate it with Simon the arch-magician and druid.'
[516] Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae opera historica* ii.354.
[517] *HE* IV.1, ed. Colgrave and Mynors, p. 330. See Bischoff and Lapidge, *Biblical Commentaries*, pp. 65–66.
[518] Stancliffe, 'Cuthbert and the Polarity between Pastor and Solitary', p. 21.
[519] James, 'Bede and the Tonsure Question', 97.

demonstrate their virtue by following 'correct' hair practices, Bede and his contemporaries linked hair with virtue for male clerics. However, the crucial difference is that in the case of the tonsure, we are dealing with a problem of ecclesiastical politics rather than ethics. While women's uncovered, curled or shorn hair is treated as an offence against male headship, incorrect tonsure is seen as a challenge to St Peter's headship of the church.

St Cuthbert

The reformist function of Bede's cosmetic theology is especially apparent in his prose *vita* of St Cuthbert. As Thacker observed, Cuthbert exemplifies Bede's ideal man of God: 'Cuthbert is presented as an exemplary monk, ascetic, and bishop, fulfilling in these roles all the requirements of a Bedan *rector*, *doctor* and *praedicator*.'[520] One of the outward markers of Cuthbert's virtue is his clothing, and this section will demonstrate how it aids his claim to holiness, from his life of ascetic practice to the miraculous power of his garments after the saint's death. Bede's representation of clothing and virtue in the *vita* of Cuthbert also gives us an opportunity to see that his treatment of Æthelthryth is, after all, gendered. As we will see, the two saints' engagement with dress is presented in a remarkably similar way, but, just as in Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, Cuthbert's dressing practices are not explicitly linked to his sexuality. Although Cuthbert's asceticism may protect him from the female gaze, Bede never made the connection between the two apparent. Thus, the rest of our analysis of Bede's cosmetic theology will show how depictions of dress aligned Cuthbert with Bede's ecclesiastical ideal.

St Cuthbert (ca. 627–687) was born in Northumbria some ten years after King Edwin's conversion to Christianity. He probably belonged to an aristocratic family but left as a young man to become a monk at the monastery of Melrose, where he was trained in the Irish tradition. Most importantly for Bede, Cuthbert was traditionally described as a conscientious pastor who nevertheless longed for the ascetic life of a solitary: although he took great trouble to provide care for others as prior and later bishop of Lindisfarne, he retired to an island hermitage for the last few months of his life, dying there in 687. He was buried in the monastic church on Lindisfarne, but his tomb was opened in 698 to move his body to a new coffin above the church floor. Cuthbert's body was found to be uncorrupted, and so were his clothes, which apparently

[520] Thacker, 'Bede's Ideal of Reform', p. 142.

had miracle-working powers. Shortly after this, Cuthbert's cult began to grow, leading to the production of several *vitae* over the next few decades.

Just a few years after Cuthbert's translation, an anonymous *vita* was produced, probably on Lindisfarne,[521] and Bede composed a verse companion for it around 705.[522] Bede returned to Cuthbert's life again in 720, after another hagiographer, Stephen of Ripon, reused the *VCA* for his own *Vita Wilfridi*, which implicitly poked fun at the Irish origins of Cuthbert to promote Bishop Wilfrid's legacy as the orthodox reformer. With Cuthbert's reputation at risk, Bede was commissioned to write a new account of his own.[523] Cuthbert's asceticism is an important element in both the *VCA* and Bede's *VCP*, revealing the two writers' desire to promote Cuthbert as the model for the whole church. This is quite evident in the ways the two *vitae* present Cuthbert's practices of dress and grooming.

The *VCA* uses clothing polemically when Cuthbert becomes the bishop of Lindisfarne: 'constantissime persuerebat, qui prius fuerat, eadem in corde humilitas, *eadem in vestitu eius vilitas erat*, atque ita plenus auctoritatis et gratiae, implebat episcopi dignitatem, non tamen ut propositum monachi, et anachoritae uirtutem desereret' ('he continued with the utmost constancy to be what he had been before; he showed the same humility of heart, the same poverty of dress, and, being full of authority and grace, he maintained the dignity of a bishop without abandoning the ideal of the monk or the virtue of the hermit'[524]). This passage borrows extensively from Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Sancti Martini*,[525] which describes Saint Martin as a bishop who maintains the dress and habits of a monk and whose authority derives from innate sanctity rather than visual manifestations of power. For the anonymous author, then, Cuthbert's dress aligns him with the Martinian ideal of a monk-bishop, with the important addition that he is also an *anchorita*, a hermit.

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[521] *Vita Sancti Cuthberti Anonyma* (hereafter *VCA*), ed. and trans. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 59–140.
[522] Bede, *Vita Metrica S. Cudbercti*, ed. and trans. Lapidge, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, pp. 181–314.
[523] Bede, *Vita Cuthberti Prosa* (hereafter *VCP*), ed. and trans. Colgrave, *Two Lives of Saint Cuthbert*, pp. 141–309. On the relationship between this text and *VW*, see Goffart, *Narrators*, p. 240, 258–96, and Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy'.
[524] *VCA* IV.1, ed. Colgrave, pp. 110–11.
[525] Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini* 10.1–2, ed. and trans. Burton, pp. 106–7: 'idem enim constantissime perseverabat qui prius fuerat. eadem in corde eius humilitas, eadem in vestitu eius vilitas erat: atque ita, plenus auctoritatis et gratiae, implebat episcopi dignitatem, ut non tamen propositum monachi virtutemque desereret' ('he remained in perfect steadfastness the man he had been before. In his heart was the same humbleness, in his dress the same coarseness; and so, full of authority and grace, he fulfilled the office of bishop without abandoning his monastic intent or power').

Like the anonymous author, Bede presented Cuthbert's asceticism as a marker of his sanctity. But Bede's *VCP* describes the holy man's clothing in greater detail and with a more clearly reformist motivation. Like the *VCA*, Bede presents Cuthbert as an exemplary ascetic and echoes Sulpicius Severus's *Vita Martini*, though in a much more subtle way, to make a claim for Cuthbert's suitability for episcopacy: 'Scio enim quia etsi quibusdam *contemptibilis* uixi,' Cuthbert says in his final moments, 'post meum tamen obitum qualis fuerim, quam mea doctrina non sit contempnenda uidebitis' ('I know that, although I seemed *contemptible* to some while I lived, yet, after my death, you will see what I was and how my teaching is not to be despised'[526]). Like Martin, Cuthbert was apparently so devoted to spiritual matters as to neglect the care of his body, a virtue which Bede illustrates with a vivid description of Cuthbert's shoe-wearing habits:

> Nanque in tantum a cultu sui corporis animum sustulerat, atque ad animae solius cultum contulerat, ut semel calciatus tibracis quas pellicias habere solebat, sic menses perduraret integros. Aliquando etiam calciatus in pascha non nisi post annum redeunte paschae tempore, propter lauationem pedum quae in coena Domini fieri solet, se discalciasse dicatur. Unde ob crebras preces incuruationesque genuum quas calciatus exercebat, callum oblongum nec exilem in confinio pedum et tibiarum habuisse deprehensus est.
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> For he had so far withdrawn his mind from the care of his body and fixed it on the care of his soul alone that, having once been shod with the boots of skin that he was accustomed to use, he would wear them for whole months together. And let it be said that once he had put on his boots at Easter, he did not take them off until Easter came round again a year later, and then only for the washing of the feet which takes place on Maundy Thursday. So, on account of the frequent genuflexions at prayer which he made while wearing his boots, he was found to have a long and thickish callus at the junction of his feet and his shins.[527]

This description fits with Bede's opposition to episcopal grandeur espoused by Wilfrid and his followers. As Stancliffe notes, 'From a Wilfridian perspective, [Lindisfarne's] bishops must have looked better fitted for a monastic rather than episcopal life,' because 'they failed to maintain a lifestyle suited to the episcopate such as would impress kings, nobles, and the laity at large.'[528]

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[526] *VCP* c. XXXIX, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 284–85. Cf. Sulpicius Severus, *Vita Sancti Martini* 9.3, ed. and trans. Burton: 'pauci tamen et nonnulli ex episcopis, qui ad constituendum antistitem fuerant evocati, impie repugnabant, dicentes scilicet, contemptibilem esse personam, indignum esse episcopatu hominem vultu despicabilem, veste sordidum, crine deformem' ('A few, however,--and among them some of the bishops who had been summoned to appoint the new bishop—impiously opposed him, saying that his whole person invited disdain, and that a man contemptible of face, shabby of dress, and disfigured of hair, was not worthy of a bishopric').

[527] *Ibid.* c. XVIII, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 218–19.

[528] Stancliffe, 'Disputed Episcopacy', p. 32.

Like the author of the *VCA*, then, Bede took sides in the ongoing debate about episcopal lifestyle, holding up Cuthbert as the precedent for the 'monastic' model.

But in Bede's version, Cuthbert not only pursues asceticism as an end in itself but corrects the ways of others, which has a lasting impact on his monastery:

> Uestimentis utebatur communibus, ita temperanter agens, ut horum neque mundiciis neque sordibus esset notabilis. Unde usque hodie in eodem monasterio exemplo eius obseruatur, ne quis uarii aut preciosi coloris habebat indumentum, sed ea maxime uestium specie sint contenti, quam naturalis ouium lana ministrat. His et huiusmodi spiritualibus exercitiis uir uenerabilis et bonorum quorunque ad se imitandum prouocabat affectum, et improbos quosque ac rebelles uitae regularis a pertinatia sui reuocabat erroris.
>
> He wore ordinary garments and, keeping the middle path, he was not noteworthy either for their elegance or for their slovenliness. Hence his example is followed in the same monastery even to this day, so that no one has a garment of varied or costly colouring, but they are fully satisfied with that kind of garment which the natural wool of the sheep provides. The venerable man, by these and other spiritual exercises of the same kind, aroused in all good men the desire to imitate him and recalled the wicked and those who rebelled against the rule from the obstinacy of their error.[529]

Two things are notable about this passage. The first is the implicit assertion that in other monasteries (perhaps in most monasteries?), monks wear expensive and colourful garments – a phenomenon we have already encountered in Aldhelm's *De virginitate* and Bede's *Letter to Ecgbert*, discussed in Chapter 2. The second notable thing is the subtle integration of patristic theology of the cosmetic into this passage. The description of Cuthbert's clothing as neither elegant nor slovenly recalls Jerome's advice to Eustochium that her dress should be 'nec satis munda nec sordida et nulla diversitate notabilis' ('should be neither very clean nor filthy, and not noticeable by any strangeness'[530]), while the statement that monks should be satisfied with clothes 'quam naturalis ouium lana ministrat' clearly draws on Cyprian.[531] Cuthbert is thus shown following the rules laid out in two of the most influential handbooks on virginity and transmitting them to his monastic community.

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[529] *VCP* c. XVI, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 212–13.

[530] *Ep*. 22.27, p. 183. Stancliffe also notes the similarity of this description to Possidius's *vita* of St Augustine, which had influenced Bede's view that a monk should lead a life that is both active and contemplative: see Stancliffe, 'Pastor and Solitary', p. 40.

[531] Cf. *De habitu virginum* 14, ed. and trans. Keenan, p. 59: 'Neque enim Deus coccineas aut purpureas oues fecit aut herbarum sucis et cochyliis tinguere et colorare lanas docuit' ('For God has not made sheep scarlet or purple, nor has He taught how to tint and colour with the juices of herbs and with shell fish').

But while Bede draws on the works of Cyprian and Jerome, he makes no connection between Cuthbert's appearance and his sexuality. His account of Cuthbert thus allows us to see that the presentation of Æthelthryth, Bede's model of female asceticism, is after all gendered. Although both saints neglect bodily care to focus on spiritual matters and teach others by their example, Cuthbert does not need these ascetic acts to prove the purity of his body. This is especially evident at the end of Cuthbert's *vita*, when his body and clothes are found to be uncorrupted after eleven years in the grave. When Cuthbert's body was unearthed, 'uestimenta omnia quibus indutum erat non solum intemerata, uerum etiam prisca nouitate et claritudine miranda parebant' ('all his garments, in which he had been clothed, were not only undefiled but seemed to be perfectly new and wondrously bright'[532]). But this miracle, unlike the preservation of Æthelthryth's body, demonstrates not Cuthbert's virginity but his special favour in the eyes of God: the preservation of his garments is compared to God restoring the worn-out robes of the Israelites at the end of their desert journey in Exodus and the resurrection of the body on Judgement Day.[533] In other words, just as in Aldhelm's *De virginitate*, male dress is not explicitly linked to virginity.

As discussed in Chapter 3, Bede wrote at a time of ecclesiastical crisis marked by what he perceived as the greed and corruption of the clergy and the dilution of true monastic values. When writing about male clothing, he therefore used it to paint a vision of his ideal church, aligned with earlier cosmetic theology in its pursuit of inner virtue over external splendour. Bede's interpretation of Old Testament priestly attire, his discussion of the tonsure, and his portrait of Cuthbert all form part of this ideal church, ascetic and unified. But Bede's writings on male attire also reflect on the way he used cosmetic theology in stories about women as they demonstrate how different the ideals of male and female sanctity could be. As was the case in *De virginitate*, the realities of the medieval church meant that for women like Æthelthryth, asceticism was a matter of personal sanctity and virginity; but for men like Cuthbert, it also had a bearing on ecclesiastical politics.

But while the cult of St Cuthbert grew in popularity, Bede's attempts to instil ascetic values in his contemporaries did not prove successful. In the 740s, St Boniface, missionary to the Frisians, wrote to the Archbishop of Canterbury expressing concerns about monks who wear expensive

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[532] *VCP* c. XLII, ed. and trans. Colgrave, pp. 292–93.
[533] *Ibid.*; this metaphor is from Bede's own *Epigram on the Translation of Cuthbert*, ll. 15–18, ed. Lapidge, *Bede's Latin Poetry*, p. 334.

garments.[534] The matter was raised formally at the 747 Council of Clofesho, which prohibited expensive dress to monks.[535]

This decree clearly had little effect, as a later council held in Mercia in 786 advised both monks and clerics to cultivate discretion in their dress, specifically prohibiting garments that are dyed with expensive pigments.[536] These admonitions were an attempt to restrain an imminent change in the attitude to dress that continued into the later Middle Ages.

ALCUIN

Simplicity in ecclesiastical dress was still being urged in the late eighth century by the English scholar Alcuin (c. 735–804), then living on the Continent. Unlike Bede and Aldhelm, Alcuin does not have a dedicated chapter in this thesis because he was remarkably uninterested in the attire of women. Although he occasionally instructed women on the need to cultivate spiritual adornment, the majority of his letters on dress, written in the last decade of the eighth century, concern men and male attire.[537] Garver has identified fifty-five letters in which Alcuin discusses garments and their purpose, all but three of them are addressed to monks, clerics, or noblemen.[538] Alcuin's 'sartorial anxieties' have been discussed at length by Garver, and this section builds on her work by placing Alcuin's writings on dress in the broader context of cosmetic theology. As will be shown, Alcuin's letters demonstrate his perception of male dress and grooming as a powerful force that reflected the morality not just of individuals but of the whole community, and wearing 'improper' garments or hairstyles could lead to devastating consequences.

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[534] Boniface, *Letter* 35, ed. Dümmler, p. 355, l. 19, describes these garments as 'latissimis clavis vermium marginibus clavata.' The meaning of this passage is uncertain: Owen-Crocker suggests 'ornaments shaped like worms' or 'embroidered purple stripes' as possible interpretations (*Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 172). This is also the only instance in Anglo-Latin literature where lavish male attire is linked to the sin of fornication, as Boniface links male vanity to homosexuality (see Emerton, *The Letters of Saint Boniface*, p. 140).

[535] Council of Clofesho, A. D. 747, ed. Haddan and Stubbs III, pp. 368–69: 'nec pompaticis, et quae ad inanem gloriam more saecularium pertineant, utantur indumentis, sed simplici, propositioque congruenti eorum vestiantur habitu' ('are not to use ostentatious clothes which pertain to the vanity of secular custom, but they are to be clothed with simple dress befitting their purpose').

[536] *Ibid.*, ed. Haddan and Stubbs, p. 450.

[537] Alcuin addressed the problem of female adornment in letters to Charlemagne's sister and daughters, stressing the importance of inner virtue over external finery (*Letter* 15, ed. Dümmler, p. 41 and *Letter* 164, p. 266)—see Garver, *Women and Aristocratic Culture*, pp. 35, 58, 61; and Chapter 4, pp. 73–74. But these references pale in comparison to the attention he dedicated to male dress and grooming.

[538] Garver, '"Go Humbly Dressed"'.

Background

The unusually large size of the corpus of Alcuin's letters makes it difficult to know if he was typical in his concerns about male attire.[539] Nevertheless, the circumstances of the late eighth century indicate a few reasons why Alcuin may have perceived dress and grooming as a pressing issue. As Miller observes, the late eighth and early ninth centuries saw an increased interest in visually distinguishing the clergy from the laity, accompanied by a rise in liturgical treatises justifying the use of elaborate clerical vestments.[540] At the same time, the wearing of silk became more common in both Anglo-Saxon England and the Carolingian Empire,[541] and English clerical dress, despite conciliar admonitions to cultivate discretion, was not only becoming more lavish but also influencing continental practices.[542] Writing to Archbishop Æthelhard of Canterbury in 801, Alcuin noted that only the tonsure seemed to separate his clerical from lay companions in terms of dress and appearance, and instructed him that when they visit Charlemagne's court, he must forbid 'eos auro vel siricis uti vestimentis in conspectu domni regis; sed humili habitu incedant secundum consuetudinem servorum Dei' ('to wear gold or silk clothes in the king's sight; they should go humbly dressed as befits servants of God'[543]).

These changes in ecclesiastical attire coincided with the onset of Viking attacks in England, beginning with the raid on Lindisfarne in 793 which sent shockwaves through Europe. In a letter to Bishop Higbald and the monks at Lindisfarne, Alcuin wondered if this event was an act of divine vengeance, and Garrison has also highlighted the urgency with which he encouraged moral reform among his English correspondents.[544] Thus, the last decade of Alcuin's life was a time of rapid and traumatic change, and in his letters, he attempted to use cosmetic theology to correct what he saw as a dangerous lapse in morals. Given the scope of this chapter, it is impossible to treat Alcuin's engagement with dress fully. This section will therefore focus on two key aspects of Alcuin's cosmetic theology: his use of the rhetoric of spiritual adornment and his admonitions about divine vengeance for lavish attire.

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[539] However, compared with the letter collection of Boniface, who only denounced ostentatious dress on one occasion (see n. 508 above), Alcuin's attention to male attire certainly stands out.
[540] Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, pp. 56–58. See also Effros, 'Appearance and Ideology in Early Medieval Gaul', pp. 7–8, 15.
[541] See Fleming, 'Acquiring, Flaunting and Destroying Silk'.
[542] Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, pp. 7, 12–32, 97–132. See also Chapter 4, pp. 74–75, on the *opus anglicanum*, an English embroidery style used for church vestments.
[543] Alcuin, *Letter* 230, ed. Dümmler, pp. 374–5.
[544] Alcuin, *Letter* 21, ed. Dümmler, pp. 58–9. M. Garrison, 'Les correspondants d'Alcuin'.

Spiritual adornment

Out of all the Anglo-Latin authors who wrote about dress, Alcuin is the only one who openly applied the rhetoric of spiritual adornment to men. In instructing his male correspondents on the issue of modesty, he described a 'spiritual wardrobe' of virtues which replace the items of a wealthy man's attire:

> Quid pompaticis carnem induis vestimentis, et ornamenta animae non quaeris? Beatus vir, cuius est nomen Domini spes eius, non respicit in vanitates et insanias falsas. Melius est collo sapientiae monile suspendi, quam sirico vanitatis involvi. Melius est castitate lumbos circumcingi, quam numerosis pomparum cingulis constringi; et ardentes bonorum operum in manibus portare lucernas, quam digitos anulis ostentationis radiare.[545]
>
> Why do you dress your flesh in showy garments, and not seek ornaments for the soul? Blessed is the man, whose hope is the name of the Lord, who does not seek vanities and deceptive follies. It is better to wear a necklace of wisdom on your neck than to be wrapped in the vanity of silk. It is better to gird the loins with chastity than to bind them with many ostentatious belts; and to carry lamps blazing with good deeds than to make the fingers shine with the flaunting of rings.

This passage, reminiscent of Cyprian, Ambrose, and Jerome, thus applies the same idea of 'spiritual adornment' to men as other authors had done to women.[546] In another letter, written to the monks at the abbey of St Martin of Tours, Alcuin echoed Aldhelm's advice to women that ascetic dress is worthless without a cultivation of inner virtues to accompany it:

> Non est igitur laudabile in vestimentis habitum imitari patrum sine observatione mandatorum, quae illi statuerunt Deo servientibus. Qui foris in oculis hominum ovis in vestimentis videri cupiat, intus autem ante conspectum Dei per cordis secreta esse contendat, quod foris ante homines putari cupiat.[547]
>
> Therefore, it is not praiseworthy to imitate the fathers in your manner of dress without observing their commands, which they established for the servants of God. Whoever wants to be seen in woollen clothing outside in the eyes of the people, let him strive inside, before the eyes of God and in the hidden things of the heart, to be what he wants to be perceived as outside before the people.

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[545] Alcuin, *Letter* 34, ed. Dümmler, p. 76. Cf. *Letter* 131, p. 196: 'Munda vis habere vestimenta; quare non multo magis quaeris mundam te habere animam?' ('You wish to have clean clothing; why not much more strive to have a clean soul?).

[546] Cf. Cyprian, *De habitu virginum* §13; Ambrose, *De virginibus*, I.6.30, ed. Dückers, p. 150; Jerome, *Ep.* 38.4.

[547] Alcuin, *Letter* 51, ed. Dümmler, p. 95. Cf. Aldhelm, *PdV* X, XV.

Like Aldhelm, Alcuin also saw the prohibition of ornaments for women as a reason for men to despise them even more:

> *Dum a pompis feminas prohibere curavit, de pretiosis vestimentis, quanto magis viros non decet vanitas vestimentorum*; et maxime Deo servientibus sub nomine monachicae vitae nocet, quorum laus est omnia temperanter agere et religiose vivere; ut nulla in illorum moribus possit esse reprehensio, sed exempla totius bonitatis, ut magis aedificentur videntes illorum optimam conversationem et Deo placentem.[548]
>
> *Since [God] took care to forbid ostentation and costly garments to women, how much more inappropriate is the vanity of dress for men*; and especially harmful for those who serve God in the name of monastic life, whose glory it is to do everything with restraint and live religiously; so that their conduct should be irreproachable and exemplify such goodness as would encourage those who see how their good life is pleasing to God.

Unlike Aldhelm, however, Alcuin was willing to use the rhetoric of spiritual adornment for men to encourage spiritual effort:

> Ideo supplici deprecatione exortans fraternitatem vestram, ut in perfecta permaneatis fideliter caritate, et concordia pacis inter vos vigeat, et oboedientiae decus resplendeat in conversatione vestra, et humilitatis honestas videatur in omni actu vestro, et *corporis castitas quasi lilia floreat* in conspectu Dei [...] Hoc cogitate iugiter, hoc rememorate semper, in his conversamini deliciis: haec [scil. virtutes] sunt *nuptialia vestimenta*, in quibus superni regis convivia possidere digni efficiamini.[549]
>
> For this reason I implore you, exhorting your brotherhood, that you may continue faithfully in perfect love, and that the harmony of peace may flourish among you, and the dignity of obedience shine in your conversation, and the honour of humility may be seen in all your actions, and that *your bodily chastity may flower like a lily* in the eyes of God (Song of Songs II.2) […] Think on this continually, remember this always, in this delight pass your life: they [i.e. virtues] are your *wedding garments* (Matthew XXII.11-12), in which you are made worthy to possess the feasts of the heavenly king.

However, this kind of spiritual adornment is different from the bridal ornaments put on by Aldhelm's martyred virgins. The men in this passage are encouraged to put on virtue not to please their divine bridegroom but to be admitted to the celebration of Christ's marriage with the church in heaven, recalling the parable of the wedding feast in Matthew XXII.11–12.[550] The comparison of chastity to a lily is somewhat unusual and hints that it *was* possible for Alcuin to

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[548] Alcuin, *Letter* 21, ed. Dümmler, pp. 58–59; italicised sentence from Gregory the Great, *Hom. in evang.* I.vi.3. See also *Letter* 19, ed. Dümmler, p. 56: 'Sed et ipse princeps apostolorum etiam feminas a pretiosis vestimentis et circulates capillis prohibuit' ('But the leader of the apostles himself prohibited costly garments and curled hair even for women'). For the Aldhelm parallel, cf. n. 42 above.

[549] Alcuin, *Letter* 54, ed. Dümmler, p. 98.

[550] Alcuin's interpretation of the wedding garment as virtues is probably inspired by Bede's *In Lucam*, in which he looks across to the parallel in Matthew and says that the wedding garment is 'the splendour of virtues' (Luke IV.14 (on verses 7–8), ed. Hurst, p. 453).

imagine male 'spiritual adornment' in connection to virginity. But when Alcuin describes the consequences of male ostentation, it is not sexual temptation but the perversion of power and religion that he fears.

Dress and divine vengeance

Just as Bede had warned the newly appointed archbishop Ecgbert about worldly luxuries, so Alcuin wrote to his former pupil Eanbald who had just been appointed archbishop of York:

'Non te saeculi pompa exaltet, non ciborum luxus enervet, non vestimentorum vanitas emolliat, non adolantium linguae decipiant, non detrahentium adversitas conturbet, non tristia frangant, non laeta elevent'[551] ('Do not be excited by worldly splendour, weakened by richness of food, softened by the vanity of dress, deceived by flattering tongues, shaken by the opposition of detractors, broken by sorrow or carried away by joy'). As Garver observes, Alcuin 'seems to expect that as archbishop, Eanbald himself was more likely to adopt and enjoy richer attire than he had formerly worn. Alcuin extended the new archbishop's concern with his own modesty and proper attire to that of those he supervises,'[552] because he wished that Eanbald would rectify the behaviour of the clergy and monks of Northumbria, who—Alcuin felt—had abandoned the duties of their profession. His letter to bishop Higbald in response to the raid on Lindisfarne seems to suggest exactly this:

> Sint vestimenta tuo gradui condigna. Noli te conformari seculi hominibus in vanitate aliqua. Inanis ornatus vestimentorum et cultus inutilis tibi est obprobium ante homines et peccatum ante Deum. Melius est animam in perpetuum permanentem bonis ornare moribus, quam corpus cito in pulvere putrescens exquisitis comere vestibus. *Vestiatur et satietur Christus in paupere, ut hec faciens regnes cum Christo*.[553]
>
> Let your clothes be fitting for your station. Do not fashion yourself after the secular men in any vanity. Meaningless ornamentation of garments and useless adornment are a reproach to you before the people and a sin before God. It is better to ornament the soul in perpetuity with good ways than to dress in exquisite garments the body which will soon rot in dust. Clothe and feed Christ in the poor, that so doing you may reign with Christ.

But it was not only the religious men who, according to Alcuin, had abandoned their duties and were the cause of divine vengeance. In fact, Alcuin's reproach to secular rulers is even harsher.

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[551] Alcuin, *Letter* 114, ed. Dümmler, p. 167.
[552] Garver, '"Go Humbly Dressed"', 215.
[553] Alcuin, *Letter* 20, ed. Dümmler, p. 58.

Following the sack of Lindisfarne, he wrote to King Æthelred I to warn him about the consequences of the noblemen's obsession with luxury:

> Nonne potest putari a borealibus poenas sanguinis venire super populum? quod in hoc facto nuper ingruente super domum Dei incepisse videri potest. Considerate habitum, tonsuram, et mores principum et populi luxuriosos. Ecce tonsura, quam in barbis et in capillis paganis adsimilari voluistis. Nonne illorum terror inminet, quorum tonsuram habere voluistis? Quid quoque inmoderatus vestimentorum usus ultra humanae necessitatem nature, ultra antecessorum nostrorum consuetudinem? Haec superfluitas principum paupertas est populi. Tales consuetudines olim populo Dei nocuerunt et eum paganis gentibus dederunt in obprobrium, dicente propheta: 'Ve vobis, qui vendidistis pauperem pro calciamentis', id est animas hominum pro ornamentis pedum. Alii inormitate vestium laborant, alii frigore pereunt; alii deliciis et epulis ut purpuratus dives inundant et Lazarus ante ianuam fame moritur.[554]
>
> Does it not mean that punishment by blood was coming from the north upon the people? Its beginning may be seen in the blow which recently fell upon the house of God? Consider the luxurious dress, hair and behavior of leaders and people. See how you have wanted to copy the pagan way of cutting hair and beards. Are not these the people whose terror threatens us, yet you want to copy their hair. And why this wasteful clothing, beyond the needs of man and beyond the practice of our ancestors? Luxury in princes means poverty for the people. Such customs in the past have harmed the people of God and exposed it to the mockery of pagan nations, as the prophet says: 'Woe to you who have sold the poor for sandals,' (Amos 2.6), i.e. the souls of men for the adornment of feet. Some pant under the weight of their clothes while others die of cold. Some are gorged with delicious feasts like the rich man in his purple, and Lazarus is dying of hunger at his gate.

It is uncertain what Alcuin means by 'pagan' hairstyles or how he could have known about them.[555] What is clear, however, is that Alcuin identified pleasure in one's clothes as a danger not just for the souls of individual men but for their entire nation: their vanity made them neglect their duties of care and even led to divine collective punishment. Alcuin later repeated this exhortation to King Æthelred.[556] In another letter, he also identified luxurious attire as part of the reason why Kent was suffering from violent upheavals;[557] and on another occasion, he made a similar comment to the Mercian ealdorman Osbert, warning him that the new styles of dress adopted by his countrymen were 'deo odibile'[558] ('hateful to God'). In other words, Alcuin saw

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[554] Alcuin, *Letter* 16, ed. Dümmler, pp. 43–44.

[555] This passage has been compared to Ælfric's ninth-century *Letter to Brother Edward*, which also accuses English men of adopting 'pagan' hairstyles – see Clayton, '*Letter to Brother Edward*', pp. 270–71. Ælfric chastised English men who cut their hair in Danish fashion, long at the front and short at the back. It is impossible to determine whether this hairstyle existed in Alcuin's time. We do know of other, earlier, male Germanic pagan hairstyles – see Pohl, 'Telling the Difference', and Ashby, 'Technologies of Appearance' – but a precise hairstyle or reasons for its adoption in Alcuin's time cannot be identified.

[556] Alcuin, *Letter* 18, ed. Dümmler, p. 50.

[557] Alcuin, *Letter* 129, ed. Dümmler, pp. 191–2.

[558] Alcuin, *Letter* 122, ed. Dümmler, p. 178.

the increased use of luxurious attire by the English nobility as a sign of bad governance, and the links between clothing and morality forged by earlier cosmetic theologians helped him to make this point.

Alcuin, 'as a witness to significant changes in dress, offers a window into a moment of change in the ways the elite used clothing to establish their identities.'[559] He wrote during a time of both rapid ecclesiastical reform and existential threat represented by Viking attacks, and cosmetic theology helped to shape his responses to these concerns. His letters provide a conservative outlook on male attire, aligned with Aldhelm and Bede, although he is much more willing to use the language of spiritual adornment to encourage asceticism among his contemporaries. Alcuin's chief concern is to influence the habits of people in power, and his lack of interest in women's attire demonstrates where, in this period, power truly lies.

But much like Aldhelm and Bede, Alcuin did not meet with the success he hoped for. 'The Anglo-Saxon elite increased their use of silk and by the eleventh century were dressing similarly to their counterparts in the Ottonian and Byzantine worlds. The Franks adopted the rich dress of the Anglo-Saxon churchmen, and secular magnates continued to dress well.'[560] We therefore end this discussion with two anecdotes that demonstrate how, in the later period, elaborate attire came to be seen as an acceptable symbol of both lay and ecclesiastical authority.

DRESS AND POWER IN THE 11TH CENTURY

As the use of silk and elaborate ornamentation for men's attire increased in the later centuries, the way such items were depicted by contemporary authors also changed. For Bede and Alcuin, expensive garments on the backs of the clergy and nobility signified their preoccupation with worldly matters and thus unsuitability for governance. But by the eleventh century, elaborate textiles and ornaments could be used to demonstrate sacrality and power in both ecclesiastical and lay contexts.

[559] Garver, '"Go Humbly Dressed",' 229.
[560] *Ibid.*, 228.

In the biography of King Edward the Confessor, composed around the time of the Norman Conquest,[561] the king's wardrobe is described in some detail, with special emphasis on the costliness of royal attire:

> Nam cum priscis Anglorum regibus antea moris non fuerit lauciorum cultibus uestimentorum uti preter sagos auro supra paratos et huiusmodi uestes secundum morem gentis, hec a principio sue coniunctionis talibus eum ex suo ipsius opere uel studio redimiuit ornamentis, ut uix ipse Salomon in omni gloria sua ita indutus putari posset. In quibus ornandis non estimabatur quanto preciosi lapides et rare gemme atque uniones candidi pararentur; in clamidibus et tunicis, caligis quoque et calciamentis nulla auri quantitas in uarietate florum multipliciter se effundencium pensabatur.[562]
>
> For whereas it had not been the custom for earlier English kings in bygone days to wear clothes of great splendour, apart from cloaks and robes adorned at the top with gold in the national style, [Queen] Edith, from the very beginning of her marriage, clad him in raiments either embroidered by herself or of her choice, and of such a kind that it could not be thought that even Solomon in all his glory was ever thus arrayed. In the ornamentation of these no count was made of the cost of the precious stones, rare gems and shining pearls that were used. As regards mantles, tunics, boots and shoes, the amount of gold which flowed in the various complicated floral designs was not weighed.

The king himself, we are told, was indifferent to such ostentation, though he appreciated the queen's efforts on his behalf.[563] Still, the claim that the queen spared no expense to dress her husband in the most ornate garments would surely have drawn a rebuke from Alcuin. But while Alcuin or Bede viewed the elite's lavish spending on dress as a burden on the rest of the kingdom, the aim of Edward's biographer is precisely to show that during his reign, the kingdom was so prosperous that no expense needed to be spared on his attire. The richness of Edward's clothes demonstrates his power as well as his legitimacy as a Christian king, modelled on Solomon, who was renowned for both his wealth and piety. 'This combination of kingly magnificence and personal unpretentiousness is typical of later medieval political philosophy,' Owen-Crocker notes, and shows a shift in attitudes to displays of wealth between the ninth and eleventh centuries to a more 'Old Testament' model where male adornment could demonstrate royal authority.[564]

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[561] The date of the work's composition and authorship are uncertain; Barlow argues that the *vita* was composed in two parts, so that Book II, which is independent in structure and different in form, was added after the Conquest, ca. 1067—see *The Life of King Edward*, pp. xxix–xxxiii. More recently, this was discussed by Licence, 'The Date and Authorship of the *Vita Ædwardi regis*'; Licence suggests Folcard, a hagiographer from Saint-Bertin, as a possible author.

[562] *Vita Ædwardi*, ed. Barlow, pp. 24–25.' The comparison to Solomon is ironic, as the Gospel passage it recalls [Matt. VI. 29, Luke XXII. 27] instructs Christians not to care for material splendour.

[563] *Ibid*. ed. Barlow, pp. 22–25, 62–65.

[564] Owen-Crocker, *Dress in Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 233.

A similar change occurred in the ecclesiastical sphere. Miller observes that highly ornamented ecclesiastical apparel features prominently in late Anglo-Saxon miniatures and notes that it seems likely that 'the ornate style of liturgical garb, with its extensive use of embroidery and woven ornamental bands, came from Anglo-Saxon sources,' and later spread through the continent.[565] This new attitude to ecclesiastical and particularly episcopal attire was 'fueled by the dissemination in the 820s of a new, more potent understanding of the episcopal office: more than mere servants, bishops were increasingly viewed as collaborators with royal power in the king's special ministry to bring his people to salvation.'[566]We have a keen observer of this change in Eadmer, a monk of Christ Church Canterbury, who had accompanied St Anselm to the Italian port of Bari for a papal council. Eadmer records the council's discussion of an important doctrinal dispute between the Latin and Greek churches, digresses at great length to describe how he recognised the archbishop of Benevento's cope as a gift of Archbishop Æthelnoth of Canterbury.[567] Eadmer writes that the cope was ornamented all over with gold thread, its ornamentation surpassing in splendour even the garments of the pope.[568] The costliness of this garment and its provenance as a work commissioned by Queen Emma, wife of Cnut, are something that Eadmer presents as a point of pride for Christ Church and the Canterbury community – contrary to the exhortations of Bede and Alcuin for the leaders of the church to exercise moderation in dress. Eadmer's fascination with the archbishop's cope signals not just the acceptability of clerical ostentation in the late eleventh century, but the new symbolism it acquired. As Harrington observes,

> In his account, Bari represents both the centre of Christendom (as the juncture of Greeks and Latins) and the far edge of Latin Christendom opposite to England. The appearance there of an English cope finer than all the others not only honours Eadmer's community of Christ Church, but it also reminds that even in the painful aftermath of the Norman conquest, the early English heritage remains as vibrant at the centre of the Christian world.[569]

In other words, the period from the ninth to the eleventh century saw a transition from the strictly ascetic view espoused by the early Middle Ages to a greater acceptance of elaborate dress as a symbol of male virtue and authority. While monastic communities were still required to

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[565] Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, pp. 131–33, 126.
[566] *Ibid.*, p. 238.
[567] Eadmer, *Historia novorum in Anglia,* ed. Rule, *Eadmeri historia,* pp. 107–10.
[568] *Ibid.*, ed. Rule, p. 107: 'Papa enim non cappa sed casula, et pallio desuper redimitus, concilio præsidebat' ('Even the pope presided over the council not in a cope but in a chasuble with a pallium wrapped around').
[569] Harrington, 'Eadmer and William of Malmesbury'.

observe moderation in dress, the rulers of both church and state returned to a 'Hebrew' model whereby ornate vestments represented power.

CONCLUSION

As can be seen, the link between external appearance and inner virtue was as important for discussions of men as those of women. In the late antique and early medieval period, many authors attempted to establish ascetic dress as a marker of sanctity for both men and women: Aldhelm, Bede, and Alcuin made statements about male virtue, holiness, and power using cosmetic theology, which associates adornment with vice and privileges 'natural' appearance without embellishments. In doing so, they developed a complex set of practices, ideas, tropes, and garments that expressed their claims to both virtue and power. The culture of clothing provided a rich and expressive visual language through which claims to power could be made. Figures such as Jerome's Pammachius, Sulpicius's Martin and Bede's Cuthbert rejected conventional visualisation of power through displays of wealth, but in doing so, they attempted to create a new power hierarchy based on virtue. Whether the writers urged the development of inner virtue with the rhetoric of 'spiritual adornment' like Alcuin and Bede or discouraged men from caring even for 'ornaments of the soul' like Aldhelm, the end goal in applying cosmetic theology to men was to negotiate the interrelation between internal virtue and external power.

The difference in the anxieties expressed by cosmetic theologians concerning male and female ostentation thus speak to the difference in the power men and women possessed. With very few exceptions, the only issue with men's fixation on expensive ornaments is that of governance, rather than ethics or sexuality. Even if expressions of power through dress may themselves be a source of attraction, that is not a concern explicitly discussed in the surviving literature. In other words, men have the authority to govern the church and state, and their attire, whether ascetic or ornate, demonstrates and legitimises this power. But for women, dress could undermine their power because of its association with seduction.

Conclusion

My discussion of cosmetic theology has highlighted the paradoxical nature of female sanctity in early medieval sources and has contributed to both sides of the feminist historians' debate by refusing to foreground the restrictions or empowerment it offered to women. My goal has been to show that depictions of modesty work rhetorically to signify certain styles of dress as manifestations of virtue, particularly the virtue of chastity, which is fundamentally gendered. With this framework in view, it is possible to read Aldhelm's, Bede's, and Goscelin's disapproval of adornment as part of their theological worldview. For them, as for late antique writers, dress practices manifested conceptions of the created order and salvation, as well as the gendered status of Christians in relation to these. Elaborate dress was to be avoided because it embodied worldly transience and, in the case of women, the temptations of the flesh. Yet ornaments could also function as an embodiment of virtue—particularly female virtue—within the rhetoric of 'spiritual adornment'. As this thesis has demonstrated, it was the latter aspect of cosmetic theology that gained special prominence in early medieval England.

Key Findings

My investigation has proceeded by analysing the foundations of cosmetic theology, namely the connection between outer appearance and inner character made in a variety of discourses in antiquity, including scripture, moral instruction, and hagiography. Beginning with Saint Paul, Christian writers argued that moral character should be legible in people's behaviour and dress, and so too should be the differences of gender and women's inferior status in relation to men. The notion that feminine beauty, enhanced by adornment, is dangerous for men informs patristic images of virtuous women, whose concern for chastity is made visible through modest dress. At the same time, Latin moralists encouraged their addressees to turn their desire to be beautiful inward and adorn their souls with virtues, developing a discourse of 'spiritual adornment'. Late antique works presented women as essentially bodily beings, and the most enduring paradigms for early women's sanctity—the persecuted virgin, the repentant widow, and the cloistered nun—are built on the conception of female virtue as inherently tied to the body.

My research demonstrates that in England too cosmetic theology played a central role in the conceptualisation of female virtue. Aldhelm's *De virginitate* mobilised late antique cosmetic theology to argue that, in her practices of dress, a Christian woman reveals her inner, moral character, and should therefore avoid adornment if she wants to be considered chaste. At the same time, Aldhelm modified the late antique notion of 'spiritual adornment' by stressing that spiritual purity was no less important than outer modesty and encouraged his addressees to pursue 'virginity of the soul' regardless of their bodily state. But, as the saintly *exempla* demonstrate, for Aldhelm, female virtue was nevertheless closely tied to the body, and the saints' beauty, which is indistinguishable from their holiness, could have both an erotic and a conversionary effect, revealing the co-dependency of women's depravity and piety.

Bede followed Aldhelm in utilising 'spiritual adornment' to encourage the cultivation of virtues but, uniquely among all authors discussed in this thesis, avoided direct engagement with the issue of human sexuality. In the *vita* of Æthelthryth, ascetic dress comes to be understood as a visible testimony to the fact that the saint has rejected worldly affairs, and the healing of her tumour *postmortem* symbolises the transformation from sinful flesh toward sinless flesh and soul. Bede did not connect Æthelthryth's repentance to the sexual significance of her necklaces—an approach he applied to all his interpretations of adornment, so much so that his reading of the Genesis narrative ends up not only testifying to the innate equality of men and women as reflections of God's image but also interpreting garments as symbolising mortality and worldliness rather than uncontrolled sexuality. In fact, I have argued that Bede drew on cosmetic theology for his reformist agenda, but depicting women as dangerous temptresses was evidently not one of his priorities. He built on Jerome, Augustine, and Aldhelm's representations of adornment but turned them into lessons in humility for all Christians.

In the eleventh century, however, we see an emphasis on the spiritual attributes of holy women which are derived from late antique authors—domesticity, modest dress, and the co-dependency of women's seductiveness and holiness. Goscelin's holy women follow the examples set out by Jerome and Aldhelm: fleeing from suitors who desire their beauty, rejecting adornment, and all the while ornamenting their souls with virtues for their heavenly Bridegroom. At the same time, paradoxically, Goscelin's ideal of female spirituality as a deeply inward and private relationship with Christ renders external modesty less important than spiritual adornment, as seen in his depiction of Edith and her mother. But this was only possible because Goscelin's model of

sanctity required strict enclosure, where the woman would not be seen by anyone in whom she could inspire lust.

As can be seen, cosmetic theology in early medieval England could take the form of a concern over women's literal and bodily garments as well as an increasingly metaphorical image of adornment, which reminded the audience of the transience of worldly beauty. This was paralleled, however, by the gradual separation and enclosure of female religious and a renewed emphasis on bridal imagery. As the final chapter shows, no parallel development occurred in the presentation of male sanctity. Conversely, male religious continually moved away from the ascetic ideals of the early church towards greater tolerance for adornment, which became an acceptable expression of their spiritual authority. Moreover, when cosmetic theology was applied to men, the authors were rarely concerned with sexuality. For men, dress could be read as a sign of political allegiance, spiritual purity, or aptitude for governance, but almost never as a reflection of their sexuality; only female *vitae* associate ascetic dress with bodily purity.

Implications of this Study

The analysis of cosmetic theology in this thesis is not an attempt to recover the lived realities of medieval women but a starting point for the re-evaluation of cosmetic theology as part of the social and literary construction of gender. Aldhelm, Bede, Goscelin and other authors created gender-based expectations of piety and faith, which were powerfully expressed through dress—a visible marker of gender during this period. But crucial theological and salvific messages of hagiographical texts have often been neglected by historians intent on extracting social or political realities, with the result that historians of gender have generally ignored dress, and historians of dress tend to overlook gender. As Coon observes,

> Feminist historians have analyzed the sacred biographies of holy women to reveal the hidden history of female empowerment in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. [But] an understanding of *vitae* within their historical context can do much to illuminate perceptions of male and female capacities that have shaped the fate of both sexes throughout western history.[570]

There is a need, then, to further explore the various ways that Christian writers used clothing and adornment to signify theological ideas—precisely because this approach might allow us to

[570] Coon, *Sacred Fictions*, p. 143.

read early Christian women as participants in the production of theologies in a more nuanced way.

Thus, there is still much work to be done on the role of cosmetic theology in Old English depictions of women, which fell outside the scope of this dissertation. While the corpus of Old English texts that deal with female modesty is smaller than that in Latin, most of them were composed or copied during the period of Benedictine reform (ca. 900–1050). Some of these works, such as the Exeter Book riddles, have been analysed by Megan Cavell for their relation to textile; Christine Rauer has highlighted the anxieties about nuns as potential temptresses is the Old English *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great; and Jonathan Davis-Secord explored the significance of bodily signs of purity in Ælfric's lives of saints.[571] But the number of texts which contain pronouncements on female modesty is much larger, including the Old English poem *Judith* and the anonymous *vitae*, such as the *Life of Mary of Egypt*, which empower and bridle their portraits of holy women through depictions of dress.[572] Very little critical attention has been paid to these texts' rhetoric of adornment, but they contain important evidence of the ways cosmetic theology was adapted for vernacular audiences and the expectations of female virtue it created.

The work that I have begun on early medieval England can also be widely applied to later periods in Western Christianity, which continued to draw on cosmetic theology from late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. On this later material there is significantly more scholarship: I have already mentioned Howard Bloch's study of cosmetic theology in courtly romance, and Jane Burns's *Courtly Love Undressed* is another crucial study of the hermeneutical value of clothwork in romance; Kathryn Rudy and Barbara Baert's joint edition of *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing* has likewise significantly advanced the study of textiles, particularly in religious and devotional writing, and Anna McKay has analysed the role played by dress in the lives of cloistered nuns; and questions of gender and its outer performance feature prominently in Juliette Vuille's *Holy Harlots*, which analyses the tradition of prostitutes-turned-saints from Ælfric to the late Middle Ages. [573]

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[571] Cavell, *Weaving Words*; Rauer, '*Nunne* in Early Old English', 162–67; Davis-Secord, 'Holy Women on Display'.
[572] The latter, as well as the lives of 'holy harlots' featured in the *Old English Martyrology*, has been examined for its depiction of cross-dressing by Vuille, *Holy Harlots*, pp. 19-58 – but this is not the full extent of the significance of dress in these *vitae*.
[573] Bloch, *Medieval Misogyny*; Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*; Rudy and Baert (eds.), *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing*; McKay, 'Clothing and Female Reclusion'; Vuille, *Holy Harlots*.

However, scholarship on the later Middle Ages could benefit from the analytical framework I employed in this thesis, which may reveal still more ways cosmetic theology was used rhetorically to delineate the distinctive theological roles of men and women. Cosmetic theology was a topic worthy of the attention of medieval writers and is, I have argued, worthy of scholarly attention as well.

Refusing to foreground either the empowering or the restrictive effects of cosmetic theology and instead treating the two as mutually informing allows us to read medieval literature as an indicator of the ways in which dress functioned for early Christians more broadly both to embody and to challenge various theological conceptions, most notably conceptions of gender. Aldhelm's, Bede's, and Goscelin's reworkings of patristic instructions on modesty shows not only that cosmetic theology reached England but that these authors inherited the messages about salvation, power, and the created order which it conveyed. The conflation of adornment with sin in Bede's account of Æthelthryth is not merely a misogynistic cliché, nor a parallel drawn for the sake of bringing the saint in proximity to earlier models. It embodies the significance of *cosm*etics for the *cosm*os—the ways in which early Christian authors understood the significance of embodiment and gender difference in the overall scheme of creation. Dress, for them, was an instrument of salvation.

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