

**Textual Representations of Almsgiving in  
Late Anglo-Saxon England**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis is a study of the textual representations of almsgiving in the homiletic and documentary sources of late Anglo-Saxon England. Almsgiving, a fundamental part of lay Christian devotional practice, has been primarily ignored by scholars as a subject for study in its own right, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon period. The aim of this thesis is to assess the textual references to almsgiving in the homilies, law codes, wills and charters of the tenth and eleventh centuries in order to determine first, how almsgiving was conceptualised by ecclesiastical authorities, and second, how almsgiving by the laity was understood to function in society. It examines the interdependence of alms-givers and alms-receivers, shedding light on the complementary relationship between rich and poor in society. It also utilises the anthropological concepts of reciprocal gift-exchange and secular display of wealth in order to contextualise the Anglo-Saxon sources within a wider cultural milieu. In doing so, this thesis demonstrates not only that almsgiving played a vital part in lay devotional practice, but also that references to almsgiving embedded in the documentary sources reflected a wide network of social practices and interactions. This in turn indicates the central social significance of almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon England, and has important implications for the understanding of early medieval Christian piety.

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## Abbreviations

ASC	Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
B	W. de G. Birch (ed.), <i>Cartularium Saxonicum: A Collection of Charters Relating to Anglo-Saxon History</i> , 3 vols. and index (London, 1885-1889).
BAR	British Archaeological Reports
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum Series Latina
CH	Catholic Homilies
CR	W. D. Macray (ed.), <i>Chronicon Abbatiae Rameseiensis</i> Rolls Series 83 (London, 1886).
CSEL	Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum
C&S	D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C. N. L. Brooke (eds.), <i>Councils and Synods with other Documents Relating to the English Church, I: A.D. 871-1204</i> (Oxford, 1981), I, part 1: 871-1066.
EEMF	Early English Manuscripts in Facsimile
EETS	Early English Text Society
EHD	D. Whitelock (ed.), <i>English Historical Documents c. 500-1042</i> (2 <sup>nd</sup> edn., London, 1979).
HE	B. Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors (eds. and trans.), <i>Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i> (Oxford, 1969).
K	J. M. Kemble (ed.), <i>Codex Diplomaticus Aevi Saxonici</i> , 6 vols. (London, 1839-1848).
LE	E. O. Blake (ed.), <i>Liber Eliensis</i> Camden Third Series 92 (London, 1962).
R	Documents by number in A. J. Robertson (trans. and ed.), <i>Anglo-Saxon Charters</i> , 2 <sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 1956).
PG	Patrologia Graeca
PL	Patrologia Latina

- S Documents by number in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters: An Annotated List and Bibliography* (London, 1968).
- SC Sources Chrétiennes
- SEHD Documents by number in F. E. Harmer (trans. and ed.), *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914).
- W Documents by number in D. Whitelock (trans. and ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930).

### **A note on formatting**

Throughout this thesis I have abbreviated the titles of homilies, law codes, wills and charters in order to facilitate easy referencing. I have included the titles of homilies where available, and wills and charters are referred to by their Sawyer number as well as a reference to the volume in which they appear, if applicable. For the law codes, I have followed the abbreviations utilised by Liebermann.

## A Note on Translations

As published translations exist for many of the sources utilised in this thesis, I have used these where appropriate and noted them in the relevant footnotes. For the remainder of the translations, I have primarily drawn on the published translation but have modified vocabulary and tone as I felt appropriate to the passage in question. These translations are my own, but they overlap with the published translations and I must acknowledge my debt to them here. For the Catholic Homilies, I have used Thorpe; for the Lives of Saints, I have used Skeat; for the Blickling Homilies, I have used Morris; for the Vercelli Homilies, I have used Nicholson; for the laws, I have used both Attenborough and Robertson; for the charters, I have used Robertson; for the writs I have used Harmer; I have also used Harmer's SEHD for miscellaneous documents. Full citations for these sources may be found in the bibliography. In addition, all English translations of the Vulgate are from Douay-Rheims. In transcribing Old English and Latin sources I have followed the spelling and punctuation conventions adopted by the editors of the published editions, deviating only to silently expand the abbreviated form of the Old English *þæt*.

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

‘At this festive season of the year, Mr. Scrooge’, said the gentleman, taking up a pen, ‘it is more than usually desirable that we should make some slight provision for the poor and destitute, who suffer greatly at the present time. Many thousands are in want of common necessities; hundreds of thousands are in want of common comforts, sir...a few of us are endeavouring to raise a fund to buy the Poor some meat and drink, and means of warmth. We choose this time, because it is a time, of all others, when Want is keenly felt, and Abundance rejoices. What shall I put you down for?’ ‘Nothing!’ Scrooge replied. ‘You wish to be anonymous?’ ‘I wish to be left alone’, said Scrooge. ‘Since you ask me what I wish, gentlemen, that is my answer. I don’t make merry myself at Christmas, and I can’t afford to make idle people merry’.<sup>1</sup> – Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

The well-known tale of Ebenezer Scrooge, brought to life by Charles Dickens in *A Christmas Carol*, relates the story of a man characterised as not only fiscally but emotionally parsimonious. Through the intervention of three not entirely friendly spirits on Christmas Eve, Scrooge discovers that it is not the accumulation and possession of wealth which defines the success of one’s mortal existence, but rather that true wealth is the happiness to be found in sharing one’s material possessions with others in need. While this tale has, in the modern social consciousness, often been reduced to an advertisement for charity during the Christmas season, its lasting appeal lies in Dickens’ clever commentary on the proper use of wealth in society and the enduring resonance of this message. The continuing existence of abundant resources in a world which also contains widespread abject poverty has spawned

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<sup>1</sup> C. Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*, ed. by R. Kelly (Peterborough, Ontario, 2003), pp. 44-45.

numerous commentaries and criticisms on wealth similar to that of Dickens, attempting to explain and even justify this sharp dichotomy.

Just as the stark contrast between wealth and poverty in the modern day is a continual source of unease, so too has it been the cause for much confusion and discontent ever since it was recorded that Jesus Christ told his disciples the parable of the rich man who was punished with hellfire for his refusal to share his wealth with the beggar Lazarus.<sup>2</sup> With this passage Christ informs his disciples that sharing one's wealth with those in need was not only a merciful thing to do, but that the failure to do so put one's immortal soul at risk of eternal punishment. Thus, the practice of almsgiving became a central aspect of Christian piety, capitalising on the benefits of almsgiving as established in Sirach 3:33: '*Ignem ardentem extinguit aqua et elemosyna resistit peccatis*'.<sup>3</sup> It is for this reason that the study of almsgiving reveals much, not only about the understanding and practice of Christian piety within a society, but also about fundamental principles concerning the relationship between wealthy and poor, and the nature of the gift itself.

Despite the significance of almsgiving as an essential expression of Christian piety, it is not as easy as one might imagine to define the practice. The *New Catholic Encyclopedia* begins its entry on 'Alms and Almsgiving (in the Bible)' with this definition: 'A religious act, inspired by compassion and a desire for justice, whereby an individual who possesses the economic means helps in a material way his less fortunate neighbor (*sic*)'.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis in this definition is firmly on the motivating values of compassion, justice and mercy, together comprising what one may describe as 'Christian charity', rather than discussing the act of almsgiving itself. Likewise, the *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* does not have an entry

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 16:19-31.

<sup>3</sup> 'Water queneth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sins.'

<sup>4</sup> 'Alms and Almsgiving (in the Bible)', in *The New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. 1: A-Azt (Washington, D.C., 1967), p. 328.

for 'almsgiving', instead redirecting the reader from 'aumône' to 'charité', the entry for which is a comprehensively detailed record containing a lengthy discussion of the history of charity from Ancient Rome to the establishment of hospitals to care for the sick and needy in the fourth century.<sup>5</sup> Overall, however, the emphasis is on charity as comprising a desire to help those in need, particularly in reference to the charity promoted by the apostles in the New Testament. While this discussion of charity does address the physical manifestations of almsgiving, such as the establishment of the aforementioned hospitals, the equation of almsgiving with charity firmly implies that there is some voluntary, altruistic motivation which defines an act as charitable. As the following chapters in this thesis will demonstrate, the modern equation of almsgiving with charity or altruism had no place in the early medieval consciousness; they simply were not recognised as desirable social values, a point to which I shall return later in this chapter. Thus, while neither of the above definitions is wrong, both are misleading and deeply problematic for the understanding of early medieval, and specifically Anglo-Saxon, almsgiving.

While the modern definitions of almsgiving may be misleading, the definitions of the medieval practice are not much more helpful. In Old English, almsgiving is rendered as *ælmesse*, defined by Bosworth and Toller simply as 'almsgiving', and by Toller later as 'alms, what is given in charity'. The different compounds involving *ælmesse* as a base are equally cryptic. The term *ælmesdæd* is defined as 'an alms-deed, a charitable action', while *ælmes-georn* is identified as an adjective meaning 'diligent in giving alms, benevolent', and *ælmes-lic* is unhelpfully characterised as 'of the nature of alms, eleemosynary, charitable'.<sup>6</sup> None of these describe what 'alms'

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<sup>5</sup> 'Charité', in F. Cabrol and H. Leclercq (eds.), *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 3.1 (Paris, 1907), pp. 598-653.

<sup>6</sup> All of these definitions may be found in J. Bosworth and T. N. Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford, 1898; repr. 1972) and T. N. Toller and A. Campbell, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth: Supplement with Revised and Enlarged Addenda* (Oxford, 1921; repr. 1973).

consist of, how they are given, or why one should assume their association with 'charity' and 'benevolence'. Likewise, the Latin term for almsgiving is *eleemosyna*, succinctly defined by Lewis and Short as 'alms', although in common usage it seems to have been dually defined as both 'alms' and 'mercy'.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the Old English use of *ælmesse*, there are few Latin linguistic compounds containing elements of *eleemosyna*. As this thesis will show, the Old English vocabulary of almsgiving indicates a specifically Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with almsgiving. In order to establish a basis for this analysis, one must first examine biblical, late antique and early medieval sources for possible social or religious definitions of almsgiving.

The Latin *eleemosyna* appears in thirty biblical verses through six different books in the Bible and Apocrypha.<sup>8</sup> The most extended treatment of almsgiving as a concept is given in the Book of Tobit, which stresses almsgiving and acts of mercy throughout. In addition to these verses, there are eighty-seven biblical passages which encourage almsgiving as an important aspect of good, pious behaviour without specifically mentioning *eleemosyna*.<sup>9</sup> Rather, these passages contain generic exhortations to give away produce, money or possessions, or to practice good works and be generally charitable to the poor. This behaviour also encouraged in Matthew 25:35-36, which many consider to be Christ's exhortation to almsgiving: '*Esurivi enim et dedistis mihi manducare sitivi et dedistis mihi bibere hospes eram et collexistis me. Nudus*

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<sup>7</sup> 'Eleemosyna', in C. T. Lewis and C. Short, *A Latin Dictionary: Founded on Andrews' Edition of Freund's Latin Dictionary* (Oxford, 1879). For dual definition, see R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice (313-450)* (Oxford, 2006), p. 174.

<sup>8</sup> Tob. 2:16, 2:22, 4:7, 4:11, 4:12, 9:9, 12:8, 12:9, 14:11; Sir. 3:33, 4:1, 7:10, 12:3, 17:18, 29:15, 31:11; Dan. 4:24; Matt. 6:2, 6:3; 6:4; Luke 11:41, 12:33; Acts 3:2, 3:3, 3:10, 9:36, 10:2, 10:4, 10:31, 24:17.

<sup>9</sup> Exod. 23:15; Job 29:15-16, 31:17, 31:20, 31:32; Dan. 4:24; Prov. 3:3, 3:27-28, 11:25-26, 13:8, 15:27, 17:5, 19:7, 21:13, 22:2, 22:9, 28:27, 31:20; 1 Kgs. 17; Isa. 1:18, 58:7; Hos. 6:6, 10:12; Sir. 3:30, 4:8, 29:1-2, 29:12, 35:21; Ps. 36:21, 40:2, 41:1, 111:9; Tob. 4:7-12, 4:16-17, 12:8-9; Matt. 5:7, 5:20, 5:40, 5:42, 6:1, 6:19-20, 6:24, 6:33, 7:1-2, 10:40-42, 13:45, 19:19, 19:21-22, 25:1-13, 25:14, 25:35-41; 26:11; Mark 2:14; Luke 3:11, 6:30, 6:34-38; 11:41, 12: 16-21; 12:33, 14:13-14; 14:33, 16:9, 16:20f, 18:22, 19:8, 21:2-3; John 15:4-6; Acts 2:44-45, 3:3-8, 4:32, 4:35, 6:1-6, 9:36, 9:39, 10:2, 10:4-5, 10:31; 1 Cor. 10:24; 2 Cor. 8:14, 9:6-14; Phil. 4:18; Jas. 2:19; Gal. 2:10, 6:10; 1 Tim. 6:17-19; 1 John 3:15; 1 Pet. 5:7. Cited in Finn, *Almsgiving*, p. 178, n. 9.

*et operuistis me infirmus et visitastis me in carcere eram et venistis ad me*'.<sup>10</sup> When the disciples question when they had done any of these things, Christ replies, '*Amen dico vobis quamdiu fecistis uni de his fratribus meis minimis mihi fecistis*'.<sup>11</sup> If taken as a definition of almsgiving, this passage implies that gifts of alms should be things which provide for basic needs, both physical and emotional.

While the Biblical references to *elemosina* do not clearly define what are considered to be gifts of alms, they do explain some theological principles of almsgiving. Matthew 6:2-4 states that one who gives alms should do so in secret rather than bragging about his generosity.<sup>12</sup> Tobit 12:8 and Luke 12:33 both stress that gifts of alms prepare a place in heaven for the giver, and three additional passages state that the giver will be rewarded for his alms. In addition, Tobit 12:9, Sirach 3:33 and Daniel 4:24 state very clearly that alms allow one to atone for sins. Men and women were both encouraged to give alms, as alms were pleasing to God, and one way of doing this was by giving away one's material possessions.<sup>13</sup> Additionally gifts of coin to the poor may be considered gifts of alms, as Acts 3:2-3 describes beggars as sitting outside of temples, asking for alms of money.<sup>14</sup> Other verses describe a person as willing to give alms in order to emphasise his or her piety and exemplary

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<sup>10</sup> Matt. 25:35-36 'For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me.'

<sup>11</sup> Matt. 25:40: 'Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me.'

<sup>12</sup> Tob. 12:8: '*Bona est oratio cum ieiunio et elemosyna magis quam thesauros auri condere.*' Luke 12:33: '*Vendite quae possidetis et date elemosynam facite vobis sacculos qui non veterescunt thesaurum non deficientem in caelis quo fur non adpropiat neque tinea corrumpit.*'

<sup>13</sup> Tob. 12:9: '*Quoniam elemosyna a morte liberat et ipsa est quae purgat peccata et faciet invenire vitam aeternam.*' Sir. 3:33: '*Ignem ardentem extinguit aqua et elemosyna resistit peccatis.*' Dan. 4:24: '*Quam ob rem rex consilium meum placeat tibi et peccata tua elemosynis redime et iniquitates tuas misericordiis pauperum forsitan ignoscat delictis tuis.*'

<sup>14</sup> Acts 3:2-3: '*Et quidam vir qui erat claudus ex utero matris suae baiulabatur quem ponebant cotidie ad portam templi quae dicitur Speciosa ut peteret elemosynam ab introeuntibus in templum is cum vidisset Petrum et Iohannem incipientes introire in templum rogabat ut elemosynam acciperet.*' Acts 3:10: '*Cognoscebant autem illum quoniam ipse erat qui ad elemosynam sedebat ad Speciosam portam templi et impleti sunt stupore et extasi in eo quod contigerat illi.*'

Christianity, as in Tobit 9:9 and Acts 9:36.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, while no one definition of almsgiving arises from the Biblical texts, it is generally described as gifts of money, possessions or physical and spiritual necessities to the poor, who are identified with Christ. Giving gifts in this way is thus encouraged as a way to demonstrate a person's piety and to earn him or her a place in heaven.

One of the purposes of this thesis is to ask whether or not one may easily define almsgiving as it was conceptualised in late Anglo-Saxon England. The restricted geographical and chronological focus allows one to gain a singular perspective not only on the practice of almsgiving within a specific cultural milieu, but also on how this practice may be informed by or reflective of both religious and social values. The chapters of this thesis represent a journey through the tenth- and eleventh-century textual sources as a means of searching for such a definition. In doing so this study seeks to more fully understand the conception and function of almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon England. It questions the equation of almsgiving with altruistic charity, demonstrating that once one moves past the modern definitions and connotations of almsgiving described above, the practice is particularly illuminating of Anglo-Saxon social and religious customs. It will be shown that late Anglo-Saxon almsgiving was a multi-faceted practice which was manifested in many aspects of both religious and secular life. In order to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the practice and performance of almsgiving, it is necessary to consult a wide variety of contemporary sources, in this case homilies, laws, wills and charters, as will be demonstrated in the examples given below. This broad approach highlights the widespread understanding and application of biblical teachings on almsgiving, revealing the extent to which these teachings took root in different ways

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<sup>15</sup> Tob. 9:9: *'Et dixit benedicat te Dominus Deus Israhel quia filius es viri optimi et iusti et timentis Deum et elemosynas facientis.'* Acts 9:36: *'In Ioppe autem fuit quaedam discipula nomina Tabitas quia interpretata dicitur Dorcas haec erat plena operibus bonis et elemosynis quas faciebat.'* Acts 10:2: *'Religiosus et timens Deum cum omni domo sua faciens elemosynas multas plebi et deprecans Deum semper.'* Acts 10:4: *'At ille intuens eum timore correptus dixit quid est domine dixit autem illi orationes tuae et elemosynae tuae ascenderunt in memoriam in conspectu Dei.'*

in society. This study will seek to elucidate and nuance the principles of almsgiving as understood by the Anglo-Saxons in order to give a more complete picture of the ways in which doctrine and practice worked together in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

### *Almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England*

Wel bið þam eorle / þe him on innan hafað, / reþehydig wer, / rume heortan; /  
þæt him bið for worulde / weorðmynda mæst, / ond for ussum dryhtne / doma  
selast. / Efne swa he mid wætre / þone weallendan / leg adwæsce, / þæt he leng  
ne mæg / blac byrnende / burgum sceoððan, / swa he mid ælmessan / ealle  
toscufoð / synna wunde, / sawla lacnað.<sup>16</sup>

The poem *Alms-giving*, tucked away after *The Descent into Hell* with a number of other fragmentary poems and riddles, was copied into the poetic anthology known as the Exeter Book c. 965-975. Despite, or perhaps because of, its appearance in such an important and influential vernacular poetic anthology, the earliest such manuscript extant from Anglo-Saxon England, the poem itself has been largely ignored by scholars who tend to focus their efforts more on meatier fare such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer* and *The Wife's Lament*. The few scholars who have attempted a discussion of the almsgiving poem as a singular entity tend to confine their interest to the relationship between the poem itself and its patristic and biblical sources.<sup>17</sup> None have expanded their queries beyond the purely literary to examine what role almsgiving itself played in later Anglo-Saxon society, which would in turn help to

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<sup>16</sup> 'It shall be well for the man, the mortal of righteous intent, who has within him a generous heart. Before the world this will prove his most esteemed remembrance and before our Lord the most favourable judgment. Just as with water he will quench the billowing flame that it may no longer, bright and blazing, damage dwellings, so with alms he will expunge all sins' wounds and salve souls'. 'Alms-giving', in B. J. Muir (ed.), *The Exeter Anthology of Old English Poetry: An Edition of Exeter Dean and Chapter MS 3501* Vol. 1: Texts (Exeter 1994), p. 350; translated in S. A. J. Bradley (trans. and ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London, 1995), pp. 395-396.

<sup>17</sup> See for example L. Whitbred, 'The Old-English Poem *Almsgiving*', *Notes and Queries* 189 (1945), pp. 2-4; J. B. Trahern, Jr., 'The Old English "Almsgiving"', *Notes and Queries*, New Series 16 (1969), pp. 46-47.

explain the composition of such a descriptive, if succinct, poem on the virtues of the practice.

References to Christian almsgiving appear frequently in both literary and documentary sources extant from the Anglo-Saxon period. Yet, as exemplified in the poem *Alms-giving*, the practice of almsgiving is rarely given any extended treatment explaining how one was to go about giving alms or how this practice functioned on a wider social scale. The frustrating lack of detail regarding the practice of almsgiving in the Anglo-Saxon sources is evident in a number of examples. Bede, in his eighth-century *Ecclesiastical History*, emphasises the piety of the Northumbrian King Oswald by relating a tale in which Oswald is praised for his gifts of alms to the poor. During an Easter feast, when the king was dining with Bishop Aidan, they were interrupted by a servant, one appointed to distribute alms on behalf of the king, who informed them that a great mass of the poor had gathered on the road outside of the castle begging for alms (*postulans aliquid elimosynae a rege*). On hearing this, Oswald ordered a silver serving dish and the food which had been served upon it to be divided up and distributed to the crowd. Bishop Aidan, also described by Bede as being particularly generous to the poor, praised Oswald's actions by grasping the king's right hand and issuing the famous blessing: '*Numquam inueterescat haec manus*'.<sup>18</sup> In this brief passage Bede offers a tantalising glimpse into the practice of almsgiving. The link between piety and generosity to the poor is clear, made explicitly so by Aidan's benediction. That this behaviour was the mark of a good king is further emphasised by the revelation that there was an appointed royal servant whose duty was to ensure that alms were given to the poor and that the poor knew where to gather in the expectation of receiving such charity. The defining of alms as food and material wealth is equally evident. Yet there are important questions which Bede leaves unanswered. He does not reveal whether or

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<sup>18</sup> 'May this hand never decay'. *HE*, iii.6. Aidan's generosity in almsgiving is recorded in *HE*, iii.5 and iii.14. Cf. *HE*, iii.9.



not it is significant that this scene transpired during an Easter feast, although one is left with the impression that this is likely to be the case. He also intimates that Oswald's behaviour in this situation was marked as unusual, leading one to wonder what was the more customary context of royal almsgiving. Perhaps most importantly, Bede makes no statement as to whether almsgiving was expected of all men or whether it was a distinctly royal prerogative. His purpose in this passage was clearly to praise the practice of almsgiving, not to illuminate its intricacies.

In his sermon *Cathedra sancti petri*, composed at the end of the tenth century, Ælfric of Eynsham relates the story of a New Testament widow, Tabitha, who was raised from the dead by the apostle Peter. Ælfric describes Tabitha as '*wel gelyfed...and swyþe ælmes-georn and mid godum weorcum geglencged forþearle*', emphasising her piety as directly linked to her almsgiving.<sup>19</sup> When Tabitha became ill and died, her friends summoned Peter, who was visiting a nearby town, asking him to visit the body. When Peter arrived at the house, it was filled with a number of weeping widows and destitute poor who showed him the garments and tunics which Tabitha had made for them, physical evidence of her almsgiving. The crowd begged Peter to return Tabitha to life, which he subsequently did, and Ælfric reports that the tale of the miracle was spread throughout the land. As with Bede's story of King Oswald's alms, Ælfric's message is enticing in its brevity. His main point is that eagerness in almsgiving quite literally has the power to raise one from the dead, as it was because of Tabitha's generosity to the widows and the poor that she was deemed worthy of resurrection. Ælfric also implies that clothing was an important type of alms-gift and widows and the destitute poor were considered to be appropriate recipients for this charity. Again, however, there are questions left unanswered. The story itself takes place in the late Roman Empire, describing late Roman alms-gifts. While Ælfric's Anglo-Saxon audience presumably knew how to relate this tale to their own

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<sup>19</sup> '...a very true believer...very eager in almsgiving, and adorned exceedingly with good works'. LS X: *Cathedra sancti petri*, lines 53-76 at 54-56.

understanding of almsgiving, a reader at some remove from Anglo-Saxon England is not informed of the differences between Roman and Anglo-Saxon alms-practice, if such differences did indeed exist. Ælfric also makes no comment on whether or not Tabitha's alms-gifts were typical of that expected from the laity or whether specific types of almsgiving were unique to widows. Like Bede, Ælfric's purpose here is to commend generosity in alms, not to explain the practice in great detail.

Even less enlightening is the reference to almsgiving which appears in the mid-tenth-century law code known as *I Edmund*. Within this short code, focusing predominantly on religious matters, lies a brief reference to church dues: '*Teoðunge we bebeodaþ ælcum Cristenum men be his Cristendome 7 cyricsceat 7 ælmesfeoh*'.<sup>20</sup> The author declines to offer further detail as to what comprised a payment of 'alms-money', nor does he explain when and how this payment was collected or what similarities it might have to the tithe and church-scot. The only specific information which may be gleaned from this clause is that 'each Christian man' was to pay alms-money, implying that included both lay and religious, royal and non-royal.

Likewise, a convoluted statement at the end of the tenth-century will of Æthelgifu, a widow of apparently considerable wealth, obscures more than it illuminates in regard to how one could bequeath gifts of alms. Æthelgifu states: '*Eall se freot 7 eall seo ælmesse þe her gecpeden is hyo pile þæt hit beo heore ælmessa for þon hit pæron hire hlafordes begeto 7 heo bit hire cynehlaford him to ælmissan for his cynescipe for Godes lufan 7 for sancte Marigan þæt git ne læton nænne monnan mid feo hire cpide apendan*'.<sup>21</sup> It is not immediately apparent what Æthelgifu considered to be 'all the almsgiving'

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<sup>20</sup> 'We command each Christian man, regarding his Christianity, to pay tithes and church-scot and alms-money'. I Em. 2, from MSS H and B. For the discrepancies in manuscripts regarding this clause, see below Chapter Three.

<sup>21</sup> 'All the manumission and all the almsgiving which is stated here she wishes to be her alms because they were her lord's acquisitions. And she begs her royal lord as alms, for his royal dignity, for the love of God and of St Mary, that you two allow no men, for money, to change her will.' J. Crick (ed.), *Charters of St Albans*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 12 (Oxford, 2007), no. 7. This section of Æthelgifu's will is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

outlined in her will: she does not use the term elsewhere in reference to any particular benefaction. Nor does she explain what it means that this almsgiving, along with the manumissions stated throughout the will, are to be her alms 'because her lord acquired them'. Yet the most confusing statement of all is Æthelgifu's plea to the king 'as alms' that he not allow anyone to change the will. In regard to this, at least, we may say with some certainty that Æthelgifu did not intend for the king to distribute alms to the poor as a means of safeguarding her will. Yet beyond gaining some idea that alms could be conceptualised beyond gifts to the poor, this passage provides no detail as to what were considered to be alms and how they were to be distributed. We learn only that wills could be used to bequeath gifts of alms and that it might be desirable for certain benefactions to be so considered.

One final example comes from a writ of dubious authenticity, issued during the reign of Æthelred II. This document claims to confirm a long-standing tradition that the land at Chilcombe, near Winchester, be assessed at one hide rather than its actual value (unstated here but recorded elsewhere as one hundred hides<sup>22</sup>), drastically reducing the annual amount owed to the king by the community at Winchester. In this writ, Æthelred is made to state: '*Ɔa licode me swyðe wel seo gesetnesse 7 seo ælmesse þe minne ylðran on angunne cristendomes into þere halgan stowe gesetten 7 se wisa cing Ælfred syððan geedniwode on þære bec þe man ætforð me rædde*'.<sup>23</sup> It is reasonably clear that it is the virtual freedom from obligations which Æthelred refers to here as alms. It is equally unclear as to why this freedom is specifically characterised as a type of alms and what this in turn may imply for an understanding of land tenure in late Anglo-Saxon England.<sup>24</sup> As with each of the other examples discussed here, this writ raises far more questions than it answers.

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<sup>22</sup> F. E. Harmer (trans. and ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Stamford, 1989), pp. 373-374.

<sup>23</sup> 'Then I was greatly pleased with the ordinance and the alms which my elders at the beginning of Christianity established for the holy foundation; and the wise King Alfred likewise renewed in that charter which was read before me.' Harmer, *Writs*, no. 107.

<sup>24</sup> The issue of alms as a type of land tenure is discussed below in Chapter Four.

The overwhelming impression from these examples is that the Anglo-Saxon authors, scribes and draftsmen responsible for creating the vast corpus of references to almsgiving in the homilies, laws, wills and charters of the period assumed a relatively comprehensive, pre-existing knowledge of almsgiving and its general tenets in the wider population. Thus, they did not need to explain the practice of almsgiving in explicit detail; they were content to recall individual examples of acts of almsgiving, briefly extol the virtues of the practice or use the vocabulary of almsgiving to refer to a legal payment, a benefaction or land tenure. It was up to those who read or heard these texts to read between the lines and interpret these examples based on their own knowledge of almsgiving and its function in society. The idea that there was a pervasive social understanding of the practice of almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon England forms the basis of this thesis. It is the purpose of the following chapters to tease out the fundamental understanding of almsgiving hinted at in the types of sources discussed here (homilies, law-codes, wills and charters) in order to build a more comprehensive picture of how the Anglo-Saxons themselves conceptualised the principles of almsgiving and how these principles in turn underpinned the very fabric of society itself. Thus, a study of almsgiving is not only vital to an understanding of lay piety in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but also how this in turn is indispensable in gaining a deeper understanding of the Anglo-Saxon cultural world, both secular and religious.

### ***Historiography***

#### *Wealth and Poverty*

As a result of the intrinsic association of almsgiving with giving to the poor, studies of almsgiving are often inextricably bound up with ideas of poverty and poor relief, forming tangential parts of larger studies focusing on wealth, poverty or charity. As has been discussed above, it is both necessary and desirable to view almsgiving as an important topic for study in its own right. A small number of scholars have

recognised this, producing works which focus specifically on almsgiving, although no extensive survey yet exists which addresses almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England. Before embarking on a discussion of these studies it is helpful first to provide a background on late antique and early medieval ideas of wealth and poverty in order to establish a social framework in which studies of almsgiving may be placed.

One must first begin by attempting to provide definitions for 'rich' and 'poor' as they were perceived in early medieval societies.<sup>25</sup> Michel Mollat noted that one must maintain an open mind when attempting to define poverty: '*Pour éclairer ces fantômes sans nom, il faut changer sans cesse de point de vue, recourir à des disciplines diverses, et seul le travail en équipe permet de débroussailler le problème: Qui et quels furent les pauvres? Quelle fut leur place dans la société? Quelle idée s'est-on faite de la pauvreté?*'<sup>26</sup> These questions clearly sum up the difficulties inherent in clearly defining a fluid concept such as poverty.<sup>27</sup>

In addressing the questions posed by Mollat, scholars have attempted to further define 'the poor', categorising different types of poverty which may be observed in

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<sup>25</sup> The starting point for general studies of poverty are M. Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. by A. Goldhammer (New Haven, CT, 1986); M. Mollat (ed.), *Études sur l'histoire de la pauvreté: Moyen Age –XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1974); B. Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, trans. by A. Kolakowska (Oxford, 1994). A useful collection of essays on early Christian attitudes to poverty is S. R. Holman (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008). For a comprehensive survey of poverty in the Roman empire, see P. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures (Hanover, NH, 2002) and collected essays in M. Atkins and R. Osborne (eds.), *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge, 2006). For studies of poverty in the Byzantine empire, see primarily E. Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e-7e siècles* (Paris, 1977) and A. E. Laiou-Thomadakis, *Peasant Society in the Late Byzantine Empire: A Social and Demographic Study* (Princeton, PA, 1977). For the high middle ages, see L. K. Little, *Religious Poverty and the Profit Economy in Medieval Europe* (Ithaca, NY, 1978); B. Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and Its Application in England* (Berkeley, CA, 1959).

<sup>26</sup> M. Mollat, 'En guise de préface: Les problèmes de la pauvreté', in M. Mollat (ed.), *Études sur l'histoire de la pauvreté: Moyen Age –XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1974), p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> The terminology of poverty, in particular, is illuminating of the difficulties inherent on categorising types of poverty. For the Latin terminology, see Mollat, *Études*, vol. 1, pp. 1-4; for the Greek terminology, see R. Osborne, 'Introduction: Roman Poverty in Context', in M. Atkins and R. Osborne (eds.), *Poverty in the Roman World* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 11. For a proposed hierarchical categorisation of poverty, see S. J. Friesen, 'Injustice or God's Will?: Early Christian Explanations of Poverty', in S. R. Holman (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), pp. 19-21.

the late antique and early medieval periods.<sup>28</sup> Poverty could afflict an individual in a number of ways, yet the most clear distinction is found in separating the voluntary poor from the involuntary poor. Involuntary poverty often came about as the result of a loss of social position or a wealthy spouse, situations which were beyond the control of the individual. The voluntary poor, on the other hand, consciously chose to dispose of their possessions in order to focus their energy on religious contemplation or ministering to others and thus adopting a life of spiritual poverty.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the late antique period sermons such as those of John Chrysostom reflect an anxiety that the public was too interested in distinguishing between the two groups when doling out charity, and they thus discourage the view that the voluntary poor were inherently more worthy of charity than the involuntary poor.<sup>30</sup>

Many modern studies of poverty in the late antique and medieval periods reflect the polarisation of wealth and poverty exemplified in the gospels and in patristic texts. Poverty is most appropriately viewed as a shifting concept, defined as the lack of something which defined one as wealthy. Between the sixth and eleventh centuries this was often the possession of things necessary to survival, such as land and food stores. Poverty, therefore, could mean the absence of rights over land and the dependence on others for food. In Merovingian and Carolingian France, wealth and poverty were defined in terms of social position and one's ability to get what one needed in order to maintain one's place in society. By the end of the tenth century, the emphasis shifted to military might as the defining characteristic of one's wealth; those who were not able to fight, namely peasants and those in monastic orders, were therefore considered to be poor.<sup>31</sup> Evidence from the literary texts throughout

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<sup>28</sup> Geremek, *Poverty*, pp. 39-40; Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, pp. 49-50, 58-60; Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 18-26.

<sup>29</sup> Geremek, *Poverty*, pp. 17, 19-21, 27-28; Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 18-26.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, arguments in W. Mayer, 'Poverty and Generosity Toward the Poor in the Time of John Chrysostom', in S. R. Holman (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), pp. 140-158.

<sup>31</sup> Mollat, *The Poor*, pp. 24-25, 52.

the Anglo-Saxon period indicate that poverty was most frequently defined in opposition to material wealth and political power, although an important distinction was made between material poverty and spiritual poverty.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, as Malcolm Godden has argued, there is a noticeable linguistic shift around the tenth century regarding the word *rice*. Whereas in the early poetry and prose texts of the eighth and ninth centuries *rice* most often carried the connotation of power or authority, by the tenth century it was increasingly translated in the context of material wealth and possessions, indicating a corresponding shift in attitudes toward wealth and its place in society.<sup>33</sup> I shall return to this concept later in this section.

It was not until the eleventh and twelfth centuries that societal values changed in a way which defined wealth solely as the possession of material resources rather than social privileges or military power.<sup>34</sup> This change was inextricably linked with the contemporary economic shift whereby societies which had formerly relied on barter and gift-exchange to acquire goods and services began to rely more heavily on the exchange of monetary wealth for the same purposes. This economic shift has been defined by scholars such as Lester Little as a movement towards a monetary profit economy, one which was echoed by the monastic communities where conceptions of poverty as the abandonment of worldly power or military might gave way to the mendicant conception of poverty as the abandonment of material wealth.<sup>35</sup> This shift was echoed in the secular world, manifesting as a gradual movement from

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<sup>32</sup> J.-C. Dufermont, 'Les Pauvres, D'Après les Sources Anglo-Saxonnes, du VII<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> Siècle', *Revue du Nord* 50 (1968), pp. 189-190, 194.

<sup>33</sup> M. Godden, 'Money, Power and Morality in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 19 (1990), pp. 42-51.

<sup>34</sup> Geremek, *Poverty*, p. 22.

<sup>35</sup> Little, *Religious Poverty*, esp. pp. 3-41; B. H. Rosenwein and L. K. Little, 'Social Meaning in the Monastic and Mendicant Spiritualities', *Past and Present* 63 (1974), esp. pp. 6, 11, 13, 17-21, 25-31.

granting land or military equipment in recognition of service to the expression of wealth in monetary terms and through commercial activity.<sup>36</sup>

Understanding the relationship between conceptions of wealth and poverty in this way indicates very clearly that in the early medieval mind, wealth and poverty were seen as two sides of the same coin. Each was defined in relation to the other, making it impossible for either to exist on its own. Yet these definitions do not explain how wealth and poverty, more specifically those who were rich and those who were poor, were perceived to function within society. Since almsgiving is intrinsically bound up in the relationships between the two, it is necessary to give this topic a more extended treatment.

Prior to the imperial acceptance of Christianity established by Constantine in the Roman Empire at the beginning of the fourth century, charitable donations of wealth were most commonly expressed through the social value of *euergesia*: doing good through public benefactions. Unlike Christian almsgiving, *euergesia* took the form of generosity to one's civic community rather than to the poor. As such, one had to be a legitimate citizen of a community in order to receive a share of doles or other handouts. Charity continued to be expressed in this way throughout the third century, as is vividly expressed by the example of imperial donations of food in the late third century: men such as the poor and illiterate Aurelius Melas received a dole of grain not because of their poverty, but more importantly because they could prove descent from citizens of a Roman city, Oxyrynchus, in Aurelius's case.<sup>37</sup> Citizenship, or membership to a civic community, was one quality which made a poor person eligible for the aid gathered through *euergesia*. Yet despite the prevalence of such practices, the rise of Christianity corresponded with an increasing emphasis on charity to the individual poor, regardless of civic status. It is debatable

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<sup>36</sup> Godden, 'Money, Power and Morality', pp. 41-42.

<sup>37</sup> P. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire*, The Curti Lectures 1988 (Madison, WI, 1992), p. 92. Cf. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, p. 5.



whether the rise of Christianity led to an increased emphasis on providing for the poor or increasing poverty necessitated charitable action from a higher authority, points argued respectively by Peter Brown and Evelyne Patlagean.<sup>38</sup> Regardless, by the end of the fourth century the emphasis on Christian almsgiving and charity to the poor had created a new kind of *euergetism* which existed alongside the old.<sup>39</sup> Both citizens and bishops sought to present themselves as ‘lovers of the poor’, redirecting wealth in society so that it might be used to alleviate destitution and aid the poor. The honour and status accorded to those who were appropriately generous with alms, particularly bishops, established new ways of negotiating authority and establishing one’s identity in society.<sup>40</sup>

As the Christian Church rose in prominence and power in the late Roman Empire, society became increasingly polarised between rich and poor.<sup>41</sup> This in turn led early Christian writers to question the nature of poverty itself and the relative functions of both wealth and poverty in society. Biblical passages stressing the virtues of poverty provide an ideological background for these discussions, notably Christ’s assertion in a sermon to his disciples: ‘*beati pauperes quia vestrum est regnum Dei... verumtamen vae vobis divitibus quia habetis consolationem vestram*’.<sup>42</sup> The exhortation to embrace poverty is more fully discussed in the context of a young, rich man asking what one must do in order to gain eternal life in heaven. Christ replies with the oft-quoted response: ‘*si vis perfectus esse vade vende quae habes et da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelo et veni sequere me... amen dico vobis quia dives difficile intrabit in regnum caelorum. et iterum dico vobis facilius est camelum per foramen acus transire quam divitem intrare in*

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<sup>38</sup> See especially Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, pp. 8-9 and *passim*; Brown, *Power and Persuasion*, pp. 76-103; Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale*, pp. 17-35, 181-196, 423-432.

<sup>39</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 182-188 and *passim*.

<sup>40</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 203-214.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, *Poverty and Leadership*, p. 6.

<sup>42</sup> Luke 6:20, 24: ‘Blessed are ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God...But woe to you that are rich: for you have your consolation’. Cf. Matthew 5:3, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’.

*regnum caelorum*'.<sup>43</sup> These comments address two notions of poverty which become extremely important in the development of a doctrine on almsgiving: those who are poor are inherently blessed, and the rich must share their wealth with the poor if they desire eternal life in heaven.

While the gospels do contain exhortations for rich men to divest themselves of their possessions in order to truly embrace salvation, the question of why an unequal distribution of wealth existed in society at all was addressed in a number of early Biblical and patristic texts. The works of Clement of Alexandria, for example, were very influential in addressing the role of rich men in relation to the poor. In his short homily, *Quis dives salvetur?*, the first known biblical commentary on Mark 10:17-31, Clement explains Jesus' command to the rich man seeking salvation: '*vade quaecumque habes vende et da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelo et veni sequere me*'.<sup>44</sup> According to Clement, this instruction should not be taken at face value; rather, he sees Jesus as encouraging the rich to share their wealth with the poor so that all might benefit from this arrangement. Thus it is not the possession of wealth which condemns a man, but his unwillingness to give generously from what he has.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, an apocalyptic text composed sometime before the end of the second century, wealth is described as a gift bestowed by God upon the rich, who were required in turn to share this wealth with the poor, in

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<sup>43</sup> Matthew 19:21, 23-24: 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me...Amen, I say to you, that a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you: It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven'. Cf. Luke 18:22, 24-25; Mark 10:21, 23-25.

<sup>44</sup> Mark 10:21: 'Go, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor: and thou shalt have treasure in heaven'.

<sup>45</sup> A. van den Hoek, 'Widening the Eye of the Needle: Wealth and Poverty in the Works of Clement of Alexandria', in S. R. Holman (ed.), *Wealth and Poverty in Early Church and Society* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2008), pp. 69-75; G. Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity in the Ancient Church*, trans. S. Taylor (New York, NY, 1883), pp. 129-130. For a discussion of the letters *1* and *2 Clement* and their importance in the development of a doctrine of almsgiving, see R. Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 77 (Sheffield, 1993), pp. 77-86, 94-107.

essence purchasing spiritual profit for themselves through this charity.<sup>46</sup> Thus both rich and poor were intrinsically interdependent in society, a relationship ultimately created by God Himself.

The ideals regarding wealth and poverty in these homilies were ultimately expanded and refined by the patristic fathers. While these later sermons preached the attainment of the spiritual ideal of poverty, they also offered justifications for the possession of earthly wealth, providing an alternative path to salvation for those who did not wish to fully embrace an ascetic lifestyle. This is expressed most clearly in the *Life of St Eligius*, which states: '*potuit nempe Deus omnes homines divites facere, sed pauperes ideo in hoc mundo esse voluit, ut divites haberent quomodo peccata sua redimerent*'.<sup>47</sup> Sentiments such as this were designed to reassure the wealthy that their riches were ordained by God. According to these ideals, rich men would still be able to earn redemption for their sins, provided they used their wealth in the proper way: by giving a portion of it to the poor. This charity allowed men and women to assert their spiritual poverty while retaining their material wealth.<sup>48</sup> The imbalance of wealth and poverty in society continued to be of concern to doctrinal authorities, as evidenced by the number of homiletic texts on the distribution of wealth in circulation in the early middle ages.<sup>49</sup> I shall return to a discussion of these texts in the next section.

It is important to note that while the rich were encouraged to share their wealth with the poor as alms, this was never intended to be used as a way to eradicate poverty.

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<sup>46</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 86-94; Friesen, 'Injustice or God's Will', pp. 33-34.

<sup>47</sup> *Vita sancti eligii episcopi noviomensis* (PL 87), col. 0533B in J.-P. Migne's *Patrologia Latina* Database, [http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk/all/fulltext?ACTION=byid&ID=Z100011254&WARN=N&TOCHITS=N&ALL=Y&FILE=../session/1277133503\\_23766](http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk/all/fulltext?ACTION=byid&ID=Z100011254&WARN=N&TOCHITS=N&ALL=Y&FILE=../session/1277133503_23766) (accessed June 21, 2010). 'Certainly God could have made all men rich, but He wanted there to be poor people in this world, so that the rich might be able to redeem their sins in this manner'.

<sup>48</sup> Dufermont, 'Les Pauvres', p. 194.

<sup>49</sup> D. Janes, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 154-155; Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving, passim*.

Indeed, as God had created both wealthy and poor, both must continue to exist in order to carry out their designated roles in society. Almsgiving was not intended as a means of restoring a social balance by equally distributing out all wealth, but rather as a means of alleviating the immediate effects of poverty and destitution.<sup>50</sup> Thus almsgiving functions in a way which continually reinforces the polarity between wealth and poverty in society.

As the *Life of St Eligius* so eloquently stated, in late antiquity and the early middle ages it was commonly perceived that God intentionally created both rich and poor, designating specific functions to each in society. Because of their imitation of the poverty of Christ, the poor were seen to have privileged access to God. This special status allowed the poor to offer the rich a return on their gifts of alms, namely in the form of offering prayers to God on behalf of their wealthy benefactors.<sup>51</sup> This relationship thus functioned in a way which benefitted both parties, ensuring sanctity for both rich and poor and ensuring the proper distribution of wealth in society. This theme of reciprocal exchange of alms for salvation shall be seen throughout this thesis.

This section has established that in late antiquity and the early medieval period, wealth and poverty were primarily defined in relation to each other, as binary concepts within a given social system. The evidence surveyed here has highlighted the reciprocal relationship between rich and poor in society, establishing that this relationship served to reinforce the piety and Christian identity of both donors and recipients. It has shown that this co-dependence arose in part because of the patristic concern over the presence of material wealth in society and a desire to reconcile this wealth with Christ's exhortations to poverty. It is now possible to

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<sup>50</sup> Mollat, *The Poor*, p. 10; Geremek, *Poverty*, p. 20.

<sup>51</sup> B. Leyerle, 'John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money', *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994), pp. 41-42; Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 180-183; Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 82, 89-90; Geremek, *Poverty*, pp. 47-48; van den Hoek, 'Eye of the Needle', p. 75.

place the history of almsgiving, as far as historiographical analysis allows, within this framework.

### *Studies in Almsgiving – Late Antiquity*

As evidenced by the discussion of *A Christmas Carol* in the introduction to this thesis, the nineteenth century may be characterised in some ways by a resurgence of interest in the relationship between poverty and charity. The wide-ranging studies of Étienne Chastel and Gerhard Uhlhorn, for example, were composed in response to the increasing debate over the importance of charity and its place in society during this time. Chastel's *Études historiques sur l'influence de la charité durant les premières siècles Chrétiens*, published in 1853, assessed the influence of charity in early Christian society, specifically the period from the first to the sixth century. This survey on the whole is coloured by Chastel's preconception that almsgiving and charity are inherently selfless actions, done out of benevolence and love rather than out of obligation.<sup>52</sup> As a result, while the study provides an important overview of early evidence for Christian almsgiving, it does not attempt to understand this evidence within the context of early Christian values and practices. Likewise Uhlhorn's *Die christliche Liebestätigkeit in der alten Kirche*, published in 1882 and translated into English in the following year, follows Chastel in adopting this old-fashioned characterisation of almsgiving between the first and sixth centuries. In Uhlhorn's view, Christian charity was above all a manifestation of love, even while acknowledging the presence of New Testament verses which promised spiritual reward for gifts of alms. He thus dismissed the encouragement of almsgiving for the redemption of one's sins as corrupting this pure intention.<sup>53</sup> Uhlhorn also denied the importance of almsgiving in the middle ages, stating that the congregational

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<sup>52</sup> É. Chastel, *Études historiques sur l'influence de la charité durant les premiers siècles chrétiens, et considérations sur son rôle dans les sociétés modernes* (Paris, 1853), pp. 4, 19-20, 175-6, 263, 281-23 and *passim*.

<sup>53</sup> Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity*, pp. 121-123.

almsgiving which had flourished in the late Roman Empire was reduced to individual donations or distribution through institutions such as monasteries or hospitals.<sup>54</sup> Again, like Chastel, Uhlhorn presents an important survey of the early evidence for Christian almsgiving, but does not properly contextualise his findings and thus leaves much work to be done in this field.

Despite the appearance of these two comprehensive, if old-fashioned, studies of the early history of charity, the subject remained largely untouched for the following century. In an important article published in 1982, Boniface Ramsey was able to remark, '...there is no study that touches exclusively upon the theme of almsgiving in the western Church in the age of its greatest Fathers'.<sup>55</sup> Although a few scholars have followed Ramsey's lead in focusing their efforts on the study of almsgiving in the early Christian Church, the subject remains largely ignored, particularly in reference to the early middle ages.<sup>56</sup> It is possible, however, to critically analyse the few existing works on almsgiving, thus allowing one to paint a general picture of the development of ideas of almsgiving prior to their adoption and use by the Anglo-Saxons.

Although most studies on almsgiving tend to take the Edict of Milan in 313, and thus the imperially-mandated toleration of Christianity, as their starting point, the history of ideas of almsgiving may be traced even farther back. Roman Garrison, in his recent study, highlights inconsistencies between the New Testament teaching that Christ's death eliminated the need for future sacrifices to atone for one's sin and the development of the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving in the period immediately

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<sup>54</sup> Uhlhorn, *Christian Charity*, pp. 139-140.

<sup>55</sup> B. Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church: the Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries', *Theological Studies* 43.2 (1982), p. 226.

<sup>56</sup> As will be demonstrated below, notable works consist of Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 226-259; Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*; Leyerle, 'Chrysostom on Almsgiving', pp. 29-47; Finn, *Almsgiving*. Cf. D. Shanzer, 'Bible, Exegesis, Literature, and Society', in *Journal of Medieval Latin* 18 (2008), pp. 130-157 and D. Shanzer, 'Jerome, Tobit, Alms, and the *Vita Aeterna*', in A. Cain and J. Lössl (eds.), *Jerome of Stridon: His Life, Writings and Legacy* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 87-103.

after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 AD.<sup>57</sup> He begins by tracing the evolution of the idea of almsgiving itself, discussing both its Graeco-Roman and Jewish precursors. It was the Greek term ἐλευθεριότης, or liberality, which was used to describe the virtue attached to the proper use of one's wealth. According to Aristotle, the motivation behind this virtue was not compassion for those in need, but rather the desire to improve one's character.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Garrison asserts that poverty was seen to have little place in Greek society, as authors such as Plato and Plautus express disapproval or even disdain for the presence of πτωχοί, or destitute poor. The Cynic tradition, on the other hand, considered poverty itself to be a virtue and therefore saw no need to alleviate it through gifts of wealth.<sup>59</sup> In stark contrast to this attitude is the Hebrew belief, expressed in the Old Testament, that the poor are God's people, identified with the enslaved Israelites rescued from Egypt as recorded in the book of Exodus. Thus one is expected to be charitable to the poor or face the risk of divine punishment. It is the Hebrew virtue of *ṣe dāqâ*, or righteousness, used throughout the Old Testament and often with the connotation of caring for the poor, which is rendered into the Greek ἐλεημοσύνη (whence the Latin *elemosyna*) in the Septuagint in order to interpret the act of righteousness.<sup>60</sup> Garrison argues that it was the Greek translation of *ṣe dāqâ* into ἐλεημοσύνη, particularly in the books of Proverbs, Tobit and Sirach, which led to the later equation of righteousness as almsgiving and thus also the development of a doctrine of redemptive almsgiving.<sup>61</sup>

While the Old Testament uses of ἐλεημοσύνη primarily take the meaning of righteousness rather than a specific act of almsgiving, Garrison contends that the

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<sup>57</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp.12-18.

<sup>58</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham (London, 1926), 4.1.6, 4.1.12, cited in Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 39-42, at 40.

<sup>59</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 42-44.

<sup>60</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 46-52.

<sup>61</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 52-55.

New Testament uses of this term are more clear in their association with the act of almsgiving.<sup>62</sup> The Gospel texts in particular often equate acts of ἐλεημοσύνη with gaining some type of spiritual reward, encouraging a more explicit understanding of redemptive almsgiving than had been previously endorsed. Yet Garrison also notes that the development of this doctrine was fundamentally incompatible with the idea that Christ's death was a unique means of atonement for the sins of the world. In his examination of both New Testament texts and the works of the apostolic fathers, he argues that it was a number of sociological and theological factors which he claims are responsible for the further development of ideas of redemptive almsgiving. The two most important of these issues were first, the delay of Christ's expectedly imminent parousia, which forced Christians to deal with the reality of economic and social inequality, and second, while Christ's sacrifice atoned for post-baptismal sins, there arose the question of how one was to atone for sins committed post-crucifixion.<sup>63</sup>

Garrison asserts that the answers to both of these questions are to be found in a series of texts published between c. 70-135 AD, particularly those known as *1 and 2 Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*, which he argues were crucial in shaping the view of almsgiving as redemptive.<sup>64</sup> The *First Epistle of Clement*, while not specifically advocating almsgiving, stresses the Christian duty of the rich to care for the poor, an approach which highlights the importance of redemptive *love* as a value. This, Garrison claims, establishes a theological context which permitted early Christians to adopt the belief that almsgiving held similar redemptive powers.<sup>65</sup> The *Shepherd of Hermas* also emphasises the obligation of the rich to provide for the needy. In return, the needy are expected to pray for their benefactors, a fact which

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<sup>62</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 60-75. Cf. E. D. Freed, 'Alms', in B. M. Metzger and M. D. Coogan (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to the Bible* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 20-21.

<sup>63</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, p. 75.

<sup>64</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 76-108.

<sup>65</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, p. 85.



Garrison interprets as giving almsgiving the potential to act in a redemptive fashion.<sup>66</sup> This in turn allows the rich an opportunity to redeem their post-baptismal sins, a theme particularly stressed by the author throughout the text. Like *1 Clement*, the author does not specifically link this behaviour with ἐλεημοσύνη; instead he highlights acts of charity such as providing food and drink or other comforts for those in need in a way which stresses hospitality and compassion rather than almsgiving.<sup>67</sup> Garrison argues that it is the *Second Epistle of Clement* which most emphatically promotes a doctrine of redemptive almsgiving. As in the *Shepherd of Hermas*, the author of this text addresses the issue of post-baptismal redemption of sin, using almsgiving as a means by which the rich may both care for the poor and atone for their sins.<sup>68</sup> Finally, Garrison addresses the issue of the fundamental incompatibility of the idea that it was necessary to atone for one's sins through almsgiving with the belief that Christ's death had already atoned for one's post-baptismal sins. He argues that it was in fact the Roman Church which both sanctioned and promoted the idea of continuing atonement for post-baptismal sins in a way which functioned very similarly to the ideals of almsgiving being promoted from Corinth. Thus the influence of the Roman Church essentially 'legitimated the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving in early Christianity'.<sup>69</sup>

Through his analysis of these texts against the social backdrop of early Christian settlements, particularly the wealthy community of Corinth, Garrison asserts that it was not only the desire to find a way of atoning for post-baptismal sins which necessitated the development of a doctrine of redemptive almsgiving, but also the more practical purpose of alleviating tensions between rich and poor in early

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<sup>66</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, p. 89. Cf. Friesen, 'Injustice or God's Will', pp. 31-34.

<sup>67</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 90-92.

<sup>68</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 103-104.

<sup>69</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 135-142 at 142.

Christian society.<sup>70</sup> As Garrison acknowledges throughout his analysis, many of his conclusions are based on educated hypotheses; there is simply not enough information about the Christian communities in the first two centuries after Christ's death to allow one to make firm conclusions. His argument that the *Epistles* of Clement and the *Shepherd of Hermas* were written in response to specific social tensions in the community of Corinth is compelling, but not certain. His assessment of the development of the doctrine of almsgiving from a theological standpoint is, however, more grounded. The evolution of the language of charity and almsgiving throughout the biblical and apostolic texts demonstrates a clear progression in meaning from the ἐλευθεριότης of the Graeco-Roman world to the ἐλεημοσύνη of the New Testament; the virtue of sharing one's wealth is increasingly focused on the poor as recipients as well as being increasingly associated with a spiritual reward. These themes come together in the progression from *1 Clement* to the *Shepherd of Hermas* to *2 Clement*, increasingly associating the care of the poor with the virtue of almsgiving, which in turn becomes linked with the forgiveness of sins.

Garrison's thesis is well-reasoned and based on persuasive use of evidence, yet despite his emphasis on the linguistic developments of notions of almsgiving, he never truly addresses the problems of defining a term which is so clearly multi-dimensional. He does not appear concerned with what it *meant* to give alms or how one went about doing so during the period in question. It is assumed that almsgiving corresponds with gifts of food and drink, as is the case in the *Shepherd of Hermas'* emphasis on hospitality, despite Garrison's brief definition of redemptive almsgiving at the beginning of his thesis: '...that money given to the poor earns the forgiveness of sins'.<sup>71</sup> This distinction may seem both unnecessary and overly critical, but as will be demonstrated throughout this thesis, the understanding of the definitions of almsgiving within a given society are crucial to grasping the perceived

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<sup>70</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 109-134.

<sup>71</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, p. 15.

function of almsgiving within the same society. Overall, although Garrison focuses on the theology of almsgiving rather than its practice or function in the early Church, his study aptly demonstrates the importance of comprehending the early development of the Christian doctrine on redemptive almsgiving and its theological importance in setting the stage for the later patristic writers concerned with the subject.

The first study which recognised the importance of the fourth and fifth centuries as a formative period in the development of patristic ideas on almsgiving was that of Boniface Ramsey, published in 1982. In this analysis, Ramsey cites the importance and influence of the patristic texts emerging during this time in colouring later perceptions and practice of almsgiving in middle ages. He focuses on the works of Augustine, Ambrose, Jerome and others, comparing these sources with references to almsgiving in the Bible and biblical commentaries. Ramsey provides a thorough analysis of the patristic conceptions of almsgiving, examining issues such as the recipients of alms, types of almsgiving, the obligation to give alms, the redemptive function of almsgiving and the givers of alms themselves before offering a brief critical evaluation of the evidence presented. In doing so, this study provides a valuable insight into the late antique conception of almsgiving and the way it was thought to function in society.

Ramsey begins by defining almsgiving as ‘the deed of mercy vis-à-vis the poor’, a blanket definition which usefully covers the myriad conceptions of the act described in the variant texts.<sup>72</sup> This is later shown to consist of gifts of food, drink, clothing, acts of kindness and forgiveness of sins, to name just a few.<sup>73</sup> On the whole the patristic authors seem to agree that these alms were to be given to anyone who was needy, although Augustine’s refutation of the idea that one should not give alms to

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<sup>72</sup> Ramsey, ‘Almsgiving in the Latin Church’, p. 226.

<sup>73</sup> Ramsey, ‘Almsgiving in the Latin Church’, pp. 228, 233-234, 235-236, 238, 240-241.

sinner implies that this was a common concern.<sup>74</sup> Likewise, Jerome states that one should not give alms to the general poor, but rather should focus charitable efforts on those who were poor in spirit, a point linked with his concern that alms be given only to those whom he considered to be particularly worthy of this charity.<sup>75</sup> That some people were over-zealous in their alms distribution is also a concern recurrent in the patristic texts, perhaps exemplified by Augustine's chiding of a certain Ecclesia who gave away almost all of her possessions to 'monks of questionable repute'.<sup>76</sup> The common message is that one should give alms in moderation, not to the point of impoverishing oneself. Linked to the idea of not giving beyond one's means was the complementary injunction that all must give alms, whether rich or poor.<sup>77</sup> Both Augustine and Jerome draw on Matthew 10:42, '*et quicumque potum dederit uni ex minimis istis calicem aquae frigidae tantum in nomine discipuli amen dico vobis non perdet mercedem suam*',<sup>78</sup> in order to demonstrate that even the gift of a cup of cold water may be considered as alms from those who have no money to spare.

In addition to these general precepts on almsgiving, Ramsey also discusses the issues of wealth distribution and redemptive almsgiving which would later form Garrison's thesis on the doctrine of almsgiving in the first and second centuries. A comparison of the two shows that although the same basic ideals of almsgiving existed in the fourth and fifth centuries, the emphasis had shifted slightly since the composition of the *Shepherd of Hermas* and the *Epistles* of Clement. Whereas Garrison argued that the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving was developed through these texts as a result of socio-economic discord in certain Christian communities,

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<sup>74</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 230-233.

<sup>75</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 229, 232-233.

<sup>76</sup> Augustine, *Epistula* 262 (CSEL 57), pp. 621-631. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 233-235.

<sup>77</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 235-240.

<sup>78</sup> 'And whosoever shall give to drink to one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, amen I say to you he shall not lose his reward'.

Ramsey's analysis shows that by the fourth and fifth centuries the inherent chasm between rich and poor in society had become idealised and integrated into the theology of almsgiving itself. Authors such as Ambrose and Augustine argued that this disparity in the possession of wealth was in fact ordained by God; such wealth was justified so long as it was used properly to provide for those in need.<sup>79</sup> As Ramsey rightly notes, almsgiving is portrayed more as a spiritual exercise for the rich rather than a means of achieving social equality for the poor. Indeed, the poor are nearly effaced through the emphasis on Christ as the true recipient of alms, as stressed in Matthew 25:31-46.<sup>80</sup> This is certainly a departure from Garrison's assessment of almsgiving's promotion in the first and second centuries as a means of achieving a more equitable distribution of wealth and therefore easing social tensions between rich and poor.<sup>81</sup>

In regard to the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving, it appears that not much had changed by the fourth and fifth centuries; as Ramsey states, 'Almsgiving was a classic means of atoning for sin, and the appeal to give alms for this reason is a commonplace in patristic literature of every period'.<sup>82</sup> While this redemptive function is indeed a common feature in many patristic texts, it is also stressed that not all sins could be forgiven through this method. Augustine in particular stresses that unchastity, idolatry and murder could only be atoned for through excommunication and penance. Almsgiving was, quite simply, not enough for these extreme sins.<sup>83</sup> Augustine expresses the opinion that almsgiving would have little effect unless one gave with the true intent to reform the actions for which one was

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<sup>79</sup> Ambrose, *Sermo* 85 (CCSL 14), p. 330; Augustine, *Sermo* 48, 8 (CCSL 41), p. 610; Augustine, *Sermo* 50, 4 (CCSL 41), p. 626; Augustine, *Sermo* 36, 9 (CCSL 41), p. 441. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 238-240.

<sup>80</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 251-255.

<sup>81</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, especially Ch. 5-6.

<sup>82</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 241-247 at p. 241.

<sup>83</sup> Augustine, *De fide et operibus* 19, 34 (CSEL 41), pp. 79-80. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 243.

seeking redemption.<sup>84</sup> It should be noted here, although Ramsey fails to do so, that Augustine's emphasis on the intentions behind true gifts of alms is on the giver's decision to give up his sin; he does not categorise proper intent as consisting of altruistic motivations of any sort. This implies that, by the fourth and fifth centuries, almsgiving had lost its connotation of providing for the poor out of pity or love, completing the linguistic shift noted by Garrison between the Old Testament texts and the homilies composed in the first and second centuries. Complementary to the idea that alms could cleanse away sin was the notion that alms may be used to prepare a place in heaven for the almsgiver. Maximus of Turin and Augustine both emphasise that when one gave alms to the poor it was like sending one's wealth directly to heaven, in effect exchanging the temporal for the eternal. Thus, that which makes one wealthy in life may be used to make one wealthy after death.<sup>85</sup>

The redemptive function of almsgiving was also emphasised in relation to other Christian duties, such as prayer and fasting. Augustine notes that the combination of these three acts comprised a complete Christian morality, with fasting cleansing the body, almsgiving representing good will and prayer signifying the rules of holy desire.<sup>86</sup> Ramsey notes that rarely are prayer and fasting discussed in relation to their impact on sin without mention of almsgiving as well.<sup>87</sup> The primacy of almsgiving over the other two is also discussed in *2 Clement*, which states that, as penance for sin, fasting is better than prayer but almsgiving is better than both.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 21, 22 (CCSL 48), pp. 786-787; Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, 21, 27 (CCSL 48), pp. 800-802; Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 19, 70 (CCSL 46), p. 87; Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 20, 75-77 (CCSL 46), pp. 89-92; Augustine, *Sermo* 9, 18 (CCSL 41), pp. 142-143. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 244.

<sup>85</sup> Augustine, *Sermo* 60, 7, 7 (PL 38), p. 405; Maximus of Turin, *Sermo* 96 (CCSL 23), p. 383. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 247-248.

<sup>86</sup> Augustine, *De perfectione iustitiae hominis* 8, 18 (CSEL 42), pp. 15-16. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 244.

<sup>87</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 244.

<sup>88</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 245.

Ramsey's analysis of these patristic texts demonstrates a wide range of ideas about the basic principles of almsgiving. Taken together they seem to represent a coherent and widespread understanding of the practice, yet it is important to remember that while almsgiving became a popular topic for discussion in the fourth and fifth centuries there was nothing like a canonical doctrine on the subject. In addition, like Garrison, Ramsey provides only a generalised definition of almsgiving, not taking into account the many possible guises of gifts of alms and assuming some homogeneity in the conceptions of the ideal and practice. His study represents only the most common and popular ideas regarding almsgiving during this period; it does not assess evidence for the reception of these ideas nor the practice of almsgiving itself, an area which has been void of scholarly attention until recently.

It is worth also briefly noting two recent, overlapping studies by Danuta Shanzer which in part note the patristic use of the Book of Tobit in developing ideas of almsgiving.<sup>89</sup> Shanzer observes that while Tobit emphasises the importance of giving alms in order to receive some type of spiritual benefit during one's life, patristic authors such as Cyprian and Jerome alter this injunction to stress that alms could affect the fate of one who had already died. She stresses particularly that Jerome played a crucial role in the promotion of post-mortem almsgiving as a means of relieving one's time in purgatory, an idea which was then picked up and popularised by Augustine in his *De civitate dei*.<sup>90</sup> Shanzer's research demonstrates an important step in the development of a general doctrine on almsgiving, indicating that a close study of individual authors, or indeed individual aspects of almsgiving, may reveal much about early attitudes to this practice.

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<sup>89</sup> Shanzer, 'Bible, Exegesis, Literature, and Society', pp. 130-157; Shanzer, 'Jerome, Tobit, Alms, and the *Vita Aeterna*', pp. 87-103.

<sup>90</sup> Shanzer, 'Bible, Exegesis, Literature, and Society', pp. 141-153; Shanzer, 'Jerome, Tobit, Alms, and the *Vita Aeterna*', pp. 90-102.

Richard Finn, in his masterful work entitled *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, builds on the foundations laid by Garrison and Ramsey, addressing not only the theological importance of almsgiving in the period 313-450, but also analysing the impact of these sources and the practice of almsgiving as far as they may be ascertained from the extant sources.<sup>91</sup> Although, like Ramsey, Finn focuses specifically on evidence from the fourth and fifth centuries, his analysis transcends these chronological boundaries, allowing one to perceive the impact of ideas of almsgiving both before and after these dates. His inclusion of works from both the western and eastern halves of the empire also add valuable depth to this discussion.

Like Ramsey, Finn begins with a generalised definition of almsgiving: '...the gift of money, food, or clothing to the very poor'.<sup>92</sup> He then discusses evidence for both the practice and promotion of almsgiving, examining the groups responsible for collecting and redistributing gifts of alms and questioning how this system functioned within different parts of the empire. In his discussion of episcopal almsgiving, Finn establishes that collections of alms were held regularly, even weekly, where all who attended the church were expected to contribute, making almsgiving an 'integral part of attending worship'.<sup>93</sup> The texts which encouraged such collections often used the imagery of the *gazophylacium* (treasury) as a means of envisioning spiritual savings, drawing on the biblical verses which emphasised the giving of alms in order to earn treasure in heaven. He does caution, however, that despite the ample evidence for the regular collection of alms, it is far less certain how often the people themselves actually gave alms in such a way. What may be determined with more conviction is that the alms collected in this manner were distributed by the bishops and divided, not necessarily evenly, to both voluntary

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<sup>91</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*.

<sup>92</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>93</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, p. 47.



and involuntary poor.<sup>94</sup> In addition to these general collections, in which the boundaries between tithing and almsgiving were often blurred beyond distinction, alms were also acquired through both imperial subventions and church properties, making 'episcopal almsgiving' the most common form of alms collection and distribution. As the bishop was the one responsible for managing the alms in this way, the act of distribution allowed the bishop to gain a sort of moral leadership through his actions, forming a bond of patronage between himself and the recipients of the alms.<sup>95</sup> Aside from the voluntary poor, the recipients of alms were primarily comprised of poorer virgins, widows and orphans who could be officially registered with the church as having a legitimate claim to alms. In addition to these groups, sick, elderly or impoverished Christians also were considered to be worthy recipients of alms, with whatever alms were left over being distributed among non-Christians.<sup>96</sup> Finn notes that this interest in formulating a hierarchy of those deserving of alms gifts indicates a concern, both theological and social, that alms were being given to appropriately needy recipients. The alms themselves were often given as staples, likely on a weekly basis and at major religious festivals, eventually being augmented by the distribution of alms at *xenodocheia* (guest-houses) or *ptochotropheia* (hostels) which began to be established during this period.<sup>97</sup>

In addition to the evidence for episcopal almsgiving, Finn also discusses the evidence for monastic and lay almsgiving. While it was a common topos in monastic *vitae* that those wishing to become monks should give up their own possessions as alms, the practice of monks acquiring alms for redistribution was more controversial. A fourth- or fifth-century letter, questionably ascribed to Basil, cautions that an anchorite should not accept alms for redistribution because it could

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<sup>94</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 34-47.

<sup>95</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 72.

<sup>96</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 67-74.

<sup>97</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 78-88.

expose the hermit to avarice.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, the *Life of Melania the Younger* relates a tale in which Melania and her husband attempted to give alms to an anchoritic monk who steadfastly refused to accept the money. When it became clear that Melania and her husband would not take back the alms, the monk threw the gold into the river rather than take it for himself.<sup>99</sup> Thus, Finn notes, monastic almsgiving appears to have existed in a strange middle ground where pious lay men, heeding the advice of the preachers and homilists, gave alms to monks in order to increase their piety but the monks themselves could not or would not redistribute those alms as intended. Yet there is also evidence that some monks were involved in the distribution of alms through institutions such as hospitals and *xenodocheia*. Monasteries themselves became important centres for the distribution of alms, especially in the eastern half of the empire. This institutionalised almsgiving complemented the system of episcopal almsgiving, with monasteries often acting as intermediaries between the donors and recipients of alms.<sup>100</sup>

Having noted previously that almsgiving by the laity was an integral part of Christian worship in the fourth and fifth centuries, Finn also discusses the evidence for individual gifts of alms directly to the poor. While sources only provide scanty information regarding this practice, the best evidence comes from accounts that the poor knew where to gather and where they could expect to receive alms. Most popular were entrances to churches, pilgrimage centres, *agapes* (meals to which the poor were invited) and hostels.<sup>101</sup> Finn argues that while the alms provided by the laity directly to the poor likely had an important impact on relieving the immediate effects of destitution, there was still considerable reluctance to give alms even among

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<sup>98</sup> Basil, *Epistula* 42, 3, in Y. Courtonne (ed.), *Saint Basile, Lettres*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1957), p. 104. Cited in Finn, *Almsgiving*, p. 93.

<sup>99</sup> Gerontius, *Vita melaniae iunioris*, ed. D. Gorce, *Vie de sainte Mélanie*, SC 90 (Paris, 1962), p. 198. Cited in Finn, *Almsgiving*, p. 94.

<sup>100</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 83, 95-99.

<sup>101</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 99-106.

those who were already committed to doing so. The sermons of John Chrysostom are revealing of a number of excuses for not giving to beggars in the street: they were too far from a money-changer, they had no servant present to ferry the alms to the beggar, the beggar had already received a church hand-out.<sup>102</sup> Finn argues that each of these examples may indicate that people were unwilling to give alms directly to the poor, preferring instead some type of ecclesiastical intermediary. Perhaps the most famous example of a reluctance to give alms is that recorded in an epistle of Jerome, regarding a Roman matron who stopped to give alms to beggars in the street. When an old woman returned to ask for a second coin, the matron responded to this temerity by punching her in the face. Jerome was not amused.<sup>103</sup> The incident serves as important evidence that the laity, when not regulated by some intermediary institution, sought to ensure that alms were only given in what they considered to be the proper way.

Just as the *vitae* promoted almsgiving as an act of monastic virtue, so too did the homiletic literature, apocryphal *Acta* and other hagiographic works promote almsgiving as a virtue to be practiced by all the Christian faithful. Finn assesses the large number of texts extant from the fourth and fifth centuries which in some way encourage the practice of almsgiving. He concludes that sermons were by far the most significant way of promoting almsgiving, providing a detailed summary of the most important authors from various geographic regions who consistently commented on the value of almsgiving: for example, Augustine from Roman North Africa; John Chrysostom from the Greek East; Chromatius, Peter Chrysologus and Leo from Italy; and Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria from Egypt. Finn is careful to note that while there are a large number of sermons which are extant today, 'we should not assume that either the complete corpus of extant sermons, or the extant

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<sup>102</sup> Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* 35.7 (PG 57), p. 412; Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 21.11 (PG 61), p. 372. Cited in Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>103</sup> Jerome, *Epistula* 22.32, in J. Labourt (ed.), *Saint Jérôme, Lettres*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1949), p. 147. Cited in Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 69-70 and Shanzer, 'Jerome, Tobit, Alms, and the *Vita Aeterna*', p. 97.

corpus of any one preacher, necessarily represent a typical sample of late antique sermons'.<sup>104</sup> While this caution is constructive, one may still perceive the widespread importance and promotion of almsgiving, even if the authors themselves do not always agree on the detail.

Finn also compares the Christian promotion of almsgiving with the tradition of pagan almsgiving, concluding that there are important distinctions between the two which develop in the fourth and fifth centuries. In comparing pagan almsgiving with the new Christian practice, he notes that the advent of Christian almsgiving did not entirely replace the previous system of Roman *euergetism*, it merely restructured the channels through which aid for the poor flowed. Christian almsgiving thus fundamentally changed the ways in which charity functioned in society.<sup>105</sup> He argues further that authors such as Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose of Milan, and Jerome utilised Classical discourses on *euergetism* in order to promote Christian almsgiving within this familiar framework.<sup>106</sup> Likewise, the textual promotion of Christian almsgiving was distinct from the pagan tradition. Finn argues that the sermons fulfilled the episcopal duty to shape the Christian identity of the laity, encouraging almsgiving as a specifically Christian, orthodox virtue. These texts were also more specific in identifying the proper recipients of alms, the times at which it was appropriate to give alms and, most importantly, how often one was to practice almsgiving, distinctions which were consistently downplayed if not ignored in the pagan texts on almsgiving.<sup>107</sup> Thus, Finn contends, just as the practice of almsgiving changed the way aid for the poor actually functioned in society, the textual promotion of almsgiving fundamentally altered the perceptions of the place of rich and poor within society and the place of almsgiving within this system.

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<sup>104</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 137-168 at p. 145.

<sup>105</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 110-115.

<sup>106</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 221-257.

<sup>107</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 171-173.

In light of the conclusions thus established, Finn argues that by the fourth century almsgiving had acquired a set of specific meanings which distinguished it from other practices. As stated above, one of these was the sense that almsgiving had an increasingly Christian connotation, linking the practice with the proper expression of one's Christian piety and generosity. In return for gifts of alms, the donors were promised a number of specifically Christian rewards, including winning God's favour and earning forgiveness of sins.<sup>108</sup> Thus the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving, as discussed by Roman Garrison, was increasingly well-developed in this period. The idea that one would be rewarded for gifts to the poor was also manifested in the relationship of gift exchange established between the donors and recipients of alms. Thus, the giving of alms by the rich and the subsequent prayers by the poor functioned as an exchange of gifts whereby both the rich and poor were accorded a new status and honour.<sup>109</sup>

Throughout this work Finn emphasises that in the fourth and fifth centuries Christian almsgiving occupied a new place in both the spiritual and social landscape, marking a distinct change from the previous Roman ideas of care for the poor. The conclusions surveyed here demonstrate that this study is an important advance in scholarship over the previous works, expanding and contextualising the works of both Garrison and Ramsey. While Finn's study is unquestionably comprehensive and he is careful to problematise the sources he utilises, he never truly addresses the complexities of establishing a definition of almsgiving itself. His characterisation of almsgiving as 'the gift of money, food or clothing to the very poor' is comparatively inadequate next to the multifarious practices and conceptions of almsgiving discussed throughout his corpus of sources.<sup>110</sup> Yet despite this small absence, the remainder of Finn's study is rich in detail and convincing in its

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<sup>108</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 177-179.

<sup>109</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 179-197, 205-214.

<sup>110</sup> Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 2-3.

arguments. He establishes that almsgiving itself fundamentally changed not only the ways in which aid was organised for those in need, but also changed the ways in which people thought about the practice of giving to the poor and what it meant to actually do so. In this way, Finn demonstrates that the advent of a widespread system of institutional and personal almsgiving, with its associated propaganda, was essential to understanding both lay piety and social attitudes to wealth and poverty and thus to better understanding society itself. The remainder of this section will assess the studies of almsgiving in England, beginning with the Anglo-Saxon period, in order to determine the extent to which the understanding of almsgiving is perceived to have changed since the fourth and fifth centuries.

#### *Studies in Almsgiving – Medieval England*

While the practice and promotion of almsgiving in the early Christian Church has been addressed in great detail by the authors discussed above, there is a distinct lack of similar scholarly attention for almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England. The only study which focuses significantly on almsgiving in this period is Eric Stanley's linguistic analysis of the social conscience of the Anglo-Saxons, borne out of a quest to determine whether there was any pre-Conquest social legislation.<sup>111</sup> In this study Stanley seeks to determine whether or not the Anglo-Saxons were motivated by emotions such as pity or compassion when engaging in charitable activities, emotions which modern societies recognise as being associated with giving to the poor. He defines his terms as such:

'Social conscience' involves the prosperous in a fellow-feeling for those less fortunate, a feeling that may almost amount to guilt: it is inequitable that wealth and happiness are not more evenly distributed throughout the land. 'Social awareness', as it affects the prosperous, is the consciousness

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<sup>111</sup> E. G. Stanley, 'Did the Anglo-Saxons Have a Social Conscience Like Us?', *Anglia: Zeitschrift fuer englische Philologie* 121.2 (2003), pp. 238-264.

that the more fortunate has at least noticed that there are problems of maldistribution of wealth and health and happiness.<sup>112</sup>

At first glance this is quite reminiscent of the Hebraic virtue of *ṣ̣e dāqâ*, or righteousness, discussed by Roman Garrison, in which compassion and social justice are the primary motivating factors in sharing one's wealth with the poor.<sup>113</sup> In Stanley's estimation, however, pity and an interest in equitable distribution of 'wealth and health and happiness' are the very definition of social consciousness. The emphasis is, of course, on the giver, motivated by guilt and shame to share his wealth with those in need. Stanley does not take into account the possibility that the unequal distribution of wealth may be seen in a positive light, something ordained by God himself, as demonstrated in the *Life of St Eligius*, discussed above. I shall return to this point shortly.

In the course of his discussion, Stanley relies on philological evidence, examining Anglo-Saxon homilies, laws and wills to investigate his question. He begins with an assessment of the *Thesaurus of Old English* entries for 'emotion', 'compassion' and 'pity', which lead to a discussion of Old English terms such as '*earnmheortnes*' (tender-heartedness), '*hreowlice*' (piteous), '*gemiltsian*' (to have compassion), and '*lissian*' (to be lenient toward, show kindness or mercy to).<sup>114</sup> In Stanley's reckoning, these terms and others like them, while stressing the desirability of compassion and mercy, do not describe the 'social conscience' he seeks. He thus questions whether this means that such a 'social conscience' did not exist at all:

...could it mean that because they had no term for it, they had no social conscience? There is no record in the *OED*, s. v. *social*, that English had the term 'social conscience' before the 1880s. Did the speakers of English not have a social conscience till they had a term for it? Surely not: it must go back. Whenever and wherever there is suffering, that suffering calls forth

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<sup>112</sup> Stanley, 'Social Conscience', pp. 241-242.

<sup>113</sup> Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving*, pp. 46-52.

<sup>114</sup> Stanley, 'Social Conscience', pp. 242-251. The definitions given here are taken from Stanley in this article. The Bosworth-Toller entries for these terms are significantly more nuanced.

compassion in those who have a social conscience, even if they have no term for it, and it is a recognizable fault in philologists to believe that a concept is lacking when there is no lexical evidence for it in the language under consideration.<sup>115</sup>

This seems, to me, to miss the point entirely. Stanley himself indicates that the term 'social conscience' did not appear before the late nineteenth-century, implying that this is a relatively modern value. As Ramsey, Garrison and Finn have all gone to great pains to establish, one must place values such as almsgiving within their proper cultural context. It matters less how *we* define almsgiving than how the Romans or the Anglo-Saxons or whatever social world we are studying saw the practice as functioning within their world.

As he acknowledges that the philological approach has borne little fruit, Stanley turns his attention to literary and documentary texts for evidence of actual provision for the poor. In doing so he shifts his focus to almsgiving, stating: 'Providing for the poor is close to almsgiving, acts of charity that are often inspired or motivated both by pity for the poor and, as much or more, by hope of eternal reward and by fear of eternal damnation'.<sup>116</sup> He substantiates this claim by listing a number of examples from homilies (Wulfstan's *Be cristendome* and Napier XLVI), wills (Oswulf and Beornthryth, S 1188/SEHD 1; Ælfgifu, S 1484/W 8) and law-codes (*VIII Æthelred* 6) which equate giving to the poor with some type of spiritual or physical reward.<sup>117</sup> In assessing the motivations of the Anglo-Saxons for giving to the poor, then, Stanley is entirely correct, as established by Ramsey, Garrison and Finn and as will be demonstrated throughout the course of this thesis.

Stanley summarises his analysis with this conclusion:

Provision for those in need is, as we have seen, a part of the generosity of the Anglo-Saxons...Perhaps, therefore, one might answer in the affirmative

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<sup>115</sup> Stanley, 'Social Conscience', p. 252.

<sup>116</sup> Stanley, 'Social Conscience', p. 254.

<sup>117</sup> Stanley, 'Social Conscience', pp. 255-263.



the first part of the question my title possesses: Did the Anglo-Saxons have a social conscience? Yet, they did. But my question goes on: Did they have a social conscience like us? I think not...I began by looking up *emotion* in the *Thesaurus of Old English*, and within that section, *compassion* and *pity* were considered, but *mercy* was excluded by me. Yet *Mercy* crept in uncalled, and worried me: how dare I think that I can understand the emotions, the affections, the sentiments of about a thousand years ago? The interrelationship of the constituent elements have changed over the years. The Anglo-Saxons seem not to have had our kind of social conscience, we seem to lack their sense of charity.<sup>118</sup>

This does, indeed, adequately sum up the evidence considered in this study. The article as a whole is pioneering in its stated goal of understanding the motivations and 'emotions' which prompted wealthy Anglo-Saxons to provide for the poor, especially so in relation to the analysis of almsgiving. Stanley has provided a valuable assessment of the Anglo-Saxon evidence for a desire to give to the poor, both in terminology and literary and documentary examples. Yet, what Stanley fails to take into account is that in the context of the development of almsgiving and the social values of the Anglo-Saxons, notions of 'charity' as we define it in the twentieth century are wholly irrelevant. As his conclusion implies, it is difficult to understand the emotions, affections and sentiments of a society so far removed from our own; but, as the following chapters of this thesis will show, with the proper contextual analysis, this understanding may not be entirely beyond our reach. His anachronistic approach to this topic, while valuable in its own way, underscores the need to provide a new, in-depth study which assesses the evidence for almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England within the context of Anglo-Saxon practices and values.

In addition to Stanley's assessment of Anglo-Saxon almsgiving, Virginia Cole, in her unpublished PhD thesis, addresses this topic in the context of a larger study on the role of almsgiving in the construction and administration of English kingship.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Stanley, 'Social Conscience', pp. 263-264.

<sup>119</sup> V. A. Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving in Medieval England: A Study in the Ritual and Administrative Construction of Kingship' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Binghamton University, 2002).

While Cole focuses primarily on the increasing ritualisation of royal almsgiving between the reigns of Henry I and Edward I, she provides a lengthy introduction to the history of almsgiving prior to Henry I. In this introductory section she surveys the patristic conceptions of almsgiving as well as the depictions of almsgiving as a kingly virtue in Anglo-Saxon texts. Utilising historical texts such as Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*, Alcuin's letters, and royal *vitae*, Cole establishes that kings were frequently praised in these texts for their generosity in almsgiving, indicating that the practice itself was considered to be a central tenet of good kingship in Anglo-Saxon England. One of these examples, discussed earlier in this chapter, is Bede's relation of the story in which King Oswald of Northumbria commands excess food to be distributed to the gathered poor during an Easter feast.<sup>120</sup> Cole argues that in stories such as this the authors stress acts of generosity and almsgiving in order to strengthen a king's reputation as a good and pious leader.<sup>121</sup> The purpose of these introductory chapters is to set the stage for Cole's more extended treatment of post-Conquest almsgiving, and thus her treatment of Anglo-Saxon almsgiving provides only a general overview of the concept. She does not, for example, search for evidence of almsgiving outside of literary sources, as the Anglo-Saxon practice of almsgiving is not the focus of her thesis. Regardless, Cole provides an excellent general introduction to the early medieval ideas of almsgiving and their relation to kingship, demonstrating that this is indeed a worthy and important topic of study.

In post-Conquest England almsgiving became more ritualised and institutionalised, giving rise to two complementary areas of study. Studies of almsgiving in this period are more popular amongst scholars and although no sustained study on almsgiving in the post-Conquest period exists, these works demonstrate its integration into other societal systems. The first of these is the role of the English hospital in collecting, organising and distributing alms. The recent work of Sethina

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<sup>120</sup> *HE*, iii.6.

<sup>121</sup> See especially Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', Chapters 3-4.

Watson, for example, has demonstrated that the rise of the English hospital in the eleventh and twelfth centuries created a new institutional structure through which alms for the poor were collected and distributed.<sup>122</sup> This new system subsumed any regulation of alms practice and distribution in Anglo-Saxon England.

In addition to works on the proliferation of hospitals in the later middle ages, the topic of royal almsgiving in later medieval England has been of notable interest to scholars in the past, likely due in large part to the amount of evidence available for the practice in the form of royal household accounts. In the remainder of her study on almsgiving and the construction of kingship, Virginia Cole makes great use of these sources, arguing that in the Anglo-Norman period kings increasingly valued ritualised distributions of alms in order to establish their identities as good kings. Although Henry I was the first king to have a royal official publically described as an almoner, there is no record of ritualised almsgiving extant from his reign. Cole argues that this is likely to be attributed to Henry's general lack of interest in royal ceremony and ritual.<sup>123</sup> Queen Margaret, on the other hand, is recorded as being very attentive to the needs of the poor as well as to the good reputation to be gained for her husband through acts of almsgiving in his name. It was Margaret who established rituals of almsgiving for herself and the king which were duly recorded in the queen's *vita*, enhancing the pious reputation of both king and queen.<sup>124</sup> Cole also suggests that royal almsgiving on this scale may have been influenced by increasing emphasis on the distribution of alms from monasteries and the associated establishment of monastic almoners.<sup>125</sup> Such ritualised almsgiving was subsequently

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<sup>122</sup> S. Watson, 'The Origins of the English Hospital', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 6<sup>th</sup> ser. 16 (2006), pp. 75-94. For more on the role of the later medieval English hospital in providing charity and gifts of alms, see M. Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1987); N. Orme and M. Webster, *The English Hospital, 1070-1570* (New Haven, CT, 1995); C. Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul: The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital* (Stroud, 1999); S. Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England: Gift-Giving and the Spiritual Economy* (Dublin, 2004).

<sup>123</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 150-159.

<sup>124</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 159-163.

<sup>125</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 167-171.

practiced and increased by successive kings, as in the establishment of multiple almoners under Henry II and the introduction of royal alms as penance for the king's sins under John.<sup>126</sup> Records of the ceremony known as the royal maundy (the re-enactment of the washing of feet at the Last Supper) also appear for the first time during John's reign, although Cole allows that such practices may have occurred under previous kings and had escaped enshrinement in the written record.<sup>127</sup> Nonetheless, whether or not John invented the maundy as a specifically royal practice, Cole argues that it became an important tradition among subsequent kings which enhanced their reputations of royal piety.

It is the reign of Henry III for which there is the most evidence of ritualised royal almsgiving, and in this Cole's research may be complemented by that of Sally Dixon-Smith. Dixon-Smith also approaches the topic of royal almsgiving through the evidence of royal household accounts, focusing specifically on Henry III.<sup>128</sup> Both Cole and Dixon-Smith emphasise Henry's use of almsgiving in order to manipulate his image as a pious king, taking advantage of opportunities for royal displays of piety in ritualised actions as well as decorating his palaces and castles with images of almsgiving.<sup>129</sup> Cole analyses Henry's actions in continuing the maundy, establishing feasts for the poor and expanding the scope of the almoner's duties, arguing that the increase in royal almsgiving was evidence that the king wished to enhance his reputation as a pious king through these actions.<sup>130</sup> Dixon-Smith reaches similar conclusions, arguing that Henry utilised the ritual of feeding the poor at feasts in order to enhance his piety and project an image of good kingship. She also asserts

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<sup>126</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 190-206, 217-220.

<sup>127</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 224-243.

<sup>128</sup> S. Dixon-Smith, 'The Image and Reality of Alms-Giving in the Great Halls of Henry III', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 152 (1999), pp. 79-96; S. Dixon-Smith, 'Feeding the Poor to Commemorate the Dead: the pro anima almsgiving of Henry III of England, 1227-1270' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of London, 2003).

<sup>129</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 249-273; Dixon-Smith, 'Image and Reality', pp. 79-96.

<sup>130</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 259-300.

that the use of ritualised *pro anima* almsgiving, in which the distribution of alms to the poor was used in acts of commemoration for the dead, served to unite both the living and the dead, creating a spiritual community in which all were linked with Christ. Dixon-Smith argues further that Henry established feasts for the poor in order to participate in this spiritual community, ultimately enhancing his reputation as a good and pious king.<sup>131</sup> The work of both Cole and Dixon-Smith demonstrates that by the twelfth century the practice of royal almsgiving had become highly stylised and formulaic.

The final example of royal almsgiving discussed by Cole is that of Edward I, who, she argues, systematised the practices of almsgiving established by his father, Henry III. The unprecedentedly detailed records extant for the reign of Edward allow one to see that royal almsgiving had become an important and highly ritualised practice with numerous applications.<sup>132</sup> In addition to Cole's analysis, Arnold Taylor has also provided a comprehensive account of the alms payments and oblations attributed to Edward I.<sup>133</sup> Although Taylor's discussion is lacking in analytical detail, relying mainly on a tabulation of the dates, occasions, amounts and recipients, the information he presents from Edward's household accounts makes it clear that gifts of alms comprised a notable portion of the king's expenses, a conclusion with which Cole concurs.

The studies described in this section demonstrate that between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries the royal practice of almsgiving changed dramatically, becoming increasingly ritualised and specific. Yet throughout this period the distributions of alms organised by the kings in question consistently function in a way which emphasises the piety of the king and thus inextricably ties almsgiving

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<sup>131</sup> Dixon-Smith, 'Feeding the Poor', esp. pp. 68-116.

<sup>132</sup> Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 302-375, esp. pp. 314-317, 321-326.

<sup>133</sup> A. Taylor, 'Royal Alms and Oblations in the later 13<sup>th</sup> Century: An Analysis of the Alms Roll of 12 Edward I (1283-4)', in F. Emmison and R. Stephens (eds.), *Tribute to an Antiquary: Essays Presented to Marc Fitch by Some of His Friends* (London, 1976), pp. 93-125.

with the construction of 'good kingship'. This reveals not only the importance of almsgiving as a means of establishing royal identity, but also highlights the dramatic changes in the practice of almsgiving itself between the practices detailed by Richard Finn and those assessed by Virginia Cole and Arnold Taylor. However, the emphasis on royal almsgiving in these studies obscures the importance of almsgiving by monks, clergymen or members of the laity – it was not only kings who could enhance their reputations by generosity with almsgiving. For all of these reasons, it is clear that a study of almsgiving in the Anglo-Saxon period is crucial to our understanding of the ways in which the practice and conception of almsgiving developed and changed between the late antique and high medieval periods.

Each of these studies discussed here has shown not only that almsgiving was an important part of Christian devotional practice, but also that understanding how and why almsgiving was practiced in a society sheds important light on certain aspects of that society: social conscience, the construction of kingship, religious observation and Christian identity, just to name a few. The study of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England presented in this thesis fills an important chronological gap in the literature; more significantly, it provides valuable insight into the religious beliefs and practices of the Anglo-Saxon laity and demonstrates how these transcend boundaries to inform other, secular aspects of society. It illuminates the ubiquity of almsgiving and establishes that understanding the Anglo-Saxon conception of almsgiving is a vital key to understanding the cultural world of late Anglo-Saxon England as well as the place of almsgiving within early medieval Christianity.

### *Secular Display of Wealth*

The previous analysis has demonstrated not only the necessity of a new study in Anglo-Saxon almsgiving, but also the importance of placing such a study within an appropriate social and religious framework. I have already discussed the contextual information for wealth and poverty in the late antique and early medieval periods.

It is also necessary to establish a wider economic and anthropological framework which will allow for a more nuanced understanding of the practice and conception of almsgiving. Only by viewing almsgiving as part of a much larger social and religious whole can we truly understand what it meant to give alms in late Anglo-Saxon society.

In order to understand how the Anglo-Saxons valued and utilised their wealth, and thus with what they were able to give alms, it is first necessary to gain some perspective on the amount and type of wealth available in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Numismatic studies have demonstrated that there was a significant amount of coinage in circulation throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. That considerable commercial transactions were also taking place between Anglo-Saxon kingdoms is evidenced by the wide distribution of Northumbrian 'stycas' and southern pennies throughout Britain.<sup>134</sup> Additional evidence indicates that some of the coinage came from the continent, signifying some level of long-distance trade links.<sup>135</sup> The lack of foreign coinage found in England during the eleventh century, despite the continued evidence of trade links, indicates that Anglo-Saxon kings exerted their considerable authority in having foreign coins re-minted in royal mints in order to circulate and regulate legitimate currency. This numismatic evidence not only indicates an increase in royal authority between the ninth and eleventh centuries, it also signifies an increasing amount of wealth in circulation which is

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<sup>134</sup> D. A. Hinton, *Gold and Gilt, Pots and Pins: Possessions and People in Medieval Britain* (Oxford, 2005), p. 107, 115; D. M. Metcalf, 'The Monetary Economy of Ninth-Century England South of the Humber: a Topographical Analysis', in M. A. S. Blackburn and D. N. Dumville (eds.), *Kings, Currency and Alliances: History and Coinage of Southern England in the Ninth Century* (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 182.

<sup>135</sup> Metcalf, 'Monetary Economy', pp. 175-177, 188-195. For more on Anglo-Saxon coinage, see especially P. Grierson, 'The Volume of the Anglo-Saxon Coinage', *Economic History Review*, New Series 20 (1967), p. 153-160; D. M. Metcalf, 'How Large Was the Anglo-Saxon Currency?', *Economic History Review*, New Series 18 (1965), pp. 475-482 and the debate between Metcalf and Grierson in *The Numismatic Circular* vols. 71 and 72. See also D. M. Metcalf, 'Continuity and Change in English Monetary History', *British Numismatic Journal* 50 (1980), 20-49 and 51 (1982), 52-90; M. Blackburn (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Monetary History: Essays in Memory of Michael Dolley*, (Leicester, 1986); A. Gannon, *The Iconography of Early Anglo-Saxon Coinage: Sixth to Eighth Centuries* (Oxford, 2003).

confirmed by the evidence of monetary values in Domesday Book and taxation of the peasantry and the aristocracy both before and after the Conquest.<sup>136</sup>

In addition to coinage, wealth may also be measured by the possession of valuable moveable goods or land. Evidence for the former is most clearly seen in the records of donations to churches or monasteries, recorded primarily in wills and monastic chronicles. The *Liber eliensis*, for example, contains eleventh- and twelfth-century inventories of gifts donated to the monastery by wealthy Anglo-Saxon patrons. The entry entitled 'What items from the treasury of the church there were found to be after the death of Abbot Theodwine' and dated 1075 x 1081 lists these objects amongst many others: 19 large crosses, 8 albs, 15 stoles with maniples with gold, 2 pendant-strips with gold, 15 chasubles with gold, 2 stoles with silver embroidery and 6 maniples with silver embroidery, 4 tapestries, 3 altars with silver, 13 reliquaries with silver and gold and 2 caskets with silver.<sup>137</sup> This evidence is supplemented by the astonishing largesse displayed in artefacts ranging from jewellery to textiles to paintings and carvings, catalogued and assessed by Dodwell in his brilliant study.<sup>138</sup> In addition, evidence for the widespread possession and use of decorative silks in late Anglo-Saxon England, recently discussed by Robin Fleming, demonstrates an impressive amount of wealth available to acquire such rare fabrics.<sup>139</sup> When these artefacts and textiles were destroyed after the Norman Conquest in order to make use of their precious metals and jewels, they netted healthy profits. A cross donated to New Minster, Winchester by Edward the Confessor and his wife Edith was melted down in 1141 to reveal fifty pounds of

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<sup>136</sup> P. H. Sawyer, 'The Wealth of England in the Eleventh Century', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5<sup>th</sup> Series, 15 (1965), pp. 148, 153, 155, 163-4.

<sup>137</sup> *LE*, ii.114. Cf. R. Fleming, 'Acquiring, Flaunting and Destroying Silk in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *Early Medieval Europe* 15.2 (2007), pp. 139-143.

<sup>138</sup> C. R. Dodwell, *Anglo-Saxon Art: A New Perspective* (Manchester, 1982).

<sup>139</sup> Fleming, 'Acquiring, Flaunting and Destroying Silk', pp. 127-158.



silver and thirty marks of gold.<sup>140</sup> Likewise, two chasubles given by Archbishop Lanfranc to the community of Christchurch, Canterbury, when burned for their gold thread and jewels, were found to be worth £138 12s.<sup>141</sup>

There is also a great deal of evidence that the possession of land was considered to be an important aspect of one's personal wealth in late Anglo-Saxon England. In a landmark study published by Robin Fleming, the landed wealth of Harold Godwineson and his relations was shown to be of greater value than that of the king. According to the entries in Domesday Book, Fleming calculated that the king's estates were worth approximately £5,950 as compared to the combined Godwineson value of £7,500, a figure she argues was likely closer to £8,400 before the fall of Tostig in 1065.<sup>142</sup> These numbers have recently been reassessed by Stephen Baxter, who argues that the Godwineson holdings are more accurately valued at £5,599 and those of Edward the Confessor at £8,089. He states additionally that the land belonging to the Leofwinesons may also be valued at £2,859.<sup>143</sup> Baxter's arguments are convincing, but the import of these findings for the current discussion lies in the symbolic significance of the figures themselves. Fleming's argument, based on her findings the Godwinesons held significantly more land than the king, was that the discrepancy in these numbers symbolised the inherent weaknesses of Edward's reign.<sup>144</sup> Even if her data were flawed, the import of this conclusion is that land

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<sup>140</sup> M. F. Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 7 (Woodbridge, 2007), p. 165-166.

<sup>141</sup> Fleming, 'Acquiring, Flaunting and Destroying Silk', p. 142, n. 67. Cf. M. F. Smith, R. Fleming and P. Halpin, 'Court and Piety in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *The Catholic Historical Review* 87 (2001), p. 586.

<sup>142</sup> R. Fleming, 'Domesday Estates of the King and the Godwines: A Study in Late Saxon Politics', *Speculum* 58.4 (1983), pp. 987-1007; R. Fleming, *Kings and Lords in Conquest England* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 70-71.

<sup>143</sup> S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 128-138 with table on p. 129. For more on the Leofwinesons, see *Ibid.*, pp. 125-151.

<sup>144</sup> Fleming, *Kings and Lords*, p. 102-103.

equalled wealth and thus power, and both earls and kings in late Anglo-Saxon England had a lot of both.

The sources mentioned here give only a small glimpse into the amount of wealth available in late Anglo-Saxon England. The records from which this has been deduced indicate that a substantial amount of this wealth was given to churches for a variety of reasons, some of which will be discussed in the following chapters.<sup>145</sup> The motivation for these gifts may be attributed in part to the biblical injunctions discussed previously that one should give away one's wealth in order to imitate Christ. Some of this was done in the form of almsgiving, as the remainder of this thesis will show. Yet in addition to serving economic and religious purposes, the distribution of wealth may also be seen to uphold important social values.

Archaeological and literary evidence indicates that the secular display of wealth was very important for both royalty and nobility. In the late antique period, the display of wealth could be used to indicate one's social status, one form of which may be seen in the practice of treasure-giving discussed previously. In addition a person's status could be demonstrated through the means of furnished burials such as the impressively furnished grave of the Merovingian king Childeric and the elaborate ship burial at Sutton Hoo.<sup>146</sup> As noted above, conspicuous furnished burials such as these had effectively ceased by the eighth century, likely in part because of the increasing acceptance of Christian practices of unfurnished burial. The spread of Christianity in the seventh and eighth centuries as well as the Carolingian reforms enacted in the ninth centuries seem to have been manifested partly in the way in

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<sup>145</sup> For a succinct overview of the amount and types of wealth given to churches by the late Anglo-Saxon laity, see Giandrea, *Episcopal Culture*, pp. 156-169.

<sup>146</sup> T. Reuter, "'You Can't Take it with You': Testaments, Hoards and Moveable Wealth in Europe, 600-1100', in E. M. Tyler (ed.), *Treasure in the Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 13-14. See also J. C. Crick, 'Posthumous Obligation and Family Identity', in W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London, 2000), p. 197. For a discussion of the relationship between wealth and status in burial sites, see E. James, 'Burial and Status in the Early Medieval West', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series 39 (1989), pp. 23-40, esp. p. 35-39.

which wealthy people demonstrated their status through the distribution of their treasures: instead of conspicuously 'destroying' the wealth in furnished burials, secular elites increasingly donated their wealth to the Church in exchange for religious benefits, not least of which included the salvation of their souls.<sup>147</sup>

Extravagant garments, such as the silks discussed by Robin Fleming in her recent article, were an important part of this conspicuous display, functioning primarily as a way of expressing one's power and social status.<sup>148</sup> This was not confined to the realms of visual display through clothing and textiles. Rich men and women in the eleventh century also sought to demonstrate their status and wealth through the conspicuous consumption of an increasingly elaborate menu, through the increased production and sale of wool, grains and pottery and through the endowment of proprietary churches.<sup>149</sup> It is clear that these men and women were concerned with using this display of wealth in order to visually demonstrate their greatness.<sup>150</sup>

Distributing wealth during life, rather than after death, therefore reinforced one's social status, essentially demonstrating that one was 'politically alive'.<sup>151</sup>

The conspicuous display of wealth as a means of demonstrating one's social power may also be seen in the literary evidence of the eleventh century. A particularly vivid example of this is the *Vita ædwardi regis*. As Elizabeth Tyler has argued, there is a great emphasis in the *Vita* on conspicuous display in order to construct the identity

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<sup>147</sup> Reuter, 'Testaments, Hoards and Moveable Wealth', p. 14.

<sup>148</sup> Fleming, 'Acquiring, Flaunting and Destroying Silk', pp. 127-158. Cf. R. Fleming, 'The New Wealth, The New Rich and the New Political Style in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in J. Gillingham (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies: XXIII*, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2000 (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 9-11 and R. Fleming, 'Lords and Labour', in W. Davies (ed.), *From the Vikings to the Normans, 800-1100* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 122-126.

<sup>149</sup> Fleming, 'New Wealth', pp. 1-22; Fleming, 'Lords and Labour', pp. 121-132.

<sup>150</sup> Reuter, 'Testaments, Hoards and Moveable Wealth', pp. 16, 23; Hinton, *Gold and Gilt*, p. 114.

<sup>151</sup> Reuter, 'Testaments, Hoards and Moveable Wealth', p. 15. Cf. P. Grierson, 'Commerce in the Dark Ages: A Critique of the Evidence', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 9 (1959), p. 137.

of Edward the Confessor as a pious yet authoritative king.<sup>152</sup> While Tyler highlights the importance of secular gift-giving in establishing one's political identity, she also notes that showing one's wealth too conspicuously or ostentatiously could give the impression that one regarded worldly wealth too highly.<sup>153</sup> The author of the *Vita* strikes a balance between these two extremes by placing Edward's extravagant sartorial choices in an ecclesiastical context rather than a secular one, stating that Edward only wore his most flamboyant clothes in church. In case this behaviour might still attract criticism, the author further deflects the blame from Edward by placing the responsibility for the wardrobe on Queen Edith. The result is that Edward emerges as a king who displays his wealth in the appropriate manner and context, emphasising both his piety and royal status. The author of the *Vita* further seeks to justify Edward's material wealth through oblique references to the Old Testament king Solomon, who was known for choosing wisdom over worldly wealth and was thus rewarded with both.<sup>154</sup> In referencing Solomon, the anonymous author invites a comparison between Edward and Solomon in the former's attitude toward wealth, further enhancing Edward's piety by emphasising the distribution of his wealth as alms elsewhere in the *Vita*.

The emphasis on conspicuous display and dispersal of wealth in order to enhance one's piety, as demonstrated by the author of the *Vita ædwardi regis*, highlights a final theme in this discussion: conspicuous piety. While it was important for wealthy men to be seen acquiring and possessing wealth, it was equally important for them to be seen giving it away, especially to the church. By the Norman Conquest this was a regular theme appearing in a number of biographical accounts of high-ranking

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<sup>152</sup> E. M. Tyler, "'When Wings Incarnadine with Gold are Spread': The *Vita Ædwardi Regis* and the Display of Treasure at the Court of Edward the Confessor', in E. M. Tyler (ed.), *Treasure in the Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 83-107, esp. pp. 99-102.

<sup>153</sup> Tyler, 'The *Vita Ædwardi Regis*', pp. 87-90, 104-5. See also Godden, 'Money, Power and Morality', p. 50.

<sup>154</sup> Tyler, 'The *Vita Ædwardi Regis*', pp. 86-87, 104, 105-106. See also I Kings 3: 1-14, II Chronicles 1: 1-13.

laymen. The Old English *Vision of Earl Leofric*, for example, like the *Vita ædwardi*, heavily emphasises the piety of its subject, in this instance by recounting a series of visions experienced by Earl Leofric of Mercia as a reward for the strength of his devotion.<sup>155</sup> As Stephen Baxter has argued in his analysis of the earls of Mercia, such displays of piety were calculated to help enhance the reputation and thus assure the position of men in the distinctly insecure political climate of the mid eleventh century.<sup>156</sup> Baxter also stresses the importance of lay patronage of religious institutions in securing one's position and displaying one's piety, a trend which is observable throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. The tenth-century Benedictine Reform offered considerable opportunity for lay patrons to found and make donations of land to new monasteries which conformed to the ideals of this movement. The foundation of monasteries and the building of proprietary churches served as a monument to the founders' piety and also testified to their social status.<sup>157</sup> In this way the establishment of churches and monasteries offered the opportunity to conspicuously display both one's wealth and one's piety. Donations of land in particular also served the purpose of creating social ties with the monastic recipients, establishing what has been termed a 'web of relationships' linking families with religious institutions.<sup>158</sup>

The desire to conspicuously demonstrate one's piety may also be seen in gifts of moveable wealth to churches, mentioned previously. Jewelled crosses, elaborately

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<sup>155</sup> Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 1-4. Cf. A. S. Napier, 'An Old English Vision of Leofric, Earl of Mercia', *Transactions of the Philological Society* 26 (1907-1910), pp. 180-188.

<sup>156</sup> Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 152-203.

<sup>157</sup> Fleming, 'Lords and Labour', pp. 133-134. Cf. Smith, Fleming and Halpin, 'Court and Piety', pp. 579-583.

<sup>158</sup> J. Nightingale, *Monasteries and Patrons in the Gorze Reform: Lotharingia c. 850-1000* (Oxford, 2001), p. 5. Cf. T. Charles-Edwards, 'The Distinction between Land and Moveable Wealth in Anglo-Saxon England', in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976), p. 180; Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 152-203. For similar themes on the Continent, see especially B. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of St Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Prosperity, 909-1049* (Ithaca, NY, 1989); S. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio parentum in Western France, 1050-1150* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988).

decorated vestments and finely illuminated manuscripts such as those recorded in the post-Conquest inventories of the *Liber Eliensis* demonstrate the extent of gifts to monasteries in the Anglo-Saxon period.<sup>159</sup> The circumstances in which these gifts were given were not often recorded, but some accounts do survive when donations were given in unusual situations. In the 870s, Alfred, ealdorman of Surrey, and his wife ransomed a gold-ornamented gospel-book, which had been stolen by a party of vikings, and returned the manuscript to Canterbury. The inscription added to the book upon its return relates the role of Alfred and his wife in the return of the book, providing valuable historical evidence for the events surrounding this donation and placing particular emphasis on the piety of Alfred and his wife.<sup>160</sup>

One of the most fruitful sources of information regarding pious gifts to religious institutions are the Anglo-Saxon wills, a body of evidence which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four. For now it is sufficient to provide one particularly telling example. The will of Æthelgifu, dating from the second half of the tenth century, includes bequests of thirty mancuses of gold, two silver cups, two horns, one book and 'the best wall-hanging' (*betste setrægl*) to the Abbey of St Albans.<sup>161</sup> These gifts form only a small portion of the bequests from Æthelgifu's estate, yet they serve as potent testimony to both Æthelgifu's wealth and her desire to use that wealth in order to augment her pious reputation after her death.

Examples such as these demonstrate not only that it was important to give away one's wealth to the poor and the church but that it was equally desirable to do so in a way which conspicuously demonstrated one's piety and participation in the Christian rhetoric of wealth distribution. It remains in the final section of this

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<sup>159</sup> See Smith, Fleming and Halpin, 'Court and Piety', pp. 569-602.

<sup>160</sup> Hinton, *Gold and Gilt*, p. 129.

<sup>161</sup> Crick, *St Albans*, no. 7; D. Whitelock, N. Ker and Lord Rennell (eds.), *The Will of Æthelgifu: A Tenth-Century Anglo-Saxon Manuscript* (Oxford, 1968).

chapter to examine gift giving as an anthropological concept in order to determine how gifts were seen to function in the Anglo-Saxon world.

### *Gift-Exchange*

The idea that one must give a portion of one's wealth to the poor, and could expect in return to receive intercessory prayers and atonement for sins, indicates that almsgiving operated within an anthropological framework of reciprocal gift-exchange. Many studies over the past century have sought to present coherent models of the function of gift-exchange within given societies. This field has been particularly fruitful in discussing medieval societies, especially those operating in pre-monetary economic systems primarily dependent on barter and trade. This section presents a survey of the concepts of gift-exchange most applicable to Anglo-Saxon England, demonstrating that ideas of gift-exchange permeated both secular and religious aspects of Anglo-Saxon culture. This in turn establishes an important anthropological framework within which the practice of almsgiving may be more clearly understood.

Perhaps the most influential study to discuss the function of gift-exchange within given societies was Marcel Mauss's pioneering work, *'Essai sur le don'*, first published in 1924.<sup>162</sup> In this study Mauss sought to explain the nature of the gift in 'primitive' and 'archaic' societies, questioning the purpose behind what he perceived as the obligation to reciprocate a gift which had been given. He argued that in archaic societies such as medieval Scandinavia, the gift was seen to have a spiritual power, or *hau* which would be passed on to the recipient. The recipient would then be under an obligation to give a return gift of a value equal to or greater than that of the original gift in order to return the *hau* to the original giver. Each gift disrupted the

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<sup>162</sup> M. Mauss, 'Essai sur le Don: Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques', *L'Année Sociologique* 1 (1923-1924), 30-186; repr. in English as M. Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. by W. D. Halls with forward by M. Douglas (London, 1990). All citations hereafter refer to the English translation.

balance of the *hau*, necessitating an infinite cycle of gift-exchange in an attempt to maintain spiritual equilibrium.<sup>163</sup> In this way, gifts which may seem to be voluntary actually represented a social necessity, incurring an obligation of reciprocity upon the donee.

Mauss also observed this obligatory gift-exchange in the rituals of potlatch practiced by north-western Native American Tlingit and Haida tribes, West Alaskan Eskimos and the Koryak and Chukchee tribes of north-west Siberia. The potlatch ceremony involved a ritual destruction of gifts which not only established dominance in a tribal hierarchy, but also demonstrated one had enough wealth that he might dispose of it and not suffer loss. More importantly, this destruction observed the cycle of reciprocal obligation in returning material gifts to their original owners: gods, spirits of the dead, animals and natural objects. This ritual of returning wealth to its original owners also serves the purpose of ensuring that these owners will be generous to them again in the future, thereby ensuring future prosperity and invoking a type of '*do ut des*' sense of reciprocity.<sup>164</sup> A similar practice was also encouraged in the *Sura*, given to Mohammad at Mecca, which states that a man must return a portion of his possessions to Allah so that Allah may reward him in return.<sup>165</sup> While each of these cultures differ drastically from one another, each shares a central belief in the reciprocity of gifts: a gift given demands a return, forming an unbreakable bond between one man and another or between a man and his god.<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>164</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 13-15.

<sup>165</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>166</sup> This differs inherently from the notion of the aneconomic gift later proposed by Jacques Derrida. He argues that a gift must operate outside of a circle of economic exchange: it must be given without any hope or expectation of reward in order to truly be considered a gift. J. Derrida, *Given Time: I. Counterfeit Money*, trans. P. Kamuf (Chicago, IL, 1992).



Since the publication of this essay, many other anthropologists and historians have used Mauss's research as a starting point for assessing practices of gift-exchange in other cultures.<sup>167</sup> Unfortunately, no such study exists for the practices of gift-exchange in Anglo-Saxon England. It is not the purpose of this thesis to fill this lacuna, however it is useful here to provide a few examples of the practices of gift-exchange in Anglo-Saxon England in order to demonstrate how deeply embedded these practices were in the collective consciousness of the people. This in turn will provide a valuable framework in which one can better understand the practice of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

One such practice is that of *heregeatu* or 'heriot', ultimately inherited from the early medieval Germanic tradition of warrior-lords distributing weapons and war gear to retainers when they joined the lord's service.<sup>168</sup> This gift of war gear not only symbolised the leader's ability to provide for his followers, it also initiated a relationship of gift-exchange whereby the retainer gave his service and loyalty in exchange for the heriot. This cycle of exchange only lasted the length of the retainer's lifetime, as his war gear would be buried with him upon his death. This essentially depleted the resources available for the king to give to other retainers and necessitated continuous warfare in order to accumulate more wealth. With the

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<sup>167</sup> For studies of gift-exchange in early medieval Europe, see especially Grierson, 'Commerce in the Dark Ages', pp. 123-140; A. Gurevich, 'Wealth and Gift-Bestowal among the Ancient Scandinavians', in A. Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, ed. by J. Howlett (Chicago, IL, 1992), pp. 126-138; W. I. Miller, 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid: Case Studies in the Negotiation and Classification of Exchange in Medieval Iceland', *Speculum* 61 (1986), pp. 18-50; W. I. Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago, IL, 1990); F. Curta, 'Merovingian and Carolingian Gift Giving', *Speculum* 81.3 (2006), pp. 671-699; I. F. Silber, 'Gift-Giving in the Great Traditions: The Case of Donations to Monasteries in the Medieval West', *Archives européennes de sociologie* 36 (1995), pp. 209-243. For other notable studies of gift-exchange see M. Strathern, *The Gender of the Gift: Problems with Women and Problems with Society in Melanesia* (Berkeley, CA, 1988); M. Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. by N. Scott (Chicago, IL, 1999); B. Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea* (London, 1922); A. B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving* (Berkeley, CA, 1992).

<sup>168</sup> Cf. L. Hedeager, 'The Creation of Germanic Identity: A European Origin-Myth', in P. Brun, S. van der Leeuw and C. R. Whittaker (eds.), *Frontières d'Empire: Nature et signification des frontières romaines : Actes de la Table Ronde Internationale de Nemours, 21-22-23 mai 1992* (Nemours, 1992), p. 122.

increasing emphasis on unfurnished burials which accompanied the spread of Christianity, the heriot was increasingly returned to the lord upon a retainer's death, allowing the cycle of gift-exchange to continue indefinitely.<sup>169</sup> By the later Anglo-Saxon period the practice of returning one's heriot had become fossilised into a legal requirement whereby the amount of heriot owed to a king was calculated according to his social status. This practice is evidenced mainly in Anglo-Saxon wills, a number of which detail the bequest of heriot or its equivalent to the testator's lord, and law codes such as *II Cnut* 71.<sup>170</sup>

In addition to the re-distribution of heriot, warrior-kings also engaged in relationships of gift-exchange through the distribution of tribute to their followers in return for their services in battle. These gifts from the spoils of war secured the loyalty of retainers, effectively defining and reinforcing the social and political hierarchy.<sup>171</sup> The need to acquire wealth which could later be bestowed as tribute acted as a catalyst for kings to establish overkingship in relation to weaker political powers, helping to further define social and political boundaries.<sup>172</sup> The process of taking wealth from a subjugated population symbolised both the destruction and dispersal of the enemy's power as well as enhancing the military reputation of the

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<sup>169</sup> Nicholas Brooks has rightly noted that much of our evidence for early practices of lending war gear comes from poems such as *Beowulf* and therefore must be used with caution. N. P. Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, BAR, British Series 59 (1978), pp. 91-92.

<sup>170</sup> Some examples of wills are S 1511/W 11; S 1487/W 13; S 1536/W 17; S 1490/W 28; S 1519/W 34 and see below, Chapter Four. Cf. Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare', pp. 81, 85-90.

<sup>171</sup> Gurevich, 'Wealth and Gift-Bestowal', pp. 178-180; T. Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute in the Carolingian Empire', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 5<sup>th</sup> Ser. 35 (1985), pp. 75-94; John Moreland, 'Concepts of the Early Medieval Economy', in Inge Lyse Hansen and Chris Wickham (eds.), *The Long Eighth Century* (Leiden, 2000), pp. 16-17; Hedeager, 'Germanic Identity', p. 122; J. M. Hill, 'Beowulf and the Danish Succession: Gift Giving as an Occasion for Complex Gesture', *Medievalia et Humanistica*, New Series 11 (1982), pp. 179-180.

<sup>172</sup> D. Tyler, 'An Early Mercian Hegemony: Penda and Overkingship in the Seventh Century', *Midland History* 30 (2005), pp. 8-13; Miller, 'Gift, Sale, Payment, Raid', pp. 23-24, 50.

conquering king.<sup>173</sup> Distributing this wealth to one's followers reinforced the reciprocal relationship defined by the exchange of loyalty for tribute, perpetuating an endless cycle of exchange which continued until the death of one or both parties.

This concept is reiterated in heroic poetry. While there has not yet been a sustained study discussing the prevalence and meaning of gift-exchange in Anglo-Saxon society, a number of scholars have assessed the importance of social gift-exchange in Anglo-Saxon poetry and other literary texts.<sup>174</sup> One scholar has argued that the repeated use of gift-giving motifs in *Beowulf* was intended to provide a link from the heroic past to a present in need of social guidance.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, though the poem may have been designed to resonate with its audience in a particular way, its depictions of gift-giving and treasure are similar to other references extant in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and the manuscript in which it was preserved dates from c. 1000.<sup>176</sup> References to gift-exchange and treasure were firmly embedded in poetic discourse, appearing throughout the Anglo-Saxon literary corpus. The description of King Alfred as 'the best treasure-giver' in Bishop Wulfsig's preface to the Old English translation of Gregory's *Dialogues* is a well-known example.<sup>177</sup> Equally oft-cited are the references to the dispensing of treasure in *Beowulf*.<sup>178</sup> Heorot, for example, is depicted as a place specifically designed so that Hrothgar may dispense

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<sup>173</sup> Reuter, 'Testaments, Hoards and Moveable Wealth', p. 15. See also Reuter, 'Plunder and Tribute', pp. 75-94.

<sup>174</sup> For example, Grierson, 'Commerce in the Dark Ages', pp. 137-139.

<sup>175</sup> A. L. J. Thieme, 'The Gift in *Beowulf*: Forging the Continuity of Past and Present', *Michigan Germanic Studies* 22.2 (1996), pp. 126-143.

<sup>176</sup> E. Treharne and P. Pulsiano, 'An Introduction to the Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Vernacular Literature', in E. Treharne and P. Pulsiano (eds.), *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>177</sup> The preface is translated in S. Keynes and M. Lapidge (trans.), *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London, 1983), pp. 187-188.

<sup>178</sup> See especially Thieme, 'The Gift in *Beowulf*', pp. 126-143; Hill, 'Beowulf and the Danish Succession', pp. 177-197; R. E. Bjork, 'Speech as Gift in *Beowulf*', *Speculum* 69 (1994), pp. 993-1022.

treasure to his retainers.<sup>179</sup> This distribution of treasure reinforces Hrothgar's status as a good king according to the parameters established by the poet fifty lines earlier: *'Swa sceal ge(ong) guma / gode gewyrcean, / fromum feohgiftum / on fæder (bea)rme, / þæt hine on ylde / eft gewunigen / wilgesipas, / þonne wig cume, / leode gelæsten; / lofdædum sceal'*.<sup>180</sup> In distributing treasure to his retainers, Hrothgar invokes a relationship of reciprocal exchange, treasure for service, fulfilling his purpose as a good king. These literary references to treasure-giving as the sign of a good leader may partly be chalked up to poetic convention.<sup>181</sup> Yet the evidence of the sustained practice of heriot and the distribution of tribute to one's followers signifies that the spirit of generosity and reciprocity inherent in these transactions strongly resonated with audiences throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. Reciprocal gift-exchange, therefore, was deeply embedded in the social rituals and interactions of this period.

Although the types of gift-giving relationships discussed so far have been firmly based in the secular realm, there are indications that the exchange of gifts as a means of reinforcing social relationships could also have Christian connotations. The poem *Christ II*, preserved in the Exeter Book, Christ himself is described as a *'sincgiefan'* (treasure-giver) in addition to the more conventional *'lareowes'* (teacher), implying that the relationship between Christ and his followers was conceptually similar to

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<sup>179</sup> R. D. Fulk, R. E. Bjork and J. D. Niles (eds.), *Klaeber's Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg* (Toronto, 2008), lines 80-81a. For a discussion linking Heorot with symbolic depictions of a palace or temple as a place from which treasure is to be distributed, see J. Helterman, 'Beowulf: The Archetype Enters History', *ELH: English Literary History* 35 (1968), pp. 5-6. Cf. Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Beowulf*, lines 69-71.

<sup>180</sup> Fulk, Bjork and Niles, *Beowulf*, lines 20-24a. 'Thus a young man should accomplish good by the dispensing of splendid treasures from his father's possessions, so that in old age dear companions stand by him in turn, when war comes, retainers serve him'. Cited and translated in Thieme, 'The Gift in *Beowulf*', p. 129-130.

<sup>181</sup> E. M. Tyler, 'Treasure and Convention in Old English Verse', *Notes and Queries*, New Series 43 (1996), pp. 2-13, esp. pp. 10-13. For a full-length study assessing the interaction between heroic poetry and Anglo-Saxon society, see J. D. Niles, *Old English Heroic Poems and the Social Life of Texts*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 20 (Turnhout, 2007).

that between a lord and his retainer.<sup>182</sup> This 'treasure' is defined later in the poem in the words of Christ himself: '*Gefeoð ge on ferððe. Næfre ic from hweorfe, ac ic lufan symle læste wið eowic, ond eow meahht giefe ond mid wunige, awo to ealdre, þæt eow æfre ne bið þurh gife mine godes onsien*'.<sup>183</sup> Christ's gift is here expressed as his eternal love for humanity. It is understood that this love has been given with the expectation that men will follow Christ and thus give their allegiance to God. Expressed in these terms, this poem highlights the reciprocal relationship between man and God. The social ideal of gift-exchange presented a convenient method by which basic principles of Christianity could be explained to the laity.

This section has demonstrated that reciprocal gift-exchange, or the idea of an obligatory return for a gift given, can be seen in many aspects of Anglo-Saxon society, secular and religious, in both documentary and literary sources surviving from the period. Such widespread appeal indicates that this practice informed many different behaviours and was omnipresent as a social value. Thus along with conspicuous display and a deeper understanding of the relationships between wealth and poverty, this chapter has established the vital frameworks which underpin the remainder of this thesis. I have surveyed the historiographical background which serves as the starting point for this study, demonstrating how I will carry this research forward in analysing the place of almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon society.

### *Outline and Methodology*

With these frameworks in mind, the purpose of this thesis is to address questions left unanswered by other studies of early medieval almsgiving. How was the doctrine

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<sup>182</sup> '*Hy þæs lareowes on þam wildæge word ne gehyrwdon, hyra sincgiefan*'. Muir, *Exeter Anthology*, p. 66, lines 458-460. Cf. M. B. Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 1 (Woodbridge, 2002), p. 207.

<sup>183</sup> '*Rejoice in heart, never will I forsake you but I will fulfil my love upon you and give you might; and I will dwell with you forever, that by my gift ye may never lack any good thing*.' Muir, *Exeter Anthology*, p. 67, lines 476-480.

of almsgiving conceptualised in England in the tenth and eleventh centuries? How and why were the laity encouraged to give alms? Perhaps most importantly, how did the laity perceive their duty to give alms, and how did they fulfil this duty? In answering these questions this study will ultimately argue that the ideal and practice of almsgiving was an integral and ubiquitous part of Anglo-Saxon society, comprising a unique social value which defies easy categorisation. It will do so by examining different textual sources of evidence, each of which provides a different perspective on Anglo-Saxon almsgiving.

This chapter has thus far provided essential contextual information which is necessary for understanding the perceived function of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon society, namely the dichotomy of wealth and poverty, the conspicuous display of wealth and the anthropological theories of gift-exchange. While this chapter presents only an overview of these three social values, the principles which are laid down here are integrated into the findings of each chapter, demonstrating important ways in which the ideals of almsgiving were adapted to fit into existing social frameworks.

Chapter Two examines the occurrences of *ælmesse* and its etymological variants in the homiletic texts of the tenth and eleventh centuries. It begins by examining the textual relationship between the Anglo-Saxon homilists and their patristic and Biblical sources for the doctrine of almsgiving, assessing the extent to which these sources were adapted for an Anglo-Saxon audience. It also raises questions about the intended audience of the homilies and how this affects our understanding of who, precisely, was supposed to give alms. Ultimately this chapter clarifies the teaching on almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England as promoted by homilists such as Ælfric of Eynsham and Archbishop Wulfstan. It demonstrates the ways in which doctrinal authorities thought about and conceptualised almsgiving in addition to presenting their ideals of how it should be practiced in society. This analysis provides valuable insight into the perceived value of almsgiving as a moral

obligation and demonstrates the ways in which homiletic authors created a paradigm for the practice of almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon society.

Chapter Three investigates secular law codes for evidence of almsgiving, examining how it was viewed as a legal obligation. The discussion focuses primarily on the law codes authored by Archbishop Wulfstan in the first quarter of the eleventh century, as these texts contain the most consistent references to almsgiving. As with the analysis of the homiletic texts, this chapter treats the law codes as prescriptive sources, regulating and enforcing an idealised behaviour. This chapter raises questions about the function of religious obligations in the secular realm, and the role of regnal authority in enforcing these obligations. It also questions the extent to which almsgiving was understood to be a voluntary act, challenging the homiletic definition of almsgiving, and examines the relationship between almsgiving and ecclesiastical dues. Throughout this chapter, links between the legislation of almsgiving and the homiletic teaching on almsgiving are highlighted, demonstrating that despite their differences in approach these two types of sources present a strikingly consistent picture of almsgiving and its function in both secular and religious spheres.

Chapter Four extends a similar approach to wills and charters, investigating the ways in which these documentary sources record references to the practice of almsgiving. This study acknowledges that these descriptions of almsgiving cannot always be taken as representative of true actions; rather it utilises this information to demonstrate idealised practice of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It illustrates the ways in which lay men and women wished others to view them in their almsgiving, examining how this reflects a desire to participate in normative pious behaviour. It thus questions the motivations behind recording these transactions, analysing them in the context of Christian piety. Because of the inherent differences between these two types of sources, wills and charters, each is given its own section within this chapter. The ideological similarities between their

treatments of almsgiving, however, merit their inclusion within a single chapter. As a whole this chapter questions how almsgiving was seen to function in transactions of land or moveable wealth and the extent to which these transactions reflect the ideals of almsgiving detailed in the homilies and laws. It draws together the ideas discussed throughout the thesis and raises new questions about the place of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon society.

### *Limitations*

Although this thesis presents evidence of almsgiving from a variety of sources, there are some notable limitations to this study. It focuses, for example, on the laity, thus necessitating the omission of evidence for monastic or episcopal almsgiving. In addition, the chronological range of this study is restricted to the period *c.* 900-1066, with the exception of comparative examples. The reason for the former date may be attributed partially to the nature of the sources themselves. As the homilies may be dated no earlier than the mid to late tenth century and the law codes which mention almsgiving do not appear earlier than the reign of Athelstan, it is reasonable to impose similar restrictions on the wills and charters, a number of which date prior to the ninth century. However, this beginning date is not firmly adhered to in this thesis, and often earlier documents are taken into account as contextual evidence. The end date of 1066 provides a convenient stopping point for this study, as the social changes ushered in by the Norman Conquest included the arrival of the Norman hospital in *c.* 1085, which, as Sethina Watson has shown in an important study, unquestionably changed the way in which alms were given, collected and administered in England.<sup>184</sup>

In a study of this length, it is also necessary to limit the pool of resources under consideration. Focusing specifically on homilies, law codes, wills and charters has the advantage of providing a wide range of literary and documentary sources which

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<sup>184</sup> Watson, 'Origins', esp. pp. 75-76, 87-92.



comprise a large portion of extant Anglo-Saxon texts. In addition to this reasoning, these sources have been chosen because of the wide-ranging picture of Anglo-Saxon society which they display: homilies and law codes present prescriptive evidence of idealised behaviour while wills and charters provide more practical evidence of individual actions.

Yet the use of these types of sources adds additional problems for a study of this nature. Each of these sources, in its own way, is inherently prescriptive. The homilies in particular primarily provide evidence of the church teaching on almsgiving. They allow a glimpse into the mentality of doctrinal authorities such as Ælfric of Eynsham and Archbishop Wulfstan, as well as the anonymous authors of the Vercelli and Blickling homilies which are at times more representative of popular thoughts and opinions. Thus the references to almsgiving in the homiletic texts should not be taken as evidence of actual practice, but rather evidence of how the authors of these texts thought almsgiving *should* be practiced. Likewise the law codes also offer a skewed perception of almsgiving in society. They represent the perceptions of both secular and religious authorities on the place of almsgiving within the legal system, but do not offer any indication of whether the laws regulating these activities were actually followed by the Anglo-Saxon public. Finally, the wills and charters, while in theory representing the best evidence for the practice of almsgiving, are the most tantalising in their descriptions of almsgiving. Each of the documents discussed within Chapter Four describes a single transaction, a snapshot in time. They are fossilised remains of the ways in which the donors wished their gifts of alms to be recorded. Aside from issues of stylised language and formulaic phrases, in many cases it is impossible to tell whether or not the desired transactions had been carried out in the stipulated fashion. Thus, as the title of this thesis indicates, the focus will be on the *textual representations* of almsgiving within these sources, not the actual practice of almsgiving.

It is also necessary to limit the scope of this study in other ways. As will become clear in the following chapters, the terminology of almsgiving (that is, words which are comprised of or contain variants of *ælmesse*) plays a vital role in the arguments which are shaped throughout this thesis. Yet a full linguistic analysis of the language used to describe almsgiving is simply beyond the scope of this documentary source-based analysis. There is no doubt that such an approach would be important in contributing to our understanding of the cultural significance of almsgiving, and this is a subject which I hope to pursue at a later date. It is not, however, the aim of the current study. While there is a certain appeal in limiting this study in such a way, this approach does have its own drawbacks, many of which will be discussed in the individual chapters. The biggest difficulty is in assessing actions which appear to be following the general precepts of almsgiving but are not specifically described as such. Passing over such references means that the pool of evidence for this study has been significantly limited, yet this approach does have the merit of yielding a sample of texts which are undoubtedly representative of perceptions of almsgiving itself. Examples of other actions which are not labelled as almsgiving will be used as contextual examples throughout the remainder of this thesis.

### *Conclusion*

The analysis and arguments presented in this introductory chapter have demonstrated a number of important points pertinent to the following study. It has established first and foremost that one must throw out any preconceptions of what almsgiving entails, particularly modern associations with voluntary altruism, in order to view almsgiving from the perspective of the Anglo-Saxons. In order to aid with this approach, this chapter has also established important contextual frameworks within which a study of almsgiving should be situated, particularly the relative functions of wealth and poverty, the importance of secular display and the fundamental nature of gift-exchange in society. This chapter has also demonstrated

the centrality of almsgiving to understanding the practice of religious piety and thus likewise its centrality to understanding the values of a society in which religion plays an integral part. Only by viewing almsgiving as part of a much larger social and religious whole can we truly understand what it meant to give alms in late Anglo-Saxon society.

## Chapter 2 - The Promotion of Almsgiving

### *Introduction*

In the anonymous Vercelli Homily XX, likely composed at some time in the tenth century, one finds a detailed summary of the perceived effects of almsgiving. This homily, intended to be preached during Rogationtide, draws substantially on the Carolingian homiliary of St Père de Chartres which itself is a compilation of patristic texts. The anonymous Anglo-Saxon author translates almost verbatim Item 22 in this homiliary, which uses extracts from both Augustine and Jerome to provide an imaginative description of almsgiving:

*7 seo ælmessylen ys gefyllednes 7 fulfremednes eallra goda, 7 heo ys halig þing, 7 heo geycð þa andweardan, 7 heo gewanaþ synna, 7 heo gemænigfyllt gear, 7 heo geæðelað þæt mod, 7 heo tobræt gemæro, 7 heo aclænsað eallo þing, 7 heo alyst fram deape 7 fram witum, 7 heo geþeodeð þone mann þe hy begæð Godes englum, 7 hine ascyreð fram deoflum, 7 heo ys unoferwinnendlic weall ymb þa sawle, 7 heo framadrifð deoflu 7 englas togelaðað on fultum, 7 heo þurhfærð þone heofon, 7 heo forestepð þone syllendan on heofona rices wuldre, 7 heo cnyst heofona rices duru, 7 heo awecð englas ongean, 7 heo tosomne gecigeð dryhten ælmihtigne on fultum þam þe hie luflice 7 rumodlice dæleð.<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Vercelli XX, lines 42-52. 'And that almsgiving is the completion and perfection of all good things. And it is a holy thing, and it increases the present [time], and it diminishes sins, and it multiplies years, and it ennobles the mind, and it extends the boundaries, and it cleanses all things, and it delivers from death and from torments, and it unites that man who practises it with the angels of God, and it separates him from devils. And it is an invincible wall around the soul, and it drives away devils and it assembles angels for succour, and it penetrates heaven, and it precedes the giver in the glory of the heavenly kingdom, and it strikes the door of the heavenly kingdom, and it wakes the angels again, and at the same time it calls the lord almighty for succour, for the one who lovingly and liberally distributes it [alms]'. Item 22 in the homiliary of St Père de Chartres is printed in J. E. Cross (ed.), *Cambridge Pembroke College MS. 25: A Carolingian Sermonary Used by Anglo-Saxon Preachers*, King's College London Medieval Studies 1 (Exeter, 1987), p. 140: '*Ad extremum sequitur de aelimosina, que est plenitudo et perfectio bonorum, de cuius laudibus ait Agustinus: Aelimosina est res sancta, auget presentia, demit peccata, multiplicat annos, nobilitat mentem, dilatat terminos, mundat omnia, liberat a morte et a poena, iungit angelis, separat a doemonibus, murus est inexpugnabilis circa animam, doemones expellit,*

While this passage tells us much about the theoretical powers of almsgiving, ranging from its capacity to diminish sin to its ability to physically strike the door of heaven, it is less informative about the practical aspects of almsgiving. It is unlikely that when the Anglo-Saxon who heard this sermon or others like it gave alms, he was motivated by the image of his gift floating up to heaven and arousing somnolent angels. These rather vague poetic phrases did not tell the Anglo-Saxon almsgiver what he really wanted to know: how to give alms, from what, to whom and for what purpose. Nor are they any more informative for the modern reader who looks to elucidate the deeper meaning of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England.

This passage does, however, highlight some of the essential characteristics of almsgiving discussed in the previous chapter. Almsgiving is described as diminishing sin and delivering from death, allowing the giver to enter into the glory of the heavenly kingdom. Thus this Anglo-Saxon homily presents a continuity of thought about almsgiving and its imagined functions, even if it does not describe the more practical details. As such it is valuable evidence for the adoption and use of patristic ideas of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England. The extent to which the Anglo-Saxon conception of almsgiving differed from that of the patristic fathers is one question which will be addressed in this chapter.

In order to understand the ways in which almsgiving was conceptualised in late Anglo-Saxon society, one must first examine how the doctrine of almsgiving was recorded in the tenth and eleventh centuries and subsequently communicated to the laity through the homiletic texts. The present chapter addresses this question, acknowledging the influence of late antique or patristic texts on the Anglo-Saxon doctrine of almsgiving, and questioning the extent to which the Anglo-Saxon homilists used and manipulated these older works on almsgiving. In doing so this

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*inuitat angelos in auxilium. Hieronimus dicit: Aelimosina penetrat caelum, precedit dantem, pulsat ianuam regni, excitat angelum in obuiam, Deum conuocat in adiutorium'*. Cited in D. G. Scragg (ed.), *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, EETS os 300 (Oxford, 1992), pp. 334-335.

chapter first asks whether a succinct definition of almsgiving may be compiled from the variant references in the homilies, assessing these references in relation to the concepts of wealth distribution, conspicuous display and gift-exchanged outlined in the Introduction. It then focuses on individual homilies in order to gain an insight into the two most common incentives for almsgiving addressed in these texts: almsgiving as forgiveness of sin and almsgiving as a penitential act.<sup>2</sup> This chapter places each of these discussions within a broader liturgical context, assessing the doctrinal importance of almsgiving within the wider conceptual sphere of Christian piety in late Anglo-Saxon England.

Due to the extensive corpus of homilies extant from the tenth and eleventh centuries, I focus here on the most well-known collections of homilies from this time: the homilies of Ælfric of Eynsham, including the two series of *Catholic Homilies*, the *Lives of Saints* and the *Supplementary Homilies*; the Old English and Latin homilies of Wulfstan, Archbishop of York; and the anonymous collections of homilies in the Blickling and Vercelli codices. Each of these sources has particular advantages and disadvantages for the study of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England, and it is helpful here to provide a brief overview of each in order to rationalise the exclusion of other contemporary homiletic works.

Throughout the late antique and Anglo-Saxon periods the use of homilies was a popular and effective way of communicating messages relevant to Christian understanding and practice. These homilies were utilised in order to convey expositions on biblical texts or to provide general moral guidance. Strictly speaking, one must discriminate between homilies and their literary cousins, sermons: a homily provides an exegetical reading of a distinct biblical passage while a sermon may be used to discuss particular moral or doctrinal issues, or to explain the

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<sup>2</sup> This is not to be confused with almsgiving as a component of prescribed penance. I shall address this distinction more fully in the relevant section below.

importance of feast days.<sup>3</sup> A third distinction may be made in reference to saints' lives, which could be utilised as sermons and provided a summary of the life of a saint as a model for Christian living. While making these distinctions is important for the literary study of such texts, it is not as necessary when reading these texts with an eye for a social practice and doctrinal issue such as almsgiving, as references to this practice occur throughout the homilies, sermons and saints' lives. In addition, the texts from late Anglo-Saxon England often themselves confuse the boundaries between homilies and sermons, frequently mixing biblical exegesis with moral exhortation.<sup>4</sup> So for the purposes of this discussion the terms homily and sermon will be used interchangeably, and sometimes in reference to saints' lives, unless otherwise noted.

It must be stressed here at the beginning that as the homilies were primarily intended as teaching texts, they should not be taken as evidence for actual religious *practice* in Anglo-Saxon England. The instructions, exhortations and general moral guidance contained within these texts represent the idealised notions of the authors in regard to subjects such as almsgiving and the extent to which these authors thought certain behaviours should be encouraged or enforced. As such, one should not expect the corpus of homilies to provide evidence for the history of the practice of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon society. Rather, one must view these texts as providing an important insight into conceptions of almsgiving in society. Thus, while one might be able to use the homilies as evidence for the ubiquitous nature of ideas of almsgiving in society, one cannot determine the extent to which this is representative of almsgiving as it was practised by the laity. For this purpose, one must rely on other documentary sources, such as those discussed in the later

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<sup>3</sup> H. Barré, *Les homéliaires carolingiens de l'école d'Auxerre: authenticité, inventaire, tableaux comparatifs, initia* (Vatican City, 1962), pp. 13-14.

<sup>4</sup> T. N. Hall, 'The Early Medieval Sermon', in B. M. Kienzle (ed.), *The Sermon*, Typologies des sources du moyen âge occidental, Fasc. 81-83 (Turnhout, 2000), pp. 205-212; R. K. Upchurch, 'Catechetical Homiletics: Ælfric's Preaching and Teaching During Lent', in H. Magennis and M. Swan (eds.), *A Companion to Ælfric* (Leiden, 2009), pp. 225-226.

chapters of this thesis. In addition to this caveat, one must also note that the authors themselves differ wildly in their approach to composing their homilies, differences which will be addressed in the following discussion. Therefore, one should not expect that these texts as a whole may be used to compile a homogeneous picture of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries. However, if it may be shown that these sources do tend to agree in respect to almsgiving, then this may be cause for reassessment of the extent to which these sources are prescriptive in their discussions of this important practice.

### *Homilies as Sources*

By far the most prolific author of homiletic texts in Anglo-Saxon England was Ælfric of Eynsham. Little is known about Ælfric's early life, although in the prologue to his *Grammar* he reveals that he received his education at the monastic school in Winchester.<sup>5</sup> It was likely there that Ælfric was exposed to the ideals of the Benedictine Reform which are reflected throughout his works;<sup>6</sup> this is especially notable in Ælfric's tendency to draw on works which were products of the ninth-century Carolingian reforms as sources for his homilies.<sup>7</sup> Around 987 Ælfric moved to the newly founded abbey at Cerne Abbas where he spent much of his time writing under the patronage of the Ealdorman Æthelweard and his son Æthelmær. In addition to producing the *Catholic Homilies*, two series of homilies meant to be used in complement to each other over the course of two liturgical years, his collection of *Lives of Saints*, and his *Supplementary Series of temporale* homilies, Ælfric also authored numerous educational works including his *Grammar*, *Glossary* and

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<sup>5</sup> J. Wilcox (ed.), *Ælfric's Prefaces* (Durham, 1994), p. 7; M. Lapidge, 'Ælfric's Schooldays', in E. Trehearne and S. Rosser (eds.), *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, 2002), esp. pp. 301-302.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of Ælfric's place within the context of the Benedictine Reform, see especially J. Hill, 'Reform and Resistance: Preaching Styles in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in J. Hamesse et X. Hermand (eds.), *De l'Homélie au Sermon: Histoire de la Prédication Médiévale: Acts du Colloque international de Louvain-la Neuve, 9-11 juillet 1992* (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1993), 15-46.

<sup>7</sup> Wilcox, *Prefaces*, p. 5; Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', pp. 22-44.



*Colloquy*.<sup>8</sup> In 1006 Ælfric was chosen by Æthelmær as abbot of the newly re-founded Benedictine abbey of Eynsham, and this promotion reinforces the view of Ælfric as an influential and recognised authority on church doctrine. The widespread dissemination of manuscripts containing Ælfric's homilies stands as strong testament to his perceived influence in these matters: at least twenty-four manuscripts and a number of fragments containing Ælfric's literary works have survived to the present day.<sup>9</sup>

Ælfric's status as a doctrinal authority lends a great deal of importance to his views on almsgiving as expressed in his homilies and saints' lives. It is his insistence upon orthodoxy which sets him apart from other Anglo-Saxon homilists, and this is most clearly demonstrated by his attitude toward apocryphal texts such as those concerning the feasts of the Virgin Mary and St Thomas.<sup>10</sup> Ælfric takes great care to discuss these feasts by drawing on what he conceived to be suitably orthodox sources; in the course of his homily for the Assumption of Mary, for example, he states '*Gif we mare secgað be ðisum symbeldæge þonne we on ðam halgum bocum rædað þe ðurh godes dihte gesette wæron. ðonne beo we ðam ðwoldmannum gelice. þe be heora agenum dihte oððe be swefnum fela lease gesetnyssa awriton*'.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this conscious dismissal of questionable sources, Ælfric also takes care to cite his patristic sources

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<sup>8</sup> For a chronology of Ælfric's works see P. Clemons, 'The Chronology of Ælfric's Works', in P. Clemons (ed.), *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins* (London, 1959), pp. 212-247.

<sup>9</sup> Comprehensive discussions of the manuscripts are presented in J. C. Pope (ed.), *Homilies of Ælfric: A Supplementary Collection*, vol. 1, EETS os 259, (Oxford, 1967), pp. 6-93 and P. Clemons (ed.), *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The First Series*, EETS ss 17, (Oxford, 1997), pp. 1-64 with an extensive analysis of their relations to each other in *ibid.* pp. 64-168.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Hill, 'Reform and Resistance', pp. 25-34; M. Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 2 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 235-265; M. Clayton, 'Ælfric and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary', *Anglia* 104 (1986), pp. 286-315; T. N. Hall, 'Ælfric and the Epistle to the Laodicians', in K. Powell and D. Scragg (eds.), *Apocryphal Texts and Traditions in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 65-66.

<sup>11</sup> CH II.XXIX: *Assumptio sanctae mariae virginis*, lines 119-123. 'If we say more about this feast day than we read in the holy books that have been written through the inspiration of God, then we would be like those heretics who have written many false traditions from their own imagination or from dreams'.

whenever possible in order to lend additional credence to his work and emphasise his place firmly within an orthodox patristic tradition.<sup>12</sup> The homilies of Ælfric may be considered to represent both the orthodox tradition and the ideals of the Benedictine Reform in the tenth and eleventh centuries; thus comparing his views on doctrinal issues such as almsgiving with those presented in the less orthodox, anonymous homilies presents a more comprehensive view of how the doctrine of almsgiving was conceptualised in this period.

The second most prolific and identifiable author of Anglo-Saxon homilies is Wulfstan the Homilist, better known as Wulfstan, Bishop of London 996-1002, Bishop of Worcester 1002-1016 and Archbishop of York 1002-1023. Very little is known of Wulfstan's life aside from his episcopal appointments although much more has been discovered about his literary accomplishments.<sup>13</sup> Wulfstan gained a reputation as a major ecclesiastical and political figure in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries, composing no fewer than twenty-six homilies, a number of royal law codes and a variety of works on both secular and ecclesiastical law. Wulfstan's acknowledged authority in both religious and political spheres allowed him to weather the political storms of 1013-1016, remaining a trusted advisor to both Æthelred II and Cnut. Additionally, his firm entrenchment into both realms has led modern scholars to note that it is often difficult to classify Wulfstan's works as wholly secular or wholly religious,<sup>14</sup> as is clear from such categorically ambiguous

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<sup>12</sup> For example see J. Hill, 'Ælfric, Gregory and the Carolingians', in J. Hamesse (ed.), *Roma, Magistra Mundi: Itineraria Culturae Medievalis: Mélanges offerts au Père L. E. Boyle à l'occasion de son 75e anniversaire*, vol. 1 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1998), pp. 411-412; J. Hill, 'Ælfric's Authorities', in E. Trehearne and S. Rosser (eds.), *Early Medieval English Texts and Interpretations: Studies Presented to Donald G. Scragg* (Tempe, 2002), pp. 52-54. For more on Ælfric's use of patristic texts and intermediary homiliaries, see below.

<sup>13</sup> For a survey of both, see D. Bethurum, 'Wulfstan', in E. G. Stanley (ed.), *Continuations and Beginnings: Studies in Old English Literature* (London, 1966), pp. 210-246 and see below, Chapter Three.

<sup>14</sup> P. Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan: Eleventh-Century State-Builder', in M. Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 10 (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 16-21, esp. 16-17; J. Wilcox, 'The Dissemination of Wulfstan's Homilies: The Wulfstan Tradition in Eleventh-Century Vernacular Preaching', in C. Hicks (ed.), *England in the Eleventh Century: Proceedings of the 1990 Harlaxton Symposium* (Stamford, 1992), p. 201.

works as the *Institutes of Polity* or the *Canons of Edgar*. Unlike Ælfric, Wulfstan does not seem to have been overly concerned with visibly presenting strictly orthodox exegesis, as his works lack the consistent emphasis on patristic sources and condemnations of apocryphal texts found throughout Ælfric's homilies; Wulfstan was more subtle in his use of patristic texts and preferred tacit disapproval to outspoken denunciation of apocryphal texts. In addition, Wulfstan's homilies were not intended to be preached at particular times during the liturgical year, focusing instead on general Christian exegesis and moral exhortation: unlike Ælfric, Wulfstan focused on Christian practice rather than theory. The authority ascribed to him by both secular and religious leaders indicates that his attitudes toward concepts such as almsgiving can be seen as acceptable and perhaps even representative of general Christian thought on the subject in the eleventh century. Comparing Wulfstan's treatment of almsgiving with those of Ælfric and the anonymous homilists helps to form a more well-rounded picture of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

While the canon of Ælfric's works has been well-established, scholars have yet to reach a consensus regarding the homiletic works of Wulfstan. In 1957 Dorothy Bethurum published a collection of eighteen Latin and Old English homilies which could be definitively attributed to the archbishop. In the introduction to this book, Bethurum noted that there were a number of Wulfstanian texts omitted from her collection 'because they are not homilies, nor are they connected in any significant way with Wulfstan's finished sermons'.<sup>15</sup> These include fourteen homiletic pieces originally edited by Arthur Napier,<sup>16</sup> and subsequently argued by Jonathan Wilcox as comprising a substantial part of the Wulfstanian homiletic canon.<sup>17</sup> James Cross has also argued for the inclusion of a number of Latin homilies contained in the

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<sup>15</sup> D. Bethurum (ed.), *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957), pp. 36-43, at p. 36.

<sup>16</sup> A. Napier (ed.), *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (Berlin, 1883; repr. with bibliographical supplement by K. Ostheeren, Dublin, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> Wilcox, 'Dissemination', pp. 200-201. Here Wilcox lists Napier I, XXI, XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXXV, XXXVI, XXXVIII, L, LI, LII, LIII, LIX, LX and LXI, as well as a few fragments, in addition to the Bethurum homilies. Cf. Bethurum, *Homilies*, pp. 38, 42.

manuscript commonly known as the Copenhagen Wulfstan Collection, although these works have not yet been accepted as unquestionably authored by Wulfstan.<sup>18</sup> Additionally Thomas Hall has recently proposed yet another Latin sermon for consideration as authored by Wulfstan, the *Admonitio episcoporum utilis*, found in three manuscripts associated with Wulfstan and demonstrating similarities to Wulfstan's other works in both content and style.<sup>19</sup> Although it has yet to be conclusively proven that Wulfstan was indeed the author of these additional eleven homilies, the evidence presented by Wilcox, Cross and Hall is compelling enough to include them for discussion in this thesis.

The works of Ælfric and Wulfstan are particularly notable in that they may be attributed to identifiable authors writing in the tenth and eleventh centuries. There are many more extant homiletic texts which, despite the best efforts of scholars, must still be labelled as 'anonymous'. The two best-known contemporary collections of anonymous homilies, transmitted in the Blickling and Vercelli codices, provide an additional contextual dimension to this discussion. The Blickling manuscript (Princeton University Library, Scheide Library 71) contains eighteen homilies which were compiled into this collection sometime in the second half of the tenth century.<sup>20</sup> These homilies likely do not share a single author, as is indicated from stylistic

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<sup>18</sup> J. E. Cross and J. Morrish Tunberg (eds.), *The Copenhagen Wulfstan Collection: Copenhagen Kongelige Bibliotek Gl. Kgl. Sam. 1595*, EEMF 25 (Copenhagen 1993), pp. 13-23. Cf. J. E. Cross, 'Wulfstan's *De Anticristo* in a Twelfth-Century Worcester Manuscript', *Anglo-Saxon England* 20 (1991), pp. 208-209, 217-220; J. E. Cross, 'A Newly-Identified Manuscript of Wulfstan's "Commonplace Book"', Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 1382 (U. 109), fols. 173r-198v', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 2 (1992), pp. 65-66.

<sup>19</sup> T. N. Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', in M. Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 10 (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 100-109, edited and translated on pp. 110-114.

<sup>20</sup> Richard Morris lists nineteen homilies in the Blickling manuscript in his EETS edition, but it has been demonstrated that his Homily XVI is actually a misplaced leaf from Homily IV. See C. D. Wright, 'Old English Homilies and Latin Sources' in A. J. Kleist (ed.), *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 17 (Turnhout, 2007), p. 61, n. 147; D. G. Scragg, 'The Corpus of Vernacular Homilies and Prose Saints' Lives Before Ælfric', *Anglo-Saxon England* 8 (1979), p. 233, n. 5.

differences between texts.<sup>21</sup> They also seem to have been combined over a period of time, although one cannot precisely date the individual homilies.<sup>22</sup> It is also unclear in which scriptorium the manuscript itself was assembled, although a Mercian provenance is generally assumed and Mary Swan has recently suggested that this may be narrowed to Worcester or possibly Hereford.<sup>23</sup> It is notable that, like Ælfric's series of *Catholic Homilies*, the texts compiled in the Blickling manuscript were arranged to follow the liturgical calendar, lending some semblance of order to the collection.<sup>24</sup> This arrangement is also similar to that in Carolingian homiliaries, such as those of St Père de Chartres and Hrabanus Maurus, indicating that the Blickling homilies were intended for preaching to or devotional use by the laity.<sup>25</sup> However, many of the homilies contain material appropriate for either a lay or ecclesiastical audience, making it impossible to definitively argue for either as the target audience of the collection.<sup>26</sup>

Little more is known of the provenance of the Vercelli Book (Vercelli, Biblioteca Capitolare, CXVII), a manuscript containing twenty-three homilies as well as Old English poetic works, saints' lives and other narratives. This book appears to have

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<sup>21</sup> P. Clemoes, 'Willard, (R.) (ed.), "*The Blickling Homilies*" (Book Review)', *Medium Ævum* 31 (1962), p. 61.

<sup>22</sup> D. G. Scragg, 'The Homilies of the Blickling Manuscript', in M. Lapidge and H. Gneuss (eds.), *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England: Studies Presented to Peter Clemoes on the Occasion of his Sixty-fifth Birthday* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 299-304, 315; M. Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching in Anglo-Saxon England', *Peritia* 4 (1985), p. 222.

<sup>23</sup> Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', p. 222; M. Swan, 'Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 198 and the Blickling Manuscript', *Leeds Studies in English* 37 (2006), pp. 92-93, 96 n. 34.

<sup>24</sup> Clemoes, "'The Blickling Homilies'" (Book Review)', p. 61; Scragg, 'Blickling Manuscript', p. 315.

<sup>25</sup> Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', pp. 223-226. D. G. Scragg also notes the similarities between the Blickling manuscript and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 198, arguing that further work on the latter may possibly shed new light on the former: Scragg, 'Blickling Manuscript', pp. 309-315. Cf. Swan, 'Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 198', pp. 89-100, esp. pp. 93-96.

<sup>26</sup> See especially M. McC. Gatch, 'The Unknowable Audience of the Blickling Homilies', *Anglo-Saxon England* 18 (1989), pp. 99-115. For an alternative argument postulating that the Blickling homilies were intended for a lay audience and thus reflect elements of popular Christian belief, see R. A. Aronstam, 'The Blickling Homilies: A Reflection of Popular Anglo-Saxon Belief', in K. Pennington and R. Somerville (eds.), *Law, Church, and Society: Essays in Honor of Stephan Kuttner* (Philadelphia, PA, 1977), pp. 271-280.

been assembled in the second half of the tenth century, likely c. 950-975, and though it has been postulated that it is the product of a Kentish scriptorium, its provenance remains open to speculation.<sup>27</sup> Unlike the Blickling manuscript, there is no clear liturgical order to the Vercelli homilies and their haphazard placement within the codex may possibly be attributed to the use of a number of exemplars.<sup>28</sup> The variety of content in the Vercelli Book implies that it was intended for private devotional use, possibly by a bishop or abbot as has been argued by Elaine Treharne.<sup>29</sup>

Treharne suggests further that the Vercelli Book was initially composed as a product of the Benedictine Reform movement with the specific intention of meeting the pastoral or devotional needs of monks in this period.<sup>30</sup> In this way the Vercelli Book may have been intended for use in a similar way to Ælfric's homilies which were also circulated so that they might help with the provision of pastoral care within the dioceses.<sup>31</sup>

The homilies contained in the Blickling and Vercelli codices may be seen as a broadly representative sample of the anonymous vernacular homilies available in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This is most clearly demonstrated by the fact that a number of homilies from both collections appear in a wide range of Old English manuscripts also in circulation during this time.<sup>32</sup> Thus, analysing the homilies in these codices gives one a different perspective on ideas of almsgiving being

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<sup>27</sup> E. Treharne, 'The Form and Function of the Vercelli Book', in A. Minnis and J. Roberts (eds.), *Text, Image, Interpretation: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Literature and its Insular Context in Honour of Éamonn Ó Carragáin*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 18 (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 255-256.

<sup>28</sup> Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, pp. xxiii, lxxiv-lxxix; D. G. Scragg, 'The Compilation of the Vercelli Book', in M. P. Richards (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts: Basic Readings* (London, 1994), pp. 339-343.

<sup>29</sup> Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', pp. 226-227; P. E. Szarmach, 'The Recovery of Texts', in K. O'Brien O'Keefe (ed.), *Reading Old English Texts* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 131; Treharne, 'Form and Function', pp. 261-265.

<sup>30</sup> Treharne, 'Form and Function', pp. 256-257.

<sup>31</sup> For a general overview of scholarship on the provision of pastoral care in Anglo-Saxon England, see especially essays in J. Blair and R. Sharpe (eds.), *Pastoral Care Before the Parish* (Leicester, 1992) and F. Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 6 (Woodbridge, 2005).

<sup>32</sup> Scragg, 'Vernacular Homilies', pp. 225-235.

transmitted in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as these homilies exist apart from the programme of strict orthodoxy promoted by Ælfric.

These differences in relation to orthodox tradition are primarily evident in the source texts used by the anonymous authors in comparison with Ælfric and Wulfstan. As the Blickling and Vercelli codices were compiled at least fifteen years before Ælfric's sermons began circulating, it may be that some of the anonymous homilies were composed and transmitted prior to their integration into these collections, possibly even before the influence of the Benedictine Reform movement. This chronological discrepancy may or may not have influenced the ways in which these homilies were composed, but it is clear that the Blickling and Vercelli homilists draw on a markedly different textual tradition than Ælfric.

The textual traditions upon which the Anglo-Saxon homilists drew are worth relating here in more detail. The individual sources may be classified into two groups: immediate sources and antecedent sources. For the purpose of this study, immediate sources are defined as texts which were immediately in front of the author during composition. Antecedent sources, on the other hand, are defined as those texts which were used by the immediate source or were even farther removed.<sup>33</sup> This subject requires a nuanced approach to defining these sources. Joyce Hill, for example, has demonstrated that Ælfric used the immediate source of Paul the Deacon in order to access the antecedent patristic sources he cites in his introduction to the *Catholic Homilies*.<sup>34</sup> The present study acknowledges the

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<sup>33</sup> D. G. Scragg, 'Source Study', in O'Brien O'Keefe, *Old English Texts*, p. 40. Cf. Wright, 'Old English Homilies' pp. 16-17; T. D. Hill, 'Introduction', in F. M. Biggs *et al.* (eds.), *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture, vol. I: Abbo of Fleury, Abbo of St Germain-des-Prés and Acta Sanctorum* (Kalamazoo, 2002), p. xviii.

<sup>34</sup> See especially J. Hill, 'Ælfric and Smaragdus', *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992), pp. 203-237, esp. 204-206. For an analysis of the homiliary itself, see C. L. Smetana, 'Paul the Deacon's Patristic Anthology', in P. E. Szarmach and B. F. Huppé (eds.), *The Old English Homily and Its Backgrounds* (Albany, NY, 1978), pp. 75-97 and Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', pp. 217-220. For more on Ælfric's use of Paul the Deacon, see C. L. Smetana, 'Ælfric and the Early Medieval Homiliary', *Traditio* 15 (1959), pp. 163-204; J. Hill, 'Ælfric's Sources Reconsidered: Some Case Studies from the Catholic Homilies', in M.

importance of distinguishing between immediate and antecedent sources in this way, yet it will focus mainly on the antecedent sources in order to determine the transmission of ideas and doctrine, rather than the texts themselves. In doing so, it becomes clear which authors were seen as important or authoritative in Anglo-Saxon England for doctrinal issues such as almsgiving.

While the Anglo-Saxon homilists all drew from substantially the same pool of sources, some authors demonstrate a preference for certain authorities over others. Ælfric, in the famous citation from his preface to the first series of *Catholic Homilies*, states that he used Jerome, Augustine, Bede, Gregory, Smaragdus and Haymo as sources for his homilies.<sup>35</sup> Ælfric also makes frequent reference to his sources within the homilies themselves, as for example in his homily *Dominica secunda post pentecosten* where he states, 'Se halga papa gregorius us onwreah þa digelnysse þisre rædinge' before citing Gregory the Great's explication of the gospel for the day.<sup>36</sup> The deliberation with which he records these sources indicates his desire to lend credence to his work by association with authorities whom he considered to be acceptably orthodox.

Whereas Ælfric makes sure to visibly situate himself within the patristic, orthodox tradition, the anonymous authors make no such distinctions. Charles Wright has demonstrated that the sources used most often by the anonymous homilists were

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J. Toswell and E. M. Tyler (eds.), *Studies in English Language and Literature: 'Doubt Wisely', papers in honour of E.G. Stanley*, (London, 1996), pp. 362-86; J. Hill, 'Ælfric's Manuscript of Paul the Deacon's Homiliary: A Provisional Analysis', in A. J. Kleist (ed.), *The Old English Homily: Precedent, Practice, and Appropriation*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 17 (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 67-96. For Ælfric's use of other homiliaries see for example C. L. Smetana, 'Ælfric and the Homiliary of Haymo of Halberstadt', *Traditio* 17 (1961), 457-469. Haymo of Halberstadt is now recognised to be Haymo of Auxerre, cf. Barré, *Les homéliaires carolingiens*, pp. 33-42.

<sup>35</sup> CH I.Praefatio, lines 14-16. Cf. discussion of this statement in relation to Ælfric's actual source texts in Hill, 'Ælfric's Sources Reconsidered', pp. 362-86 and J. Hill, 'Translating the Tradition: Manuscripts, Models and Methodologies in the Composition of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies*', in D. Scragg (ed.), *Textual and Material Culture in Anglo-Saxon England: Thomas Northcote Toller and the Toller Memorial Lectures* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 241-259.

<sup>36</sup> CH I.XXIII: *Dominica secunda post pentecosten*, lines 29-30. 'The holy pope Gregory has revealed to us the mystery of this text'.



apocryphal Biblical texts, such as the Gospel of Nicodemus, the *Visio pauli* and the *Apocalypse of Thomas*, followed by the works of Gregory the Great, Pseudo-Augustine, Caesarius of Arles and Isidore of Seville; rarely if ever do these composers draw directly on the works of Augustine or Jerome.<sup>37</sup> This discrepancy in source texts may be partially ascribed to the stylistic concerns of the individual authors. The homilies of Caesarius of Arles, for example, make use of vivid imagery and simple exposition in order to convey the message most effectively to a lay audience. This dramatic style proved popular with the Blickling and Vercelli homilists as they also sought to appeal to an audience composed primarily of the laity, hence their frequent use of Caesarius.<sup>38</sup> Ælfric, on the other hand, aimed his homilies at an audience composed of both monastic and lay members. His concern with doctrinal matters and authoritative sources led him to focus more on the authoritative, exhortatory writings of patristic fathers such as Augustine or Bede.<sup>39</sup> Overall, Ælfric's works may be characterised as more pastorally centred and theologically complex than the anonymous homilies. Therefore determining correlations between these works regarding the doctrine of almsgiving will provide a more well-rounded picture of this doctrine as conceptualised throughout homiletic literature.

While Ælfric and the anonymous homilists extensively utilised the works of the patristic fathers, the homilies of Wulfstan reveal a distinctly different approach in composition. Although Wulfstan draws on many sources in composing his homilies, the two authors he used most often were himself and Ælfric.<sup>40</sup> The textual

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<sup>37</sup> Wright, 'Old English Homilies', pp. 42-49. Wright also notes that this may partly be attributed to the 'dearth of patristic originalia in Anglo-Saxon England prior to the eleventh century', which led to a wealth of pseudonymous writing which homilists were not able to distinguish from authentic texts. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>38</sup> J. B. Trahern, Jr., 'Caesarius of Arles and Old English Literature: Some Contributions and a Recapitulation', *Anglo-Saxon England* 5 (1976), pp. 118-119; Wright, 'Old English Homilies', p. 48.

<sup>39</sup> Wilcox, *Prefaces*, p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> Bethurum, *Homilies*, pp. 26-27, 29-36 and 278-365; Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', pp. 98-100. For a summary of the material available to Wulfstan at Worcester see Bethurum, 'Wulfstan', pp. 212-213.

relationship between Wulfstan and Ælfric has been well-documented, particularly in reference to Wulfstan's requests to Ælfric to supply him with pastoral letters and Ælfric's consent to do so.<sup>41</sup> It has also been noted that one of the reasons why it is so difficult to determine how Wulfstan's works were disseminated in later manuscripts, or even why it is nearly impossible to compile a fixed canon of Wulfstan's works, is because he so often re-wrote his work, borrowing pieces from other compositions in the compilation of new homilies.<sup>42</sup> For this reason Wulfstan is cited as his own immediate source for numerous passages in his homilies, and it is often difficult to determine the other antecedent sources used. This in turn gives Wulfstan's sermons the appearance of being more representative of Wulfstan's own thought rather than a compilation of patristic sources such as that observable in the homilies of Ælfric. Thus utilising Wulfstan's sermons in this study provides a distinct perspective on conceptions of almsgiving in the eleventh century.

I have already argued that Ælfric's homiletic works are particularly useful for this study because of his accepted status as a contemporary doctrinal authority, but there is another reason why his works must be regarded as particularly useful in this respect. Not only was Ælfric by far the most prolific author in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but as noted earlier, his works were also disseminated to an unprecedented degree. There are twenty-six manuscripts containing significant portions of the *Catholic Homilies*, as well numerous fragments and manuscripts containing only one or two homilies.<sup>43</sup> This indicates a high level of distribution

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<sup>41</sup> B. Fehr (ed.), *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics: in altenglischer und lateinischer Fassung*, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 9 (Hamburg, 1914; repr. with a supplement by P. Clemons, Darmstadt, 1966), pp. 68-140.

<sup>42</sup> Wilcox, 'Dissemination', pp. 204-205. Andy Orchard has also noted that Wulfstan did the same with his external sources, again making it difficult to pin down source texts. A.P. McD. Orchard, 'Crying Wolf: Oral Style and the *Sermones Lupi*', *Anglo-Saxon England* 21 (1992), pp. 224, 257. Cf. Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', p. 108.

<sup>43</sup> For more on the dissemination of the manuscripts, see Clemons, *Catholic Homilies*, pp. 134-168 and M. Godden (ed.), *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: The Second Series*, EETS ss 5, (Oxford, 1979), pp. lx-lxv, lxxiv-lxxviii.

throughout England, though it is likely that only large monastic centres such as Rochester, Canterbury, Worcester and Exeter would have been able to afford such large manuscripts despite Ælfric's apparent desire that they be used by parish priests at the local level.<sup>44</sup> The fact that these manuscripts were so popular in the tenth, eleventh and twelfth centuries further demonstrates the popularity of Ælfric as a doctrinal authority. The homilies of Wulfstan also enjoyed a great degree of dissemination in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, although these texts were often copied individually or in small groups rather than in large, homogeneous collections. Nonetheless, groups of five or more homilies were circulated in five extant manuscript collections, and fourteen more manuscripts contain a smaller number of Wulfstan's homilies.<sup>45</sup> While this level of dissemination is nowhere near the level achieved by Ælfric's works, it is proportional to the smaller number of homilies composed by Wulfstan and clearly demonstrates the influence of his works. The level of dissemination achieved by the homiletic compilations in the Blickling and Vercelli codices presents a striking counterpoint when compared with Ælfric and Wulfstan. As noted previously, the collections of homilies preserved in these books are not found in the same form in any other manuscript, although some of the individual homilies do appear in other compilations. It has been argued that the homilies preserved in Blickling and Vercelli may be considered as a generally representative sample of other anonymous works in circulation at the time. Thus, although they were not disseminated to the same degree as the works of Ælfric and Wulfstan, if the content of the anonymous homilies agrees with Ælfric and Wulfstan on doctrinal issues such as almsgiving, then one may infer some continuity in this doctrine throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries. This is especially interesting in light of the common assumption that Ælfric's comment regarding the 'much error

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<sup>44</sup> Clayton, 'Homiliaries and Preaching', p. 239. Cf. M. McC. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 42-45.

<sup>45</sup> Wilcox, 'Dissemination', pp. 199-217, esp. pp. 202-204.

in many English books' was a veiled criticism of the content of Blickling and Vercelli.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, if these homilies differ in content from those of Ælfric or Wulfstan, then this raises interesting questions about the varying conceptions of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England. These questions form the basis for the remainder of this chapter.

### *The Gift of Alms*

In comparison with the corpus of patristic and late antique sermons devoted to the promotion of almsgiving, it is striking how few Anglo-Saxon homilies directly deal with this subject, and even then this is almost exclusively within sermons dedicated primarily to another theme. General definitions for almsgiving appear in a few homilies, although it should be noted that these definitions are not cited as such by the authors. Rather, they are merely offered in the course of a larger discussion and therefore should not be taken as all-encompassing definitions. It is useful here to briefly survey the homilies which do appear to define almsgiving, so as to gain an initial perspective on how almsgiving itself was conceptualised.

A rather wide-ranging definition for almsgiving is given in Homilies III and XX in the Vercelli Book. Although these two homilies share a common source for this passage, the author of Homily XX offers a slightly more detailed description of almsgiving: '*Þreo cynn syndon ælmesdæda. An is lichomlic, þæt man þam wædliendan to gode sylle swa hwæt swa man mæge. Oðer is gastlic, þæt man forgife þam þe oðerum ænig yfel deð eall þæt he him to wite. Þridde is þæt man þa dweliendan on soðfæstnesse weg gelædde*'.<sup>47</sup> Almsgiving is conceptualised here in all-encompassing terms: anything

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<sup>46</sup> CH I.Prefatio, line 51. '*...mycel gedwyld on manegum Engliscum bocum.*' Cf. Wilcox, *Prefaces*, p. 19; Treharne, 'Form and Function', pp. 258-259.

<sup>47</sup> Vercelli XX, lines 53-56. 'The three kinds of almsdeeds are: one is bodily, that man gives to the poor whatever goods he is able. The other is spiritual, that man forgives he who does any evil to another, all that he does as an injury to him. Third is that man leads the erring in the way of truth.'. Cf. Vercelli III, lines 154-158.

which might care for the physical or spiritual needs of another is considered to be almsgiving.

The immediate source for this definition is a nearly identical passage found in the homiliary of St Père de Chartres: '*Tria sunt enim genera aelimosinarum. Una corporalis: aegenti dare quicquid poteris. Altera spiritalis: dimittere ei a quo laesus fueris. Tertia: delinquentem corrigere et errantes in uiam reducere ueritatis*'.<sup>48</sup> Yet the Vercelli definition is also remarkably similar to a passage in Augustine's *Enchiridion* which illuminates the different types of almsgiving. Augustine states:

*Ac per hoc ad omnia quae utili misericordia fiunt ualet quod dominus ait: Date eleemosynam, et ecce omnia munda sunt uobis. Non solum ergo qui dat esurienti cibum, sitiendi potum, nudo uestimentum, peregrinanti hospitium, fugienti latibulum, aegro uel incluso uisitationem, captiuo redemptionem, debili subuectionem, caeco deductionem, tristi consolationem, non sano medelam, erranti uiam, deliberanti consilium, et quod cuique necessarium est indigenti, uerum etiam qui dat ueniam peccanti, eleemosynam dat.*<sup>49</sup>

Both Augustine and the anonymous authors seem to conceptualise almsgiving as something which primarily provides for the physical needs of the recipient. Yet they also emphasise that alms may be considered as things which provide for one's spiritual health, such as forgiveness of sins. Augustine in particular equates this forgiveness with mercy (*misericordia*), which he clearly considers to be a type of almsgiving.

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<sup>48</sup> Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, pp. 334-5. 'Indeed, there are three types of alms. One is corporal: to give to the needy whatever you will be able. Another is spiritual: to forgive those by whom you were injured. Third: to correct the erring and lead those gone astray into the way of truth'. The source passage in *Pembroke 25* cites Jerome as the author of this section explaining categories of alms and almsdeeds. Cf. Cross, *Cambridge Pembroke College MS. 25*, p. 140.

<sup>49</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 19, 72 (CCSL 46), p. 88. 'And through this one is strong by all things which come about through useful mercy, because the Lord said: Give alms, and behold all things are clean for you. Therefore not only the one who gives food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, hospitality to the traveller, refuge to the fugitive, visitation to the sick or imprisoned, redemption for the captive, conveyance for the weak, guidance for the blind, consolation for the sorrowful, a cure for the sick, a path for the errant, counsel for the one who deliberates, and gives whatever is necessary to the poor; but also he who truly gives pardon to the sinner, gives alms'.

Wulfstan, in his homily *Her ongynd be cristendome*, also describes almsgiving as something which provides for the needs of the recipient, although he does not distinguish between physical and spiritual alms: '*Ælmesgedal dæle man gelome, Mete þam ofhingredum, drenc þam ofðyrstum, hushleow gefarenum, wæfels þam nacedum, frofer þam dreorigan, neosunge þam seocan, 7 byrgenne þam deadan*'.<sup>50</sup> This description of the physical and spiritual needs of the recipient of alms echoes that given by Augustine. It is also evocative of Christ's revelation of the fate of the just on the Day of Judgement in Matthew 25:34-46. In this passage Christ addresses the righteous, stating that they will be saved because of their generosity in life: '*esurivi enim et dedistis mihi manducare sitiivi et dedistis mihi bibere hospes eram et collexistis me, nudus et operuistis me infirmus et visitastis me in carcere eram et venistis ad me*'.<sup>51</sup> When the righteous question when they have done these things, Christ states that anyone who is generous to a poor or needy man is in essence generous to Christ himself. In return for these charities, the righteous will be saved from eternal punishment. Likewise, those who neglect to perform these acts of generosity will be judged harshly and sent to eternal punishment because, indeed, they have neglected Christ himself. As discussed in Chapter One, this passage is often cited as the source for the patristic identification of the poor with Christ. In drawing on this biblical tradition of providing for one's physical needs as a means of giving to Christ, Wulfstan further defines this tradition as one encompassing almsgiving. Therefore, according to Wulfstan, by providing for a person's physical needs, one gives alms to Christ himself.

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<sup>50</sup> Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xc: *Her Ongynd Be Cristendome*, lines 159-162. 'One shall continuously bestow the distribution of alms: food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, shelter of a house to the travelling, clothing to the naked, comfort to the sorrowful, visitation to the sick, and burial for the dead'. Cf. Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xb: *De Cristianitate*, lines 124-127; Wulfstan, *Contra iniquos iudices et falsos testes*, in Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', pp. 121, translated on p. 123; Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 19, 72 (CCSL 46), p. 88.

<sup>51</sup> Matt. 25:35-36. 'For I was hungry, and you gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and you took me in: Naked, and you covered me: sick, and you visited me: I was in prison, and you came to me.'

This link between physical needs, almsgiving and giving to Christ is also vividly described in the versions of the Life of St Martin of Tours, retold by Ælfric and authors in both the Blickling and Vercelli codices. Each of these *vitae* provides a similar description of an early episode in Martin's life. On a cold winter's evening, as Martin was riding into the city of Amiens, he was accosted by a naked beggar asking for clothing. Martin took pity on the beggar, cut his cloak in two, gave half to the beggar and kept half for himself.<sup>52</sup> Later that night Christ came to Martin in a dream, wearing the same cloak and praising Martin for his kindness. Martin, recognising the importance of his vision, immediately sought baptism for himself.<sup>53</sup> While Ælfric relays only that the poor man cried because of his condition, both the Blickling and Vercelli authors state that the man begged for alms of clothing, providing a clear link between giving alms to the poor and thus giving to Christ himself.

The importance of establishing this link between almsgiving and giving to Christ is revealed in the definition of alms provided by Ælfric. In his homily *Dominica prima in quadragesima* he reveals that '*þas twa ælmessana cynn us sind to beganne. mid micelre gecnyrdnyse. þæt we oðrum mannum mid inweardre heortan forgifon. gif hi awar us geæbiligdon. to ði þæt god us forgyfenysse do ure synna; And uton don þearfum. and wannspedigum sume hiððe ure goda. þam ælmihtigum gode to wurðmynte. þe hit us alænde. þæt he us mare on ðam toweardan forgife*'.<sup>54</sup> As with Augustine and the authors of the Vercelli homilies, Ælfric distinguishes here between physical and spiritual alms,

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<sup>52</sup> See D. Janes, *God and Gold in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 159 for the secular symbolism of this act.

<sup>53</sup> CH II.XXXIV: *Depositio sancti martini episcopi*, lines 27-44; Vercelli XVIII: *De sancto martino confessore*, lines 44-82; Blickling XVIII: *To sancte martines mæssan*, pp. 212- 215.

<sup>54</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 40-46. 'These two kinds of alms are to be practiced by us with great diligence: that we forgive other men with inward heart, if they have offended us in anything, in order that God may give us forgiveness of our sins. And let us give to the poor and indigent some benefit of our goods, for the honour of Almighty God, who lent it to us, that he might give us more in the future'.

although he does not specifically define them as such, and emphasises the forgiveness of other men as a type of alms which is especially desirable.

In the latter half of Ælfric's statement on alms, he echoes Wulfstan and the anonymous authors in emphasising the need to provide for one's physical needs. Unlike the other authors, however, Ælfric also demonstrates an awareness of the reciprocal relationship one may establish with God by donating gifts of alms to the poor. If men grant forgiveness to those who have offended them, then God will grant them forgiveness of sin in return. Likewise, God has bestowed excess wealth upon men; men give this excess to the poor (who are equated with Christ) and in return God will grant more wealth to men in the future. The cycle continues indefinitely. In this way Anglo-Saxon almsgiving is described in terms of the gift-exchange relationships, described in Chapter One, which form an integral part of tenth- and eleventh-century social interactions. As with the ceremony of potlatch, giving alms to the poor was seen as a way of returning wealth to its original owner, God, so that His generosity would continue perpetually. In this sermon Ælfric articulates the reward to be gained in general terms, implying that one will be compensated in kind for the goods which are bestowed as alms on the poor and needy. In this way he presents almsgiving in a way which would be familiar to his audience, as it functions within a normative social framework.

This concept of returning to God what He has given to man may be seen as applying to tithes as well as alms. For example, in Wulfstan's sermon, *In decimis dandis*, which is taken nearly verbatim from a sermon of Caesarius of Arles on tithing, he discusses the importance of returning a portion of one's possessions to God.<sup>55</sup> Wulfstan begins by addressing those who may be questioning the purpose of the tithe: '*Deus autem noster, qui dignatus est totum dare, decimum a nobis dignatur recipere, non sibi set nobis*

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<sup>55</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 33 (CCSL 103), pp. 142-147.



*sine dubio profuturum*'.<sup>56</sup> He explains that tithes are beneficial for men precisely because of the relationship outlined in Ælfric's sermon. Returning a tithe of one's produce to God ensures that God will grant future prosperity. The produce from a good harvest belongs to God, not man, because God is the creator of all things. Wulfstan then argues that if one does not give one-tenth of one's possessions to the Lord, then the Lord will punish him by taking away nine-tenths and forcing him to live on one-tenth. This, he states, is the reason behind crops which fail or a devastating lack of rainfall: '*Quid est, auide subportatur? Nouem tibi partes subtracte sunt quia decimam dare noluisti. Constat quidem quod ipse non dederis, set tamen Deus exegit. Haec enim est Domini iustissima consuetudo ut si tu illi decimam non dederis, tu ad decimam reuoceris*'.<sup>57</sup>

A similar relationship is outlined in Ælfric's Second Series homily, *Dominica prima in quadragesima*. Here, drawing on a Pseudo-Augustinian sermon, Ælfric states that God has given wealth to the rich so that they may care for the poor.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, if rich men keep for themselves that which God intended for distribution to the poor, then He will take everything away from them: '*ðonne cweð se ælmihtiga wealdend to ðe; Efne nu ic ðe ofteo minne fultum. and hafa ðe þin geswinc; Ic ofteo mine renscuras. and ic wyrce ðin land unwæstmbære; Gif þæt land ðin is. se ren is min; Teoh ðu forð renscuras gif ðu miht. and gewætera ðine æceras; Gif ðu mage du þæt sunne scine. þæt ðine æceras ripion*'.<sup>59</sup> He then proceeds to curse selfish men further, warning his audience that

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<sup>56</sup> Wulfstan, *In decimis dandis*, in Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', p. 115, translated on p. 117. 'For our God, who has deigned to give us everything, thinks it right that he should receive tithes from us that will no doubt benefit us rather than himself'.

<sup>57</sup> Wulfstan, *In decimis dandis*, in Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', p. 116, translated on p. 118. 'Why does this happen, you greedy undertaker? The nine-tenths were taken from you because you refused to pay tithes. The fact is, of course, that you did not give it; God exacted it. For this is the Lord's exceedingly just practice: if you will not pay a tenth to him, you will be reduced to a tenth yourself'.

<sup>58</sup> Anonymous *Sermo* 310, printed with commentary and translation in J. E. Cross, 'Miscelle: A *Sermo de Misericordia* in Old English Prose', *Anglia* 108 (1990), pp. 429-440.

<sup>59</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 67-85 at 74-79. 'Then the Almighty Ruler will say to you, "Behold now I will withdraw my support from you, I will make your land barren. I will withdraw my rain-showers, and I will make thy land barren. If the land is yours, the rain is mine.'

the poor could continue to live without the rich men, but rich men cannot live without the support of the Lord. Unlike Wulfstan in the *In decimis dandis*, Ælfric here is referring to gifts of alms rather than the tithe. In the section preceding that just quoted, Ælfric gives an extended treatment of almsgiving, stating:

*God bebyt þæt man ælmessan wyrce. and he forbead facn. and reaflac; Se unrihtwisa berypð oðre and blissað. eft gif se ðearfa hine bitt ælmessan. þonne geunrotsað he and awent his neb aweg. and forgyt þæs witegan cwyde þe cwæð; Se ðe awent his neb fram clypigendum ðearfan. he sylf clypað eft to gode. and his stemn ne bið gehyred; Ahylð ðin eare to ðæs wædlan bene. þæt god eft þine stemne gehyre; Dæl of ðam ðe ðe god forgeaf. and þin god beoð gemenigfylde; Gyf ðu forgymeleasast to dælenne ælmessan. god þe benæmð þinra goda. and þu belifst siððan wædla.<sup>60</sup>*

It is notable that in this passage, Ælfric differs from his Pseudo-Augustinian source, choosing to render *miser ricordiam* as *ælmessan* rather than *mildheortnyss*e as he had done earlier in the sermon. This deliberate emendation indicates that Ælfric intended to stress the importance of almsgiving specifically, rather than the tithe or general mercy which he discusses elsewhere in the sermon. Thus, this section of the sermon reinforces the mutual relationship between man and God, reiterating the significance of almsgiving in maintaining this reciprocity.

This theme is further echoed in Vercelli Homily X where the anonymous author utilises the same Pseudo-Augustinian source, providing an even more extended commentary on all of the ways in which a man is dependent on God and thus may

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You bring forth the rain-showers, if you can, and water your fields. If you can, cause the sun to shine, that your fields may ripen". Cf. Blickling IV: *Dominica tertia in quadragesima*, pp. 48-51; LS XIII: *De oratione moysi; in medio quadragesima*, lines 147-177; M. Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (eds.), *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 134-135.

<sup>60</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 57-66. 'God commanded alms to be given, and he forbade fraud and robbery. The unrighteous robs others and rejoices: then, if the needy ask alms of him, he is offended, and turns his face away, and forgets the saying of the prophet, who said, "He who turns his face from the crying poor, shall afterwards himself cry unto God, and his voice shall not be heard. Incline your ear to the prayer of the needy, that God may afterwards hear your voice. Distribute from that which God has given you, and your goods shall be multiplied. If you neglect to distribute alms, God will take your goods from you, and afterwards you shall remain poor"'.

be ruined if God withdraws his favour. The Vercelli author reinforces the message that God has given wealth to men in order that they might share it with the poor, paraphrasing Matthew 25:40, ‘*Swa lange swa ge hit doð, 7 swa oft swa ge hit syllað [anum] minum ll[æ]stum, ge hit symle me syllað, 7 ic eow sylle ecne gefean in heofonum*’.<sup>61</sup> Like Ælfric’s *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, this homily stresses the reciprocal relationship between God and man, indicating that in addition to ensuring the prosperity of crops and continual gifts of wealth, God will also reward man with eternal joy in heaven if he duly shares his wealth and prosperity with the poor. The homily continues with a lengthy digression in the voice of Christ, in which He threatens to remove all support from men who do not share their wealth and dares men to attempt to live without heavenly aid. The passage ends with a reference to Luke 12:48: ‘*Ðam þe dryhten mycel [syleð], myceles he hine eac eft manað*’.<sup>62</sup> The tone of this passage borders on mockery with the author almost ridiculing the members of his audience who think they might be able to survive without the support of God. It appeals to the very real fear that natural calamities such as poor harvests or devastating weather may be sent as punishment for ignoring one’s obligations to return a portion of one’s wealth to God, both through tithes and through almsgiving. These passages clearly illuminate the reciprocal relationship which was seen to exist between God and men, delineating the hierarchy in which each exists: God provides for rich men so that they in turn might provide for the poor. In each of these extracts, the discussions of alms and tithes are intertwined, demonstrating a conceptual similarity between the two. It is common in the homilies that discussions of almsgiving occur within the context of tithes, and vice versa, as both were seen as returning a portion of God’s property to him. Yet it is important to note that a firm distinction was kept between almsgiving and tithing, as was demonstrated in

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<sup>61</sup> Vercelli X, lines 147-149. ‘As long as you do it and as often as you give it to my least one, you always give it to me, and I will give to you eternal joy in heaven’.

<sup>62</sup> Vercelli X, lines 141-206, at 204-205. ‘To he whom the Lord gives much, so He also asks him of much’. Cf. CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 63-66.

Wulfstan's version of *In decimis dandis*. This distinction is repeated in Vercelli Homily XX, where the author also states that man is to return the tenth portion of his goods to God as a tithe and give alms from the remaining nine parts.<sup>63</sup> For the most part, these two actions were seen as separate and the relationship between tithing and almsgiving shall be addressed in more detail in Chapter Three.<sup>64</sup>

These passages also raise interesting questions about the nature of the relationship between God and man regarding wealth. The command that rich men must share their wealth because God intended them to do so provides a neat rationale for the disparity between rich and poor on earth, but it also gives an opportunity to stress the importance of almsgiving. As discussed in Chapter One, the Biblical stigma associated with the possession of material wealth was well established in the late antique and early medieval period. This stigma emerged partly in the condemnations of avarice which seem to have developed parallel to the doctrine of almsgiving.<sup>65</sup> This is evident partly in the patristic interpretation of Christ's parable of Dives and Lazarus, recorded in Luke 16:19-31. In this story Dives, who ignored the poor beggar Lazarus during his life, is taken to hell after his death. When Dives asks for relief from his torments, Abraham reveals that he is being punished because he only used his wealth to make himself comfortable during his life. Likewise Lazarus, who suffered during his earthly life, was taken to heaven upon his death so that he might be comforted in the afterlife. Thus each was rewarded accordingly for his actions in life.

Although the most obvious interpretation of this story may be that Dives was punished for the possession of wealth, most patristic authors interpreted the story as a condemnation of the failure to share one's wealth, rather than condemning the

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<sup>63</sup> Vercelli XX, lines 28-30.

<sup>64</sup> One exception to this distinction is Blickling IV: *Dominica tertia in quadragesima*, which seems to use tithes and alms interchangeably.

<sup>65</sup> R. Newhauser, 'Avarice and the Apocalypse', in R. Landes, A. Gow and D. C. Van Meter (eds.), *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050* (Oxford, 2003).

possession of wealth itself.<sup>66</sup> This is in keeping with the patristic understanding that God had chosen to bestow wealth upon rich men, as was most clearly articulated in the *Life of St Eligius* and discussed in the previous chapter. This interpretation is repeated throughout the Anglo-Saxon homilies as well. Ælfric, in his homily *Dominica secunda post pentecosten*, quotes Gregory the Great in arguing that Dives had not acquired his wealth by illegitimate means. He was punished, therefore, not for possessing this wealth but rather because he was miserly and exulted in his wealth.<sup>67</sup> Ælfric concludes, ‘*pises mannes uncyst 7 upahfednys hine besencte on cwicsusle. for þan ðe he næfde nane mildheortnysse; þæt he mid his gestreone his agene sawle alysde*’.<sup>68</sup> This interpretation is not explicitly clear from the biblical text, yet it has important implications for the understanding of wealth and almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon society. Viewing the story of the rich man and Lazarus in this way gives context to the previously cited injunctions in Vercelli Homily X, Wulfstan’s *In decimis dandis* and Ælfric’s *Dominica prima in quadragesima* that rich men should return a portion of wealth to God through alms and tithes or they will be forced to do without, both in this world and in the next.

The homiletic emphasis on wealth as something which has been bestowed by God for the care of the poor is reflective of the early Christian concern regarding the presence of excess material wealth in society. As demonstrated in Chapter One, this was a common theme in late antique commentaries on wealth and poverty, and the previous examples have demonstrated that it occurred frequently in the Anglo-Saxon homilies as well. While the authors state that the poor should be aided through gifts of alms from the wealthy, this is always with the understanding that

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<sup>66</sup> B. Ramsey, ‘Almsgiving in the Latin Church: the Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries’, *Theological Studies* 43.2 (1982), pp. 239-240. Cf. B. Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, trans. by A. Kolakowska (Oxford, 1994), p. 35.

<sup>67</sup> CH I.XXIII: *Dominica secunda post pentecosten*, lines 29-32.

<sup>68</sup> CH I.XXIII: *Dominica secunda post pentecosten*, lines 34-36. ‘This man’s parsimony and arrogance sank him into living torment, because he did not have any compassion, so that with his treasure he might have redeemed his own soul’.

poverty will never, and indeed should never, truly be eradicated.<sup>69</sup> Just as the rich have been created by God so that they might care for the poor, so the poor were created in order to provide an object for the charity of the rich. Thus, as with interpretations of Dives and Lazarus, wealth was not forbidden so long as it was acquired through just means and some portion of it was distributed to the poor. The author of the Blickling Homily III summarises this qualification succinctly, '*Nis eow þonne forboden þætte æhta habban, gif ge þa on riht strenap; forþon Gode is swiþe leof þæt ge þa earmum mannum syllon, & mid eowrum æhtum gearnian þæt ge þone eacan gefean begytan motan, þe Drihten on is mid his halgum, & mid eallum þam þe his bebodu healdan willap & gelæstan*'.<sup>70</sup> Ælfric offers an additional perspective on the possession of wealth, '*Gif ealle menn on worulde rice wæron. þonne næfde seo mildheortnyss nænne stede. þæt seo ælmyse ure synna lig adwæscte*'.<sup>71</sup> Both rich and poor men serve a pre-ordained function in society. Eradicating either group would thus upset the balance created by God and would not benefit anyone. It is the presence of both wealthy and poor men which necessitates the giving of alms which allows rich men to earn salvation for their souls.

While it is clear in the homilies that God created the wealthy to take care of the poor, injunctions for almsgiving were not confined to fulfilling this relationship. Ælfric in particular places frequent emphasis on the need for poor people to give alms as well. In his homily *Dominica in sexagesima*, he relates the story of a paralysed man who received alms because of his physical condition. Rather than keeping the alms for himself, the man redistributed these alms to others in need, emphasising the

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<sup>69</sup> M. Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. by A. Goldhammer (New Haven, CT, 1986), p. 10.

<sup>70</sup> Blickling IV: *Dominica tertia in quadragesima*, pp. 52-53. 'It is not forbidden for you to possess wealth, if you acquire it rightly; because it is very pleasing to God that you should give it to poor men and earn with your wealth that you may obtain the eternal joy, in which the Lord is with his saints and with all those who wish to observe and carry out his commands'.

<sup>71</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 113-115. 'If all men in the world were rich, then mercy would have no place, that alms might extinguish the flame of our sins'.

strength of his piety.<sup>72</sup> In his *Natale sancti andreei* Ælfric cites the example of the poor widow seen giving one farthing in alms to the temple, recorded in Mark 12:41-44. Jesus praises the widow for her sacrifice, remarking to his disciples that her piety is greater than that of any rich man giving alms to the temple because she has given away something of which she had great need.<sup>73</sup>

The relation of these stories emphasises that it is not just the wealthy who are obligated to give alms, but that those who have nothing must give alms as well. This is made possible by the broad definition of alms as physical or spiritual needs, as well as gifts of money.<sup>74</sup> Again in the *Natale sancti andreei* Ælfric explains that it is not the amount of the gift which is important, but rather that the giver parts with something of value to himself. He further elaborates that it takes only a small gift in order to purchase the kingdom of heaven:

*Se Hælend cwæð on sumere stowe to his apostolum; Soð ic eow secge. swa hwa swa sylð ceald wæter drincan anum þurstigum men þæra ðe on me gelyfað; ne bið his med forloren; Mine gebroþra scrutniað nu þa; mid hu waclicum wurþe godes rice bið geboht. 7 hu deorwurðe hit is to geagenne; Se ceap ne mæg wið nanum sceatte beon geeht. ac he bið ælcum menn gelofod be his agenre hæfene.<sup>75</sup>*

This summarises Ælfric's message for the homily: the kingdom of God is priced according to each man's property. Much is expected from those who are wealthy, but a poor man may give alms with something as small as a drink of cold water.

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<sup>72</sup> CH II.VI: *Dominica in sexagesima*, lines 167-197.

<sup>73</sup> CH I.XXXVIII: *Natale sancti andreei*, lines 96-105. Cf. CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 100-120.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Matt. 25:40.

<sup>75</sup> CH I.XXXVIII: *Natale sancti andreei*, lines 105-110. 'The Saviour said in some place to his apostles, "Truly I say to you, Whoever gives cold water to drink to one thirsty man of those who believe in me, his reward shall not be lost." My brothers, consider now with how trifling value God's kingdom is bought, and how precious it is to possess. The purchase may not be augmented for any treasure, but it will be priced for every man according to his own property'.

Wulfstan also comments that each man should happily give alms according to that which is possible for him,<sup>76</sup> and the author of Blickling Homily VI reveals that giving alms according to one's means is instructed in the Bible and is thus pleasing to the Lord.<sup>77</sup> Each of these authors makes it very clear that all people were expected to give alms, regardless of their personal wealth. The emphasis on giving according to one's means implies that the rich were expected to give a significant portion of their possessions as alms, not merely something which was unwanted or unneeded. This raises an important theological distinction. While it is a common injunction in the Anglo-Saxon homilies that all men should give alms, Ælfric's citation of Jesus praising the alms of the poor woman (and therefore by implication criticising the alms of the rich men) implies that alms are only spiritually beneficial if one gives something which is valuable or necessary to oneself. This qualification on the effectiveness of one's alms in proportion to the dearness of one's gift is not expressed consistently throughout the homilies, but it may indicate a contemporary concern that the laity were not taking the injunctions to give alms seriously. More often in the texts almsgiving is conceptualised as something which one does according to one's means, but the emphasis is on the act of giving itself rather than on the proportion of wealth which one gives.

The injunction to give alms according to one's means implies that rich men were expected to give a proportionally larger amount of their wealth, but it should be noted that it was not expected that a man should impoverish himself in doing so. Indeed, the patristic tradition, to which I have not yet found correspondence in the Anglo-Saxon homilies, cautions moderation in almsgiving rather than risking

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<sup>76</sup> Bethurum, *Homilies*, XIV: *Sermo in XL*, lines 20-23.

<sup>77</sup> Blickling VI: *Dominica sexta in quadragesima*, pp. 72-75. Cf. CH I.X: *Dominica in quinquagesima*, lines 170-174; CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 116-122; Supp. XVI: *Dominica VI post pentecosten*, lines 163-172; LS XXVI: *Natali sancti oswaldi, regis et martyris*, lines 90-97; Blickling X: *Disses middangeardes ende neah is*, pp. 108-109.



impoverishment for the sake of giving to the poor.<sup>78</sup> This tradition is articulated in Jerome's urging for restraint in his reiteration of Paul's commentary on wealth and charity in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14, '*non enim ut aliis sit remissio vobis autem tribulatio sed ex aequalitate, in praesenti tempore vestra abundantia illorum inopiam suppleat ut et illorum abundantia vestrae inopiae sit supplementum ut fiat aequalitas sicut scriptum est*'.<sup>79</sup> While this tradition is not specifically discussed in the Anglo-Saxon homilies, it seems to be generally understood that the act of giving is by itself meritorious; one does not need to be concerned by the amount given as long as it is in proportion to one's wealth. Ælfric's emphasis on the widow who gave one farthing, which in the biblical text amounted to her entire wealth, presents a marked shift from this general rule.<sup>80</sup>

### *For God or for Glory? – Conspicuous Almsgiving*

The homiletic command to distribute one's wealth as alms had wider connotations in late Anglo-Saxon society. Chapter One illustrated the importance of the conspicuous display of one's wealth in the tenth and eleventh centuries. In commanding that alms be given to the poor, the homilists allowed wealthy laymen the opportunity to express their status in a different way. Whereas kings and warriors had previously demonstrated their power by distributing wealth to their men, now kings and nobles were expected to demonstrate their Christian piety by conspicuously giving alms to the poor or to monasteries.

The emphasis on conspicuous gifts of alms as a means of indicating one's piety was in direct contrast to the Biblical injunction for almsgiving found in Matthew 6:2-4: '*cum ergo facies elemosynam noli tuba canere ante te sicut hypocritae faciunt in synagogis et in vicis ut honorificentur ab hominibus amen dico vobis receperunt mercedem suam, te autem*

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<sup>78</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 233-235.

<sup>79</sup> 'For I mean not that others should be eased and you burdened, but by an equality. In this present time let your abundance supply their want, that their abundance also may supply your want: that there may be an equality'. Jerome *Epistula* 108, 15 (CSEL 55), pp. 326-27. Cf. Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 234.

<sup>80</sup> Mark 12:41-44. Cf. CH I.XXXVIII: *Natale sancti andreei*, lines 96-110.

*faciente elemosynam nesciat sinistra tua quid faciat dextera tua, ut sit elemosyna tua in abscondito et Pater tuus qui videt in abscondito reddet tibi*'.<sup>81</sup> This verse is frequently cited in reference to almsgiving, indicating that the performative aspect of almsgiving had the potential to cause concern amongst the Christian community. According to Wulfstan, public almsgiving played an important role in ecclesiastical rituals such as the dedication of a church, although it should be noted that in the context of this sermon alms are clearly being given as part of the ritual rather than on an individual basis.<sup>82</sup> The concern that public almsgiving would be used as a means of drawing attention to one's piety is addressed most emphatically by Ælfric. In his homily *De virginitate*, he reminds his audience of the instruction given in Matthew 6:2-4, interpreting this passage to mean that one who truly wishes to give alms does so for the glory of God, not for the glory of oneself:

*Nyte þin wynstre hand hwæt þin swiðre hand do, us nis na to understandenne be ðam stæflicum andgite, ac be þam gastlicum andgite, þæt we for Godes lufan ure ælmessan don, na for idelum gylpe. Seo wynstre hand getacnað þissere worulde gylp. Nu se ðe ælmessan dælð þam Ælmihtigan to lofe, he dælð soðlice mid þære swiðran handa. And se ðe for idelum gylpe his ælmessan dælð, he dælð witodlice mid þære wynstran handa.*<sup>83</sup>

With this caution, Ælfric reminds his audience that God judges not only the gifts of alms, but also the motivations behind these gifts. In doing so he omits the biblical injunction to give one's alms in secret, instead allowing that men could give alms publically, so long as they did so for the glory of God rather than to boost their own

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<sup>81</sup> 'Therefore when thou dost an alms-deed, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be honoured by men. Amen I say to you, they have received their reward. But when thou dost alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth. That thy alms may be in secret, and thy Father who seeth in secret will repay thee'.

<sup>82</sup> Bethurum, *Homilies*, XVIII: *De dedicatione ecclesiae*, lines 21-24.

<sup>83</sup> Supp. XXX: *De virginitate*, lines 57-66. 'Let your left hand not know what your right hand does, it is not for us to understand regarding the literal interpretation, that we do our alms for God's love, not for vainglory. The left hand signifies the pride of this world. Now, he who distributes alms for the glory of the Almighty, he truly distributes them with the right hand. And he who distributes his alms for vainglory, he assuredly distributes them with his left hand'. Cf. CH II.XXVIII: *Dominica XII post pentecosten*, lines 17-82.

reputations. Ælfric thus cleverly amends his biblical source in a way which allows for the virtue of conspicuously displaying one's Christianity through gifts of alms. This also drew on an established historical precedent, as from the fourth and fifth centuries almsgiving had emerged as an important way to express one's Christianity.<sup>84</sup>

Giving alms as a means of asserting one's Christian identity was a common theme in the Anglo-Saxon homilies. This virtue was particularly popular in stories which described a person's conversion to Christianity, whereby almsgiving was used as a means of illustrating one's commitment to the new Christian life. Wulfstan's sermon *Her ongynd be cristendome*, for example, describes many desirable aspects of Christian behaviour, and his comments regarding almsgiving occur in the context of encouraging conversion to Christianity: '*Eala, leofan men, ne latiað na, ne latiað, ac oftslice efstað 7 to Gode wendað. And se ðe wære gitsiende oðra manna þinga 7 æhta, weorðe of his agenan rihte begytenan ælmesgyfa georne*'.<sup>85</sup> Here Wulfstan uses the phrase '*ælmesgyfa georne*' (literally 'diligent in alms-gifts') to describe this generosity as a desirable characteristic of one who converts to Christianity. This was apparently the case with the centurion Longinus and the Roman Gallicanus, both of whom are recorded by Ælfric as distributing alms immediately after their conversions to Christianity.<sup>86</sup> It is likely that this action was meant to be interpreted as a public declaration of one's Christianity, perhaps linked with Christ's command in Matthew

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<sup>84</sup> R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice (313-450)* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 188-190.

<sup>85</sup> Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xc: *Her ongynd be cristendome*, lines 121-124. 'Behold, beloved men, do not hesitate, do not delay, but quickly make haste and turn to God. And he who was covetous of other men's things and wealth, may he become eager of almsgiving from his own true gains'. Cf. the Latin version of this sermon, Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xb: *De christianitate*, lines 97-98: '*Nolite, fratres, nolite tardare conuerti ad Dominum. Sed qui fuit cupidus, sit in elemosinis largus.*'

<sup>86</sup> LS VII: *Natale sancte agnetis uirginis*, lines 381-387; LS XXVII: *Exaltatio sancte crucis*, lines 192-198.

19:21: *'si vis perfectus esse vade vende quae habes et da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelo et veni sequere me'*.<sup>87</sup>

A number of homilies authored by Ælfric use a similar phrase to describe almsgiving as a means by which one could indicate one's Christianity and piety. On two separate occasions he relates the story of a New Testament widow who had died and subsequently been brought back to life by an apostle. The first of these, Tabitha, whose story was related in the previous chapter, was described as *'wel gelyfed...and swyþe ælmes-georn and mid godum weorcum geglencged forþearle'*, linking her piety directly with her almsgiving and thus implying that this was the reason for her resurrection.<sup>88</sup> The second widow, Drusiana, was similarly portrayed: *'Heo wæs swiðe gelyfed and ælmesgeorn, and þa ðearfan, ðe heo mid cystigum mode eallunga afedde, dreorige mid woþe ðam lice folgodon'*.<sup>89</sup> She also was subsequently raised from the dead, again apparently because of her generosity in almsgiving. Ælfric also relates the story of the centurion Cornelius who, although unbaptised, believed in God and gave alms generously. Because of this generosity, Cornelius was visited by an angel who revealed that Cornelius's alms had garnered him favour with God and he was to seek out the apostle Peter in order to receive instruction in the Christian faith.<sup>90</sup> In each of these stories, Ælfric relates the giving of alms as an act incidental to his main story. Yet the emphasis he places on this action makes it clear that almsgiving was considered to be an integral part of Christian behaviour, so much so that almsgiving itself was equated with an assertion of one's Christianity.

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<sup>87</sup> 'If thou wilt be perfect, go sell what thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me'.

<sup>88</sup> '...a very true believer...very eager in almsgiving, and adorned exceedingly with good works'. LS X: *Cathedra sancti petri*, lines 53-76 at 54-56.

<sup>89</sup> CH I.IV: *Assumptio sancti iohannis apostoli*, lines 40-41. 'She was of great faith, and eager of alms, and the poor, whom she had bountifully fed, sad [and] with weeping, followed the corpse'.

<sup>90</sup> LS X: *Cathedra sancti petri*, lines 136-150.

Ælfric's description of the conversion of Oswald, king of Northumbria, also links almsgiving with desirable Christian behaviour. Closely following his source, Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica*, Ælfric describes how Oswald was instructed into the Christian faith by St Aidan and mimicked his piety. Aidan himself is described as being particularly kind to the poor, giving away to the poor any gifts he received from kings or rich men, but it is Oswald who is praised most in terms of almsgiving:

*Ɔa wearð se cynincg oswold swiðe ælmes-georn and eadmod on þeawum and on eallum þingum cystig and man ahrærde cyrcan on his rice geond eall and mynsterlice gesetnyssa mid micelre geornfulnysse. Hit gelamp on sumne sæl þæt hi sæton ætgædere oswold and aidan on þam halgan easterdæge þa bær man þam cyninge cynelice þenunga on anum sylfrenan disc and sona þa inn eode an þæs cyninges þegna þe his ælmyssan bewiste and sæde þæt fela þearfan sætan geond þa stræt gehwanon cumene to þæs cyninges ælmyssan. Ɔa sende se cyning sona þam þearfum þone sylfrenan disc mid sande mid ealle and het toceorfan þone disc and syllan þam þearfum heora ælcum his dæl and man dyde ða swa.<sup>91</sup>*

Not only had Oswald given alms, but he had done so with a generosity which was apparently quite noteworthy; his actions at the Easter feast serve as potent testimony to this fact. It is difficult to imagine how almsgiving could be any more public and neither Bede nor Ælfric attach a stigma to king's actions; instead both praise the king in the form of Aidan's blessing, '*Ne forrotige on brosnunge þeos gebletsode swyðre hand*'.<sup>92</sup> Clearly in examples such as these, eagerness in almsgiving was considered to be an appropriate expression of one's new-found Christianity, demonstrating that visible almsgiving was a desirable way in which one could convey piety. Thus both

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<sup>91</sup> LS XXVI: *Natali sancti oswaldi, regis et martyris*, lines 83-97. 'King Oswald became very eager of almsgiving and humble in manners, and bountiful in all things, and they [Oswald and Aidan] raised churches everywhere in his kingdom, and monastic foundations with great zeal. It happened upon a certain occasion that they sat together, Oswald and Aidan, on the holy Easter Day; then they brought to the king the royal meats on a silver dish. And presently one of the king's thegns, who had charge of his alms, came in and said that many poor men were sitting in the streets, [having] come from all quarters for the alms of the king. Then the king immediately sent to the poor the silver dish, with all the food, and ordered men to cut the dish in pieces and give it to the poor, a portion to each of them, and they then did so'. On Aidan, see LS XXVI: *Natale sancti oswaldi, regis et martyris*, lines 57-59; *HE*, iii.5, quoted above in Introduction.

<sup>92</sup> LS XXVI: *Natale sancti oswaldi, regis et martyris*, line 101. 'May this blessed right hand never rot in corruption'.

Ælfric and Wulfstan encourage almsgiving in a way which reflects and works with the social value of conspicuous display.

It is notable that with the exception of King Oswald, none of the men and women praised for their almsgiving after their conversion to Christianity may be identified as Anglo-Saxon. Each exists in the New Testament or may be placed in a similar chronological context. In recounting these stories as examples of how one should behave upon one's conversion, Ælfric acknowledges the patristic tradition of equating almsgiving with the demonstration of one's Christianity. The prevalence of these types of references within the context of saints' lives serves to reinforce the link between almsgiving and Christian identity, as the accepted purpose of *vitae* was to relate examples of ideal Christian behaviour in the hope of encouraging imitation. Thus, giving alms is presented as being inherently equated with Christianity in a number of homilies.

The examples presented in this section demonstrate two important characteristics of the act of almsgiving itself. First, as Ælfric argues, almsgiving does not have to be secret; it is not the visibility of the action which is condemned, but rather the motives behind one's pious gift. In viewing almsgiving in this way, Ælfric essentially contradicts the biblical injunction that man should give alms in secret. Instead he emphasises the importance of public almsgiving, so long as it was carried out with humble motives: alms given for the glory of God rather than the glory of oneself. This characterisation of almsgiving paves the way for numerous examples in Ælfric's homilies and a single example authored by Wulfstan in which public almsgiving is portrayed as a means of expressing one's Christianity upon conversion. It is clear that this was something to be praised and even expected. It served as a means of showing one's allegiance to a new religious code, one which stressed the importance of sharing one's wealth with the poor. It is unknown whether the Anglo-Saxon audience would have appreciated the subtle distinction between giving alms for God's glory and giving for one's own glory, but the motif of public piety was

emphasised in mid-eleventh-century sources such as the *Vita ædwardi regis* and *Vision of Earl Leofric*, discussed in the previous chapter. It is always difficult to assess the motivations behind actions recorded in somewhat prescriptive texts, yet it is clear that the Anglo-Saxons increasingly valued the importance of publically displaying their piety through acts of almsgiving. This is a subject to which I shall return in Chapter Four.

### *Almsgiving and the Forgiveness of Sin*

In the homiletic excerpts discussed thus far, it has been demonstrated that men could expect to receive some type of benefit in return for their gifts of alms. This was reflected in both the social framework of gift-exchange in which these transactions operated and the honour accorded to actions of conspicuous piety. It has already been established that these rewards might be given in kind, for example as prosperous crops and increased material wealth, or they might serve an important social function, as in earning prestige on account of one's visible piety. However, these homilies have also hinted toward another reward which may be gained from gifts of alms, one which transcends the earthly realm: forgiveness of sin.

The relationship between almsgiving and the forgiveness of sin is frequently explicated in the Anglo-Saxon homilies. Its biblical roots may be found in Sirach 3:33, which states: '*ignem ardentem extinguit aqua et elemosyna resistit peccatis*'.<sup>93</sup> This verse is sometimes cited in the homilies, emphasising that sins will be forgiven in exchange for gifts of alms.<sup>94</sup> It makes use of vivid imagery in order to demonstrate the power of almsgiving to atone for one's sins, providing the audience with a clear picture of the ways in which almsgiving would be beneficial to the soul.

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<sup>93</sup> 'Water quengeth a flaming fire, and alms resisteth sin'.

<sup>94</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 113-117; Vercelli X, lines 122-140; Vercelli XX, lines 22-61.

In early Christianity, almsgiving was linked with the forgiveness of sin in the doctrine of redemptive almsgiving. As discussed in Chapter One, this doctrine was developed in the first and second centuries in response to questions over whether it was possible to make amends for post-baptismal sin. Early Christian theologians created and circulated texts such as *The Shepherd of Hermas* and *2 Clement* which argued that one could seek forgiveness for sins through the act of almsgiving.<sup>95</sup> This argument proved popular with patristic authors such as Ambrose, who stated that one should redeem one's sin through gifts of money and good works.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, Boniface Ramsey notes that by the fifth century almsgiving was so inextricably linked with the forgiveness of sins that authors such as Jerome and Maximus, Bishop of Turin, placed almsgiving on a similar level with baptism in its ability to cleanse one from sin.<sup>97</sup> Also by the fifth century, it became acceptable for the laity to be concerned about death and the fate of their souls at the Final Judgement. This was a shift from the previous mindset that concern over one's fate was evidence of a guilty conscience and therefore evidence of great sins. With this new development in Christian thinking, repentance emerged as something which Christians must be mindful of at all times in order to acknowledge their dependence on God's grace.<sup>98</sup>

While the ability of almsgiving to atone for sin was well-established by the tenth century, the Anglo-Saxon homilists often explain this doctrine in more detail. One of the most expressive ways of demonstrating this relationship was by illustrating the connections between almsgiving and the eight virtues. The author of Vercelli Homily IV likens almsgiving to one of the many shields which the Lord has given to

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<sup>95</sup> R. Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series 77 (Sheffield, 1993), pp. 76-108.

<sup>96</sup> Ambrose, *Expositio Psalmi* 118, 8.41 (CSEL 62), p. 176. Cited in. Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 242.

<sup>97</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', pp. 242-3.

<sup>98</sup> É. Rebillard, *In hora mortis: évolution de la pastorale chrétienne de la mort aux IV<sup>e</sup> et V<sup>e</sup> siècles dans l'Occident latin*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 223 (Rome, 1994). Cf. M. Smyth, 'The Origins of Purgatory Through the Lens of Seventh-Century Irish Eschatology', *Traditio* 58 (2003), p. 94.



man in order to defend himself against the arrows of the devil, which are identified with the sins of man:

*Donne hæfð þæt dioful geworht bogan 7 stræla. Se boga bið geworht of ofermettum, 7 þa stræla bioð swa manigra cynna swa swa mannes synna bioð...Donne is mycel þearf, men þa leofestan, þæt we hæbben þa scyldas þærongean þe dryhten us hæfð gesett mid to scyldanne. Ærest is an scyld wisdom 7 wærscipe 7 fæstrædnes on godum weorcum, 7 mildheortnesse 7 eaðmodnesse scyld, 7 rhytes geleafan scyld 7 godra worca scild, 7 þæs halgan gastes sweord [þæt syndon Godes word] þe men singað, 7 ælmessan 7 fæstenes scyld, 7 manþwærnesse 7 bilwitnesses scyld, 7 staðulfæstnesse scyld on godum weorcum. 7 þone scyld nimen us to wige wið þam awyrgedan deofle þe lufu hatte.<sup>99</sup>*

Thus, through the use of this fantastic piece of imagery, the audience is encouraged to take the words of Sirach quite literally in seeing alms as a shield which deflects the arrows of sin. That the words of Sirach 3:33 were not repeated in this homily indicates that they would have been well known enough in the general population for the audience itself to make this link.

Although almsgiving was not often regarded as one of the eight virtues, it was considered to be a component of *largitas* and thus appears frequently in discussions on this topic. In his homily *Sermo de memoria sanctorum*, Ælfric extensively considers both the eight sins and the eight virtues one may use to combat them.<sup>100</sup> In his discussion of *largitas*, he counsels that men should perform almsdeeds without boasting in order to combat *avaritia* (covetousness). Later in the same homily, in his discussion of *soðe lufe to gode* (true love to God), used to combat *jactantia* (vainglory),

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<sup>99</sup> Vercelli IV, lines 308-310, 322-329. 'Then the devil has made bows and arrows. The bow is made of pride, and the arrows are of as many kinds as there are sins of man...Then it is greatly necessary, beloved men, that we have the shields against them with which the lord has appointed us for shielding. First, one shield is wisdom and caution and resolution in good works, and the shield of mercy and humility, and the shield of true faith and the shield of good works, and of the sword of the Holy Ghost (that is the word of God) of which men sing, and the shield of almsgiving and fasting, and the shield of gentleness and innocence, and the shield of steadfastness and good works. And we will take that shield with us into battle against the cursed devil who hates love'. Cf. Vercelli XX, lines 57-61; Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xb: *De christianitate*, lines 94-111; Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xc: *Her ongynd be cristendome*, lines 60-71.

<sup>100</sup> LS XVI: *Sermo de memoria sanctorum*, lines 267-384. Cf. Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xc: *Her ongynd be cristendome*, lines 60-140.

Ælfric states: 'Ac uton don ælmyssan swa swa he us tæhte, gode to lofe na us to hlisan, þæt god sy geherod on urum godum weorcum and se idela gylp us beo æfre unwurð'.<sup>101</sup> Again, Ælfric stresses that alms must be given for the glory of God rather than for one's own glory, here expanding this premise to indicate that such almsgiving is particularly virtuous. Thus, while almsgiving is not considered to be a capital virtue in this context, it is reckoned to be indispensable in the fight against sin.

Aside from describing the metaphorical uses of almsgiving to combat sin, the homilists also provide practical applications for this mercy. The author of the Blickling homily *Dominica prima in quinquagesima* instructs his audience that one may atone for daily sins through fasting, praying and gifts of alms.<sup>102</sup> This reference to 'daily sins' recalls the patristic categorisation of sins into minor sins, or venial sins, which occur frequently and could easily be atoned for, and major sins which demanded more complicated means of expiation.<sup>103</sup> This dichotomy is clearly demonstrated in Ælfric's *Sermo ad populum in octavis pentecosten dicendus*:

*Sumera manna sawla siðiað to reste æfter heora forðsiðe, and sume farað to witum, be þam ðe hi geworhton ær, and beoð eft alyseð þurh ælmesdæda, and swiðost þurh ða mæssan, gif him man fore deð...Sume leahtras beoð on ðisum life gebette, and sume æfter deaðe, swa swa ure Drihten sæde; ac ða micclan synna ne magon þær beon gebette, ne þam fordonan ne fremað þæt þæt him man fore deð, for ðan ðe he his ne gearnode ær on his life.*<sup>104</sup>

<sup>101</sup> LS XVI: *Sermo de memoria sanctorum*, lines 364-367. 'But let us do almsgiving, just as He taught us, for the praise of God, not for our own glory, that God be magnified in our good works, and vainglory ever be worthless to us'.

<sup>102</sup> Blickling II: *Dominica prima in quinquagesima*, pp. 24-25. Cf. CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 100-120; LS XII: *In caput jejunii*, lines 149-152; Blickling III: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>103</sup> J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. by A. Goldhammer (Chicago, IL, 1984), pp. 5, 84, 86-87, 90-91, 101. Whereas Augustine does not provide a discussion of 'venial' sins, he does distinguish between greater and lesser sins. Caesarius of Arles was the first to refer to serious sins as 'capital sins', later elaborated into a doctrine by Gregory the Great and discussed by St Eligius. Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 84-87, 101. Cf. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 98.

<sup>104</sup> Supp. XI: *Sermo ad populum, in octavis pentecosten dicendus*, lines 208-224. 'The souls of some men go to rest after their decease, and some go to punishment according to that which they did before, and afterwards they are set free through almsdeeds, and above all through the mass, if a man performs

While Ælfric declines here to enlighten his audience as to what these 'great sins' may be, the answer may perhaps be found in Augustine's sermon *De fide et operibus*. In this sermon Augustine states that while almsgiving could be used to atone for most sins, if one committed unchastity, idolatry or murder, he could atone for them only through excommunication or a more severe penance than almsgiving alone.<sup>105</sup>

The distinction in compensating for major and minor sins is inextricably bound up in conceptions of purgatory and the afterlife in early medieval thought, as the severity of one's sins during life determined the length of one's punishment after death.

While many early medieval texts do imply some concept of a purgatorial state after death, a comprehensive doctrine of purgatory did not exist until the later twelfth century.<sup>106</sup> Despite this lack of a consensus on what happened to man after death, patristic writers such as Augustine, Caesarius of Arles and Gregory the Great conceptualised the afterlife as a time in which one's soul was punished for one's sins during life as a means of preparing the soul for the Final Judgement.<sup>107</sup> Augustine, in the course of a lengthy discussion on the forgiveness of sin in his *Enchiridion*, states that one would not need to face a purgatorial fire (*per ignem quendam*

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them on behalf of him...Some sins may be compensated for in this life, and some after death, just as our Lord said, but the great sins may not be compensated for there, not for the depraved man who does not practice that which a man performs on behalf of him, because he did not earn it [compensation] before in his life'. See also CH II.XX: *Item in letania maiore, feria tertia*, lines 222-227, where Ælfric states that an unrighteous man may partially redeem himself if he distributes alms on his deathbed.

<sup>105</sup> Augustine, *De fide et operibus*, 19.34 (CSEL 41), pp. 79-80. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 243.

<sup>106</sup> Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 91-132; F. M. Biggs, 'The Fourfold Division of Souls: The Old English "Christ III" and the Insular Homiletic Tradition', *Traditio* 45 (1989/1990), pp. 35-51; M. McC. Gatch, 'Some Theological Reflections on Death from the Early Church Through the Reformation', in L. O. Mills (ed.), *Perspectives on Death* (New York, 1969); repr. in M. McC. Gatch, *Eschatology and Christian Nurture: Themes in Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Religious Life* (Aldershot, 2000), 99-136, pp. 106-119. For a discussion of early conceptions of 'paradise' after death, see A. J. Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday in Anglo-Saxon Literature*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 3 (Cambridge, 2001).

<sup>107</sup> Le Goff, *Purgatory*.

*purgatorium*) after death if one atoned for sins in life through gifts of alms.<sup>108</sup> In this way alms were seen to be effective toward lessening the punishment one's soul might receive in the afterlife.

Almsgiving by the living on behalf of one who had already died was also seen as effective in decreasing the post-mortem punishment faced by the soul. Ælfric, in his *Sermo ad populum*, cited previously, states that although a soul will experience punishment for the sins committed during life, it may be set free through almsdeeds and masses, if another performs these on its behalf.<sup>109</sup> Likewise, in his relation of the vision of Drihthelm in the homily *Alia visio*, Ælfric repeats the assertion that alms could be effective for reducing one's punishment after death when they were given on behalf of the dead.<sup>110</sup> In expounding this point, Ælfric drew on a well-established patristic precedent. Bede, in Book V of his *Historica ecclesiastica* (Ælfric's source for this passage), also emphasises the importance of almsgiving, fasting and the performance of masses in order to set free the souls of the dead.<sup>111</sup> Gregory the Great was also an emphatic promoter of intercessory alms and masses in Book IV of his *Dialogues*, a source on which Ælfric drew elsewhere in this homily.<sup>112</sup>

This emphasis on almsgiving as a means of cleansing one from sin and reducing punishment in the afterlife underscores the belief that man could influence the fate of his soul through his actions in life. In his *Sermo in laetania maiore (de auguriis)*, Ælfric delivers a condemnation of the idea of predestination, asserting that God has given man the ability to choose his own actions and rewards or punishes each man

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<sup>108</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 18.69 (CCSL 46), p. 87. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 241-249 at 241. Cf. Smyth, 'Origins of Purgatory', pp. 94-95; Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 72-73; Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 29-30. For a discussion of Augustine's thoughts on the idea of purgatory, see J. Ntedika, *L'évolution de la doctrine du Purgatoire chez saint Augustin* (Paris, 1966) and Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 61-85, 133-135.

<sup>109</sup> Supp. XI: *Sermo ad populum, in octavis pentecosten dicendus*, lines 208-215.

<sup>110</sup> CH II.XXI: *Alia visio*, lines 71-79, 131-133. Cf. Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, p. 45-47.

<sup>111</sup> HE, v.12. Cf. Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 105, 107.

<sup>112</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, ed. A. De Vogüé, *Grégoire le Grand, Dialogues* SC 265 (Paris, 1980).

according to his works. Therefore, man does not give alms in vain, but rather he will be rewarded for his actions with eternal life.<sup>113</sup> Ælfric emphasises this argument by referring to Psalms 36:27, '*recede a malo et fac bonum*', and 1 Corinthians 3:8, '*autem propriam mercedem accipiet secundum suum laborem*'.<sup>114</sup> He makes the point that these scriptural injunctions would be useless if man had no control over his own fate, and therefore men should perform good works and give alms so that they might be rewarded in the end. Ælfric's insistence on this point indicates that there may have been some promotion of the idea of predestination at the time, although this was no longer a major theological controversy in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>115</sup>

Indeed, he takes aim at this idea, stating that:

*Nu secgað sume menn þæt him sceole gelimpan swa swa him gesceapan wæs and geset æt fruman and ne magon forbugan þæt hi mis-faran ne sceolan...Eac ða arfæsten beoð wolice gearwurðode gif þæt soð beon mæg þæt him swa gesceapen wæs and on unnyt we swincað on urum þeowdome oððe on ælmyssum, oþþe on oðrum dædum, gif we his na maran edlean æt urum drihtne nabbað, þonne ða receleasan menn, þe butan ge-rade lybbað, and on eallum þingum wadað on heora agenum willan and on heora lustum heora lif aspendað.*<sup>116</sup>

Here Ælfric firmly emphasises that men are judged by their own actions. Thus, those who give alms will receive due reward for their actions, just as those who behave poorly will be punished for their sins.

While all of these examples provide a sense of optimism for those who may be concerned about the souls of their dead friends or relatives, the author of the Vercelli Homily XIV offers a caveat. He cautions that a man who neglects the salvation of his

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<sup>113</sup> LS XVII: *De auguriis*, lines 222-256.

<sup>114</sup> 'Decline from evil and do good'; 'And every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour.' Cf. 1 Peter 3.11: '*declinet autem a malo et faciat bonum*'.

<sup>115</sup> Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, p. 64. Cf. Le Goff, *Purgatory*, p. 5.

<sup>116</sup> LS XVII: *De auguriis*, lines 222-224, 233-240. 'Now some men say that it must happen to them just as it was determined for them and ordained from the beginning, and that they cannot avoid acting amiss...Likewise the good are unjustly honoured, if it can be true that it was so determined for them; and we labour in vain in our service, either in almsgiving, or in other deeds, if we have no more reward from our Lord for it than those reckless men who live without consideration, and go in all things by their own will and spend their lives in their own pleasures'.

own soul will not be able to intercede on behalf of another: ‘*Nænig man oðerne æfter deaðe getreowlice onlysan mæg, gif he sylf ær her on worlde his sawle hælo agymeleasað*’.<sup>117</sup> While this may have significantly reduced the number of those eligible to appeal on behalf of a soul, Ælfric highlights the availability of another option in his *Sermo ad populum*. He argues that the souls who have gone to heaven may also pray for the souls of those who are still on earth, as well as for souls which dwell in punishment, acting as agents of intercession for the forgiveness of sins. After his statement that almsdeeds and masses may free a condemned soul Ælfric elaborates on this theme: ‘*And þa halgan sawla þe on heofonum wuniað gebiddað for us ðe on eorðan wuniað, and eac for ðam sawlum ðe syndon on witum, and hi habbað gemynd heora holdra freonda, and we magon eac þingian ðam ðe on witum beoð and swiðust þurh mæssan, swa swa us secgað bec, ac þam on helle beoð ne gehelpð nan foreþingung*’.<sup>118</sup> It is significant here that while Ælfric offers an extended discussion on how the souls of the dead might be saved from punishment, he only lists three things which may help: the prayers of souls in heaven, masses said by friends on earth and almsgiving performed by friends on earth. As with the comparison of almsgiving and baptism, this demonstrates that almsgiving was considered to be as effectual as the performance of masses in atoning for the sins of another.<sup>119</sup>

While the examples discussed thus far have referred in general terms to the efficacy of alms for the post-mortem expiation of sins, there are a few cases in which this idea

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<sup>117</sup> Vercelli XIV: *Larspel to swylcere tide swa man wile*, lines 45-46. ‘No man may truly liberate another after death, if he himself neglects the health of his soul earlier here in this world’.

<sup>118</sup> Supp. XI: *Sermo ad populum, in octavis pentecosten dicendus*, lines 236-242. ‘And the holy souls which dwell in heaven pray for us who dwell on earth, and also for the souls who are in punishment, and they have remembrance of their faithful friends; and we may also intercede for those who are in punishment, and above all through masses, just as books tell us; but for those who are in hell, no intercession may help’. Cf. Supp. XI: *Sermo ad populum, in octavis pentecosten dicendus*, lines 208-212, 220-224. The importance of saying prayers and offering masses for the dead is expressed in Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, iv.57-58, 6; iv.62, 3. For more on intercession, see Smyth, ‘Origins of Purgatory’, pp. 124-127; Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 73-75, 97-98; Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 91-93

<sup>119</sup> For Ælfric’s understanding of the efficacy of the mass, see his *Hortatorius sermo de efficacia sanctae missae*, appended to CH II.XXI: *Alia visio*, lines 140-180.

is treated at length. The story of Drihthelm, mentioned previously, is one of a series of vision narratives related by Ælfric in the *Catholic Homilies* in which he emphasises the importance of almsgiving in providing for a soul after death. It comprises a large part of the homily *Alia visio*, intended for the Tuesday in Rogationtide, and is worth discussing in greater detail here.<sup>120</sup> In this story Drihthelm, described as ‘*arfæst on life*’ (pious in life), died one evening after an illness. During the night, his body was watched over by attendants and Drihthelm’s wife. The next morning Drihthelm awoke from death and, after comforting his wife who was understandably terrified by this development, immediately went to the church where he prayed for the remainder of the morning.<sup>121</sup> Later he divided his property into three parts, one part of which was distributed to the poor, and entered the abbey at Melrose where he became a monk.<sup>122</sup> He later revealed that on the night of his death he had seen a vision whereby he was shown the fate of different souls after death: the very good and very wicked enter immediately into heaven and hell, respectively, whereas those who fall between these two categories were held in an interim place until the Day of Judgement. According to the angel who acted as Drihthelm’s guide through the afterlife, those whose souls necessitated a cleansing punishment in this interim place could achieve some relief through the aid of almsdeeds, given by others on their behalf. While Ælfric presents a vivid picture of the afterlife as a place where souls are punished and cleansed after death, he takes care to emphasise that almsgiving has the power to lessen the punishment one’s soul might receive after death.

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<sup>120</sup> CH II.XXI: *Alia visio*, lines 1-110.

<sup>121</sup> For a discussion of the idea that dying was perceived as a liminal condition, see V. Thompson, ‘The View from the Edge: Dying, Power and Vision in Late Saxon England’, in D. Griffiths, A. Reynolds and S. Semple (eds), *Boundaries in Early Medieval Britain*, Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History 12 (Oxford, 2003), pp. 92-97.

<sup>122</sup> For the tri-partite division of ecclesiastical renders, see discussion below in Chapter Three. Cf. G. Constable, *Monastic Tithes: From Their Origins to the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, New Series 10 (Cambridge, 1964), p. 50; R. Fowler, *Canons of Edgar*, EETS os 266, (Oxford, 1972), pp. 12-15 (no. 55-57); translated in *C&S*, pp. 332-333; VIII Atr. 6.

Ælfric's link here between giving alms and receiving eternal life in heaven is reflective of a wider homiletic interest in the relationship between charity and salvation.<sup>123</sup> If almsgiving had the ability to redeem one's sins and lessen the soul's punishment after death, then one might assume that the more one gave alms the better chance one would have of meriting eternal life in heaven. The angel in Drihthelm's vision implies this when he states that those who are repentant in life will be punished after death, but through this cleansing of sins they may enter the kingdom of heaven at the Final Judgement:

*Seo mycele byrnende dene þe þu ærest gesawe is witnungstow. on þære beoð þæra manna sawla gewitnode and geclænsode. þe noldon heora synna þurh andetnysse. and dædbote gerihlæcan. on gehalum þingum. hæfdon swa þeah behreowsunge æt heora endenextan dæge. and swa gewiton mid þære behreowsunge of worulde. and becumað on domes dæge ealle to heofonan rice; Eac hi sume þurh freonda fultum and ælmysdæda. and swyðost þurh halige mæssan. beoð alysed. of ðam witum ær þam mycclum dome.<sup>124</sup>*

Again, Ælfric stresses the importance of intercessory almsgiving as a means of releasing souls from post-mortem punishments, second only to saying the holy mass on their behalf.

The promise of eternal life through almsgiving is most often revealed in the homilies by drawing on the vivid imagery displayed in Matthew 6:19-21: '*nolite thesaurizare vobis thesauros in terra ubi erugo et tinea demolitur ubi fures effodiunt et furantur, thesaurizate autem vobis thesauros in caelo ubi neque erugo neque tinea demolitur et ubi*

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<sup>123</sup> CH I.X: *Dominica in quinquagesima*, lines 170-174. See also LS XII: *In caput jejunii*, lines 110-114, CH I.XI: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 223-227, CH I.XXVII: *Natale sancte pauli*, lines 193-209, CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadagesima*, lines 110-112, Supp. XIII: *Dominica V post pentecosten*, lines 106-108, Blickling IV: *Dominica tertia in quadagesima*, pp. 40-41, Vercelli IX, lines 220-228, Vercelli XVI: *Omelia epyffania domini*, lines 184-205, Vercelli XXI, lines 120-125; Bethurum, *Homilies*, XIII: *Sermo ad populum*, lines 16-23.

<sup>124</sup> CH II.XXI: *Alia visio*, lines 71-79. 'The great burning valley which you first saw is the penal place, in which the souls of men are punished and cleansed, [those] who would not correct their sins in life and health, but yet were penitent at their last day, and so departed from the world with repentance, and will on the Day of Judgement all come to the kingdom of heaven. Some of them also, through aid of friends and almsdeeds, and, above all, through holy masses, will be delivered from those torments before the great judgement'.



*fures non effodiunt nec furantur, ubi enim est thesaurus tuus ibi est et cor tuum*'.<sup>125</sup> Ælfric relates this passage to almsgiving very clearly in his homily *Dominica in quadragesima*, with his statement that man should not store his wealth here on earth but rather accumulate a treasure in heaven through gifts of alms: 'Hu mage we urne goldhord on heofonum behydan but ðurh ælmessan; Swa hwæt swa we be anfealdan godes þearfum for his lufan syllað he hit us forgyllt be hundfealdum on ðam toweardan life'.<sup>126</sup> The link between almsgiving and spiritual treasure was made early in patristic thought and is drawn upon frequently by the Anglo-Saxon homilists.<sup>127</sup> Evocative references to earthly treasure being consumed by rust or stolen by thieves likely had a particular resonance in Anglo-Saxon England where furnished burials were not a thing of the far distant past. By encouraging men to distribute their wealth rather than bury it, the homilists demonstrate participation in the new economic system of wealth-redistribution rather than ceremonial destruction.<sup>128</sup>

Returning again to the homily *Alia visio*, Ælfric relates a story from Gregory's *Dialogues* regarding a man who is allowed to actually see the treasure which one could amass in heaven through almsgiving. The story recounts how after the man dies, his soul travels to 'halgena wununga' (the dwellings of the saints) and sees a golden palace being constructed on a Saturday. When the soul asks for whom the building is being constructed, the workmen reveal that it is for a certain shoemaker in Rome. After this dream, the soul returns to the body and the man is restored to life. He goes to Rome to inquire after this shoemaker and learns that after selling his wares on Saturday the shoemaker would distribute the surplus profit to the poor as

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<sup>125</sup> 'Lay not up to yourselves treasures on earth: where the rust, and moth consume, and where thieves break through, and steal. But lay up to yourselves treasures in heaven: where neither the rust nor the moth doth consume, and where thieves do not break through, nor steal. For where thy treasure is, there is thy heart also.'

<sup>126</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 109-112. 'How can we hide our treasure in heaven but through alms? Whatever we give to one of God's poor, for love of Him, He will repay to us a hundredfold in the life to come'.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Finn, *Almsgiving*, pp. 178-179.

<sup>128</sup> See above, Chapter One.

alms. It was because of this charity that the building was being constructed on his behalf in the afterlife.<sup>129</sup> In relating this story, Ælfric seems to have conflated two separate visions reported by Gregory: that of a soldier who saw golden houses being constructed in the afterlife and a monk named Deusdedit who saw a house being built for a shoemaker.<sup>130</sup> The implications of this conflation are irrelevant here, but it is interesting to note that Ananya Jahanara Kabir has argued that if the place discussed in the soldier's vision (and therefore also in the vision of Ælfric's soul) is the dwelling-place of righteous souls, then these golden buildings should be seen as symbolic of the almsgiving and charitable deeds by which men may earn a place in this afterlife.<sup>131</sup> In recording this vision, Gregory encourages his audience to literally visualise the type of treasure which one could earn for oneself in the afterlife, and in doing so he provides a seemingly tangible incentive for giving alms during one's life. Ælfric's conflation of these two stories leaves the audience with an even stronger sense of the link between gifts of alms and earning a place with the righteous after death, as the golden palace seen by the soul is portrayed as a direct result of the giving of alms in life. Like Gregory, Ælfric's relation of these visions implies that he understood the difficulty his Anglo-Saxon audience might have in wrestling with the abstract concepts of the afterlife and eternal life in heaven. In providing such a visual metaphor in this homily, he relates these abstract qualities with a seemingly tangible incentive: golden treasure in heaven.

It is important to note that in this vision Ælfric does not present a picture of the afterlife which is consistent with that portrayed in the vision of Drihthelm. In this vision Ælfric implies that the afterlife is a place where one might physically prepare the treasure which one will earn after the Final Judgement rather than a place where souls are punished. In light of the previous discussion of conceptions of the afterlife

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<sup>129</sup> CH II.XXI: *Alia visio*, lines 112-130.

<sup>130</sup> Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, iv.37, 70-72; iv.38, 1-11. Cf. M. Godden (ed.), *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: Introduction, Commentary and Glossary*, EETS ss 18, (Oxford, 2000), pp. 542-543.

<sup>131</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 80-81.

in early medieval thought, this passage need not cause concern in this respect. It was noted previously that Ælfric strongly condemned works which he considered to be apocryphal or unorthodox. Another example of this is Ælfric's opposition to vision narratives, most notably the popular *Visio pauli*. In his homily, *Item in letania maiore, feria tertia*, he presents a vehement attack on this *Visio*, referring to it as a 'leasan gesetnysse' (false composition) and presenting the *Visio fursei* as an alternative, suitably orthodox, vision narrative. Kabir has noted that Ælfric was influenced both by Augustinian ideas which attempt to merge ideas of 'paradise' and 'heaven' into a single conceptual afterlife, and ideas in the writings of Julian of Toledo, Gregory the Great and Bede which do imply a distinction between the two.<sup>132</sup> These contradictory sources help to explain the inconsistencies in Ælfric's portrayal of post-death visions and experience. In fact, these contradictory visions are enlightening in the sense that while they portray two different conceptions of the afterlife, they are both consistent in their portrayal of almsgiving as something which will earn benefit for the soul after death. This in turn is consistent with Milton Gatch's argument that Ælfric's purpose in revealing these visions is to inspire repentance on the part of the audience, not to construct an image of the afterlife.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, Ælfric has adapted each of these visions from other sources without making any attempt to mould these descriptions into a unified picture. The role of almsgiving in earning salvation for the soul, however, is stressed consistently throughout, demonstrating the importance of gifts of alms in determining the fate of one's soul.

One of the most vivid explanations of the link between almsgiving, forgiveness of sin and eternal life in heaven is expressed in Ælfric's *Sermo ad populum*. In this homily Ælfric relates his interpretation of the final judgement, in which he depicts Christ sitting in judgement of four groups of men.<sup>134</sup> The men have been placed in

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<sup>132</sup> Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 14-48.

<sup>133</sup> Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 66-76, 101.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Smyth, 'Origins of Purgatory', pp. 91-132; Biggs, 'Fourfold Division', pp. 35-51; Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 43-44, 87-110.

these groups according to their piety in their lives on earth, with the highest group consisting of the disciples and other holy men, and the lowest group consisting of those who were not Christian and who constantly sinned against God. Amongst other characteristics, the two middling groups are divided into those who have given alms and therefore merit eternal life, and those who have not given alms in addition to performing other sins and misdeeds and therefore will be judged by the devil.<sup>135</sup> At one point, Christ speaks to those who are being judged, asserting, in the words of Matthew 25:34-40, that the good Christians had given him food, drink, clothing and other kindnesses. When the good Christians ask when they had done these things, Christ replies: '*Þæt is soðlice swa to understandenne: swa oft swa ge ælmessan dydon anum lytlan ðearfan of Cristenum mannum, þæt ge dydon Criste, for ðan ðe Crist sylf is Cristenra manna heafod, and eft ða Cristenan syndon Cristes lima*'.<sup>136</sup> As noted at the beginning of this chapter, the biblical verse does not equate this charity specifically with almsgiving, although it became commonplace in later patristic thought. Ælfric draws on this tradition here, branching off from his biblical quotation to say that the good are so judged as a result of their almsgiving to the poor, reasserting as he does so the equation of almsgiving with providing basic necessities for those in need.

The four-fold division of souls described in this passage is similar to that discussed previously in Ælfric's relation of the vision of Drihthelm in the *Alia visio*. Yet, in this sermon Ælfric places significantly more emphasis on the role of almsgiving during one's life in determining one's fate after death, a predilection which shows links with the patristic tradition. Ælfric's main source for the *Sermo ad populum* is Julian of

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<sup>135</sup> Supp. XI: *Sermo ad populum, in octavis pentecosten dicendus*, lines 365-383. See also Blickling IV: *Dominica tertia in quadragesima*, p. 40-41.

<sup>136</sup> Supp. XI: *Sermo ad populum, in octavis pentecosten dicendus*, lines 430-434. 'That is truly thus to understand: as often as you did almsgiving for one little poor man from [all] Christian men, you did that for Christ, because Christ himself is the head of Christian men, and again the Christians are the limbs of Christ'.

Toledo's *Prognosticon*,<sup>137</sup> yet it is instructive to compare Ælfric's treatment of almsgiving to Gregory the Great's discussion of the Final Judgement in his *Moralia in iob*. Gregory also describes souls as being divided into four groups: those who, upon death, are immediately judged favourably, those who are immediately damned, those who will be judged favourably and those who will be judged unfavourably. Like Ælfric, Gregory draws heavily on the evidence of almsgiving (or lack thereof) as a means of judging the actions of the two middling groups. He cites Jesus' comments in Matthew 25:40-46 regarding the ultimate fate of those who have provided for the physical needs of the poor as well as the fate of those who have not. Gregory also praises those who have atoned for their misdeeds and have concealed these '*eleemosynarum superductione*' (with the cloak of almsgiving), stating that they will be judged favourably in the end.<sup>138</sup> Again, like Ælfric, this is the only criterion which Gregory provides for determining who will receive eternal life and who will be damned at the Final Judgement. These passages vividly express the link between almsgiving and eternal salvation or damnation, and this clear division allows the audience to determine which category they were likely to fall into based on their own actions.

Ælfric's conception of what happens to a soul after death, as detailed in the story of Drihthelm and the *Sermo ad populum*, is in keeping with the early medieval idea of a four-fold division of souls after death.<sup>139</sup> The very wicked and the very good are

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<sup>137</sup> Cf. Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, pp. 95-101, 129-133; Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 44-46, 93-95. For more on the eschatology of Julian of Toldeo, see Le Goff, *Purgatory*, pp. 98-99.

<sup>138</sup> Gregory the Great, *Moralia in iob*, 26.27.50-51 (CCSL 143B), pp. 1304-1306. Cf. Smyth, 'Origins of Purgatory', pp. 92-93, 122-123. Smyth's translation is modified from that given in M. McNamara, 'Some Aspects of Early Medieval Irish Eschatology', in P. Ní Chatháin and M. Richter (eds.), *Irland und Europa im früheren Mittelalter: Bildung und Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1996), pp. 42-75 at 58-59, where the English text is taken from J. Bliss and C. Marriott (eds.), *The Morals on the Book of Job by S. Gregory the Great*, Library of Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1847), pp. 171-173. Cf. Gregory the Great, *Dialogi*, ii.35, 2-3; iv.8; iv.19-20, and iv.40, 6-9.

<sup>139</sup> Smyth, 'Origins of Purgatory', pp. 91-95; Biggs, 'Fourfold Division', pp. 35-51; Gatch, 'Some Theological Reflections', pp. 106-119; P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 3 (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 259-263. For a

immediately sent to heaven or hell, and the semi-good and semi-bad souls remain in purgatory until the Final Judgement where they will be redeemed or damned.

While there is some confusion in early Insular eschatological thought over whether souls were judged immediately after death or whether they awaited the Final Judgement,<sup>140</sup> Ælfric adopts the latter viewpoint consistent with the ideals of patristic authors such as Gregory the Great and Julian of Toledo.<sup>141</sup> Therefore, Ælfric shows the souls suffering torments as they awaited the Judgement, although, as previously noted, he also states that their punishment might be lessened through the prayers and alms of others.

Ælfric's conception of the Final Judgement introduces a theme which is found throughout many of the homilies: those who give alms may expect to receive eternal life in heaven, but those who do not give alms may expect eternal punishment. This theme is clearly illustrated in the Vercelli Homily IV, where the author contrasts the heavenly life with the life of damnation and states that those who do not follow God's command will be punished in the eternal fire. The initial emphasis is certainly on what will happen to the man who does not give alms and act rightly during his life, but he later reveals that through almsgiving a man may spare himself this eternal punishment:

*Hwæt, us is la selre on þysse worulde þæt we symle ure synna hreowe don 7 hie mid ælmessan lisen, þæt we eft ne þurfon þa ecan witu þrowian. Nis nanes mannes onmedla to þæs mycel on þysse worulde þæt ne he scyle dædes byrigean. 7 mid sawle anre we sculon riht agyldan on þam myclan dome. Wa is hyre þonne earmre, gif hio ana stent, ealra godra dæda wana, on domes dæge beforan Gode. Þær þonne ne mæg se fæder helpan þam suna, ne [se] sunu þam fæder, ne nan*

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development of the four-fold division of souls in the early medieval period, see Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 6, 28-29, 87-110.

<sup>140</sup> Smyth, 'Origins of Purgatory', pp. 91-132.

<sup>141</sup> Gatch, 'Some Theological Reflections', pp. 117-118; Kabir, *Paradise, Death and Doomsday*, pp. 43-48, 93-95.

*mæg oðrum. Ac anra gehwylcum men sceal beon demed æfter his aġenum gewyrhtum.*<sup>142</sup>

This vision of the Final Judgement establishes that, while all men will receive some punishment after death, the giving of alms will reduce the length of one's torments in the afterlife and will thus allow eventual access to heaven. Interestingly, the author of this homily does not seem to believe in the power of intercessory alms, as he states that on Judgement Day man will be judged only by his own works and may not be helped by anyone else. Yet, his emphasis on almsgiving as a means of redeeming one's own soul is consistent with that portrayed in other homilies. The author also offers a lengthy passage imagining the interaction between the Lord and various souls on the Judgement Day. His analysis of the scene is very similar to that of Ælfric regarding the importance of almsgiving and its influence on the ultimate destination of a soul, which becomes clear in the ensuing speeches given by both a righteous and an unrighteous soul.<sup>143</sup> This scene offers a vivid portrayal of the Final Judgement, with almsgiving playing an important part in this judgement.

The examples discussed in this section have demonstrated that in the Anglo-Saxon homilies almsgiving was often proposed as a means by which one could earn forgiveness for one's sins. In addition, intercessory almsgiving could be used in order to earn forgiveness for the sins of another, both during life and after death. This conception of almsgiving is inextricably linked with notions of a purgatorial state between death and the Day of Judgement, as almsgiving is frequently designated as one of the criteria which determines the amount of punishment a soul

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<sup>142</sup> Vercelli IV, lines 17-71, at 63-71. 'What then is better for us in this world that we always do penance for our sins and redeem them with almsgiving, that afterwards we do not need to suffer eternal punishment. The pride of any man is not so great in this world that he shall not taste of death. And with the soul alone we must pay just retribution on the great judgement. Then woe is that poor soul, if it stands alone, lacking of all good deeds, on the day of judgement before God. Then there the father may not help the son, nor the son the father, nor none may help another. But each man alone shall be judged according to his own works'. It should be noted here that the reference to penance (*hreow*) in this sermon does not necessarily indicate formal penance under instruction from a confessor.

<sup>143</sup> Vercelli IV, lines 96-321, esp. 102-116, 133-152, 221-247.

is to receive after death. The depictions of the purgatorial state in the afterlife appear mainly in the homilies of Ælfric and as one might expect, they reflect a well-established patristic tradition of the interim state, despite the fact that a definitive doctrine of purgatory had not yet been established at this time. More importantly, they reflect the place of almsgiving within this doctrine, firmly establishing its importance as something which not only desirable but necessary for earning eternal life in heaven.

### *Almsgiving in the Liturgical Year*

In addition to answering the question of why one should give alms, the Anglo-Saxon homilists address the question of when one should give alms. Indeed, the homilies which give the most extended treatment of alms and almsgiving are those which are linked with penitential times of the liturgical year, namely Lent, Advent and Rogationtide. It is helpful to discuss each of these seasons in turn in order to demonstrate the perceived role played by almsgiving in each.

In Anglo-Saxon England the season of Lent was characterised in the homilies as well as the liturgy as representing a model of the history of Christianity. The rituals and preaching for this season encouraged Christians to begin by contemplating the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because of their great sins and gradually build up to rejoicing in Christ's sacrifice for mankind and the ability for the faithful to reconcile themselves with God through the medium of penance.<sup>144</sup> Again, it is necessary to reiterate the distinction between individual acts of penance and the ritual of confession followed by the performance of a prescribed penance for the absolution of one's sins.

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<sup>144</sup> M. B. Bedingfield, *The Dramatic Liturgy of Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 1 (Woodbridge, 2002), pp. 73, 82-89. Cf. Upchurch, 'Catechetical Homiletics', pp. 217-246. Both Bedingfield and Upchurch also discuss the importance of penance during the Lenten season, but do not comment on the importance of almsgiving in this regard despite its frequent appearance in Lenten homilies.



It is clear from the homilies that almsgiving played an important role in this individual penitential observance and thus ultimately in one's reconciliation with God. Indeed, annual confession and performance of prescribed penance was encouraged as a means of cleansing oneself in preparation for the Lenten season.<sup>145</sup>

It is important to point out that while almsgiving itself was often cited in the penitentials as the appropriate penance for certain offences, or allowed as a means of commuting a more taxing penance such as a lengthy fast, one must distinguish between almsgiving as a formal penance prescribed by a bishop after confession of one's sins and informal almsgiving which one could do at any time for the remission of one's sin.<sup>146</sup> It has been noted by many scholars that exhortations to do canonical penance appear throughout the Old English corpus, in homilies, poems and law codes, yet to my knowledge not one of the homiletic sources discusses almsgiving in this context.<sup>147</sup> Thus, references to penance in this section should not be taken to imply prescribed penance, but rather voluntary penance unless otherwise noted.

In the *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, Ælfric begins by enjoining all men to cleanse themselves from sin with fasting, vigils, prayers and almsdeeds in order to properly honour the celebration of Easter.<sup>148</sup> He encourages Christians to perform almsdeeds

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<sup>145</sup> For evidence of this in the homilies of Ælfric, see especially Upchurch, 'Catechetical Homiletics', pp. 217-246. Cf. S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900-1050* (Woodbridge, 2001), pp. 38-39, 58-61, 64, 69-71; A. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983), p. 112.

<sup>146</sup> Canons enjoining almsgiving as penance appear occasionally in the penitentials in circulation in Anglo-Saxon England. See especially the canons designated by Allen Frantzen as S 33.09.01, X 26.09.01 (giving alms instead of other prescribed penances); B62.02.02, X 01.01.01 (giving alms as penance); Y 42.22.01 (penance for giving alms in a pagan way); D 55.13.01 (statement that much may be redeemed by almsgiving); D 55.15.01 (injunction to give alms). Edited and translated in A. J. Frantzen, *The Anglo-Saxon Penitentials: a Cultural Database*, <http://www.anglo-saxon.net/penance/index.html> (accessed 21 June 2010). The penitential handbooks current in Anglo-Saxon England are also printed in A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3. (Oxford, 1871, repr. 1964) and translated in J. T. McNeill and H. M. Gamer (eds.), *Medieval Handbooks of Penance: a Translation of the Principal Libri Poenitentiales* (New York, 1938).

<sup>147</sup> See especially Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, esp. chapters 5, 6, 7; C. Hough, 'Penitential Literature and Secular Law in Anglo-Saxon England', in D. Griffiths (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 11 (Oxford, 2000), pp. 133-141.

<sup>148</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 1-9.

and do good works at all times, but asserts that these are most important during the Lenten period. In this way men who have sinned on other days may make amends for these sins during Lent. Men who have performed good works on other days are to be commended, but they also should be even more active in their almsgiving during Lent. With this statement Ælfric asserts that the very least which is expected of men is that they repent of their sins during Lent by performing good works and almsdeeds and by fasting, although it is clear that he would prefer men to do these things throughout the liturgical year. Ælfric then provides a broad definition of alms as forgiveness of sins and the donation of goods to the poor and qualifies this with a commentary on the acceptable and unacceptable ways to give alms. He follows this with a discussion of wealth, stating that God has given wealth to rich men so that they might care for the poor. If a man does not use his goods to care for the poor, then his goods shall be taken away and he shall be made poor. Ælfric finishes this section with references to Matthew 6:19-21, exhorting man to hoard his treasure in heaven through alms, and Sirach 3:33, reminding his audience that alms extinguish sin like water extinguishes fire.<sup>149</sup>

In this passage Ælfric discusses many of the themes which have been considered in the previous sections. Yet it is his association of almsgiving specifically with the Lenten period which merits further comment here. It is worth quoting this statement more fully in order to understand Ælfric's reasoning:

*Witodlice on eallum tidum gedafenað cristenum mannum þæt hi gode weorc began. and ælmesdæda. and swa ðeah swiðost on þisum gemænelicum fæstene; Se ðe on oðrum dagum sleac wære to godnyse. he sceal huruðinga on ðisum dagum acucian on godum biggengum; Se ðe ær glædlice mid godum weorcum hine sylfne geglengde. him gedafenað þæt he nu on ðisum dagum geornlicor mid weallendre lufe his godnyse secyðe; Ne bið nan fæsten gode gecweme. buton se mann hine sylfne fram leahtrum forhæbbe.<sup>150</sup>*

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<sup>149</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 36-128.

<sup>150</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 28-37. 'Truly it is at all times befitting Christian men to perform good works and almsdeeds, that yet most of all at this general fast. He who on other

Earlier in the homily Ælfric laments that man has become weak, no longer able to fast for forty days following the example of Moses or Elijah.<sup>151</sup> The implication is that Ælfric expects men to sin during Lent and he notes that these sins will void any good which might be accomplished through a lengthy fast. The focus on almsgiving and its redemptive properties in this context acknowledges man's inherent weakness, but emphasises that by giving alms at any time, especially during Lent, one may mitigate the negative effects of one's sin and therefore make one's fast more acceptable to God during this time. It is this ability to redeem one's sins which makes almsgiving especially desirable as a means of cleansing oneself in preparation for the Easter celebration.

The author of Blickling Homily III (*Dominica prima in quadragesima*) offers a similar perspective on the efficacy of almsgiving. After a mathematical demonstration of how devoting forty days to the Lord during Lent is like tithing the days of one's year,<sup>152</sup> the author outlines the ways in which one must properly observe the season. Like Ælfric he cites the need to cleanse oneself during Lent because of man's weakness in abstaining from sin:

*Donne sceolon we nu for þon dæg hwamlicum synnum on þas tid georne clænsian, mid fæstene, & mid halgum wæccum, & mid ælmessum; swa we sceolon eac ure heortan gefyllan mid þære swetnesse godcundra beboda, þæt on us ne sy gemeted nænig stow æmetig gastlicra mægena, þæt þær mæge yfelu uncyst on eardian. Ne magon we buton þæm medmyclum synnum beon, ah we sceolan on þas tid þas feawan dagas on forhæfdnesse lifgean, urne lichoman & ure heortan clænsian from yflum gepohtum þæs þe we magon; forðon seo blis & seo oferfyll*

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days may be remiss in goodness, should at least on these days be active in good practices. To him who previously had gladly adorned himself with good works, it is fitting that on these days he more earnestly show his goodness with ardent love. No fast will be acceptable to God, unless a man abstain from sins'.

<sup>151</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 10-22.

<sup>152</sup> For a discussion of the origins of this idea, see Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, pp. 73-74.

*þæs lichoman getyhp þone mon to synnum, & seo forhæfdnes hine geclænsap & gelædeþ to forgifnesse.*<sup>153</sup>

This passage echoes Ælfric's instructions that one should utilise almsgiving as a way of cleansing oneself from sin during Lent, and it appears that this injunction may be approaching a common conception of this subject. The Blickling author also acknowledges that it is not possible for man to be entirely without sin, but that man must do as best he can during the Lenten season. In this way the redemptive value of almsgiving allows a man to earn forgiveness for his daily sins and thus participate in the Lenten fast more effectively.

The author of Blickling III also explains the close relationship between almsgiving and fasting, declaring that fasting may be perfected through almsgiving and acts of mercy. To this end a man who is fasting should give the food which he would normally consume to the poor and needy as alms. In doing so the man perfects his own fast and also obeys the command of the Lord for the rich man to share his excess with the poor.<sup>154</sup> The idea that almsgiving somehow 'completes' the act of fasting identifies it as an integral part of penitential periods such as Lent. These passages demonstrate that almsgiving holds an important place in acts of personal piety and devotion, particularly for its redemptive qualities.

It is also noticeable in these examples that almsgiving is often conceptualised as similar to the holy sacraments, such as baptism and the performance of masses. In the homilies, almsgiving frequently appears in the context of other aspects of Christian practice, most often alongside prayer and fasting. The references to these

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<sup>153</sup> Blickling III: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, pp. 36-37. 'Then must we now, at this time because of our daily sins diligently cleanse ourselves with fasts and with holy vigils and with alms; so must we also fill our hearts with the sweetness of the divine commands that there may not be found in us any place devoid of spiritual power, wherein wicked vices may dwell. We cannot be without venial sins, but we must at this time, these few days, live in abstinence and cleanse our body and heart from evil thoughts as much as we are able, because the bliss and the excess of the body lead man to sin, and abstinence cleanses him and leads him to forgiveness'.

<sup>154</sup> Blickling III: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, pp. 36-37.

other practices imply that they must be accompanied by almsgiving in order for them to be truly pleasing to God. The extract from Blickling III, just cited, encourages men to perfect their fast with additional gifts of alms and acts of mercy. The author of Vercelli III echoes this idea, stating that one must perfect his fast with almsgiving and prayer in order to earn eternal life in heaven: *'To witanne is weotodlice þæt þæt fæsten mid godum worcum is Gode swiðe andfenge. For þam þæt is þæt fulfremede fæsten þæt mid ælmessan 7 mid gebedum þone heofon þurhfærð, 7 to þæs hehstan Godes þrymsetle becymeð'*.<sup>155</sup> The link between almsgiving, prayer and fasting is also frequently made in patristic texts, although it should be noted that almsgiving comes across as the dominant practice: fasting and prayer are rarely mentioned without it.<sup>156</sup> Indeed, almsgiving is often mentioned as a way of ensuring that one's prayers are heard or that one's fast might be successful.<sup>157</sup> Therefore by giving alms during Lent one is able to fast more perfectly and therefore to offer a more complete sacrifice to God in honour of Christ's sacrifice for men. In this way men are able to reconcile themselves with God and secure a place in heaven with Christ.

While the link between almsgiving and Lent is emphasised frequently in Lenten homilies, almsgiving is only briefly mentioned in connection with the season of Advent. Liturgically, Advent is parallel to the season of Lent in that both are times of reflection and anticipation prior to celebrating the coming of Christ, through his birth at Christmas and through his resurrection at Easter.<sup>158</sup> Ælfric acknowledges this parallel and encourages men to give alms during the season of Advent, a message similar to his encouragement of almsgiving during Lent. In his sermon *De natale domini*, he begins with a lengthy discourse on the virginity of Mary and its

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<sup>155</sup> Vercelli III, lines 122-125. 'Truly it is to know that the fast with good works is very acceptable to God. For that is the perfect fast, the fast with almsgiving and prayers; through that he will come through heaven and come to the highest throne of God'.

<sup>156</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', *Theological Studies* 43.2 (1982), pp. 244-247.

<sup>157</sup> Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 246. Cf. Acts 10:4; Augustine *Sermo* 150, 6, 7 (PL 38), p. 812. Cited in Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church', p. 246, n.101.

<sup>158</sup> Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 217.

implications for the virtue of chastity. Later in the homily he returns to this theme, but in the interim he asserts that one should honour Christ's nativity by shunning devilish sins and loving God's virtues, including almsgiving:

*We sceolon eac cristes acennednysse. and his gebyrdtide mid gastlicere blisse wurðian. and us sylfe mid godum weorcum geglengan. and us mid godes lofsangum gebysgian. and ða ðing onscunian. ðe crist forbytt. þæt sind leahtras. and deofles weorc. and ða ðing lufian ðe god bebead. þæt is eadmodnys. and mildheortnys. rihtwisnys. and soðfæstnys. ælmesdæda. and gemetfæstnys. gepylld and clænnys.*<sup>159</sup>

Instead of continuing to develop this theme of virtues enjoined by God, Ælfric returns again to a discussion of chastity before ending the sermon.<sup>160</sup> It is clear from the content of this sermon that Ælfric links chastity specifically with the season of Advent because of the virgin birth of Christ. Therefore, one prepares for Christmas by keeping chaste in order to honour both Christ and the Virgin Mary.

While Ælfric does not give an extended treatment of almsgiving here as he did in the homily for Lent, some of the same connections may be demonstrated. Ælfric stresses the importance of chastity during this time, emphasising that one must cleanse one's body during the time of Advent. The repeated significance placed on chastity and virginity throughout Ælfric's works indicates not only that he held the virtues in high regard, but also that the laity, and even the clergy, had trouble adhering to these strictures.<sup>161</sup> As with his expectation that the laity would commit venial sins during Lent, Ælfric also seems to have expected men to break the rules of chastity during Advent. Thus Ælfric assigns a similar role to almsgiving during Advent: those who are not able to keep chaste during this season may atone for this sin

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<sup>159</sup> CH II.I: *De natale domini*, lines 277-283. 'We should also honour Christ's nativity and his birth-tide with ghostly joy, and adorn ourselves with good works, and busy ourselves with songs of praise to God, and shun the things which Christ forbids, which are sins and the works of the devil; and love those things which God has enjoined, that is, lowliness and mercy, righteousness and truth, almsdeeds and moderation, patience and chastity'.

<sup>160</sup> CH II.I: *De natale domini*, lines 267-291.

<sup>161</sup> For a discussion of Ælfric's attitudes toward virginity, see C. Cubitt, 'Virginity and Misogyny in Tenth- and Eleventh-Century England', *Gender and History* 12 (2000), pp. 1-32.

through the redemptive power of almsgiving. In doing so they are able to appropriately honour the festival of Christ's birth.

The third season in which almsgiving is particularly stressed is that of Rogationtide. This season differs from Lent and Advent in that it is not specifically tied in with a stage in the life of Christ, although it does occur immediately before Ascension Day in the liturgical calendar. While Rogationtide and the Ascension of Christ developed separately in the liturgical calendar, by the tenth and eleventh centuries there was a recognized eschatological relationship between the two. To this end Rogationtide, like the seasons of Lent and Advent, was seen as a period of time in which the laity were to cleanse themselves in order to symbolically prepare for Christ's Ascension.<sup>162</sup>

Different origins have been postulated for the celebration of the Rogation Days, among them Gregory the Great's response to a plague and St Peter's Christian answer to pagan processions for agricultural prosperity. The most popular origin story, and the one most accepted by modern historians, refers to the penitential festival enacted by the fifth-century bishop, Mamertus of Vienne.<sup>163</sup> According to Ælfric's rendition of the story, the city of Vienne was afflicted by an earthquake which caused many deaths and was followed by wild animals entering the city and devouring the citizens. Bishop Mamertus commanded his people to fast for three days and the affliction duly ceased.<sup>164</sup> The anonymous homilies elaborate on the details of this story, sometimes conflating it with other strains of this tradition. This

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<sup>162</sup> Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, pp. 192-3.

<sup>163</sup> Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 194. Cf. J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 486; J. Bazire and J. E. Cross (eds.), *Eleven Old English Rogationtide Homilies*, Toronto Old English Series 7 (Toronto, 1989), p. xv-xvi, xxi-xxii; J. Hill, 'The *Litaniae Miores* and *Minores* in Rome, Francia and Anglo-Saxon England: Terminology, Texts and Traditions', *Early Medieval Europe* 9.2 (2000), pp. 223-224. Bazire and Cross note that the Vercelli XI: *Spel to forman gangdæge* and XII: *Spel to oðrum gangdæge* draw on the tradition of St Peter as the originator of the feast in response to a three-day pagan festival at a similar time of year. Bazire and Cross, *Rogationtide Homilies*, p. xxi.

<sup>164</sup> CH.I.XVIII: *In letania maiore*, lines 5-11. Cf. Vercelli XIX, lines 149-164. Bazire and Cross note that Ælfric presents a fairly accurate rendition of this tale, drawing from Amalarius, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, who in turn took his account from Gregory of Tours. Bazire and Cross, *Rogationtide Homilies*, p. xxi.

is particularly evident in Vercelli Homily XIX which states that it was a plague rather than an earthquake which afflicted the city of Vienne and caused numerous deaths. In the Vercelli version, Bishop Mamertus, distressed over this loss of life, asked all the bishops in the country to instruct the people to fast for three days and pray to the Lord to release them from the sickness. The people did so, accompanying their prayers and fasts with almsgiving, holy masses, pilgrimages and other good works. As a result of their devotion and faith, God granted them relief from the plague.<sup>165</sup>

Other accounts of this story vary in detail, but by the sixth century the practice of three penitential days before the Ascension became general throughout the Gallican church. This festival was accepted in the Roman church during the pontificate of Leo III (795-816) and subsequently became known as the 'Rogation Days'.<sup>166</sup> By the ninth century the Rogations had become known as the *Litania maiora*,<sup>167</sup> although in the vernacular they were referred to as '*gangdagas*' and '*gebeddagas*', which reflected the central elements in the Rogationtide liturgy: processions and stational penitential prayers.<sup>168</sup> Regardless of the specific origins of the festival, by the ninth and tenth centuries the Rogation Days served as a means by which people could prepare themselves to participate in the Ascension festival. The Anglo-Saxon homilists emphasised Rogationtide as a time for penance, listening to teachers, attending

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<sup>165</sup> Vercelli XIX, lines 149-164.

<sup>166</sup> Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 194; Bazire and Cross, *Rogationtide Homilies*, p. xvi. This celebration in the Gallican tradition is distinct from the alternative Litany Days in the liturgical calendar, those celebrated on 25 April in the Roman tradition. See Hill, '*Litaniae Miores and Miores*', pp. 211-212, 227-229.

<sup>167</sup> For a discussion of the apparent confusion between the *Litaniae Miores* and *Litaniae Miores*, see Hill, '*Litaniae Miores and Miores*', pp. 211-246. Hill examines the evidence for both *Litaniae Miores* and *Miores* in Anglo-Saxon England and Francia and concludes that while the term *in letania maiore* was used in both places in authoritative contexts, there are no known usages of *in letania minore*. She states, 'Indeed...the term "Minor Litany" as a contrast to "Major Litany" is a rationalization after the event, and later than the period under discussion. In any case, in most of the texts examined here there is only one observance (even when both were known) and there was thus no need for terminological contrast.' *Ibid.*, p. 245.

<sup>168</sup> Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 194. Cf. Bazire and Cross, *Rogationtide Homilies*, p. xvii; Hill, '*Litaniae Miores and Miores*', pp. 212.



church and visiting relics in order to cleanse the sins of the past year, and almsgiving played a vital role in this celebration.<sup>169</sup>

While the theme of almsgiving is stressed in many of the anonymous Rogation Day homilies, Ælfric does not address it at all in his First Series homilies for Rogationtide, and in his Second Series homilies for Rogationtide he only mentions alms incidentally in the context of wider discourses. This is certainly interesting in comparison with the two sets of Vercelli homilies for Rogationtide, XI-XIII and XIX-XXI. In the first set of homilies, almsgiving is only mentioned in Homily XII, but it is directly cited as something which one must do with fasting and prayer in order to properly observe the holy Rogation days: '*Þonne wið þon gesette us sanctus Petrus syðþan 7 oðerra cyricena ealdormen þa halgan gangdagas þry, to ðam þæt we sceoldon on Gode ælmihtigum þiowigan mid usse gedefelice gange 7 mid sange 7 mid circena socnum 7 mid fæstenum 7 mid ælmessylenum 7 mid halegum gebedum*'.<sup>170</sup> The author then states that during the Rogation processions men must carry the gospels, which detail the mysteries of Advent and Easter. The author of this homily does not give any further explanation of his reference to these other liturgical seasons, but the implication is that the period of Rogationtide should be considered as a similarly penitential season. Thus the mention of almsgiving in this homily as a way of suitably honouring God during this time is consistent with the portrayal of almsgiving in the other homilies discussed here.

The second set of Vercelli Rogationtide homilies provided a more extended treatment of almsgiving, continuing throughout the three homilies. It is worth discussing each of these in turn. The homily for the first day in Rogationtide, Vercelli Homily XIX, gives instructions as to how one should properly honour these

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<sup>169</sup> Cf. Blair, *The Church*, p. 486.

<sup>170</sup> Vercelli XII: *Spel to oðrum gangdæge*, lines 12-16. 'Then, at a later time, Saint Peter and elders of the other churches established for us the three holy Rogation Days in order that we should serve God Almighty with our fitting procession and with song and with attendance at churches and with fasting and with almsgiving and with holy prayers'.

three days: *'We hie sceolon healdan on mycelre eadmodnysse 7 on myclum gepylde 7 on soðre lufe 7 on eallre clænnesse lichoman 7 sawle 7 on godum wæccum 7 nytwyrðum 7 on fæstenum 7 on halgum gebedum 7 on ælmesdædum 7 on eallre godnesse 7 on lufe Godes 7 manna'*.<sup>171</sup> According to this homilist, the celebration of Rogationtide involved echoing the practices instituted by the bishop Mamertus in the city of Vienne. He reveals the efficacy of these actions, demonstrating that through almsgiving, holy masses, prayer and fasting, God will answer one's prayers and remove worldly afflictions. The author also states that when God granted relief from the sickness, he rewarded the residents of that country with *'ece hæle'* (eternal health).<sup>172</sup> This phrase may be interpreted not only as physical health but also as spiritual health, reminding the audience of the ultimate worth of alms for the salvation of one's soul. This would be especially relevant during Rogation Days when one was supposed to be preparing to celebrate the Ascension of Christ.

In Vercelli Homily XX, the author begins with an exhortation that men must fittingly observe the holy Rogation Days with fasting, almsgiving, prayers. He then continues with an exhortation to avoid evil things so that God would not take away the produce of the earth or send forth torments to men. Instead, the audience is reminded to give the tenth part of all goods to God so that He will continue to liberally provide the other nine portions. He then states that men should use the remaining nine parts to give alms to the poor because alms free the sinful man from sins and from death. The author also provides a lengthy discussion on the merits of almsgiving, some of which were quoted at the beginning of this chapter, and which are worth citing again here:

*Fæsten 7 ælmessylen sceolon æghwylcum cristinum menn ætgædere fyligean, for ðam þæt fæsten ys halig þing ... 7 seo ælmessylen ys gefyllednes 7 fulfremednes*

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<sup>171</sup> Vercelli XIX, lines 55-66 at 62-66. 'We must observe them in great humility, in great patience and in true love and in all cleanness of body and soul and in good works and vigils and in fasts and in holy prayers and in almsdeeds and in all goodness and in love of God and man'.

<sup>172</sup> Vercelli XIX, line 164.

*eallra goda, 7 heo ys halig þing, 7 heo geycð þa andweardan, 7 heo gewanaþ synna, 7 heo gemænigfyllt gear, 7 heo geæðelað þæt mod, 7 heo tobræt gemæro, 7 heo aclænsað eallo þing, 7 heo alyst fram deape 7 fram witum, 7 heo geþeodeð þone mann þe hy begæð Godes englum, 7 hine ascyreð fram deoflum, 7 heo ys unoferwinnendlic weall ymb þa sawle, 7 heo framadrifð deoflu 7 englas togelaðað on fultum, 7 heo þurhfærð þone heofon, 7 heo forestepð þone sylrendan on heofona rices wuldre, 7 heo cnyst heofona rices duru, 7 heo awecð englas ongean, 7 heo tosomne gecigeð dryhten ælmihtigne on fultum þam þe hie luflice 7 rumodlice dæleð.<sup>173</sup>*

The author then distinguishes between three different types of alms: gifts of goods to the poor, forgiveness of others and leading the erring onto the path of truth. Finally, the author ends this section by encouraging all men to eagerly give alms and fast in order to protect themselves against the eight capital sins of the devil, discussed previously in this chapter.<sup>174</sup>

This homily provides one of the most explicit discussions of almsgiving in any of the Anglo-Saxon homilies. Although the author does not provide a specific link between almsgiving and Rogationtide within the sermon, this correlation is implied by the extended treatment of almsgiving within this and the other Rogation Day sermons. As with Homily XIX, and in keeping with the general character of the anonymous Old English homilies, this sermon provides a vivid explanation of the many ways in which almsgiving could be beneficial to one's soul. This is particularly evident in the passage cited above which allows the audience to visualise practical outcomes of almsgiving, such as knocking at the door of heaven

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<sup>173</sup> Vercelli XX, lines 35-52. 'Fasting and almsgiving ought to follow together for all Christian men, because that fasting is a holy thing ... And that almsgiving is the completion and perfection of all good things. And it is a holy thing, and it increases the present [time], and it diminishes sins, and it multiplies years, and it ennobles the mind, and it extends the boundaries, and it cleanses all things, and it delivers from death and from torments, and it unites that man who practises it with the angels of God, and it separates him from devils. And it is an invincible wall around the soul, and it drives away devils and it assembles angels for succour, and it penetrates heaven, and it precedes the giver in the glory of the heavenly kingdom, and it strikes the door of the heavenly kingdom, and it wakes the angels again, and at the same time it calls the lord almighty for succour, for the one who lovingly and liberally distributes it [alms]'.

<sup>174</sup> Vercelli XX, lines 22-61.

and awakening the angels. Thus the audience is also encouraged to imagine the efficacy of almsgiving in cleansing one from sin and preventing future sins.

The final homily in this trilogy, Vercelli Homily XXI, also provides a brief discussion of almsgiving. Near the beginning of this homily the author provides a clear demonstration of how almsgiving fulfils the commandments of God. He refers to Isaiah 58:7 '*frange esurienti panem tuum et egenos vagosque induc in domum tuam*',<sup>175</sup> and reminds his audience that God has made both happy and wretched men, but all men must give alms often according to their means:

*Ealle he tosomne gecigde, ge þone eadigran ge þone earmeran, þæt we ealle sceolon ælmessan syllan gelome, ge earm ge eadig, ælc be his mihtum, 7 sæde eac þæt man mid wæterdrinces sylene mihte him mycele ælmessan gedon se ðe wolde ænigum men gesyllan þone rumgyfulan drinc gyf he hys beðorfte. 7 symle we sceolon biddan Godes mildheortnesse mid ormættre geomrunge 7 mid syngalum gebedum 7 mid rumgyfullum ælmessylenum 7 þæt he us ura synna forgyfenessa do. 7 uton a amang oðerum godum worcum ælmyssan don, for ðam seo ælmessylen alyst þone synfullan mann fram synnum 7 fram deaðe.<sup>176</sup>*

Like the author of Vercelli XX, this author does not specifically link almsgiving with the period of Rogationtide. However, his discussion of the merits of almsgiving are in keeping with those expressed in the other Rogation Day homilies, implying that almsgiving is an intrinsic part of preparing for the Ascension. Thus one is encouraged to see almsgiving as one of the things which must be done in order to cleanse oneself from sin during this penitential season.

This link between Rogationtide and almsgiving is more clearly made elsewhere in the homily. The homilist stresses that the giving of alms may be as simple as

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<sup>175</sup> 'Deal thy bread to the hungry, and bring the needy and the harbourless into thy house'.

<sup>176</sup> Vercelli XXI, lines 29-47 at 38-47. 'All He called together, both the more happy and the more wretched, that we should all give alms frequently, both the wretched and the happy, each according to his powers, and He said also that one might with the gift of a drink of water perform great almsgiving, he who wished to give to any man the bountiful drink, if he had need of it. And we should always ask for the mercy of God with intense sorrow and with perpetual prayers, and with bountiful almsgiving, and so that He grant us forgiveness of our sins. And let us always bestow alms, among other good deeds, because that almsgiving releases the sinful man from sins and from death'.

providing basic physical needs such as food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty, clothing for the naked and shelter for strangers.<sup>177</sup> The author particularly stresses the importance of almsgiving as a means by which one may atone for one's sins and thus earn a place in heaven: *'He us gegearwað þa heofonlicum for ðam eorðlicum 7 þa ecan þing for þam hwilendlicum þingum þysse worulde, gif we ælmyssan don willað on urum life, 7 gif we dædbote don willað urra misfenga, 7 gif we þa hingriendan fedað 7 him drinc gesyllað, 7 gif [we] þa nacodan be urum mihtum scrydað, 7 gif we þa elðeodigan onfoð þonne hie ure be[ð]urfen'*.<sup>178</sup> As I have demonstrated previously, the provision of physical necessities was considered to be one important definition of almsgiving. This homily clearly links such provision with atonement for misdeeds, emphasising the redemptive properties of almsgiving. The author also warns his audience that one who does not fulfil God's command to share wealth with the poor will suffer unspeakable torments in the afterlife.<sup>179</sup> In this way almsgiving is seen as especially important during Rogationtide as it is a time for penance and atonement for sins in preparation for the Ascension of Christ.

It has been demonstrated that the giving of alms during the Rogation Days functioned as a means by which Christians could cleanse themselves in order to symbolically prepare for the Ascension. This explains the importance of cleansing through fasting and almsgiving to a certain extent, but there may be an additional explanation. As related in Vercelli Homily XII, the laity were enjoined to carry relics, gospel books and crosses around *'ure land'* (our land) in addition to commending possessions to God and thanking him for his prosperity.<sup>180</sup> John Blair has noted that

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<sup>177</sup> Vercelli XXI, lines 120-125. Cf. Vercelli XXI, lines 40-43.

<sup>178</sup> Vercelli XXI, lines 120-125. *'He will prepare for us the heavenly in the place of the earthly, and the eternal things in the place of the transitory things of this world, if we wish to perform alms in our life, and if we wish to perform atonement for our misdeeds, and if we feed those hungering [ones], and give drink to them, and if we clothe those naked [ones] according to our powers, and if we receive those strangers when they need us'*.

<sup>179</sup> Vercelli XXI, lines 14-28.

<sup>180</sup> Vercelli XII: *Spel to oðrum gangdæge*, lines 14-34. Cf. Blair, *The Church*, p. 486; Bedingfield, *Dramatic Liturgy*, p. 191.

while processing was an important part of the Rogationtide ritual, the later practice of walking around the parish boundaries and 'beating the bounds' had not yet become part of the ritual in Anglo-Saxon England. Rather, in the tenth and eleventh centuries one of the central functions of the processions was to thank God for the crops and produce which He had provided and ask that He continue to provide more in the future.<sup>181</sup> This emphasis on giving thanks to God for His generosity is further reflective of the gift-exchange relationship detailed in the beginning of this chapter, demonstrated explicitly in the Ælfric, Wulfstan and the anonymous author of Vercelli Homily X.<sup>182</sup> God gave wealth to men and, in exchange for this generosity, men were required to return a portion of this wealth to God in the form of tithes and almsgiving or else God would punish them by taking away His favour. Thus, thanking God through gifts of alms during Rogationtide was a way of ensuring that God continued to bless men with ongoing prosperity, just as God saved the people of Vienne in return for their alms and fasting.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have discussed the evidence presented in the Anglo-Saxon homilies for the conceptions of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It has been established that as the homilies record the ideals of Christian behaviour according to doctrinal authorities, they present a perspective on almsgiving as it should be practiced. These authorities link almsgiving inextricably with Christian identity, emphasising the importance of giving alms in order to participate in the wider Christian community and publicly demonstrate one's piety, although this last virtue was condemned as often as it was encouraged. Such almsgiving is defined in the homilies as providing for both the physical and spiritual needs of a person, although this most often takes the form of encouraging the wealthy to share their excess with

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<sup>181</sup> Blair, *The Church*, p. 487.

<sup>182</sup> CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 63-66; Vercelli X, lines 141-206; Wulfstan, *In decimis dandis*, in Hall, 'Wulfstan's Latin Sermons', pp.116-117, translated on pp. 118-119.

the poor. The link between Christ's injunctions in Matthew 25:34-46 and gifts of alms allows for all men to give alms according to their means, whether it be a gift of water to a thirsty man or a large portion of one's personal wealth for redistribution to the poor.

The ways in which the homilists conceptualise almsgiving demonstrate an awareness of the societal patterns of gift-exchange. Their portrayal of almsgiving as something which completes a cycle of giving between God and man shows a clear desire on the part of the homilists to engage with the audience in terms which are familiar to them. In this way almsgiving is seen as something which is not new and different, but rather as something which is intrinsically bound up in secular behaviour and relationships. Ultimately, the giver is the beneficiary of these relationships, earning not only forgiveness of sins in this life, but ultimately eternal life in heaven. The emphasis on both temporal and spiritual rewards provides a strong incentive for parting with a portion of one's wealth and allows man to conceptualise receiving the tangible rewards of increased wealth as well as the intangible rewards of eternal life. In this way the homilists appeal to both spiritual and physical desires of the audience.

In addition to providing a general overview of Anglo-Saxon conceptions of almsgiving, the individual homilies also stress two important and interlinked aspects of almsgiving: the redemptive properties of alms gifts and the significance of almsgiving during certain times of the liturgical year. Throughout the homilies, almsgiving was consistently encouraged because of its redemptive properties, allowing men to atone for their sins through gifts of money, food or forgiveness to others. This was particularly stressed in homilies which presented visions of the afterlife, in which almsgiving was described as something which may lessen one's punishment in purgatory or earn one entrance into heaven. Understanding the importance of almsgiving in this context sheds valuable light on conceptions of purgatory in the homilies, indicating that while the afterlife may be presented in

different ways in these texts, the description of the effects of almsgiving is portrayed consistently without. This in turn demonstrates that the doctrine of almsgiving, particularly in terms of its redemptive properties, was well-developed in late Anglo-Saxon England.

This consistent depiction of almsgiving is continued in the homilies for Lent, Advent and Rogationtide. Although the link between almsgiving is not stressed consistently within all homilies dedicated to these liturgical seasons, a clear message emerges from the homilies which do address the subject. Homilies for Lent and Rogationtide in particular emphasise almsgiving as something which one must do during these periods. Its redemptive properties make it ideal as a way of spiritually cleansing oneself during the preparatory fasts. Although the link between almsgiving and Advent is not as strongly made, it is implied by the importance placed on chastity as a means of celebrating this season. As with Lent and Rogationtide, almsgiving is expressed as a means by which one may atone for one's sins during this time. By giving alms especially during these important times of the year one could demonstrate one's own sacrifice as a way of participating in Christ's birth, death and ascension. In this way almsgiving is portrayed as a ubiquitous part of Christian observance during the liturgical year. Understanding these ideals and proposed applications of almsgiving and its redemptive properties thus illustrates its importance as a vital component of lay piety.

Yet, as noted earlier in this discussion, the types of penitential almsgiving discussed throughout the homilies should not be confused with almsgiving as a type of prescribed penance for the remission of sins. This chapter has shown that almsgiving played an important role in one's preparation for the penitential seasons of Lent, Advent and Rogationtide, and this should be seen as an emphasis on voluntary almsgiving. In this way giving alms as a means of achieving forgiveness for one's sins was a personal act, done without official episcopal sanction and without formal confirmation of one's absolution. It is not known how often Anglo-



Saxons actually undertook the ritual of confession, penance and forgiveness,<sup>183</sup> but the evidence presented in this chapter suggests that voluntary almsgiving may have been a way for an individual to atone for his sins without undergoing this formal ritual. This certainly presents an interesting question for future research.

The homilies discussed in this chapter present almsgiving in a prescriptive light, encouraging the laity to give alms in certain ways at certain times of the year in order to assert their piety. The next chapter will discuss further ways in which almsgiving was encouraged through the medium of law codes, indicating that while the homilists sought to promote almsgiving as an alternative to eternal punishment in hell, secular lawmakers threatened the laity with a different kind of punishment.

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<sup>183</sup> Frantzen, *Literature of Penance*, p. 112.

## Chapter 3 – The Legislation of Almsgiving

### *Introduction*

In the legal tract which has become known as the *Penitential Edicts of Bath*, issued under the authority of Æthelred II in 1009, Archbishop Wulfstan announced that the Anglo-Saxons faced a national crisis precipitated by recurrent viking hostility. He did not waste time assigning blame or lamenting the failings of the English, an approach which would characterise his famous *Sermo lupi ad anglos*, preached some five years after the *Edicts*. Instead Wulfstan skipped straight to the point, instituting a national three-day penance which included fasting, confession, almsgiving and holy masses. The only contextual evidence for this proclamation is provided by the inscription and prologue to the Anglo-Saxon version: ‘*Dis man gerædde, ða se micle here com to lande. Ealle we beþurfan, þæt we geornlice earnian, þæt we Godes miltse 7 his mildheortnesse habban moton 7 þæt we þurh his fultum magon feondum wiðstandan*’.<sup>1</sup> With these prefatory comments, Wulfstan locates this edict within the ideological context of almsgiving expressed in the homilies and discussed in the previous chapter: gifts of alms may be used to acquire divine rewards. He indicates that the nation as a whole may obtain the mercy and compassion of God through the penitential activities of fasting, confession, almsgiving and holy masses, and that this mercy will take the form of divine assistance in resisting future viking aggression.

Roughly contemporary with the *Penitential Edicts* is the law code known as *VIII Æthelstan*, authored by Wulfstan in 1014. The focus of this code is primarily

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<sup>1</sup> VIIa Atr. Inscr. - Pro. ‘This edict was drawn up when the great army came to the country. We all have need, that we diligently strive, that we might have God’s mercy and his compassion and that we may withstand our foes through his help’.

ecclesiastical, protecting the rights of the Church as an institution as well as those who served God within it, including monks, abbots and other clergymen. Near the beginning of this law code is a series of clauses detailing the payments and dues owed by laymen to the Church, including a certain type of almsgiving known as ‘plough-alms’: ‘*Sulhælmessan gebireð þæt man gelæste be wite æghwilce gear, þonne XV niht beoð agan ofer estertid...And ealle Godes gerihta firðrige man georne, ealswa hit þearf is. And gif hwa þæt nelle, gewilde man hine to rihte mid worldlicre steore; 7 þæt si gemæne Criste 7 cyninge, ealswa hit iu wæs*’.<sup>2</sup> The differences in tone between this code and the *Penitential Edicts* are striking. There is no indication that this code was precipitated by a national crisis, such as the resurgence of viking hostility in 1009. There is no sense of reciprocity and gift-exchange in that one will receive a spiritual benefit for the payment of alms. Wulfstan simply lays out the payments owed to the Church, including ‘plough-alms’, and reminds men that the non-payment of these dues will result in ‘a secular penalty’.

Despite these differences, one may also observe an important similarity between the *Penitential Edicts* and *VIII Æthelred*: both indicate that the giving of alms may be enforced by secular legislation and authority. In light of the conclusions presented in the previous chapter, namely that voluntary almsgiving was strongly encouraged by the homilists as means of expiating sin and participating in a Christian identity, this emphasis on obligatory almsgiving as a payment which was mandated demonstrates that the conception of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon society was more nuanced than homiletic texts alone indicate. This observation raises a number of important questions which will be addressed in this chapter. What was the role of the king in legislating religious matters? To what extent does this legislation blur the boundaries between the voluntary and the obligatory in regard to Christian

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<sup>2</sup> VIII Atr. 12, 14-15. ‘Plough-alms shall be paid according to the penalty every year 15 nights after Easter...And all God’s dues shall be diligently rendered, just as it is necessary. And if anyone refuses to do so, he shall be brought to justice with a secular penalty, and this shall be divided between Christ and the king, just as it was customary’.

practices? How does almsgiving fit into the wider picture of religious legislation? And, perhaps most importantly, what did late Anglo-Saxon kings hope to achieve through this legislation?

In addressing these issues, this chapter builds on the conclusions of Chapter Two, illustrating how the ideals of almsgiving preached in the homilies could be translated into duties enforced by secular authority. After establishing the primacy of Wulfstan in this study and providing a contextual background on the role of the king in providing religious legislation for his people, I will assess the place of almsgiving within this legislation. The laws in question may be thematically divided into two sections. The first will discuss the legislation of voluntary almsgiving, as exemplified in the *Penitential Edicts of Bath* and which, it will be shown, has distinct links with the homiletic tradition on almsgiving. The second will address the history of legislating obligatory almsgiving in late Anglo-Saxon England. Because the legislation of almsgiving is inextricably linked with church dues such as the tithe and church-scot, I will first provide an overview of these dues and their history in Anglo-Saxon England before discussing the development of a tradition of legislation for these practices. This analysis will highlight the importance of plough-alms within this tradition, assessing the extent to which this due was representative of the homiletic conception of almsgiving. As this chapter will demonstrate, the seeming equation of plough-alms with other church dues such as tithe and church-scot calls into question the extent to which any of these dues were considered to be types of almsgiving and how almsgiving itself may have functioned within the secular legislative tradition. I will argue that the inclusion of the vocabulary of almsgiving into the legislative tradition forces one to re-examine preconceptions about what it meant to give alms in late Anglo-Saxon society.

## *Archbishop Wulfstan and the Formulation of Law*

Any discussion which focuses on late Anglo-Saxon legislation is destined to be biased toward the works of Archbishop Wulfstan. His unrivalled position as a trusted advisor to Æthelred II and Cnut in matters both religious and political, and particularly in his role as law-maker, allows one to gain privileged insight into the development of Anglo-Saxon legislation over an extended period of time. Yet his law codes did not exist within a historical vacuum. As demonstrated by the example of the *Penitential Edicts*, law codes could be, and indeed were, composed in response to specific political or social crises. Wulfstan is well-known for his strong opinions on what he perceived to be the moral decay of the Anglo-Saxons, opinions he expressed freely in a number of political and homiletic tracts in addition to his law codes. Thus, assessing Wulfstan's legislative achievements in the wider context of his other works, as well as viewing them against the background of the political and social turmoil of the early eleventh century, allows one to gain an important perspective on the development of Wulfstan's personal programme of spiritual reform aimed at the laity over the course of almost three decades, particularly in his ideas on almsgiving.

Although the previous chapter provided a brief overview of Wulfstan's homiletic works, it is helpful to review these with the addition of Wulfstan's political works here. A series of articles published by Dorothy Whitelock have shown Wulfstan to be the author of a number of legal texts, most notably the laws of Æthelred II from 1008 and the laws of Cnut prior to 1023, in addition to the homiletic texts which were authored by the Archbishop during his life.<sup>3</sup> Wulfstan has also been identified as the

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<sup>3</sup> D. Whitelock, 'Wulfstan and the Laws of Cnut', *English Historical Review* 63 (1948), pp. 433-452; D. Whitelock, 'Wulfstan Cantor and Anglo-Saxon Law', in A. H. Orrick (ed.), *Nordica et Anglica: Studies in Honor of Stefán Einarsson* (The Hague, 1968), pp. 83-92; repr. in D. Whitelock (ed.), *History, Law and Literature in 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Century England* (London, 1981), with original pagination; D. Whitelock, 'Wulfstan's Authorship of Cnut's Laws', *English Historical Review* 70 (1955), pp. 72-85; A. G. Kennedy, 'Cnut's Law Code of 1018', *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983), pp. 57-81. See also K. Jost, 'Einige Wulfstantexte und ihre Quellen', *Anglia* 44 (1932), pp. 265-315. For larger studies of Wulfstan's

author of the law code known as the *Peace of Edward and Guthrum*, previously thought to date to the mid tenth century, as well as the so-called *Canons of Edgar* and the *Institutes of Polity*.<sup>4</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, Wulfstan was notorious for editing, rewriting and reusing his own works. This has led to a considerable concordance between his homiletic and legislative texts. One clear example of this can be found in a comparison of Wulfstan's homilies *Be mistlican gelimpan* and *To eallum folce* with the law codes *VII* and *VIIa Æthelred*.<sup>5</sup> The three texts share many verbal parallels and it is likely that the law code served as a draft version for both of these homilies.<sup>6</sup> In addition to using his older works as a basis for creating new texts, Wulfstan also did not shy away from editing and reissuing the same text multiple times. The most well-known example of this is the *Sermo lupi ad anglos*, initially composed in 1014 and of which there are three extant versions.<sup>7</sup> While this date has generally been accepted, there has been much additional debate regarding the order of composition of the three separate versions. It has been argued, by scholars such as Dorothy Bethurum, Dorothy Whitelock and more recently Malcolm Godden, that the shortest version of the sermon was composed first and was

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homilies see D. Bethurum (ed.), *The Homilies of Wulfstan* (Oxford, 1957) and A. Napier (ed.), *Wulfstan: Sammlung der ihm zugeschriebenen Homilien nebst Untersuchungen über ihre Echtheit* (Berlin, 1883; repr. with bibliographical supplement by K. Ostheeren, Dublin, 1967). An account of more recent scholarship is given below.

<sup>4</sup> D. Whitelock, 'Wulfstan and the So-Called Laws of Edward and Guthrum', *English Historical Review* 56 (1941), pp. 1-21; repr. in D. Whitelock (ed.), *History, Law and Literature in 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Century England* (London, 1981), with original pagination; K. Jost, (ed.) *Die 'Institutes of Polity, Civil and Ecclesiastical': Ein Werk Erzbischof Wulfstans Von York*, *Swiss Studies in English* 47 (Bern, 1959); R. Fowler, *Canons of Edgar*, EETS os 266, (Oxford, 1972).

<sup>5</sup> These homilies are edited as Napier XXXV: *Be mistlican gelimpan* and Napier XXXVI: *To eallum folce* respectively. See discussion below.

<sup>6</sup> S. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop, and the Viking Raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12', *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007), pp. 186-187, 189.

<sup>7</sup> Bethurum, *Homilies*, no. XX (BH, C, EI): *Sermo lupi ad anglos*; D. Whitelock (ed.), *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (London, 1963).

eventually expanded into the longer and latest version.<sup>8</sup> This traditional view has been challenged by Stephanie Hollis and Jonathan Wilcox, who offer compelling evidence that the order of composition should be reversed, with the longest version being viewed as the earliest.<sup>9</sup> As Simon Keynes has recently pointed out in his own reassessment of the manuscripts, there are numerous possibilities which arise from the evidence, and the issue needs substantially more investigation.<sup>10</sup>

Despite this extensive list of works attributed to Wulfstan, it appears that we may only be scraping the surface of his influence in the production and circulation of texts. Recent assessments of the handwriting initially argued by Neil Ker as belonging to Wulfstan have highlighted a considerable number of manuscripts which can be linked with the Archbishop through palaeographic evidence.<sup>11</sup> This is particularly notable in the discovery of a number of 'Commonplace Books'

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<sup>8</sup> Whitelock, *Sermo Lupi*, pp. 1-5; Bethurum, *Homilies*, pp. 22-24; M. Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (eds.), *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 143-146.

<sup>9</sup> S. Dien, 'Sermo Lupi ad Anglos: the Order and Date of the Three Versions', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 76 (1975), pp. 561-570; J. Wilcox, 'Wulfstan's *Sermo Lupi ad Anglos* as Political Performance: 16 February 1014 and Beyond', in M. Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 10 (Turnhout, 2004), esp. pp. 388-392.

<sup>10</sup> Keynes argues that the longest version was indeed composed first and suggests the intriguing possibility that the first version of the sermon was composed not in 1014 but in 1009. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', pp. 203-213.

<sup>11</sup> N. R. Ker, 'Hemming's Cartulary: a Description of the Two Worcester Cartularies in Cotton Tiberius A. xiii', in R. W. Hunt, W. A. Pantin and R. W. Southern (eds.), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to Frederick Maurice Powicke*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford, 1969), p. 71. Cf. Whitelock, *Sermo Lupi*, pp. 1-5; Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 30; P. Clemoes, 'Introduction', in B. Fehr (ed.), *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics: in altenglischer und lateinischer Fassung*, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 9 (Hamburg, 1914; repr. with a supplement by P. Clemoes, Darmstadt, 1966), p. cxxviii; N. Ker, 'The Handwriting of Archbishop Wulfstan', in P. Clemoes and K. Hughes (eds.), *England Before the Conquest: Studies in Primary Sources Presented to Dorothy Whitelock* (Cambridge, 1971), p. 315; J. E. Cross and J. Morrish Tunberg (eds.), *The Copenhagen Wulfstan Collection: Copenhagen Kongelige Bibliotek Gl. Kgl. Sam. 1595*, EEMF 25 (Copenhagen 1993), pp. 44-47. See also P. Wormald, *The Making of English Law, vol. 1: King Alfred to the Twelfth Century*, (Oxford, 1999), p. 188, esp. n. 108. One notable dissenting voice may be found in C. E. Hohler, 'Some Service Books of the Later Saxon Church', in D. Parsons (ed.), *Tenth-Century Studies: Essays in Commemoration of the Millennium of the Council of Winchester and Regularis Concordia* (London, 1975), p. 225, n. 59. The argument in favour of attributing this hand to Wulfstan is assessed in detail in P. Wormald, 'Archbishop Wulfstan and the Holiness of Society', in P. Wormald, *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), pp. 225-251.

associated with the Archbishop.<sup>12</sup> The number of manuscripts which are associated with Wulfstan and on which he exerted some type of influence calls into question the extent to which Wulfstan's surviving works can be seen as representative of laws which were promulgated and circulated at the time.<sup>13</sup> This bias is particularly evident in a comparison of law codes recorded in manuscripts associated with Wulfstan and the same law codes recorded in manuscripts not bearing the influence of the Archbishop, a point recently discussed by Patrick Wormald. This discovery has important implications for a study of Anglo-Saxon law codes, and Wulfstan's considerable influence in manuscript production and transmission colours the way in which we perceive the later Anglo-Saxon law codes and particularly the place of almsgiving within them.

### *Royal Responsibility and Spiritual Welfare*

One theme which emerges throughout Wulfstan's works is that indicated at the beginning of this chapter: a Christian king is responsible for the spiritual health of his people. This was not a new and innovative concept in the eleventh century; it can be traced back to late antique authors such as Augustine who emphasised that the king must be an enforcer of both religious and secular obligations. This ideology was effectively revived and circulated in the ninth century, particularly in the works of Hincmar of Rheims, himself ultimately influenced by Augustine, Isidore and

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<sup>12</sup> See, for example, discussions in D. Whitelock, 'Archbishop Wulfstan's Commonplace Book', *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association of America* 57 (1942), pp. 916-929; J. E. Cross, 'A Newly-Identified Manuscript of Wulfstan's "Commonplace Book"', Rouen, Bibliothèque Municipale MS 1382 (U. 109), fols. 173r-198v', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 2 (1992), pp. 63-83; J. E. Cross and J. Morrish Tunberg, 'Introduction', in J. E. Cross and J. Morrish Tunberg (eds.), *The Copenhagen Wulfstan Collection: Copenhagen Kongelige Bibliotek Gl. Kgl. Sam. 1595*, EEMF 25 (Copenhagen 1993), pp. 13-76; Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 202, 210, 213, 216-21, 344, 452.

<sup>13</sup> See also the cautionary remarks of Catherine Cubitt regarding Wulfstan's 'idiosyncratic view of lawmaking'. C. Cubitt, 'Bishops and Councils in Late Saxon England: the Intersection of Secular and Ecclesiastical Law', in W. Hartmann and A. Grabowsky (eds.), *Recht und Gericht in Kirche und Welt um 900* (Munich, 2007), pp. 153-154.



Gelasius.<sup>14</sup> According to Hincmar, the act of royal consecration bound the king to the laws of his realm and solidified his position as *minister* over his kingdom, thereby holding him responsible for both the welfare of the Church and the piety of his subjects.<sup>15</sup> In the Carolingian Church this was exemplified by Charlemagne's *Admonitio generalis* which stressed the king's responsibility for encouraging and maintaining the salvation of his people, a duty which extended to correcting and admonishing the population as necessary.<sup>16</sup> The respective roles of bishops and kings became a key point of interest in this period, as growing episcopal power demanded increased interdependence between kings and bishops. Janet Nelson has argued that this shift in the balance of power set the stage for the introduction of the ritual of royal anointing, which appeared at different times in the kingdoms of western Europe.<sup>17</sup> In England this process is evident in the incorporation of a number of bishops in the king's council from the time of Athelstan, particularly so in the key role played by bishops in secular legislation and administration during the

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<sup>14</sup> While both Augustine and Hincmar wrote that law-making was an essential component of the royal office, Hincmar reasoned that in this capacity the king acted on God's behalf. Thus, he was bound to the laws he made and could be deposed if he was found to be acting unjustly. J. L. Nelson, 'Kingship, Law and Liturgy in the Political Thought of Hincmar of Rheims', *English Historical Review* 92 (1977), pp. 242-243, 247, 250. For an Anglo-Saxon perspective, see Ælfric's Supp. IX: *Dominica post ascensionem domini* and Jost, *Institutes of Polity*, chs. 5 and 6. Cf. P. Stafford, 'The Laws of Cnut and the History of Anglo-Saxon Royal Promises', *Anglo-Saxon England* 10 (1982), pp. 183-189.

<sup>15</sup> Nelson, 'Kingship, Law and Liturgy', pp. 242-262; J. L. Nelson, 'Inauguration Rituals', in P. H. Sawyer and I. N. Wood (eds.), *Early Medieval Kingship* (Leeds, 1977), pp. 62-63. Cf. R. R. Trilling, 'Sovereignty and Social Order: Archbishop Wulfstan and the *Institutes of Polity*', in J. S. Ott and A. Trumbore Jones (eds.), *The Bishop Reformed: Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 68-69.

<sup>16</sup> M. De Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 116-117, 131-135; P. Fouracre, 'Carolingian Justice: the Rhetoric of Improvement and Contexts of Abuse', *La Giustizia nell'Alto Medioevo (Secoli V-VIII), Settimane di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo* 42 (1995), pp. 771-803, esp. pp. 778-780.

<sup>17</sup> J. Nelson, 'National Synods, Kingship as Office, and Royal Anointing: An Early Medieval Syndrome', *Studies in Church History* 7 (1971), pp. 49-50. Cf. J. Nelson, 'The Earliest Surviving Royal *Ordo*: Some Liturgical and Historical Aspects', in B. Tierney and P. Linehan (eds.), *Authority and Power: Studies on Medieval Law and Government Presented to Walter Ullmann on His Seventieth Birthday* (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 29-48; J. Nelson, 'The Lord's Anointed and the People's Choice: Carolingian Royal Ritual' in D. Cannadine and S. Price (eds.) *Rituals of Royalty: Power and Ceremonial in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 137-180.

reign of Edgar.<sup>18</sup> The introduction of the anointing ritual in England in 973 formally established this interdependence between religious and secular power, acknowledging the bishop's ability to confer and legitimize secular power, an ability allowed only by the consent of the king.<sup>19</sup> Thus in tenth-century England both kings and bishops increasingly acknowledged their shared responsibility for the spiritual well-being of the laity: kings through their acceptance of the ritual of coronation and anointing, bishops through their essential role in the creation of both secular and religious legislation.<sup>20</sup>

The role of the king in providing for the spiritual health of the realm is reiterated in a number of Anglo-Saxon texts, most notably Wulfstan's *Institutes of Polity*. This text, possibly begun as early as 1008 and apparently unfinished at the time of Wulfstan's death in 1023, exists as a number of chapters recorded in five manuscripts, although no one complete copy containing all chapters is extant.<sup>21</sup> Because of its overlap with a number of Wulfstanian works, both religious and political, it is difficult to classify. The text as a whole was clearly meant as a commentary on the social order in a Christian society, although it is unclear for what purpose Wulfstan intended this work or even to whom it was directed.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of the difficulties associated with the manuscript transmission of this work or even the questions involved in categorising it, the *Institutes of Polity* provide invaluable clarity and insight into

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<sup>18</sup> See, for example, the prologues to *I Athelstan*, *I Edmund* and *II Edgar*, each of which will be discussed in turn below.

<sup>19</sup> This is not to say that the ritual of anointing had not occurred at all in England before this point, but that after 973 it became standardised. Nelson, 'National Synods', pp. 41-59. For comments specifically regarding Anglo-Saxon England, see *ibid.* pp. 48-49. Greta Austin notes a corresponding rise in the episcopal desire for attaining and creating new books of law in order to carry out these duties, particularly in Germany in the period 900-1050. See her comments in G. Austin, 'Bishops and Religious Law, 900-1050', in J. S. Ott and A. Trumbore Jones (eds.), *The Bishop Reformed: Studies of Episcopal Power and Culture in the Central Middle Ages* (Aldershot, 2007), pp. 40-57.

<sup>20</sup> For a recent assessment of the interdependence between bishops and kings, see J. L. Nelson, 'Liturgy or Law: Misconceived Alternatives?', in S. Baxter *et al.* (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 433-447.

<sup>21</sup> Trilling, 'Sovereignty and Social Order', p. 62. The text has been edited by Jost, *Institutes of Polity*.

<sup>22</sup> Trilling, 'Sovereignty and Social Order', pp. 61-65.

Wulfstan's conception of the roles of the king and bishop in society and the part played by each in the creation of secular legislation.

In the second chapter of the *Polity*, entitled *Be eorðlicum cyninge*, Wulfstan addresses the role of the king in providing laws for his people. Rather than stressing the importance of legislating issues of secular administration, Wulfstan instead outlines the duty of the king to use his legislative authority as a means of ensuring the Christianity of his people:

*Cristenum cyninge gebyreð swyðe rihte, þæt he cristen folc rihtlice healde, and þæt he sy, swa hit riht is, folces frofer and rihtwis hyrde cristenre heorde. And him gebyreð, þæt he eallum mægene christendom rære and Godes cyrcan æghwar georne fyrðrige and friðige and eal cristen folc sibbige and sehte mid rihtre lage, swa he geornost mæge, and þurh ælc þing rihtwisnesse lufie for Gode and for worolde. Forþam þurh þæt he sceal sylf fyrmest geþeon and his þeodscype eac swa, þe he riht lufige for Gode and for worolde.*<sup>23</sup>

Thus, according to Wulfstan, if a king uses his power properly in the enactment of legislation to ensure the prosperity of Christianity in his nation, this will in turn lead to 'peace and reconciliation' throughout the land. This idea is echoed in the fourth chapter of the *Polity*, '*Be cynestole*', where Wulfstan elaborates on the king's responsibility, likening it to a throne which stands on three pillars:

*Ælc riht cynestol stent on þrym stapelum, þe fullice ariht stent: an is Oratores, and oðer is Laboratores, and ðridde is Bellatores. Oratores sindon gebedmen, þe Gode sculan þeowian and dægges and nihtes for ealne þeodscipe þingian georne. Laboratores sindon weorcmen, þe tilian sculon, þæs ðe eall þeodscype big sceall libban. Bellatores syndon wigmen, þe eard sculon werian wiglice mid wæpnum. On þyssum ðrym stapelum sceall ælc cynestol standan mid rihte on cristenre þeode. And awacie heora ænig, sona se stol scylfð; and fulberste heora ænig,*

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<sup>23</sup> Jost, *Institutes of Polity*, pp. 41-42. 'It behoves a Christian king in a Christian nation to be, as is right, the people's comfort and a righteous shepherd over the Christian flock. And it behoves him to raise up the Christian faith with all his power and zealously advance and protect God's Church everywhere, and *with just law* to bring peace and reconciliation to all Christian people, as diligently as he can, and in everything cherish righteousness in the sight of God and the world. For if he cherish justice in the sight of God and the world, through that he himself foremost shall prosper and his subjects similarly'. Translation from M. Swanton (trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Prose* (London, 1993), pp. 188. My emphasis.

*þonne hyrsð se stol nyðer, and þæt wyrð þære þeode eall to unþearfe. Ac stapelige man and strangie and trumme hi georne mid wislicre Godes lare and mid rihtlicre woruldlage: þæt wyrð þam þeodscype to langsuman ræde. And soð is, þæt ic secge: awacie se cristendom, sona scylfð se cynedom; and arære man unlaga ahwar on lande oððe unsida lufige ahwar to swiðe, þæt cymð þære þeode eall to unþearfe. Ac do man, swa hit þearf is, alecge man unriht; þæt mæg to þearf for Gode and for worulde.<sup>24</sup>*

In this passage Wulfstan illuminates the reciprocal responsibilities of both the king and his subjects for ensuring both the spiritual and physical health of the country: the king is to provide for his people by the imposition of just laws, and the people are to collectively support the king so that the throne may not collapse. Each order of society has a responsibility to provide for the good of the nation through prayer, work or defence.<sup>25</sup> As the following discussions will demonstrate, these themes form the basis for Wulfstan's imposition of legislation, particularly that relating to almsgiving.

Although the duty of the king to provide good laws on both secular and religious matters was most clearly laid down by Wulfstan in his *Polity*, it reflected a long-standing tradition in Anglo-Saxon law.<sup>26</sup> Beginning with the seventh-century laws

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<sup>24</sup> Jost, *Institutes of Polity*, pp. 55-58. 'Every lawful throne which stands perfectly upright, stands on three pillars: one is *oratores*, and the second is *laboratores* and the third is *bellatores*. "Oratores" are prayer-men, who must serve God and earnestly intercede both day and night for the entire nation. "Laboratores" are workmen, who must supply that by which the entire nation shall live. "Bellatores" are soldiers, who must defend the land by fighting with weapons. Every throne in a Christian nation must stand aright on these three pillars. And should any of them weaken, the throne will immediately totter; and should any of them shatter, then the throne will tumble down, and that is entirely to the nation's detriment. But let them be diligently fixed and strengthened and made firm with the wise teaching of God and with worldly justice; that will be to the lasting benefit of the nation. And it is true what I say: should the Christian faith weaken, the kingship will immediately totter; and should *bad laws* arise anywhere in the land or vicious habits be too greatly cherished anywhere, that will be entirely to the nation's detriment. But let there be done what is necessary, injustice put down and God's law raised up; that may be of advantage in the sight of God and the world'. Translated from Swanton, *Anglo-Saxon Prose*, pp. 189-90. My emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> For a general discussion of the Three Orders of society, see G. Duby, *The Three Orders: Feudal Society Imagined*, trans. by A. Goldhammer (Chicago, IL, 1980). For its reception in Anglo-Saxon England, see T. E. Powell, 'The "Three Orders" of Society in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), pp. 103-132.

<sup>26</sup> For a discussion of the intersection between secular and religious law, see Cubitt, 'Bishops and Councils', pp. 153-159, which argues that the use of excommunication in the Anglo-Saxon law codes

of Ine, the regulation of Christian obligations was slowly introduced into the Anglo-Saxon legislative tradition. This combination of secular and religious law was further realised in Alfred's great *domboc*, which began with a lengthy preface of apostolic and Mosaic law, thus locating Alfred's laws within an established Biblical legislative tradition. Within the laws of Ine, preserved in the *domboc*, occurs a clause meting out punishment for neglecting the baptism of a child: '*Cild binnan ðritegum nihta sie gefulwad; gif hit swa ne sie, XXX scill. gebete. Gif hit ðonne sie dead butan fulwihte, gebete he hit mid eallum ðam ðe he age*'.<sup>27</sup> This clause is not alone in representing a royal interest in religious obligations, but similar regulations are few and far between in Ine's code. Likewise, Alfred includes his own clauses on ecclesiastical matters, such as the law regulating proper conduct during Lent: '*Gif mon in lenctenne halig ryht in folce butan leafe alecgge, gebete mid CXX scill*'.<sup>28</sup> Catherine Cubitt has recently argued that the appearance of clauses such as these, and especially those threatening excommunication as a punishment, may be more reflective of the decisions made at synodal assemblies rather than at the instigation of the king, but that the chain of evidence linking these assemblies with the royal court is often poorly recorded.<sup>29</sup> Such an argument has important implications for our understanding of the process of creating Anglo-Saxon law codes. However, as Cubitt observes, this should not obscure the significance of the visible intersection of royal and ecclesiastical law during this period. For the following discussion it is more important that these laws, both religious and secular, were issued in the name of the king and underpinned by royal authority.

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only occurs in limited contexts, hinting at hidden relationships between canon law, penance and royal law.

<sup>27</sup> Ine 2-2.1. 'A child shall be baptised within 30 days. If this is not done, [the guardian] shall pay 30 shillings compensation. If, however, it dies without being baptised, he shall pay as compensation all he possesses'.

<sup>28</sup> Alf. 40.2. 'If anyone, without permission, publicly disregards the laws of the Church during Lent, he shall pay 120 shillings compensation'.

<sup>29</sup> Cubitt, 'Bishops and Councils', pp. 153-159.

The preceding examples have demonstrated the ideological framework in which the later Anglo-Saxon laws should be viewed. The tradition that it is a duty of a king to provide for the spiritual health of his people had its roots in the Carolingian ideals enshrined in the *Admonitio generalis* as well as the works of Augustine, Isidore and Gelasius. The political works of Archbishop Wulfstan represent the Anglo-Saxon version of this doctrine, linking this royal pastoral care with the provision of just laws. This tradition is also observable in the early laws of Ine and Alfred, both of which contain clauses regulating religious matters. The following sections assess the law codes which place a specific emphasis on the religious duties of the nation, in particular through the giving or paying of alms, fulfilling the role of the king in encouraging Christian behaviour among his people.

### *From Homily to Law*

As hinted at in the introduction to this chapter, the laws known as *VII* and *VIIa Æthelred*, or the *Penitential Edicts of Bath*, provide the best, and indeed only, example of the legislation of the type of almsgiving one would recognise from the homilies. This code survives in two forms, a Latin version translated in the twelfth century from a lost Old English text (*VII*) and an Old English version (*VIIa*), which differ substantially in structure and somewhat in content.<sup>30</sup> While Felix Liebermann argued that both texts stemmed from the ordinances issued at Bath (according to the Latin version) in 1009 (gleaned from evidence in the Old English version),<sup>31</sup> notable discrepancies between the texts have led others to question the close relationship between the two codes.<sup>32</sup> It has been suggested that while the Latin version did indeed represent the decisions made at Bath in 1009, the more general measures

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<sup>30</sup> The OE version is also preserved in roughly the same form in Napier XXXIX.

<sup>31</sup> The rubric for the Old English states that it was issued 'when the great army came to the country'. It has been accepted from internal evidence that this refers to the Danish incursions in 1009. See C&S, p. 373-374; Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', p. 179; and Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 331 n. 314; *EHD*, p. 447.

<sup>32</sup> C&S, p. 374.

imposed by the Old English code indicate that it was composed at a later date for a more generalised application.<sup>33</sup> Alternatively, the Old English version may represent Wulfstan's draft of the material which was later polished for a final version, which would be later translated into Latin. It is difficult to reconstruct the precise relationship between these texts, yet it seems likely that the Latin version is more representative of the ordinances authorized by the king and his councillors at Bath.<sup>34</sup> Despite the confusion surrounding the origins of the two codes, the following discussion draws substantially on the evidence of the Old English *VIIa Æthelred*, as this version provides additional detail regarding Wulfstan's intentions for the use of the law code.

The decisions made by the king and his councillors at Bath in 1009 and subsequently enshrined in *VII* and *VIIa Æthelred* represent one approach among many in a series of measures intended to counter the increasing Danish aggression. Throughout the reign of Æthelred, the Anglo-Saxons had faced a resurgence of viking raids, culminating in confrontations such as the devastating defeat of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth and his thegns at the Battle of Maldon in 991.<sup>35</sup> After this date, Æthelred tried to resolve the situation in a number of ways, most of which were largely unsuccessful. Some of these solutions involved peaceful negotiation, such as the payment of large amounts of tribute (*gafol*) between 993 and 1005 in an attempt to bribe the vikings into returning home. Other ideas were less savoury, as in the order of what became known as the St Brice's Day Massacre of Danish mercenaries in England in 1002, Æthelred's response to the supposed discovery of a plot on his life.<sup>36</sup> In addition to trying to negotiate with the vikings through measures fair or

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<sup>33</sup> Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 330-332.

<sup>34</sup> Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', p. 180.

<sup>35</sup> See collected essays in D. Scragg (ed.), *The Battle of Maldon, AD 991* (Oxford, 1991); S. Keynes, 'The Vikings in England, c. 790-1016', in P. Sawyer (ed.), *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 48-82.

<sup>36</sup> ASC (E) 1002.

foul, Æthelred also appealed to a higher authority for assistance in this crisis. A series of charters issued by the king between 993 and 1005 cumulatively served to grant or restore lands and privileges to a number of religious houses, indicating a desire on the part of the king to make peace with God for any past misdeeds which may have incurred disfavour.<sup>37</sup> One charter in particular, dating from 993, records the restoration of privileges to Abingdon Abbey on behalf of the king, who admitted that in his youth he had been led astray by the poor counsel of others.<sup>38</sup> This charter has been characterised as a turning point in Æthelred's reign, particularly as its penitential tone serves as evidence of the king's desire to atone for the sins of his youth.<sup>39</sup> Observed as a whole, the various actions taken throughout these years may be seen as the king and his counsellors resorting to increasingly desperate measures to earn a reprieve from viking hostility, paving the way for the *Penitential Edicts* issued in 1009.<sup>40</sup>

Wulfstan was well-aware of the negative impact of the viking invasions on the collective well-being of the Anglo-Saxons. Utilising the combined effects of his homiletic and legislative authority, he encouraged the people to atone for their sins, on both a personal and national scale, in order to earn God's favour and thus a reprieve from Danish aggression. The Old English version of the *Penitential Edicts* is an explicit example of this ideology, fusing together homiletic and legislative elements to create a unique type of law code. As quoted in the beginning of this chapter, Wulfstan begins by announcing that the *Edict* has been composed in response to the arrival of the '*micele here*' (great army) in England and thus it is the

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<sup>37</sup> See S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978-1016: a Study in their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 13 (Cambridge, 1980), pp.176-208. I shall address this issue more fully in the next chapter.

<sup>38</sup> S 876; S.E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Abingdon Abbey*, vol. 2, Anglo-Saxon Charters 8 (Oxford, 2001), no. 124.

<sup>39</sup> Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 176-187; Cubitt, 'Bishops and Councils', pp. 162-167. Cubitt argues further that the charter itself records evidence of the king's penance, assigned by an episcopal council at Pentecost in that year.

<sup>40</sup> Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', p. 154-155.



duty of the Anglo-Saxons to seek '*Godes miltse 7 his mildheortnesse*' (God's mercy and compassion) in order to survive this new ordeal.<sup>41</sup> This introduction sets the tone for the remainder of the *Edict*, indicating that the ultimate goal of this legislation was to achieve more permanent relief from the viking depredations which had been plaguing the country for nearly two decades. The remainder of the code reads like a step-by-step plan for achieving this solution. First, and perhaps most importantly, the entire English nation was to fast on bread, water and herbs for three days, specifically the Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday before Michaelmas.<sup>42</sup> In addition, all people were to attend church barefoot and go to confession. From the church, the people were then to process with the relics, calling upon Christ '*inweardre heortan*' (from their inmost heart).<sup>43</sup> This description of fasting and processing evokes a similar image of the processions associated with the Rogation Days, as discussed in the previous chapter. This link was likely intentional, as the Rogationtide celebrations were customarily held to have originated with the three-day fast imposed upon the people of Vienne by the bishop Mamertus. As in *VIIa Æthelred*, the tradition states that Mamertus instituted a three-day penitential fast in an appeal to God that He help rid the city of the afflictions associated with a recent earthquake.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, Simon Keynes has recently noted that evidence of similar penitential periods exists in a number of eighth- and ninth-century Carolingian sources recording the institution of a fast in conjunction with almsgiving, prayers and litanies in response to a military emergency.<sup>45</sup> This tradition would have been known to the Anglo-Saxons, as the story of Mamertus had been popularised by Ælfric and other anonymous homiletic authors in the Rogationtide

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<sup>41</sup> VIIa Atr. Inscr. – Pro.

<sup>42</sup> VIIa Atr 1. A similar fast, also prescribed in conjunction with the singing of mass '*contra paganos*', is described in Ælfric's Pastoral Letter for Bishop Wulfsgie, chs. 150-161, printed in *C&S*, pp. 193-195 and 224-226. Cf. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', p. 171.

<sup>43</sup> VIIa Atr 2-2.1.

<sup>44</sup> See above, Chapter Two.

<sup>45</sup> Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', pp. 184-186.

homilies.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, the combination of masses, prayers and almsgiving draws on the patristic tradition, echoed in the Anglo-Saxon homilies, of linking these three actions together in order to improve the redemptive effects of each.<sup>47</sup> Thus in imposing a three-day period of penance, Wulfstan makes deliberate use of an established convention, providing a familiar precedent for this new legislation.

In addition to the fast, a penny or its value was to be given as dues from every hide of land, and at the church a confessor and a reeve of the village were to witness the division of this money into three parts: likely one part for the priests, one for the church and one for the poor, as decreed in the *Canons of Edgar*.<sup>48</sup> Wulfstan also sets down the penalty for non-compliance:

*7 gif hwa þis ne gelæaste, ðonne gebete he þæt, swa swa hit gelagod is: bunda mid XXX p, þræl mid his hide, þegn mid XXX scill. 7 swa hwar swa þæt feoh up arise, dæle man on Godes est æghwiltcne pænig. 7 ealswa þone mete, þe gehwa brucan wolde, gif him þæt fæsten swa geboden nære, dæle man on Godes est georne æfter þam fæstene eal þearfigendum mannum 7 bedridan 7 swa gebrocedum mannum þe swa fæstan ne magon.*<sup>49</sup>

By instructing alms of money and food to be given in this way, Wulfstan ensured that everyone in the kingdom would either give alms or have alms given on their behalf. This is stipulated in further detail in the following clause: '*7 hiredmanna gehwiltc sille pænig to ælmeßan, oððe his hlaford sille for hine, buton he silf hæbbe; 7*

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<sup>46</sup> See, for example, CH I.XVIII: *In letania maiore*, lines 5-11; Vercelli XIX, lines 149-164.

<sup>47</sup> Ramsey, B., 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church: the Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries', *Theological Studies* 43.2 (1982), pp. 244-245. Cf. CH I.XI: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 205-214; CH II.XXI: *Alia visio*, lines 77-79; Blickling III: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, pp. 36-37.

<sup>48</sup> Fowler, *Canons of Edgar*, pp. 12-15 (no. 55-57); translated in C&S, pp. 332-333.

<sup>49</sup> VIIa Atr. 3-4.1. 'And if anyone does not render this, he shall remedy that as has been legislated: a householder with 30 pence, a slave with his hide, and a thegn with 30 shillings. And wherever such payment comes up, every penny shall be distributed for love of God. And likewise all the food which each would enjoy, if this fast were not commanded for him, shall be diligently distributed after the fast, for love of God, to all needy men and the to bed-ridden and to the afflicted who may not fast in this way'. Cf. II Eg 4-4.2 for a similar penalty.

*heafodmen teoðian'*.<sup>50</sup> There is a strong emphasis on the giving of alms throughout these clauses, variously described as dues from each hide of land, the distribution of pennies gathered as payment for non-compliance and excess food and drink which would normally be consumed. Wulfstan ties each of these actions in with the general penance called for in this *Edict*, emphasising that this almsgiving was an essential component of the general atonement for one's sins. In addition, while the amount of money to be given as alms is stipulated (one penny from each member of a household and a penny as dues from each hide of land), the amount of food or drink to be given is not quantified in such a way.<sup>51</sup> Wulfstan's instructions for almsgiving, couched as they are here in homiletic tones, give the impression that even though all men are commanded to give alms, they still have some room to manoeuvre in determining the form these alms are to take. Thus these clauses provide important evidence for the role of legislation in blurring the boundaries between the voluntary and the obligatory.

After this group of clauses regulating secular behaviour, Wulfstan also includes a short section on the duties of the clergy and monks:

*7 on æghwilcan mynstre singe eal gefereæden ætgædere heora saltere þa ðry dadas. 7 ælc mæssepreost mæssige for urne hlaforð 7 for ealle his þeode. 7 þar to eacan mæssige man æghwilce dæge on ælcan minstre ane mæssan sinderlice for ðare neode, þe us nu on handa stent, oð þæt hit betere wurðe. 7 æt ælcan tidsange eal hired aþenedum limum ætforan Godes weofode singe þone sealm: 'Domine, quid multiplicati sunt' 7 preces 7 col.*<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> VIIa Atr 5. 'And each member of a household shall give a penny as alms, or his lord shall give it for him, unless he himself has it, and men of position shall pay tithes'.

<sup>51</sup> See, for example, Napier XXXVI: *To eallum folce*, which states that during a fast one must give away the food which one would normally eat were one not fasting, as discussed below.

<sup>52</sup> VIIa Atr. 6-6.3. 'And in every minster all the brotherhood in common shall chant [the psalms from] their psalters on these three days. And every masspriest shall say mass for our lord and for all his people. And in addition, in each minster, one mass shall be said daily for that need, which now stands in or hands, until it becomes better. And at every service all the brotherhood, prostrate before the altar of God, shall chant the psalm: "O Lord, how they are multiplied" and the Prayers and Collect'.

This series of statements illuminates the religious counterpart to the penitential almsgiving of the laity. While the people at large are to give away money, food and drink as alms, the priests and monks are to accompany this almsgiving with prayers, psalms and masses aimed specifically at ‘the distress with which we are now afflicted, *until an improvement takes place*’. There seems no doubt in Wulfstan’s mind that such an improvement will indeed occur, provided all of the nation collectively participates in this general penance, thus illustrating a belief in the redemptive effects of almsgiving.

The edict ends with a final clause restating again Wulfstan’s rationale for imposing such measures: ‘7 æghwilce geare heonon forð gelæste man Godes gerihta huru rihtlice, wið ðam þe us God ælmihtig gemiltsige 7 us geunne, þæt we ure fynd ofercuman motan. God ure helpe! Amen’.<sup>53</sup> Again, the element of reciprocity is emphasised. Wulfstan equates the payment of ‘God’s dues’ with receiving the mercy of God and thus ‘victory over our enemies’. In doing so, he stresses that this three-day fast, in which all men are to confess their sins, give alms, perform masses and offer prayers, functions as a national penance by which the sins of the nation will be atoned for through the redemptive properties of almsgiving. Wulfstan thus draws on the homiletic tradition outlined in the previous chapter whereby almsgiving is linked with forgiveness for sin. Although Wulfstan himself does not often ponder the theological implications of almsgiving in his sermons, he does stress that the giving of alms is something which all men must do for the good of their own souls and the good of the nation. This emphasis on almsgiving is readily apparent throughout Wulfstan’s laws, but especially so in the *Penitential Edicts*. It is also important to stress that the type of almsgiving advocated by Wulfstan in *VIIa Æthelred* is substantially the same type of almsgiving encouraged in the homilies: food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, a portion of one’s wealth to those in need. It is striking

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<sup>53</sup> VIIa Atr 8. ‘And every year henceforth man shall certainly pay God’s dues rightly, in order that God Almighty may have mercy upon us, that we may overcome our enemies. God help us. Amen’.

here that Wulfstan draws on this established ideology of almsgiving in a way which creates a strong consonance between homiletic and legal texts.

Although the *Penitential Edicts* are the best example of legislation on almsgiving, they draw on a legal precedent established in previous Anglo-Saxon law codes. Among the numerous law codes attributed to Athelstan, one of the most enigmatic is what has become known as the *Charity Ordinance*. In this short tract Athelstan, ostensibly under the advice of Archbishop Wulfhelm of Canterbury, instructs all reeves to always provide food for the destitute (*fedap ealle wæga an earm Engliscmon*), for the forgiveness of the king's sins. The use of the phrase 'ealle wæga' implies that this action was to be performed with frequency, perhaps on an annual basis, rather than occurring as a singular act of almsgiving on behalf of the king. This proclamation is then further clarified as comprising 'ane ambra meles 7 an sconc spices opþe an ram weorþe IIII peningas 7 scrud for twelf monþa ælc gear...7 gif se gereafa ðis oferheald, gebete XXX scill., 7 sie þæt feoh gedæled ðæm ðearfum ðe on ða tun synd, ðe ðis ungefremed wunie, on ðæs bisceopes gewitnesse'.<sup>54</sup> Although this tract is clearly directed at the reeves, Athelstan uses secular legislation to ensure that food and clothing are provided for the poor, an act which he equates with earning forgiveness for his own sins.<sup>55</sup> All of the contextual evidence points to reading this law as one regulating almsgiving, yet it is curious that nowhere within this text does the word *ælmesse*

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<sup>54</sup> Alm 1-2. '...an amber of meal, a shank of bacon or a ram worth four pence and clothes for twelve months each year...And if the reeve neglects this, the penalty shall be 30 shillings, and the money shall be distributed to the poor who are in the town, where this remains unfulfilled, in the witness of the bishop'. Patrick Wormald has noted that the Old English version of this code is questionable, as no original Old English version survives. The present text comes instead from an Elizabethan Anglo-Saxon translation of the Latin version of the code which itself was transmitted in the *Quadripartitus*. There seems to be no question, however, that the code was intended to regulate the provision of charity to the poor. See Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 261-2, 295. Cf. P. Wormald, 'The Lambarde Problem: Eighty Years On', in P. Wormald (ed.), *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), pp. 139-178.

<sup>55</sup> Similar provisions for the poor, as well as psalm-singing for the king, were stipulated in a series of charters issued by Athelstan between Christmas Eve 932 and January 933, providing an intriguing intersection between charter and law: S 379, 418, 419, 422, 423. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 307.

occur. It is not until the legislation of Wulfstan that the vocabulary of almsgiving enters into the legal tradition.

Regardless of this lack of specific terminology, Athelstan's *Charity Ordinance* echoes the teachings on almsgiving which would later be preached in the Anglo-Saxon homilies: men should give food and clothing to those in need, and in return the donors may receive forgiveness for sins. That it is the king who benefits from these alms, rather than the reeves who act charitably, is an innovation introduced by Athelstan. It indicates a belief that giving alms on behalf of another may likewise earn redemption for the third party rather than the giver. Again, this idea is echoed in the homilies of Ælfric, which preach that men may reduce the time others spend in purgatory by giving alms on their behalf, even though these homilies do not appear until the end of the tenth century.<sup>56</sup> These clear links between homily and law suggest that a general ideology of almsgiving was present in Anglo-Saxon England as early as the reign of Athelstan, despite the lack of extant homiletic texts from this time.

This link between homiletic and legal conceptions of almsgiving is further intensified in two other sermons authored by Wulfstan which substantially represent the content of *VIIa Æthelred*: Napier XXXV (*Be mistlican gelimpan*) and XXXVI (*To eallum folce*).<sup>57</sup> The two texts are essentially the same in content, differing only on a few minor points, and it appears as though *VII* and *VIIa Æthelred* were used as a base for composing them.<sup>58</sup> In *To eallum folce*, Wulfstan begins with Biblical examples,

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, CH II.XXI: *Alia visio*, lines 1-110.

<sup>57</sup> While both of these sermons are directly related to Æthelred's *Penitential Edicts* and are both likely originally authored by Wulfstan, they seem to have been altered by another person at a later date. It is impossible to know precisely which sections were the result of Wulfstan's initiative and which may be attributed to later adjustments. Regardless of these differences, the homilies represent substantially the same content regarding church dues and plough-alms and thus provide additional evidence as to Wulfstan's plan for enacting ecclesiastical legislation. For a discussion of this aspect of the sermons and their relation to the laws of Æthelred, see Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 332 n. 318; Bethurum, *Homilies*, p. 38.

<sup>58</sup> Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', pp. 187, 189.

calling specific attention to the actions of the Ninevites who, because of their sinfulness, sought God's forgiveness through fasts, prayer and almsgiving.<sup>59</sup>

Wulfstan then exhorts the English to follow the example of the Ninevites, should the need arise: *'Gyf hit gewyrþe, þæt on þeodscype becume healic ongelimp for manna gewyrhtan, here oþþe huncger, manncwealm oððe orfcwealm, bryne oþþe blodgyte oþþe ungelimplice gewyðeru oþþe færlic cōþa oþþe færlic deaþ, þonne sece man a þa bote to gode sylfum'*.<sup>60</sup> Men are instructed to fast for three days, as often as necessary, in order to fulfil this penance. The actions associated with this fast echo the stipulations laid out in *VIIa Æthelred*, such as perambulations with relics and reciting masses and psalms. Wulfstan then elaborates on these instructions:

*...and sceote man ælmešan, be þam þe man geræde, swa æt soluh penig, swa sylflende hlaf æt hreocendum heorþe, swa elles hwæt, swa witan þonne to þearfe and gerædan for ealles folces neode...and mæssepreosta gehwylc do, swa hit micel þearf is, on his mæssesancgum clipje to Criste, and ealle godes þearwas mid sealmsange þingjan jorne, and godes þearfan anrædlice gebiddan for þam, þe heom god doþ.*<sup>61</sup>

Within this short passage Wulfstan outlines two new ways in which men may give alms during a penitential time: a penny per plough and a *gesufel* loaf. This almsgiving is to be accompanied by intercessory prayers and psalms by the masspriests and clergy, in addition to the prayers of the poor and needy. The last of these recalls the reciprocal relationship between rich and poor whereby poor men

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<sup>59</sup> Almsgiving is mentioned in connections with the Ninevites only in MS E of Napier XXXV: *Be mistlican gelimpan*. Cf. Napier, *Wulfstan*, p. 170. See also Jonah 3:1-10.

<sup>60</sup> Napier XXXV: *Be mistlican gelimpan*, p. 169, lines 15-16, p. 170, lines 1-3. 'If it comes to pass that profound misfortune comes into the nation on account of the deeds of man, army or hunger, pestilence or cattle-plague, fire or bloodshed or unfortunate weather or unexpected disease or unexpected death, then man may always seek penance for his own good'.

<sup>61</sup> Napier XXXVI: *To eallum folce*, p. 173, lines 13-19. 'And man shall pay alms, according to that which is advised, as a penny per plough, as a *gesufel* loaf from a smoking hearth, as whatever else the wise men counsel is necessary and for the need of all people...and each masspriest shall do whatever is greatly necessary, in his office of mass he shall cry out to Christ, and all God's servants shall eagerly intercede with the singing of psalms, and all God's needy shall constantly pray for them, which does good for them'.

who receive alms are expected to pray on behalf of those who give the alms.<sup>62</sup> Taken as a whole, this passage outlines the respective roles of every member of society, all of which work together to demonstrate a collective repentance and thus earn redemption for the sins of the nation.

Wulfstan also offers suggestions for the proper regulation of such a penitential fast. Men who do not fast properly or do not pay alms are ordered to atone for this breach according to the judgement of the shire-bishop and shire elders in order to discourage similar misbehaviour in others. Wulfstan clarifies what he means by appropriate fasting, stating that men are to distribute to the poor the food which they normally would have consumed had a fast not been prescribed, and they should not be so greedy as to keep it for themselves.<sup>63</sup> On the whole, this homily echoes the provisions for almsgiving established in *VIIa Æthelred*.

*Be mistlican gelimpan* follows the same pattern as *To eallum folce*, first calling attention to the fasts of the Ninevites and then establishing the particulars of the penitential fast for the English. Yet in this sermon Wulfstan also provides a unique insight into his conception of almsgiving and its function in this arena. After instructing men to seek their confessors, process with relics and pay alms, he provides a list of things which one may do in order to give alms, elaborating on the list provided in *To eallum folce*:

...and sceote man ælmešan, be ðam þe man þonne to þearfe geræde: swa æt heafde peninc,<sup>64</sup> swa æt sylh peninc, swa gesyflodne hlaf æt hreocendum heorðe, swa elles

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<sup>62</sup> See B. Leyerle, 'John Chrysostom on Almsgiving and the Use of Money', *Harvard Theological Review* 87 (1994), pp. 41-42; R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice (313-450)* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 180-183; R. Garrison, *Redemptive Almsgiving in Early Christianity*, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series* 77 (Sheffield, 1993), pp. 82, 89-90; B. Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, trans. by A. Kolakowska (Oxford, 1994), pp. 47-48.

<sup>63</sup> Napier XXXVI: *To eallum folce*.

<sup>64</sup> The version printed by Napier reads 'heafde peninc' (penny per head?), which does not appear in any other similar context. A preferable reading may be the variation occurring in MS E, which gives 'heorðe peninc' (hearth-penny) instead. This makes sense in light of the frequent occurrence of plough-alms and Romfeoh/hearth-penny throughout the Wulfstanian law codes.



*hwæt, swa witan þonne to ðearfe gerædan, hwium weaxgescot, hwilum mealtgescot, hwilum ælmesbæð, hwilum fotþweal and ælmesgedal and hwilum be teopunge, hwilum be mannes efenwihte, hwilum be freotmen, and hwilum an, hwilum oðer witan scylan rædan folce to þearfe.*<sup>65</sup>

It is interesting to note that the terms ‘wax-scot’, ‘malt-scot’ and ‘alms-bath’, as well as the ‘meal-scot’, occurring as variants in MS E, do not appear anywhere else in the corpus of Anglo-Saxon texts.<sup>66</sup> They appear to be unique occurrences, perhaps coined by Wulfstan in composing this sermon. That they do not appear in *Bemistlican gelimpan* or in either VII or VIIa *Æthelred* need not imply that they were considered to be trivial additions. Rather, they may represent a later stage in Wulfstan’s composition of these texts, indicating a further maturation of his ideas regarding almsgiving and the forms it might take. This list of alms certainly stands apart from the typically vague homiletic injunctions to share one’s wealth with the poor, as discussed in the previous chapter.<sup>67</sup>

In providing such a detailed list of different types of almsgiving, Wulfstan provided a variety of alternate ways in which the laity could participate in this form of penance, regardless of personal wealth. His focus on the redemptive properties of almsgiving in both the *Penitential Edicts* and these two sermons indicates that Wulfstan saw the payment of alms, in addition to saying masses, praying and

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<sup>65</sup> Napier XXXVI: *To eallum folce*, p. 173, lines 13-19. ‘And man shall pay alms, regarding that which man shall then deliver to the poor: as a penny per head, as a penny per plough, as a *gesufel* loaf from a smoking hearth, or whatever else, as the wise men then arrange for the poor, now wax-scot, now malt-scot, now an alms-bath (bathing of the poor?), now the washing of feet (maundy) and the distribution of alms and now with tithing, now for someone of equal rank, now for a freed man, and now one thing, now another, as the wise men shall determine is necessary for the people’.

<sup>66</sup> Using the Old English Corpus online database I have not been able to find any occurrence of these terms in any other manuscripts. *Corpus of Old English*, <http://tapor.library.utoronto.ca/doecorpus/> (accessed 21 June, 2010).

<sup>67</sup> For example, in Ælfric’s homily *In caput jejunii*, he gives the following instruction without any further discussion of almsgiving: ‘*Nu se rica mann ne mæg her habban þe ma þe ure ænig þa orsorgan and þa unateorigendlican blysse, hwi nele he þonne oððe we gebycgan on þysum earmum life þa eacean myrhðe mid godum geearnungum and ælmys-dædum*’. (Now the rich man cannot here have, any more than any of us, that sorrowless and that untiring bliss; why then will not he, or we ourselves, purchase, in this miserable life, the eternal joy with good merits, and with almsdeeds?.)

paying other church dues, as a means of earning national redemption through the salvation of individuals.<sup>68</sup>

It is also notable that in both of these homilies Wulfstan references the Ninevites as a model for imitation in seeking redemption for sins on a national scale. The story of the Ninevites is recorded in the Old Testament book of Jonah. In the previous chapters of this book, Jonah had been sent by God to preach in Ninevah on account of the great wickedness of the residents of that city. Contrary to God's wishes, Jonah instead boarded a boat headed toward Tarsus, from which he was tossed overboard and subsequently endured a three-day sojourn in the belly of a great fish. On reflection of this incident, Jonah accepted God's plans for him and travelled to Ninevah, where his preaching was so successful that the Ninevites promptly declared all people should fast and repent of their sins. God, being touched by this display of piety, spared the Ninevites from destruction.<sup>69</sup> In encouraging the Anglo-Saxons to imitate the behaviour of the Ninevites, Wulfstan urges a similar penitence and atonement for sins, hoping that national salvation may be achieved through individual acts of repentance. The statement that such a fast should last for three days may be attributed to an innovation in tenth- and eleventh-century homilies which relate the story of Jonah and the Ninevites. In these texts, the fast of the Ninevites is frequently described as lasting for a total of three days, deliberately evoking a parallel to the three-day penance associated with the three days of Rogationtide; the original Biblical verse does not specify the length of the Ninevites' penance.<sup>70</sup> As discussed in the previous chapter, the homilies intended for preaching during Rogationtide often stressed the importance of almsgiving as a means of

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<sup>68</sup> For influence of the tradition of penitentials on Wulfstan's laws, see C. Hough, 'Penitential Literature and Secular Law in Anglo-Saxon England', in D. Griffiths (ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Studies in Archaeology and History* 11 (Oxford, 2000), pp. 136-139.

<sup>69</sup> See especially Jonah 3:1-10.

<sup>70</sup> P. E. Szarmach, 'Three Versions of the Jonah Story: an Investigation of Narrative Techniques in Old English Homilies', *Anglo-Saxon England* 1 (1972), p.184.

achieving forgiveness for one's sins during this penitential period. Wulfstan's emphasis on the importance of fasting, prayer and almsgiving intentionally draws parallels with these other texts, despite the fact that his homily lacks a liturgical designation. Instead of associating these virtues with a particular time of the liturgical year, Wulfstan links them with the more immediate viking invasions, stating that the three-day penance will help to earn God's forgiveness and thus also 'victory over our enemies'.<sup>71</sup>

The evidence of the *Penitential Edicts*, when taken in conjunction with homilies *Be mistlican gelimpan* and *To eallum folce*, demonstrates a strong emphasis on the importance of repentance through almsgiving in order to ensure continued favour with God. The viking aggression of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries was seen as tangible proof that the Anglo-Saxons had angered God with their sinfulness, and therefore Wulfstan utilised the media of both law codes and homilies in order to remind the people of the importance of proper Christian behaviour. In doing so, the Archbishop drew on an established homiletic tradition of linking almsgiving with redemption of one's sins, stating that through gifts of alms, in addition to prayers and masses, the Anglo-Saxons would be able to earn forgiveness for their sins and thus God's mercy in the form of deliverance from their afflictions. The evidence of these three texts demonstrate how Wulfstan established an important stage in the development of alms practice, changing voluntary almsgiving from a moral obligation to a practice which was sanctioned by secular law and enforced through secular penalties. In doing so he demonstrated how ideas of almsgiving could be applied in both homiletic and legislative contexts, blurring the boundaries between both. Yet this emphasis on legislating the practice of almsgiving did not exist in a cultural vacuum. It was part of an established programme of legislating religious obligations, mentioned in the beginning of this chapter and most visible in the development of legislation on other ecclesiastical payments known collectively as

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<sup>71</sup> VIIa Atr 8.

church dues. The remainder of this chapter will demonstrate that the legislation of almsgiving within this group of church dues provides important evidence for late Anglo-Saxon conceptions of the function of almsgiving in society.

### *Rendering to God – Almsgiving and Church Dues*

Although some of the dues discussed in this section may be familiar in the context of early medieval Christianity, others occur only in very limited contexts, and it is therefore helpful to provide a brief overview of each in order to establish its importance in the history of Anglo-Saxon England. The *teopunge* (tithe), possibly the most well-known ecclesiastical payment, was well-established as a religious obligation dating back to the Old Testament. Tithing is referred to throughout both the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, with one of the most clear definitions of the practice occurring in Leviticus 27:30, 32: ‘All tithes of the land, whether of corn, or of the fruits of trees, are the Lord’s, and are sanctified to Him ... Of all the tithes of oxen, and sheep, and goats, that pass under the shepherd’s rod, every tenth that cometh shall be sanctified to the Lord’. The tithe was widely acknowledged as a Christian obligation and in the late antique period there were a number of sermons dedicated to informing men of their duty to render one-tenth of their possessions to God.<sup>72</sup> Tithing as a moral obligation remained unregulated by secular authorities until the Carolingian period, when it began to be enforced by royal legislation, notably in the Herstal Capitulary of 779.<sup>73</sup> This legislation arrived in Anglo-Saxon England in the Legatine Synods of 786-787, which declared that all men, both secular and religious, were to pay tithes annually. This legislation appears to have had little effect on English practice, however, as tithing does not appear in any legislative text

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<sup>72</sup> See discussion in Chapter Two.

<sup>73</sup> Constable, *Monastic Tithes*, p. 24-25, 27; S. Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 460-461. Cf. J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), p. 435; B. R. Taylor, ‘Continuity and Change: Anglo-Saxon and Norman Methods of Tithe-Payment Before and After the Conquest’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 83.3 (Autumn, 2001), p. 28; R. Willard, ‘The Blickling-Junius Tithing Homily and Caesarius of Arles’, in T. A. Kirby and H. B. Woolf (eds.), *Philologica: The Malone Anniversary Studies* (Baltimore, MD, 1949), p. 67.

until the tenth century.<sup>74</sup> It is clear, however, that the practice was known in England, as evidenced by Æthelwulf's famous 'Decimation' charters of the mid ninth century in which the king recorded the donation of one-tenth of his land for the salvation of his soul.<sup>75</sup> The sudden appearance of an injunction to tithe in a royal Anglo-Saxon law code during the reign of Athelstan (924-939) may be the result of a growing desire on the part of the king to regulate ecclesiastical payments, as Athelstan is also the first to discuss multiple religious obligations in a single law code.<sup>76</sup> It is worth noting that while the tithe was considered in the homilies to be a distinctly separate entity from almsgiving, in reality this line was often blurred, further evidence of which shall be discussed below.<sup>77</sup> In Anglo-Saxon England, tithes were to be divided into three parts for redistribution: one for the repair of churches, one for the servants of the churches and one for the poor; this division is almost identical to the way that Wulfstan decreed alms be divided in the *Canons of Edgar*.<sup>78</sup>

In addition to the general tithe in the Anglo-Saxon laws, there are also two distinct forms of tithe which are often described in addition to the term *teobunge* in the Anglo-Saxon laws. These are *geoguðe teobunge*, tithe of young animals, and *eorðwæstma*, fruits of the earth, two dues which appear to be intended as additional obligations as they always appear in the context of other dues while references to the

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<sup>74</sup> A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 3 (Oxford, 1871), pp. 456-7. See Blair, *The Church*, p. 435-6; J. Story, *Carolingian Connections: Anglo-Saxon England and Carolingian Francia, c. 750-870* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 85-86; Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 306; Taylor, 'Continuity and Change', p. 29. Cf. Constable, *Monastic Tithes*, pp. 25-27, 29-31.

<sup>75</sup> ASC (A), 855. Cf. Constable, *Monastic Tithes*, p. 30, which notes that this is in no way an official tithing edict.

<sup>76</sup> John Blair attributes the rise of the local churches in the tenth century as the cause of 'the definition of what had hitherto needed no defining' in terms of religious obligations. Blair, *The Church*, p. 433.

<sup>77</sup> See above, Chapter Two.

<sup>78</sup> Constable, *Monastic Tithes*, p. 50; Fowler, *Canons of Edgar*, pp. 12-15 (no. 55-57); translated in C&S, pp. 332-333. This tri-partite division is repeated in VIII Atr. 6. Cf. Wood, *Proprietary Church*, pp. 514-518 for the more practical perceptions of the division of tithes and offerings.

general tithe may be found scattered throughout any particular code. This may indicate that these payments were considered to be particular to the body of Anglo-Saxon dues whereas the tithe was conceptualised as a more universal religious obligation.

The payment known as *cyricsceat* (church-scot) also seems to have been relatively widespread throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. It is first legislated in the seventh-century laws of Ine, and references to it appear in two late ninth-century leases.<sup>79</sup> It is frequently represented with other church dues in the laws of Edgar, Æthelred and Cnut as rendered yearly by Martinmas, although none of these laws describes the nature of the payment itself. It also occurs in various documents related to the bishopric of Worcester as well as in Domesday Book, where it appears that the payment refers to a render in kind based on the number of hides held by a landowner, usually a payment of corn or wheat.<sup>80</sup> Even less is known about the origin of church-scot itself. It has been argued by some that it dates back to pagan Anglo-Saxon England or ancient Celtic custom, but the evidence is simply too scarce to make an informed conclusion.<sup>81</sup> For the purposes of this discussion it is sufficient to note that however obscure the origins of the payment of church-scot may have been, in the tenth and eleventh centuries it became an important part of the legislative package of religious obligations.

The origin of the payments known as *sawelsceatt* (soul-scot) and *leohtsceot* (light-scot) is also unclear, although unlike church-scot they do not appear to be uniquely

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<sup>79</sup> Ine, cc. 4 and 61; S 1275, S 1279. Cf. Blair, *The Church*, p. 434.

<sup>80</sup> P. Wormald, 'Church and King', intended as Chapter 8 of his *Making of English Law, Volume II: From God's Law to Common Law* (hitherto unpublished); F. Tinti, 'The "Costs" of Pastoral Care: Church Dues in Late Anglo-Saxon England', in F. Tinti (ed.), *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, Anglo-Saxon Studies 6 (Woodbridge, 2005), p. 28; Blair, *The Church*, pp. 434-5.

<sup>81</sup> As argued respectively by W. A. Chaney, 'Anglo-Saxon Church Dues: A Study in Historical Continuity', *Church History* 32 (1963), pp. 268-277 and N. Neilson, *Customary Rents*, Oxford Studies in Social and Legal History 2 (Oxford, 1910), pp. 188-201, esp. p. 196. Cf. Wormald, 'Church and King'; Tinti, 'Church Dues', p. 28.

Anglo-Saxon.<sup>82</sup> Soul-scot, a due hotly debated on the Continent from the time of Gregory the Great, refers to the payment owed as a burial fee and is often described as paid '*æt openum græfe*'.<sup>83</sup> It is unknown whether this payment was meant to purchase the burial plot itself or the ministrations of an officiating priest, but payment of this due has been linked to the mother-church dues held on to so tenaciously by declining minsters in the tenth and eleventh centuries.<sup>84</sup> References to soul-scot were often noted in the Anglo-Saxon wills, where the testator ensures that a certain object or sum will be taken from his or her estate in order to pay this burial fee.<sup>85</sup> Light-scot, a payment to be used for the provision of lights in the minster, also appears in a charter dating to 847 and may be found in early Continental sources.<sup>86</sup> Along with soul-scot this payment only appears in genuine law codes after c. 1008.<sup>87</sup> It has been noted by both Patrick Wormald and John Blair that despite the late entrance of light-scot and soul-scot into the law codes of Anglo-Saxon England, contextual evidence indicates that these two payments likely originated much earlier than their appearances in charters and other documentary sources would imply.<sup>88</sup>

Two other payments frequently mentioned in the later Anglo-Saxon law are more difficult to explicitly define. They are *Romfeoh* and *sulhælmesse* (plough-almes), both of which have an enigmatic history prior to the Norman Conquest and both of which

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<sup>82</sup> For the significance of grants to Frankish churches for the provision of lights, see P. Fouracre, 'Eternal Light and Earthly Needs: Practical Aspects of the Development of Frankish Immunities', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds.), *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 53-81. For soul-scot, see Blair, *The Church*, pp. 434-437, 446-447.

<sup>83</sup> As, for example, in VIII Atr. 13. Cf. Blair, *The Church*, p. 437.

<sup>84</sup> J. Blair, 'Introduction: from Minster to Parish Church', in J. Blair (ed.), *Minsters and Parish Churches: the Local Church in Transition 950-1200* (Oxford, 1988), p. 8; Blair, *The Church*, pp. 433-453; Tinti, 'Church Dues', pp. 27-51. Cf. Wood, *Proprietary Church*, pp. 481-482.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example, S 1493, S 1498/W 10, S 1505/W 12.

<sup>86</sup> For the development of a similar tax in a Frankish context, see Fouracre, 'Eternal Light and Earthly Needs', pp. 53-81, esp. p. 75.

<sup>87</sup> P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England, 600-800*, Cambridge Studies in Anglo-Saxon England 3 (Cambridge, 1990), p. 170; Blair, *The Church*, p. 438.

<sup>88</sup> Wormald, 'Church and King'; Blair, *The Church*, p. 439.

may have been types of almsgiving. *Romfeoh*, also referred to as *Rompenincg* or *heorðpæning*, is most frequently translated by modern authors as ‘Peter’s Pence’.<sup>89</sup> While references to *Romfeoh* are extant from the ninth century, these early payments do not match up with the post-Conquest Peter’s Pence described as a payment of 300 marks per year to the pope.<sup>90</sup> Rather, they seem to describe a payment of alms fossilised in the eighth and ninth centuries,<sup>91</sup> although there is no evidence for linking this term with almsgiving in the later Anglo-Saxon period. Due to these differences, it seems unwise to associate *Romfeoh* too closely with Peter’s Pence, and I will thus refer to the due as *Romfeoh* in order to avoid any post-Conquest associations. Unlike the church dues mentioned earlier, *Romfeoh* appears for the first time in a legislative context in the brief, anonymous, tenth-century tract entitled *Romscot*, which indicates that the payment of *Romfeoh* was to take place before noon on St Peter’s Day.<sup>92</sup> As Patrick Wormald has noted, this tract does not seem to have been published under the aegis of the king, as it is relatively marginalised in the legislative tradition.<sup>93</sup> The later law codes which mention a payment of *Romfeoh* echo *Romscot*’s provision that the payment was to be taken to Rome, also explain additionally that this sum was to be collected as one penny from each household.<sup>94</sup> It is unclear for precisely what purpose these payments were intended, but they generally seem to have been taken to Rome for use as deemed necessary by the pope, and thus had no immediate application in Anglo-Saxon England.

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<sup>89</sup> For general treatment of this subject, see W. E. Lunt, *Financial Relations of the Papacy with England to 1327* (Cambridge, MA, 1939), pp. 3-30; W. E. Lunt, *Papal Revenues in the Middle Ages, vol. 1* (New York, 1934, repr. 1965), pp. 65-71; Neilson, *Customary Rents*, pp. 197-201; H. Loyn, ‘Peter’s Pence’, in *Society and Peoples: Studies in the History of England and Wales, c. 600-1200* (London, 1992), pp. 241-258. I am very grateful to Oliver Pngelley for discussing this subject at length with me.

<sup>90</sup> Lunt, *Financial Relations*, pp. 9-12.

<sup>91</sup> Blair, *The Church*, p. 441.

<sup>92</sup> *Romscot* 1-2. See Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 368 n. 469 for additional readings of this section.

<sup>93</sup> Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 368-369.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. Napier LXI: *Be cristendome*, authored by Wulfstan, which lays out both the penalty for non-payment of *Romfeoh*, but also states that it must be paid to the king ‘according to English law’.



The term *sulhælmesse* is equally tainted by post-Conquest conceptions of the term. It literally translates as ‘plough-alm’, a conceptually ambiguous term which is never truly defined within any of the Anglo-Saxon laws which regulate it. The Bosworth-Toller Dictionary defines it as ‘a contribution of one penny to be paid for every *sulh* (plough),’<sup>95</sup> and an earlier version of Bosworth’s dictionary notes that this penny was to be given to the poor.<sup>96</sup> This would certainly account for the use of the terminology of almsgiving in this due, although there is no evidence specifically linking it with provision for the poor in any source that I have found. I have also been unable to find a clear explanation of the term in any Anglo-Saxon source. It is possible that this is what Wulfstan meant when he wrote that alms should be paid as a penny per plough in *Be mistlican gelimpan* and *To eallum folce*, discussed in the previous section. In this homiletic context, however, Wulfstan does not attach any definite obligation to the term as may be found throughout the law codes.<sup>97</sup> The definition of plough-alm as one penny paid for every plough is, however, given in a thirteenth-century charter preserved in the Ramsey Cartulary which defines it as such, although it is unclear whether this definition may be traced to pre-Conquest times or whether it was a later interpolation.<sup>98</sup> This charter was later cited by Dugdale in his *Monasticon anglicanum*, in a passage which has since been used as an authoritative definition for the term, particularly in reference to understanding the plough-alm and its relevance in the medieval Scandinavian Church.<sup>99</sup> Yet despite

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<sup>95</sup> J. Bosworth and T. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth* (Oxford, 1898; repr. 1972), p. 933.

<sup>96</sup> Rev. J. Bosworth, *A Dictionary of the Anglo-Saxon Language* (Cambridge, 1838), p. 362.

<sup>97</sup> Napier XXXV: *Be mistlican gelimpan* and Napier XXXVI: *To eallum folce*.

<sup>98</sup> ‘...de qualibet caruca juncta inter Pascha et Pentecosten unum denarium, qui dicitur Ploualmes, recipit apud Sanctum Ivonem...’ W. H. Hart and Rev. P. A. Lyons (eds.), *Cartularium Monasterii de Rameseia*, vol. 1 (London, 1884), p. 282. Cf. *ibid.* pp. 294, 306, 331, 353.

<sup>99</sup> This definition is repeated in W. Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum, Sive Pandectæ Cænobiorum Benedictinorum, Cluniacensium, Cisterciensium, Carthusianorum a Primordiis ad Eorum Usque Dissolutionem...*, vol. 1, (London, 1655), p. 256. Cf. E. Jørgensen, *Fremmed Indflydelse under den danske Kirkes tidligste Udvikling* (Copenhagen, 1908), pp. 156-159; A. Taranger, ‘Den Angelsaksiske Kirkes

the clear Anglo-Saxon roots for this practice, plough-alms is not clearly defined in any source which I have found dating prior to the thirteenth century.

Despite the lack of a clear definition for plough-alms in the Anglo-Saxon sources, it is possible to make some general observations about the term. Although there is no clear evidence linking the due to some type of provision for the poor, as stated by Bosworth, the presence of *'ælmesse'* as part of this compound term indicates that some connotation with almsgiving was indeed intended; the implied reference was unlikely to be accidental. Precisely what this meant in practice is unknown, but it is possible that the money collected as plough-alms, like that collected for the tithe, was in part meant to be distributed to the poor and needy throughout the kingdom. At present there is not sufficient evidence to definitively argue that plough-alms was intended to function in this way. However, if one considers plough-alms to be a type of almsgiving, and I think the linguistic evidence is compelling enough to do so, then its frequent inclusion with other church dues in the Anglo-Saxon law codes raises important questions about how almsgiving was seen to function in the secular and legal realm. Perhaps more importantly, its unfailing inclusion with other church dues such as church-scot and *Romfeoh* calls into question the extent to which any of these dues were considered to be types of almsgiving. In order to address these questions, I turn now to a discussion of the evolution of church dues in the Anglo-Saxon legislation.

### *Almsgiving – Moral Duty or Legal Obligation?*

While these individual ecclesiastical payments seem to have developed in different ways in Anglo-Saxon England, they all come together to form a neat package of religious obligations in the laws of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The first law code in which they appear is that referred to as Athelstan's *Tithing Ordinance*, or *I*

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Indflydelse Paa den Norske: Udgivet af Den Norske Historiske Forening', *Historisk Tidsskrift*, Tillaegsskrift 12 (1890), pp. 282-285.

*Athelstan*. Like the previously mentioned *Charity Ordinance*, this code begins by asserting that it had been composed under the advice of Archbishop Wulfhelm and other bishops, indicating the importance of the role played by bishops in the legislative process. Athelstan then informs the reeves in every borough that tithes should be rendered, both in livestock, as *geogude teopunge*, and in yearly fruits of the earth, as *eorðwæstma*. He both asks ‘*on Godes naman 7 on eallum his haligra*’ (in the name of God and all his saints) and commands ‘*be minum freondscipe*’ (by my friendship) that this action be carried out, not only on the king’s property but also on that belonging to bishops, ealdormen and reeves. This order is to be extended to all those who are under the jurisdiction of said bishops, ealdormen and reeves, and these payments are to be rendered on the Feast of John the Baptist (29 August). The author of the code then cites two biblical verses relating to tithes and provides a warning for those who refuse to pay:

*Uton gepencan, hu Iacob cwæð se heahfæder: ‘Decimas et hostias pacificas offeram tibi’; and hu Moyses cwæð on Godes lage: ‘Decimas et primitias non tardabis offere Domino’. Us is to ðencanne, hu ondrislic hit on bocum gecweden is: ‘Gif we þa teoðunga Gode gelæstan nellað, þæt he us benimað þara nigon dæla, þonne we læst wenað, 7 eac we habbað þa synne to eacan’.*<sup>100</sup>

The last of these quotations appears to be a reference to an Old English version of the sermon ‘*De decimis dandis*’ similar to that found in the Blickling Homily IV, discussed in Chapter Two, although this law antedates any extant Anglo-Saxon homily on this topic by nearly half a century.<sup>101</sup> In referencing this sermon, one very popular

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<sup>100</sup> I As 2-3. ‘Let us remember how Jacob the Patriarch declared “I will offer tithes and peaceful sacrifices to you”, and how Moses declared in God’s Law “Do not delay to offer tithes and first fruits to the Lord”. It behoves us to remember how terrible is the declaration stated in books; “If we are not willing to render tithes to God, he will deprive us of the nine [remaining] parts, when we least expect it, and moreover we shall have sinned also”’. Neither Biblical verse corresponds exactly with those recorded in *I Athelstan*. See F. L. Attenborough (ed. and trans.), *The Laws of the Earliest English Kings* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 206.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Attenborough, *Laws*, p. 206; Willard, ‘Blickling-Junius Tithing Homily’, pp. 65-78. Although the homiletic texts which make use of this sermon all date significantly later than Athelstan’s laws, the sermon itself may be traced at least as far back as Caesarius of Arles, indicating that it was in circulation in England in the early tenth century.

throughout the late antique and later Anglo-Saxon periods, as well as citing two Biblical verses, Athelstan provides a necessary Christian legitimacy for a law regulating tithing. Framing the law in this way, Athelstan implicitly augments his secular authority with a religious authority steeped in both homiletic and Biblical precedent, ensuring the resonance of his declaration.

*I Athelstan* then continues with a clause enjoining the reeves to enforce payments of church dues: '7 ic wille eac, þæt mine gerefan gedon, þæt man agife þa ciricsceattas 7 þa sawlsceattas to ðam stowum þe hit mid rihte togebirige 7 sulhælmessan on geare, on ða gerad þæt þa his brucan æt ðam haligum stowum, þe heora cirican began willað 7 to Gode 7 to me geearnian willað. Se þe þonne nelle, þolige þare are oððe eft to rihte gecirre'.<sup>102</sup> This clause provides an interesting insight into the system of church dues and their function in society. In stating that payments such as tithes, church-scot, soul-scot and plough-alsms were to be used by the bishops of the churches in question for the provision of pastoral care within a localised region, Athelstan frames these dues as legal obligations rather than voluntary gifts.<sup>103</sup> Thus, those who do not adhere to the stipulations surrounding these obligations will be subject to punishment authorised by a secular authority in the form of the reeves appointed for this enforcement.

It is important to note, however, that the manuscript transmission of this law code calls into question the authenticity of the clause regarding these payments. As Patrick Wormald has argued, the version of this code recorded in the *Quadripartitus*, a post-Conquest Latin translation of the Anglo-Saxon laws, does not record plough-alsms and soul-scot as being due alongside church-scot. The two manuscripts which do record these dues are part of a strain of transmission which has associations with

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<sup>102</sup> I As 4. 'And I also wish that my reeves see to it that church-scot and soul-scot are given at the places to which they are legally due, and that plough alsms [are rendered] yearly – on the understanding that all these payments shall be used at the holy places by those who are willing to attend to their churches, and wish to gain the favour of God and me. He who is not willing [to attend to his church] shall either forfeit his benefice or revert to a proper discharge of his duties'.

<sup>103</sup> Cf. Blair, *The Church*, pp. 452-453; Tinti, 'Church Dues', pp. 27-51. Cf. Wood, *Proprietary Church*, p. 482.

Wulfstan and therefore may have been inserted in this earlier law code under his authority.<sup>104</sup> This possible interpolation of the term ‘plough-alm’, and similar cases which will be discussed throughout this chapter, indicates an interest in plough-alm which may be specific to Wulfstan.

Throughout his *Tithing Ordinance*, Athelstan deliberately invokes both secular and religious authority, asking his people to obey the laws out of loyalty to both God and king. He enjoins both bishops and reeves to help enforce his edict, enlisting both secular and ecclesiastical powers to punish those who break the law. After his injunction to pay church dues and his comments on how the dues were to be used,<sup>105</sup> Athelstan offers a brief sentence justifying his religious legislation and his understanding of the link between the secular and the religious: ‘*Se godcunde lare us gemynap, þæt we ða heofonlica ðinga mid ðam eorþlicum 7 ða ecelic mid ðam hwiltwendlicum geearniap*’.<sup>106</sup> With this sentence Athelstan indicates the rationale behind his legislation of religious obligations: it is only through correct behaviour in the temporal realm that one may hope to gain eternal life in heaven. This demonstrates an understanding of the principles of reciprocal gift-exchange discussed in the

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<sup>104</sup> See especially arguments in Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 295, 309, 314-315.

<sup>105</sup> That people feared their payments to the church would be misused is indicated by Wulfstan’s version of *De decimis dandis*, where he states: ‘*Sed perfida mens uestra solet dicere quando nos decimas aut primitias dare admonemus aut elemosinas facere precipimus quia ideo hoc iubemus ut de eorum substantia nobis diuitias preparemus. Sed nos non ex nostro arbitrio sed ex Dei lege respondere possumus, dicentes preceptum est Dei ad Moysen ut duodecim tribus filiorum Isreal accipiant hereditatem in terra repromissionis*’. (But your dishonest turn of mind has accustomed you to claim that whenever we admonish you to give us tithes or first-fruits, or when we enjoin you to give alms, we are making such demands so we can build up our own wealth from the substance of your gifts. But we can refute that charge not on the basis of our own opinion but through the law of God, explaining that it was God’s decree to Moses that the twelve tribes of the sons of Isreal would take possession of their inheritance in the Promised Land’. Edited and translated in T. N. Hall, ‘Wulfstan’s Latin Sermons’, in M. Townend (ed.), *Wulfstan, Archbishop of York: The Proceedings of the Second Alcuin Conference*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 10 (Turnhout, 2004), pp. 17, 19.

<sup>106</sup> I As 4.1. ‘For the divine teaching instructs us that we earn the heavenly things by the earthly things, and the eternal by the temporal’. Like the text of Athelstan’s *Charity Ordinance*, this phrase occurs only in a version of the text transmitted in the problematic Lambarde manuscript, as discussed by Wormald, which, while not necessarily problematic, necessitates caution in drawing firm conclusions. On *I Athelstan* in general, see Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 302-303.

previous chapters, as well as their potential benefits on a widespread, social scale. Thus in taking payments which were previously seen as moral obligations and using secular legislation to require and enforce the payment of these dues, Athelstan takes responsibility for the spiritual well-being of his people. In this way Athelstan's laws function in a similar way to the Carolingian capitularies under Charlemagne which introduced obligatory tithing into the legislative tradition. With his own code on tithing, Athelstan takes an important step toward the increasing regulation of religious obligations in the Anglo-Saxon law codes.

Whereas *I Athelstan* alludes to both a biblical and homiletic precedent for the payment of church dues, it does not indicate any specific punishment for the non-payment of dues. *I Edmund*, issued between 941 and 946 (likely 945 or 946), reiterates the importance of paying these dues: '*Teoðunge we bebeodað ælcum Cristene men be his Cristendome and cyricsceat 7 Romfeoh 7 sulhælmessan*'.<sup>107</sup> It is important to note here that again this version of the law only occurs in a manuscript associated with the Wulfstan tradition. The two other manuscripts containing this code have '*ælmesfeoh*' (alms-money) instead of *Romfeoh* and plough-alms, but are otherwise identical.<sup>108</sup> The only other occurrence of the term *ælmesfeoh* is in the first two clauses of the text known as the *Rectitudines singularum personarum* which describe the duties of thegns and *geneats* respectively.<sup>109</sup> These clauses stipulate that each was to pay *ælmesfeoh* and church-scot in addition to fulfilling other secular obligations. The same payments are repeated in *I Edmund*, although Edmund states that they apply to 'all Christian men' rather than just thegns and *geneats*. The expansion of *ælmesfeoh* to *Romfeoh* and plough-alms under Wulfstan's influence may imply that these two were to be considered as specific types of *ælmesfeoh*. What is more certain is that this is

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<sup>107</sup> I Em 2. 'We command tithing for all Christian men regarding their Christianity, and church-scot and *Romfeoh* and plough-alms'. Wormald, *Making of English Law*, p. 441.

<sup>108</sup> See F. Liebermann (ed. and trans.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen: herausgegeben im auftrage der savigny-stiftung*, vol. 1. (Halle, 1903; repr. Aalen, Germany, 1960), p. 184.

<sup>109</sup> Liebermann, *Gesetze*, vol. 1, pp. 444-453.

further evidence that the early law codes did not contain references to plough-alms; these were later interpolations.

Regardless of the specific dues involved, all versions of this law code list the same penalty for those who refused to pay church dues: excommunication.<sup>110</sup> This drastic punishment represents a new stage in the legislation of religious obligations, utilising secular authority as a means of establishing ecclesiastical punishments but still locating the penalty firmly within ecclesiastical jurisdiction. It is certainly a change from *I Athelstan*, which enforced the law using the secular authority of reeves.

That Edmund's code was intended as a statement of combined religious and secular agendas is implied in the prologue which states: '*Eadmund cynges gesamnode micelne sinoð to Lundenbirig on ða halgan easterlican tid ægðer ge godcundra hada ge worldcundra: ðar wæs Oda arcebiscop 7 Wulfstan arcebiscop 7 manega oðre biscopas smeagende ymbon heora sawla ræd 7 þara þe him underþeodde wæron*', although the tone of the remainder of the code is decidedly ecclesiastical'.<sup>111</sup> Thus with this prologue *I Edmund* indicates that these laws were intended to benefit the souls not only of the king and bishops but also of the clergy. This amounts to a statement of responsibility on the part of the king, acknowledging that laws such as those regulating church dues were meant to serve a higher purpose of securing personal salvation for the people under his rule. He therefore recognises his own role as king in ensuring the proper observance

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<sup>110</sup> I Em 2. For a discussion of the import of excommunication in this code, see Cubitt, 'Bishops and Councils', pp. 156-157.

<sup>111</sup> I Em Pro. 'King Edmund has convened at London, during the holy season of Easter, a great assembly both of the ecclesiastical and secular estates. Archbishop Oda and Archbishop Wulfstan and many other bishops have there deliberated regarding their [own] souls and [the souls] of those who were subject to their authority'. According to Patrick Wormald, Hanna Vollrath and Catherine Cubitt, the occasion to which this prologue refers should be considered as a synod, which reinforces the religious agenda of *I Edmund*, particularly in light of the decidedly secular companion code *II Edmund*. P. Wormald, 'Giving God and King their Due: Conflict and its Regulation in the Early English State', in P. Wormald (ed.), *Legal Culture in the Early Medieval West: Law as Text, Image and Experience* (London, 1999), p. 337; H. Vollrath, *Die Synoden Englands bis 1066, Konziliengeschichte, Series A: Darstellungen* (Paderborn, 1985), pp. 220-225; Cubitt, 'Bishops and Councils', pp. 156-157.

of Christianity throughout his nation, utilising the format of secular legislation in order to ensure the payment of ecclesiastical dues.

This legislation is again taken one step farther in the joint code *II-III Edgar*, the first part of which also reiterates the necessity of rendering church dues, citing the obligation to tithe (both in fruits of the earth and young animals), pay plough-alms, church-scot, the hearth penny (*Romfeoh*) and soul-scot. Again, as in *I Athelstan* and *I Edmund*, the relevant clauses show signs of tampering. That this may be attributed to Wulfstan's influence is even more clear in *II Edgar* than in these previous codes. Whereas the manuscript tradition not associated with Wulfstan states that church-scot, tithes (all types) and *Romfeoh* were to be paid to the minsters, the Wulfstorian manuscripts contain additional clauses enjoining the payment of plough-alms and soul-scot. These clauses are located in a section of the manuscript which also contains emendations in Wulfstan's own hand, indicating that he approved of the interpolations even if he did not specifically authorize them.<sup>112</sup> Thus it appears that in *I Athelstan*, *I Edmund* and *II Edgar*, the references to plough-alms may all be attributed to manuscripts with Wulfstan associations and as such are questionable in their contemporary authenticity. This does not, however, affect a reading of the other church dues regulated by Edgar in this code.

Unlike Athelstan and Edmund, Edgar introduces strict deadlines for the payment of these obligations: tithes of young animals are due at Pentecost, tithes of the fruits of the earth are due at the Equinox, the hearth-penny is due by St Peter's Day, and all church dues are to be paid by Martinmas every year, echoing Ine's laws on church-scot.<sup>113</sup> In announcing set times of the year in which these dues are to be paid, Edgar further blurs the boundaries between voluntary and obligatory payments, adding another aspect of formalisation to these dues and their collection. In addition to

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<sup>112</sup> Blair, *The Church*, p. 433 n. 25, p. 441, n. 63.

<sup>113</sup> Ine 4. See also Ine 2-2.1 on baptism, discussed previously in this chapter.



these deadlines, Edgar's code also introduces a severe penalty for the non-payment of tithes:

*7 gyf hwa þonne ða teoðunge gelæstan nelle, swa we gecwædan habbað, fare þæs cynges gerefa to 7 þæs biscofes 7 þæs mynstres mæssepreost, 7 niman unþances þæne teoðan dæl to þam mynstre, þe hit togebyrige, 7 tæcan him to ðam nigeðan dæle; 7 todæle man þa eahta dælas on twa, 7 fo se landhlaford to ealfan, to ealfan se biscop, sy hit cynges man, sy hit þegnes.<sup>114</sup>*

This is reminiscent of Athelstan's warning that God will deprive those who do not pay the tithe of the remaining nine-tenths of their possessions. Here Edgar places this punishment in the earthly realm, instructing both religious and secular authorities to act as God's agents on earth, and thus assumes his role as God's administrator of punishment to those who ignore their religious obligations.

This idea of secular punishments for non-payment of religious obligations is expressed in even more detail in the code known as *IV Edgar*. It is worth quoting the whole of the prologue and part of the first section in order to understand the king's intended programme:

*Her is geswutelod on þisum gewrite, hu Eadgar cyningc wæs smeagende, hwæt to bote mihte æt ðæm færcwealme, ðe his leodscipe swyðe drehte 7 wanode wide gynd his anweald. Ðæt is þonne ærest, þæt him þuhte 7 his witum, þæt þus gerad ungelimp mid synnum 7 mid oferhrynysse Godes beboda gearnod wære, 7 swyþost mid þam oftige þæs neadgafoles, þe Cristene men Gode gelæstan scoldon on heora teoðingcsceattum. He beþohte 7 asmeade þæt godcunde be woruldgeþwanan.<sup>115</sup>*

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<sup>114</sup> II Eg 3.1. 'And if then anyone will not render the tithe, as we have decreed, the king's reeve is to go there, and the bishop's [reeve] and the mass-priest of the minster, and they are to seize without his consent the tenth part for the minster to which it belongs, and to assign to him the ninth part; and the (remaining) eight parts are to be divided into two, and the lord of the estate is to take half, and the bishop [is to take] half, whether it be a man of the king or of a thegn'.

<sup>115</sup> IV Eg Pro, 1. 'It is declared here in this order, that King Eadgar has been considering what may be a remedy for the plague which has greatly afflicted his nation and diminished his royal power widely beyond [his kingdom]. That is first, that he and his councillors think that this misfortune was earned with sins and with disregard of God's commands, and most of all with the withholding of the tribute which Christian people should render to God in their tithes. He has been thinking over and considering that divinity in relation to worldly customs'.

This represents an important theological link not yet seen in the law codes. Rather than stating that these laws are for the general, spiritual good of the nation, as Edmund had previously done, Edgar states that he was enacting these laws for a specific purpose: to remedy the effects of the great plague which had come because of the sinfulness of the nation. This is perhaps a veiled reference to homilies such as Vercelli X, possibly in circulation at this point, which warned that God would withdraw his support from those who did not rightly tithe, and thus they would be afflicted by plague and famine.<sup>116</sup> This is precisely what Edgar argues in this code: as a lord may wish to punish a tenant who does not pay what is owed, so God seeks to punish those who neglect payments of tithe and church-scot. Thus, by the joint authority of the king and archbishop, the people of the nation are instructed to be diligent about paying God what is owed to him so as to earn not only a reprieve from His wrath during life, but also freedom from hell after death. Although Edgar does not state here which dues are specifically owed to the church, he refers to the previous laws enacted at Andover and confirmed at Wihthordestan (*II-III Edgar*), implying that payments of church-scot, hearth penny and tithe should continue.

The evidence from these clauses makes three things clear: Edgar acknowledged and asserted his responsibility to provide for the spiritual welfare of the nation through the implementation of religious legislation; the sinful neglect of payments owed to God had led to a decline in that spiritual welfare; and the plague which afflicted the nation was God's punishment for the inaction of both king and people. It was thus the duty of the king to make amends by using his secular authority to enforce religious obligations. The tone of this legislation marks an escalation in the number and intensity of ecclesiastical duties for which the king is willing to take responsibility, and the introduction of distinct secular penalties ensures that the dues will be paid by all. The correlation between paying dues and receiving God's favour also indicates that these dues may in some ways function similarly to alms, whereby

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<sup>116</sup> Vercelli X, lines 141-206.

the gift of alms earns forgiveness for sin. This is certainly the type of exchange which Wulfstan encourages throughout his *Penitential Edicts*. Thus, with Edgar's legislation the line between voluntary and obligatory payment of church dues becomes more hazy, but so too does the line between alms and church dues become increasingly difficult to see.

The evolution of Anglo-Saxon legislation regarding the regulation of religious obligation through the reign of Edgar has illustrated an increasing interest on behalf of the king in defining specific church dues and their payments, as well as the penalties for non-payment. The package of dues as represented in *II-III Edgar* appears to have established the standard for future legislation, as the codes issued by Æthelred and Cnut rarely adjust either the dues themselves or the dates of payment. Yet, as the remainder of this section will argue, Archbishop Wulfstan's legal and homiletic works between the period 1002-1023 mark a dramatic intensification in the legislation of religious obligations. Understanding the legal and homiletic works of Wulfstan, particularly how they relate to almsgiving, sheds important light on our understanding of the legislation of religious obligations in later Anglo-Saxon England.

Prior to Wulfstan's appointment as Archbishop of York in 1002, the four law codes issued by Æthelred in the last decade of the tenth century marked a distinct departure from those of Edgar, due to their wholly secular focus.<sup>117</sup> In contrast, the law codes authored by Wulfstan between 1008 and 1023 displayed a distinctly religious agenda. Wulfstan, who had gained a reputation as a skilled homilist during his time as Bishop of London, 996-1002, first displayed his knowledge of both ecclesiastical and political matters in his *Peace of Edward and Guthrum*, likely

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<sup>117</sup> For a discussion of the early legislation of Æthelred, see Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 320-330.

composed prior to 1008.<sup>118</sup> This code begins, for example, with a statement of purpose for the laws agreed upon between the English and the Danes and recorded within:

*7 hig gesetton woruldlice steora eac, for ðam þingum þe hig wistan, þæt hig elles ne mihton manegum gesteoran, ne fela manna nolde to godcundre bote elles gebugan, swa hy sceolde; 7 þa woruldbote hig gesetton gemæne Criste 7 cyngge, swa hwar swa man nolde godcunde bote gebugan mid rihte to bisceopa dihte.*<sup>119</sup>

Wulfstan follows this with a series of clauses on church dues, stating that anyone who does not pay their ecclesiastical dues (tithe, *Romfeoh*, light-scot, plough-alms) shall pay a fine in an English district or *lahslit* in a Danish district.<sup>120</sup> These laws are important because they likely represent Wulfstan's first attempt at composing a law code, and they contain all of the basic elements which Wulfstan would later include in his royal legislation of church dues.

These ideals are repeated with more detail in *V Æthelred*, Wulfstan's first law code composed under royal authority, which echoes the laws of Edgar and *Edward and Guthrum* in its emphasis on the king's responsibility for the spiritual welfare of his people.<sup>121</sup> In this code, Wulfstan reiterates the religious obligations owed by the people: plough-alms, tithes of young animals and fruits of the earth, *Romfeoh* and

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<sup>118</sup> For Wulfstan's early episcopal career, see J. M. Cooper, *The Last Four Anglo-Saxon Archbishops of York*, Borthwick Papers 38 (York, 1970), p. 5; Whitelock, *Sermo Lupi*, pp. 12-13; Bethurum, *Homilies*, pp. 101-102. For discussion and dating of the *Peace of Edward and Guthrum*, see Wormald, *Making of English Law*, pp. 389-391.

<sup>119</sup> EGu Pro.2. 'And they also fixed secular penalties for those things which they knew that they might not control many of the others; indeed many would not wish to submit to the divine penalties, as they ought to do. And they fixed secular penalties common to Christ and the king, wherever men did not wish to submit in accordance with the divine penalty in consultation with the bishops'.

<sup>120</sup> EGu 5.1-6.4.

<sup>121</sup> V and VI Atr were both issued after the meeting of the king and Witan at Enham in 1008 and the relationship between the two codes has been the subject of much speculation. See especially K. Sisam, *Studies in the History of Old English Literature* (Oxford, 1953), pp. 248, 278-287; C&S, pp. 341-342; K. Jost, *Wulfstanstudien*, Schweizer Anglistische, Arbeiten 23 (Bern, 1950), pp. 35-43; P. Wormald, 'Æthelred the Lawmaker', in D. Hill (ed.), *Æthelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, BAR, British Series 59 (1978), pp. 49-57, 64-65; Wormald, *The Making of English Law*, pp. 332-335 and p. 335 n. 338.

soul-scot. This is the first legitimate appearance of plough-alms in the Anglo-Saxon laws and it occurs in all manuscripts which record this code, including those in traditions not associated with Wulfstan. According to *V Æthelred*, plough-alms are to be paid fifteen nights after Easter, the same deadline interpolated into the previous codes. The other dues were to be paid at the same times of the year specified in the laws of Edgar, with the exception of the tithe of fruits of the earth, which was to be paid at the Feast of All Saints rather than the Equinox.<sup>122</sup> Wulfstan also introduces the obligation of light-scot, which he states must be paid three times each year. Again, following Edgar, Wulfstan makes the link between obeying the laws of God and earning God's mercy: '*Ac lufige man Godes riht heonan forð georne wordes 7 dæde; þonne wyrð þysse þeode sona God milde*'.<sup>123</sup> He makes it clear that this mercy shall have a perceptible result, stating later: '*Forþam þurh þæt hit sceal on earde godian to ahte, þe man unriht alecge 7 rihtwisnesse lufie for Gode 7 for worolde*'.<sup>124</sup>

The improvement to which Wulfstan refers is not specified in this code, but it is impossible not to view this legislation in the context of the viking raids which plagued England throughout the reign of Æthelred and the escalation of which prompted the issue of the *Penitential Edicts* in 1009. It is in this context of wider political and social turmoil which we should view the law codes calling for the payment of church dues in order to obtain the 'improvement' advocated by Wulfstan. As noted previously, the laws known as *IV Edgar* make a clear link between the sins of the people and divine punishment, stating that the situation may be remedied through more prompt payment of tithes and dues owed to the church. Wulfstan draws on this idea and adapts it to fit the current situation in England. His law codes clearly demonstrate his adoption of the long-standing tradition which

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<sup>122</sup> Cf. I Cn 8.1.

<sup>123</sup> V Atr 26. 'But the law of God shall henceforth be diligently cherished both in word and in deed; then immediately God will have mercy upon this nation'.

<sup>124</sup> V Atr 33.1. 'Because through that suppression of injustice and love of righteousness, for God and for the world, one shall earn an improvement in the nation.'

viewed the viking invasions as divine punishments for the sins of the English.<sup>125</sup> This perception of the hand of God behind the viking invasions, punishing the English for their sins, illustrates a clear motive for the king and his councillors to seek out all outlets for the redemption of the sins of the nation. The ideological links between payments of ecclesiastical dues and earning God's favour, established most clearly in the homiletic texts of the tenth and eleventh centuries, call for the use of secular law codes in order to achieve this redemption, and thus salvation for the nation. Again, in Wulfstan's legislation as with that of Edgar, church dues as a group (plough-alms, tithe, soul-scot, etc.) are ascribed redemptive properties similar to that of almsgiving itself, confusing the ability to distinguish between almsgiving and other church dues.

Wulfstan's subsequent law codes, *VI and VIII Æthelred* as well as *Cnut 1018 and I-II Cnut*, each reiterate substantially the same list of dues which were owed yearly to the church. One major difference appears in *VIII Æthelred* and *I-II Cnut*, in that both codes institute secular penalties for the non-payment of church dues similar to those laid down in the laws of Edgar. This emphasis on viewing the laws of Edgar as a precedent for Wulfstan's own laws is in keeping with the general idea of returning to the 'golden age' of Edgar's reign which was widely romanticised during the early eleventh century.<sup>126</sup> Wulfstan frequently drew on this ideal, littering his later law codes with references to the laws and reign of Edgar. One explicit example of this, taken from *VIII Æthelred*, not only refers to the precedent set down by Edgar's laws but also locates Wulfstan's own laws within this established tradition:

*And wite Cristenra manna gehwilc, þæt he his Drihtene his teoþunge, a swa seo sulh þone teoðan æcer gega, rihtlice gelæste be Godes miltse 7 be þam fullan wite, þe Eadgar cyninge gelagode. Ðæt is: Gif hwa teoþunge rihtlice gelæstan nelle, þonne fare to þæs cyninges gerefa 7 þæs mynstres mæssepreost – oððe þæs landrican 7 þæs bisceopes gerefa – , 7 niman unþances ðone teoðan dæl to ðam*

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<sup>125</sup> Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion', pp. 130-131. Cf. Keynes, 'An Abbot, an Archbishop', p. 170.

<sup>126</sup> Whitelock, 'Wulfstan and the Laws of Cnut', pp. 442-443.

*mynstre, þe hit to gebirige, 7 tæcan him to ðam nigoðan dæle; 7 todæle man ða eahta dælas on twa 7 fo se landhlaford to healfum, to healfum se biscop, si hit cyninges man, sy hit þegnes.*<sup>127</sup>

Wulfstan also stipulates a fine of 30 pence plus 120 shillings to the king for the non-payment of *Romfeoh* and twelve times the amount of church-scot due plus 120 shillings to the king for its non-payment.<sup>128</sup> Those who did not pay plough-alms would also incur a fine, although the amount is not specified.<sup>129</sup> The same penalties are recorded in *I Cnut*, with the exception of plough-alms, for which Cnut does not threaten a fine for non-payment.<sup>130</sup> The fines described in *VIII Æthelred* are identical to those set down in *II Edgar*, although Edgar does not provide details of the penalty to be paid for refusing to pay church-scot despite noting that such a penalty does exist.<sup>131</sup>

This final stage in Wulfstan's legislation on church dues represents the most comprehensive discussion of these religious obligations, itemising the dues themselves, their dates of payment and the fines owed for non-compliance. In *VIII Æthelred* and *I Cnut*, the penalties for non-payment are authorised by royal authority, placing the collection and regulation of these dues firmly within the secular realm. In these codes Wulfstan draws on the full legislative precedent set by the laws of Edgar, evoking memories of this 'golden age' as a means of legitimating his own legislation on church dues. This demonstrates a clear evolution in the secular regulation of these ecclesiastical obligations, indicating that the line between

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<sup>127</sup> VIII Atr 7-8. 'And each Christian man knows, that he [give] his tithe to his Lord, namely the plough that travels the tenth acre, rightly following God's mercy and regarding the full penalty which King Edgar legislated. That is: If anyone does not rightly follow the tithe, then the king's reeve and the masspriest of the minster – or the reeve of the lord or of the bishop – shall go to him and without his consent shall take the tenth part and distribute it to the minster to which it belongs, and direct to him the ninth part; and divide the remaining eight parts in two, and the lord of the manor shall take half and the bishop shall take half, whether he is the king's man or a thegn's man'.

<sup>128</sup> VIII Atr 10.1, 11.2.

<sup>129</sup> VIII Atr 12.1.

<sup>130</sup> I Cn 8-14.

<sup>131</sup> II Eg 3-4.1

voluntary and obligatory was no longer blurred: one had no choice but to pay church dues when and how they were decreed, or pay the penalty stipulated in these codes.

It was argued at the beginning of this section that plough-alms represented a specific type of almsgiving, possibly the payment of a penny per plough, and it has been shown throughout this section to have had a complicated history in the different manuscripts recording the Anglo-Saxon law codes. Plough-alms as a church due seems to have been specifically related to Archbishop Wulfstan and his influence in the transmission of law codes, made explicit by the apparent interpolation of this due into the older codes of Athelstan, Edmund and Edgar. Its appearance throughout the history of the Anglo-Saxon law codes from Athelstan to Cnut thus gives plough-alms a sense of consistency in the standard package of church dues legislated throughout this period. Wulfstan's likely role in engineering this programme of standardisation indicates that he had a specific interest in encouraging the payment of plough-alms. It should be noted also that references to the due also appear in Wulfstan's sermons, in particular Napier LXI (*Be cristendome*), which substantially repeats the list of dues and their deadlines as recorded in *VIII Æthelred*.<sup>132</sup> It is also important to point out that if the argument regarding Wulfstan's influence on the manuscripts containing clauses on plough-alms in *I Athelstan*, *I Edmund* and *II Edgar* is accepted, then the word *sulhælmesse* does not appear in any context other than in association with Wulfstan. It is possible that the archbishop himself invented this payment.

These conclusions are speculative at best. What may be said with more certainty is that the appearance of plough-alms in the Anglo-Saxon legislation, in addition to the brief reference to alms-money in *I Athelstan* and the *Rectitudines singularum personarum*, indicates that almsgiving had increasingly varied applications in the

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<sup>132</sup> Napier LXI: *Be cristendome*.



tenth and eleventh centuries. It is difficult to say exactly how much these dues had in common with the almsgiving promoted in the homilies, but it is certainly possible that they were in some way used to aid the poor and needy within individual parishes. What is more important is that these dues indicate that the vocabulary of almsgiving had penetrated the legal terminology in a very visible way. It has been argued in this section that the increasing secularisation of church dues in this period indicates an increasing acceptance of royal responsibility for the Christian behaviour of the nation. Thus, payments which were once voluntary, and as such Wulfstan states they had clearly been ignored, became increasingly obligatory. At least in Wulfstan's eyes, plough-alks became an important incarnation of these obligatory church dues.

In addition to the evidence provided by the vocabulary of almsgiving, this analysis of the evolution of church dues in the law codes has made it clear that the ideology of almsgiving was progressively ascribed to church dues, to the point that the payment of these dues was considered to have similar redemptive properties in earning God's forgiveness for misdeeds. The payment of church dues is never explicitly equated with earning forgiveness of sin the way that almsgiving is described in the homilies, yet the evidence presented in this section makes it clear that at the very least kings and bishops believed that God's mercy could be earned through these payments. In this way the emphasis on reciprocal gift-exchange so often equated with almsgiving may be seen to have permeated the legislative consciousness in a way which no longer allowed one to clearly separate almsgiving from church dues.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has presented a wide range of evidence for the purpose of understanding the place of almsgiving in the Anglo-Saxon law codes. The first section, drawing on the theological concept of redemptive almsgiving outlined in the

previous chapter, focused on the *Penitential Edicts* of Wulfstan issued in 1009. These *Edicts* exemplified a targeted response to a specific situation. Drawing on established tradition, Wulfstan painted the vikings as an arm of divine vengeance, sent by God to punish the Anglo-Saxons for their sins. Thus, according to Wulfstan, if Anglo-Saxon men and women would atone for their sins through a three-day penance comprised of almsgiving, masses and prayers, like the Ninevites and the residents of Vienne before them, they might be delivered from their earthly punishments. In using secular legislation enacted in the name of the king to regulate such matters, Wulfstan blurred the boundaries between moral obligations and legal requirements, although it is notable that there is no secular penalty stipulated for non-compliance with these *Edicts*; it is framed solely as something which all men must do for the good of themselves and the nation. The payment of alms is thus, in a sense, still a voluntary practice. This call for almsgiving is similar to that found throughout the homiletic texts, except that the royal legislation had the weight of secular authority behind it. Therefore, in legislating this voluntary almsgiving, Wulfstan fulfils the duty of both himself and the king to maintain the spiritual and physical health of the nation, enacting just law in order to ensure that men properly returned wealth to God through almsgiving. In thus achieving their own individual redemption, the Anglo-Saxons worked toward collective salvation, proving both themselves and the nation worthy of God's favour rather than his wrath.

The view of almsgiving presented in Wulfstan's *Penitential Edicts*, taken in conjunction with the ideals of almsgiving preached in the Anglo-Saxon homilies, appears to present a unified picture of the place of almsgiving in both homilies and laws. Almsgiving was necessary because one must return one's wealth to God, but it was also desirable because of its ability to redeem one's sins. In making this type of almsgiving part of the Anglo-Saxon legislation, Wulfstan did not change its inherent function; he simply introduced a new dimension to the obligation by placing it more firmly in the secular realm as a solution to tangible, physical

problems. The emphasis on reciprocal gift-exchange remained the same. Yet the introduction of plough-alms in the later legislation in conjunction with the increasing emphasis on church dues as a way of earning God's favour indicates that this picture of almsgiving was not as homogeneous as it first appears.

It has been shown that the language of almsgiving entered the Anglo-Saxon legislation, even before Wulfstan's *Penitential Edicts*, in the form of *ælmesfeoh* in *I Athelstan* and the *Rectitudines singularum personarum*. This alone indicates that almsgiving has a hitherto unappreciated importance in its legislative application. The appearance of *sulhælmesse* in texts and manuscripts linked with Wulfstan himself indicates that the archbishop placed a strong significance on the payment of this due. It is possible that the incorporation of *ælmesse* into this compound was meant to be taken literally, and as such plough-alms was considered to be a type of almsgiving. If this is the case, it is also possible that the payment of plough-alms was intended to function in some type of redemptive way. Wulfstan's statements in the *Peace of Edward and Guthrum* stress the responsibility of the king and his councillors for the spiritual health of the nation, especially in his perceptive observation that when left to his own devices man tended to ignore his fiscal responsibilities to God. Thus in legislating a payment which functioned as a type of alms in addition to the individual church dues, each of which provided specific functions in ensuring the provision of pastoral care (church-scot and soul-scot) and future prosperity from God (tithe), Wulfstan ensured not only that men paid to Church and God what was owed, but also that men cared for their own souls through the redemption of their sins. Adding plough-alms to an existing canon of church dues allowed the new obligation to be viewed in a context which would have been familiar to the Anglo-Saxons, as church-scot and tithe had occurred regularly in legislation since the reign of Athelstan and in other, older documentary sources. In addition, emending previous laws so that they also contained injunctions to pay plough-alms provided a textual and historical precedent on which Wulfstan could

draw when composing his own law codes in the eleventh century. The result was that even after Wulfstan's death in 1023, plough-almes continued to be part of the canon of church dues in Anglo-Saxon legislation.<sup>133</sup>

Yet even if plough-almes cannot be shown to have functioned specifically as a type of almsgiving, given for the redemption of one's sins, it has been demonstrated that by the eleventh century church dues as a whole began to be associated with these redemptive properties. As a result it became increasingly difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between payments which were 'almes' and payments which were 'dues'. These payments as a group were seen as another way of sharing one's wealth with God through the institution of the Church in order to receive some type of reward in return. Instead of receiving forgiveness of sins, as was the case with almes, church dues allowed one to earn the more general reward of God's mercy. It was this mercy which would allow for the continuing peace and prosperity of the Anglo-Saxons as a nation. Thus, the progression of legislation on church dues demonstrates that ideas of almsgiving and a reciprocal gift-exchange relationship with God had penetrated the secular aspects of society more deeply than had been visible in a study of the homiletic texts. The following chapter will draw on the evidence presented here, questioning the extent to which this vocabulary and ideology had infiltrated other facets of society and what this means for one's understanding of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon England. At this point one thing may be said with certainty: the late Anglo-Saxon practice and understanding of almsgiving was far from the idealised, homogeneous picture painted by the homilists.

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. Cn 1027 16.

## Chapter 4 – The Perception of Almsgiving

### *Introduction*

The previous chapters have demonstrated that the references to almsgiving in the homiletic and legal texts extant from late Anglo-Saxon England reveal distinctive pictures of the way almsgiving was thought to function in the tenth and eleventh centuries. While Chapter Two established that the majority of homiletic texts extant from this period can be shown to consistently express an idealised practice of almsgiving ultimately derived from the texts of late antiquity, Chapter Three shed additional light on how these ideals were conceptualised by legislators, particularly Wulfstan, and thus codified as part of a larger legal programme. This chapter will take the next step in this process, focusing on the wills and charters extant from the tenth and eleventh centuries in order to analyse the ways in which individual acts of almsgiving were recorded in the documentary sources and determining the extent to which they reflect the ideals of almsgiving discussed in the previous chapters. Ultimately it will discuss the place of almsgiving in the rhetoric of the often formulaic documentary sources, using these texts as a means of gaining insight into the practice of almsgiving as a component of religious devotion and piety.

The purpose of this chapter is to investigate individual responses to these religious and secular edicts through the gifts of wealth and property recorded in the wills and charters of the same period. By examining the contextual evidence surrounding descriptions of individual bequests or donations, one is able to gain an insight into the social importance placed on the act of giving and thus further understanding of the importance of gift-exchange in Anglo-Saxon society. In so doing, the analysis of

these sources sheds light on the importance of almsgiving as an act of lay piety in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

It is important to note here at the beginning that when I refer to the 'practice' of almsgiving, I do not mean almsgiving in the sense of an action which has been completed. In the majority of cases one has no way of knowing whether the gifts of alms stipulated in wills or charters were ever enacted on behalf of the donor. Yet the references to almsgiving which appear in these sources provide important information regarding the way gifts of alms were meant to function in society; they represent the donor's intent, even if the proposed action never took place. In this way these sources shed significant light on the societal conception of almsgiving and its relation to Christian practice, allowing almsgiving to act as a social barometer which measures the importance of such practices in the wider population.

### *The Wills*

On the day of his death in 1014, the Ætheling Athelstan received permission from his father, King Æthelred, to make a will.<sup>1</sup> His bequests ranged from large estates such as that of Adderbury, purchased from the king for two hundred mancuses, to small personal items, such as a drinking-horn bought from the community at the Old Minster, Winchester, to gifts of alms which were to be distributed to the poor for the sake of Athelstan's soul. While this wide range of bequests demonstrates some of the ways in which members of the late Anglo-Saxon nobility were able to arrange for their possessions to be distributed after their deaths, Athelstan's benefactions are notable among those of other surviving wills because of his specific arrangements regarding the distribution of alms to the poor. Near the beginning of his will, Athelstan granted his estates in East Anglia and the Peak Valley (Derbys.) to his brother Edmund and stipulated that each year one day's food-rent should be paid

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<sup>1</sup> S 1503/W 20. Cf. S. Keynes, 'Royal Government and the Written Word in Late Anglo-Saxon England' in R. McKitterick (ed.), *The Uses of Literacy in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 254.

from these properties to the monastic community at Ely on the festival of St Æthelðryth. In addition to this food-rent, Athelstan includes this benefaction: ‘7 gesylle þær to mynstre an hund penega. 7 gefede þær on þone dæg. c. þearfena. 7 sy æfre seo ælmesse gelæst gearhwamlice. age land se þe age. þa hwile. þe Cristendom stande. 7 gif þa nellað þa ælmessan gefordian þe þa land habbað. gange seo ar. into sce Æþeldryðe’.<sup>2</sup> With this statement Athelstan indicates that he considers the feeding of the poor and the distribution of alms to be an act of almsgiving, requesting that this distribution of alms be carried out annually in perpetuity. He also ensures that if these alms were not distributed according to his wishes, then the property would revert to the monastic community, providing an incentive for his brother Edmund to ensure that the alms would indeed be distributed annually. In both the *notificatio* and *anathema* clauses at the end of the will, Athelstan reveals that all of his benefactions had been arranged for the sake of his own soul as well as for the souls of his father, his grandmother and anyone who may have assisted in carrying out his wishes.

This will is unusual in many respects. It is the only known surviving Anglo-Saxon testament attributed to an *ætheling* who predeceased his father. The will was made on Athelstan’s deathbed, which is uncommon among surviving wills, and indicates that his death was sudden and unexpected. This urgency is also implied in the evidence that Athelstan received permission to make a will and had it drawn up on the same day as his death: ‘Nu þancige Ic minon fæder mid ealre eadmodnesse on godes ælmihtiges naman þære andsware. þe he me sende on frigedæg. æfter middessumeres mæssedæge. be Ælfgare. Ælffan suna. þæt wæs. þæt he mid Cydde. mines fæder worde. þæt ic moste be godes leafe. 7 be his. geunnan minre are. 7 minra æhta. swa me mæst ræd þuhte. ægðer for gode. ge for worulde’.<sup>3</sup> Athelstan’s arrangements for post-mortem almsgiving

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<sup>2</sup> ‘...and a hundred pence shall be given to that minster, and a hundred poor people fed there on that day; and may these alms be forever performed yearly, by whomever shall hold the estates, as long as Christianity shall last. And if they who have the estates will not discharge these charities, the property shall go to St Æthelthryth’s’.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Now I thank my father in all humility, in the name of God Almighty, for the answer which he sent me on the Friday after the feast of Midsummer by Ælfgar, Æffa’s son; which, as he told me in my

were presented with uncommon detail, although as we shall see this manner of distributing alms was not entirely unique. Despite the curious features of this will, it represents a good example of the way in which many Anglo-Saxons attempted to provide for the salvation of their souls as well as the disposition of their property in their testamentary statements. It is this link between almsgiving and the salvation of one's soul which underpins our understanding of the function of almsgiving in the corpus of tenth- and eleventh-century wills.

This will and others like it raise interesting questions regarding the place of almsgiving within the testamentary bequests of late Anglo-Saxon England. The combination of urgency and detailed provisions of alms recorded in Athelstan's will leads one to ask whether the Anglo-Saxons truly understood the link between almsgiving and the redemption of one's soul. Likewise, did the almsgiving recorded in these documents follow the conceptualisation of the practice as recorded in the homiletic and legal texts? More generally, who gave alms and how did they do so? Were ritualistic distributions such as that established by Athelstan normal practice or did almsgiving take other forms? The following discussion seeks to answer these questions, drawing on the corpus of wills extant from the tenth and eleventh centuries in order to establish whether or not one can perceive a continuity in thought between the homilies and laws assessed previously and the wills examined in this section. More generally, this section seeks to understand the relationship between almsgiving and other pious bequests, determining whether or not one may consider gifts of alms to be a distinctive, classifiable type of bequest in these documents. Unlike the other sources considered thus far in this thesis, the corpus of Anglo-Saxon wills contain few specific references to almsgiving; the word *ælmesse* does not appear often. Yet, as the following analysis will show, it is possible to use the contextual evidence of other pious bequests in order to gain a deeper

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father's words, was that I might, by God's leave and his, grant my estates and my possessions as seemed to me most advisable both for God and for the world'. The dating of this will is discussed in Keynes, 'Royal Government', p. 254.



understanding of the perceived forms which gifts of alms could take. This discussion will also examine the references to *ælmesse* which do not fit the patterns of almsgiving considered thus far in this thesis, proposing that these represent different ways in which the traditional meaning of almsgiving had been adopted into the common parlance of late Anglo-Saxon England. As a whole, the evidence assessed in this section will demonstrate that conceptions of almsgiving as recorded in the documentary sources indicate that the practice was even more multi-faceted than the homilies or law codes imply. This in turn provides valuable evidence for the understanding of almsgiving as a value which had not only religious but social resonance in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

### *The Anglo-Saxon Testament*

The testamentary will in Anglo-Saxon England differed in significant aspects from that in modern society.<sup>4</sup> While modern wills are conceptualised as legal documents recording the disposition of a person's possessions or assets, Anglo-Saxon wills did not function in a legally binding way. The oral declaration of one's wishes, made before witnesses, comprised the legal aspect of will-making and the written record, commonly referred to as the '*cwide*', was merely evidence of this process.<sup>5</sup> The oral declaration and subsequent written record could take place either during the donor's life (*inter vivos*) or on the donor's death-bed (*verba novissima*), although one's stage of life did not seem to have had a significant impact on the decision to make a will.

Indeed, most Anglo-Saxon wills contain information which implies the donors were

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<sup>4</sup> H. D. Hazeltine, 'Comments on the Writings Known as Anglo-Saxon Wills', in D. Whitelock (trans. and ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills* (Cambridge, 1930), p. viii; F. Pollock and F. W. Maitland, *The History of English Law Before the Time of Edward I*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn., vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1911), pp. 325-356; M. M. Sheehan, *The Will in Medieval England: From the Conversion of the Anglo-Saxons to the End of the Thirteenth Century*, Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, Studies and Texts 6 (Toronto, 1963), chapters 4 and 5; L. Tollerton Hall, 'Wills and Will-Making in Late Anglo-Saxon England' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of York, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the connotations and definitions of the word '*cwide*', see Sheehan, *The Will*, p. 20. For discussions of wills as written representations of legal oral transactions, see Hazeltine, 'Comments', pp. x-xviii, xxxv. See also Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 47-54; Tollerton Hall, 'Wills and Will-Making', pp. 27-28.

not under the immediate threat of death.<sup>6</sup> The early tenth-century will of Wulfgar, for example, stipulates that the estate at Ham was to pass to his wife, Æffe, after his death. Yet the endorsement on the document updates the terms of the will, stating that since Æffe had subsequently predeceased Wulfgar, then the estate was to pass to Old Minster, Winchester instead: '*Her swutelap þæt Wulfgar geuþe Hamme into ealdan mynstre æfter Æffan dæge hys wifes*'.<sup>7</sup> Wulfgar apparently did not see the need to create a new will in light of these changed circumstances, but the two surviving wills of Sifflæd, neither of which can be clearly dated, provide evidence that some donors did make multiple wills during their lives as their situations or property holdings changed. In the case of Sifflæd, one of the wills reveals that it was drawn up before she went on pilgrimage, although it is unclear whether the other will was created before or after this event.<sup>8</sup> The ninth-century will of King Alfred also refers to wills which had been made previously, although he takes care to point out that all of these documents had been destroyed and any which may have survived would be surpassed by this new will.<sup>9</sup>

The argument that many wills were made during the donor's life is strengthened by the fact that donors often reserved their right to use the gifts in question until the time of their deaths, after which the gifts would revert to the named beneficiaries.<sup>10</sup> This type of delayed bequest allowed the donor to enjoy his possessions for the remainder of his life while still ensuring that they would be distributed according to

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<sup>6</sup> Tollerton Hall, 'Wills and Will-Making', p. 27, chapter 3, esp. pp. 118-141; C. Hough, 'Legal and Documentary Writings', in P. Pulsiano and E. Trehearne (eds.), *A Companion to Anglo-Saxon Literature* (Oxford, 2001), p. 183.

<sup>7</sup> S 1533/R 26. 'Here it is declared that Wulfgar has granted Ham to the Old Minster after the death of Æffe his wife'.

<sup>8</sup> S 1525 and 1525a. Cf. D. Whitelock (trans. and ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Wills*, Cambridge Studies in English Legal History (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 206-207 and the entry for Sifflæd 1, *Prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England Database*, <http://www.pase.ac.uk/pase/apps/persons/CreatePersonFrames.jsp?personKey=15368>, (accessed 19 January 2010).

<sup>9</sup> S 1509/H 11.

<sup>10</sup> Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 16-17, 24-29.

his wishes after his death. The mid-eleventh-century will of a certain Thurstan demonstrates the extent to which some donors sought to protect their rights to land during their lifetimes. In this document, Thurstan states that the estate at Wimbish was to pass to Christ Church, Canterbury after the death of both his wife and himself, although for the remainder of their lives they arranged for a pound to be paid each year as proof of their right to retain the land.<sup>11</sup> This demonstrates an interest on behalf of the donor in ensuring that the desired bequests would indeed be executed according to the terms of the will, even if the donor's death was delayed by several years.

The fact that many donors utilised the medium of wills in order to state their wishes regarding their properties both during life and after death, sometimes through the creation of successive wills, demonstrates that a primary function of wills was to act as a means by which both men and women could assert their rights over their possessions. It has been argued by other scholars that the wills of widows often constitute evidence of women seeking to gain support for property claims in the vulnerable time after their husbands' deaths.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it is clear that the making of a will need not necessarily be seen as a preparation for death, but rather as a means of protecting one's property and possessions against unforeseen circumstances and in accordance with one's specific wishes.

The number of extant wills dating from the Anglo-Saxon period is less than one hundred, if one includes post-mortem bequests recorded in charters as well as straightforward testamentary documents. As Katheryn Lowe has noted, it is difficult to determine if individual bequests detailed in the documents were

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<sup>11</sup> S 1530, W 30. For other examples of a delayed bequest, see especially the wills of Wulfgyth (S 1535/W 32) and Ordnoth and his wife (S 1524/W 5).

<sup>12</sup> For more on this see J. Nelson, 'The Wary Widow', in W. Davies and P. Fouracre (eds.), *Property and Power in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. pp. 89-94. See also J. Crick, 'Men, Women and Widows: Widowhood in Pre-Conquest England', in S. Cavallo and L. Warner (eds.), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Harlow, 1999), pp. 25-27, 28-29; J. Crick (ed.), *Charters of St Albans, Anglo-Saxon Charters 12* (Oxford, 2007), p. 94.

intended to be effected during the donor's life or after death, even if the text itself refers to the document as a *ctwide*.<sup>13</sup> In her study of Anglo-Saxon vernacular wills, Lowe provides a list of sixty-four vernacular bequests which she categorises as wills, and it is from this catalogue which the evidence for this chapter will be taken. The remaining documents which may possibly be categorised as wills are extant in Latin monastic chronicles such as the *Liber eliensis* and the *Chronicon abbatiae ramesiensis*. These post-Conquest compilations record a number of Anglo-Saxon documents which are similar to wills, yet these documents can be problematic in that they often represent abbreviated, sometimes severely so, versions of the original. The difficulty inherent in relying on later Latin versions of Anglo-Saxon wills is striking when one compares the Latin abstract of the will of Æthelgifu to the original Old English document.<sup>14</sup> While the abstract contains most of the pertinent details of the items bequested by Æthelgifu, it lacks much of the important contextual information present in the original will.<sup>15</sup> Most relevant to this discussion, it omits any description of the pious benefactions detailed in the original will in terms of almsgiving, whereas the vernacular document uses the phrase '*to ælmessan*' twice in describing these bequests. I shall return to a discussion of this will and this phrase in a later section, but for the present it is sufficient to note that examples such as this highlight the difficulties inherent in using Latin abstracts or summaries of Old English wills in a study which relies heavily on the occurrence of individual words or phrases associated with almsgiving. For this reason the following study will be based on the sixty-four vernacular wills designated as such by Lowe.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> K. A. Lowe, 'The Nature and Effect of the Anglo-Saxon Vernacular Will', *Journal of Legal History* 19.1 (1998), p. 24.

<sup>14</sup> Printed as 7a and 7, respectively, in Crick, *St Albans*, pp. 144-161. For a fuller discussion of the differences between vernacular and Latin wills, see K. A. Lowe, 'Latin Versions of Old English Wills', *Journal of Legal History* 20.1 (1999), pp. 1-24.

<sup>15</sup> For an discussion of the relation of the abstracts to the vernacular will, see D. Whitelock, N. Ker and Lord Rennell (eds.), *The Will of Æthelgifu: A Tenth-Century Anglo-Saxon Manuscript* (Oxford, 1968), pp. 38-44; Crick, *St Albans*, pp. 91-100, 154-161; Lowe, 'Latin Versions', pp. 10-15.

<sup>16</sup> Lowe, 'Nature and Effect', pp. 48-57.

As a whole, the Anglo-Saxon wills provide the modern scholar with a great variety of information. While many of these documents have certain elements in common, such as general formatting or types of bequests, they should not be considered as a uniform body of evidence. Part of this is due to the simple lack of survival of what we may only assume is a significant number of documents.<sup>17</sup> This is supplemented by the geographical survival patterns of the extant wills. Of the sixty-four vernacular wills surviving from the tenth and eleventh centuries, nearly one-third come from the monastic records at Bury St Edmund's, and one-third come collectively from the minsters at Winchester (both Old and New Minsters) and Canterbury (Christ Church). The remaining documents all may be traced to minsters in the southern or eastern parts of England, which may indicate stronger royal control or influence by religious reforms, but it is difficult to pinpoint a specific motive. Additionally, it is possible that the high survival rate of wills at certain institutions may be the result of what one scholar has termed 'particularly enthusiastic archiving' in the monastery; the opposite may be true in institutions for which survival rates are low.<sup>18</sup> It is also notable that later monastic chronicles, such as the *Liber eliensis* and the *Chronicon abbatiae rameseiensis*, record many wills dating from the Anglo-Saxon period, although many of the original wills themselves are not extant.<sup>19</sup> It should be noted here that of the wills extant at Bury St Edmund's, none dates earlier than 1042, and none of the wills from either minster in Winchester dates from after 987. These discrepancies in dating and survival may be the result of many political, religious or social factors, a study of which would be too large in scope for the purposes of this chapter. It is sufficient to note here that the surviving corpus of wills must be treated with care, and one must be careful in making generalisations about such a geographically and chronologically diverse range of source material.

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<sup>17</sup> Whitelock, *Wills*, p. xli; Tollerton Hall, 'Wills and Will-Making', pp. 33-34.

<sup>18</sup> Tollerton Hall, 'Wills and Will-Making', pp. 33-34, at p. 33 n. 58. Cf. Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>19</sup> For example, *LE*, ii.88; *CR*, nos. 33, 38, 63.

While the surviving wills are geographically limited to certain areas, collectively they represent a variety of social strata, though these are clearly restricted to the lay elite. The will of the Ætheling Athelstan has already been mentioned; the wills of King Alfred, King Eadred and Queen Æthelflæd are also extant.<sup>20</sup> Surviving wills tend to be restricted to the upper classes, as evidenced by those of Ealdorman Ælfgar, Ealdorman Ælfheah, Ealdorman Æthelwold and Ealdorman Aelfred, although thegns and reeves are also represented.<sup>21</sup> Female will-making was not confined to the rank of queen, as shown by the wills of Æthelgifu, Ælfgifu, Wulfgyth, Sifflæd and Leofgifu.<sup>22</sup> There are many testators for whom identification is no more than guesswork, and for those who remain unidentified we can only speculate. Some of the wills indicate or at least imply the social position of their donors by the possessions which are listed, for example the number of hides or estates held by the donor.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, we may assume that all testators must have been of a certain social standing, as all are able to possess and bequeath alienable property – a privilege reserved for the upper classes.<sup>24</sup> The identities of other donors may be proposed from references to donees, witnesses or even properties, but some,

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<sup>20</sup> King Alfred (S 1507/SEHD 11), King Eadred (S 1515/SEHD 21), Queen Æthelflæd (S 1494/W 14).

<sup>21</sup> Ealdorman Ælfgar (S 1483/W 2), Ealdorman Ælfheah (S 1485/W 9), Ealdorman Æthelwold (S 1504/SEHD 20), Ealdorman Aelfred (S 1508/SEHD 10). Harmer refers to both Æthelwold and Ælfred as Earls, which has been amended to Ealdormen in this thesis to reflect contemporary usage. For wills of thegns and reeves, see for example S 1482/SEHD 2; S 1500/R 3; S 1509/R 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ælfgifu (S 1484/W 8), Æthelgifu (S 1497), Wulfgyth (S 1535/W 32), Sifflæd (S 1525/W 37 and S 1525a/W 38), Leofgifu (S 1521/W 29). On women and will-making in Anglo-Saxon England, see Crick, 'Men, Women and Widows', pp. 24-36 and J. Crick, 'Women, Posthumous Benefaction and Family Strategy in Pre-Conquest England', *Journal of British Studies* 38 (1999), pp. 399-422.

<sup>23</sup> The eleventh-century legal text known as *Gebyncðo* states that a man must have five hides of land (presumably held as bookland) in order to become a thegn, indicating that men possessing five or more hides held the rank of thegn or higher. F. Liebermann (ed. and trans.), *Die Gesetze der Angelsachsen: herausgegeben im auftrage der savigny-stiftung*, vol. 1 (Halle, 1903; repr. Aalen, Germany, 1960), p. 456; translated in D. Whitelock (ed.), *English Historical Documents c. 500-1042*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 1979), pp. 468-469. See also A. Williams, 'A Bell-house and a Burh-geat: Lordly Residences in England Before the Norman Conquest', in C. Harper-Bill and R. Harvey (eds.), *Medieval Knighthood IV: Papers from the Fifth Strawberry Hill Conference, 1990* (Woodbridge, 1992), p. 226.

<sup>24</sup> Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 96-99; S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 326-328; S. Baxter, *The Earls of Mercia: Lordship and Power in Late Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 145-147.

such as Wulfwaru, for whom the contextual information of the will provides no helpful identifications, must remain a mystery.<sup>25</sup> While no firm conclusions may be drawn in respect to will-making among certain social classes, the wills provide the reader with a glimpse into ideas of religious devotion and property distribution across upper-class social boundaries.

It is clear from the evidence of the wills that regardless of the donor's social status, he or she had to seek permission from the king as a lord in order to make a will.<sup>26</sup> This is the case in the will of the Ætheling Athelstan, as Athelstan reiterates that his will should stand because he has been granted permission from the king: *'Nu bidde ic. ealle þa witan. þe minne cwyde gehyron rædan. ægðer ge gehadode. ge læwede. þæt hi beon on fultume. þæt min Cwyde standan mote. Swa mines fæder leaf. On minon Cwyde stænt'*.<sup>27</sup> The will of Wulfwaru begins with a statement requesting that King Æthelred grant her permission to make her will, while on the other hand the will of Æthelflæd states that, like the Ætheling, she had already received permission from the king.<sup>28</sup> In addition to this royal permission, the will also had to be confirmed by the king and his councillors. The late tenth-century will of Æthelric has the unusual distinction of surviving separately from a written confirmation of the will by the king, demonstrating that the process of securing the king's permission could be written as well as verbal.<sup>29</sup> This served as an added benefit in that it was tangible proof of the king's approval, helping to ensure that the will be allowed to stand. Some wills such as that of Brihtric and Ælfswith ask others to help and support the will, indicating that perhaps the king's permission had not been acquired or the oral will had not yet

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<sup>25</sup> S 1538/W 21. Cf. Whitelock, *Wills*, p. 174.

<sup>26</sup> For wills in which permission has been granted, see S 1503/W 20; S 1483/W 2. For wills in which permission is requested, see S 1484/W 8. Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>27</sup> 'Now I ask all the wise men, both ecclesiastical and lay, who may hear my will read, that they will help that my will may stand, as my father's permission is stated in my will'.

<sup>28</sup> S 1538/W 21; S 1495/W 22. See also S 1484/W 8; S 1485/W 9; S 1511/W 11.

<sup>29</sup> S 1501/W 16.1 and 16.2. Cf. Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 49-52; Keynes, 'Royal Government', p. 254.

been confirmed when the written version was drawn up.<sup>30</sup> Each of these examples serves as an important reminder that the written record of a donor's bequests should not be taken as a guarantee that such bequests were eventually carried out; rather, they should be seen as evidence of the testators' desires to secure their bequests as best they could, faced with the possibility that a number of things could go wrong before their wishes were carried out.

In regard to the nature of the wills themselves, Linda Tollerton Hall has argued that although there is no set formula which all wills follow, wills and bequests from the tenth and eleventh centuries tend to follow a similar format, indicating that 'the late Anglo-Saxon will was a highly formalised document'.<sup>31</sup> While it is true that many of these documents do possess some collective features, these commonalities are relegated to specific characteristics such as verb tense, verb choice and phrases such as 'at the end of X's life' (*æfter X's dæg*). The actual bequests themselves do not seem to follow any sort of pattern (other than general order of disposition of goods), and with the exception of the heriot, there are very few bequests which are common in a large number of wills.<sup>32</sup> As the following discussion shall demonstrate, pious bequests of alms did not follow any sort of set pattern throughout the corpus of wills, and while phrases such as 'for my soul' (*for mine soule* or *pro anima mea*) were common, the ways in which these bequests were described were not.

The ways in which phrases referring to almsgiving appear in the Anglo-Saxon wills can be primarily categorised into two groups: those which involve giving alms with the hope of gaining spiritual reward and those which use the terminology of almsgiving to describe one's actions as particularly charitable. Each of these

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<sup>30</sup> S 1511/W11. See also S 1497; S 1503/W 20. Cf. Keynes, 'Royal Government', p. 254; Whitelock, Ker and Lord Rennell, *Will of Æthelgifu*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Tollerton Hall, 'Wills and Will-Making', pp. 40-50 at p. 40. Cf. Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, vol. 2, pp. 219.

<sup>32</sup> For a discussion of heriot, see N. P. Brooks, 'Arms, Status and Warfare in Late-Saxon England', in D. Hill (ed.), *Ethelred the Unready: Papers from the Millenary Conference*, BAR, British Series 59 (1978), pp. 85-93.



provides important evidence for how almsgiving was conceptualised by the laity in the tenth and eleventh centuries, although as will become clear in the remainder of this section, a comprehensive and cohesive definition of almsgiving remains an elusive quarry. Nevertheless the following discussion shall demonstrate some important thematic similarities in the references to alms, providing vital evidence for the ways in which the ideals regarding the practice of almsgiving were recorded in the documentary sources.

It is necessary to note here that while wills can be a veritable treasure trove of historical information, they should not be considered as comprehensive documents which provide a complete picture of a testator's wishes for the disposal of his property. Scholars have noted that wills often conceal certain types of information, such as marital status, presence of children or heirs and history of possessions (especially land) within the description of bequests.<sup>33</sup> In these cases, what appear to be straightforward bequests are more often complicated transactions which only come to light when they are able to be compared with other sources.<sup>34</sup> In addition, many types of almsgiving leave no trace at all; chance references in documentary sources point to a much larger system of almsgiving than that which appears in the wills. An example of this exists in *VI Athelstan 8.1* which states that the hundred-groups which are in charge of the tithes shall meet once a month in order to reassess their statutes. At these meetings, '7 habban þa XII menn heora metscype togædere 7 fedan hig swa swa hig sylfe wyrðe munon, 7 dælon ealle þa metelafe Godes þances'.<sup>35</sup> This statute

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<sup>33</sup> Crick, 'Posthumous Benefaction', pp. 402-403, 416. See also T. Reuter, "'You Can't Take it with You": Testaments, Hoards and Moveable Wealth in Europe, 600-1100', in E. M. Tyler (ed.), *Treasure in the Medieval West* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 21-23; Crick, *St Albans*, p. 92.

<sup>34</sup> See also the will of Bishop Ælfric (S 1489/W 26) which asks that the monks at Bury St Edmund's pay sixty pounds in return for his bequest of the estates at Tichwell and Docking. Documents which conceal sales in the guise of gifts will be discussed in the following section on charters. Cf. J. Campbell, 'The Sale of Land and the Economics of Power in Early England: Problems and Possibilities', *Haskins Society Journal* 1 (1989), pp. 23-37.

<sup>35</sup> 'Twelve men shall have their dinners together, and feed themselves just as they themselves think right, and they shall distribute all the fragments, by the grace of God'.

indicates that after feasts excess food was given to the poor, presumably as alms in keeping with the homiletic precepts that providing food and drink for the poor was a type of almsgiving, yet evidence of this behaviour is rare if it exists at all.

Likewise, the eleventh- and twelfth-century inventories found in the *Liber eliensis* give lengthy, detailed lists of gifts of moveable wealth donated to the monastery at Ely, yet in many cases no trace of these gifts exists outside of this record.<sup>36</sup>

Charitable donations of food, money or land which are not specified as alms can be difficult to trace through the documentary evidence. Yet, as the remainder of this section will demonstrate, the references to almsgiving in the wills demonstrate a thriving system of gift-exchange in late Anglo-Saxon England, one which has important implications for the understanding of almsgiving and its place in tenth- and eleventh-century society.

#### *Exchanging Alms for Salvation*

As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the link between gifts of alms and the salvation of one's soul was well-established in early Christian theology. Michael Sheehan has discussed the importance in the middle ages of works such as Caesarius of Arles' *Sermo LX*, which demonstrated the spiritual significance in late antiquity of giving alms on one's deathbed as a way of achieving forgiveness of one's sins.<sup>37</sup> While the link between alms and penance was a common theme in patristic sources, by the tenth century in Anglo-Saxon England the theological link between death-bed confession and bequests of alms for the remission of one's sins was rarely made, likely as the result of the homiletic emphasis on the donation of alms during one's life.<sup>38</sup> This was readily apparent in homilies which stressed giving alms at particular

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<sup>36</sup> *LE*, ii.114, ii.135, ii.139, iii.50.

<sup>37</sup> Caesarius of Arles, *Sermo* 60, CCSL 103, pp. 263-266. Cf. Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 7-12.

<sup>38</sup> Sheehan, *The Will*, pp. 12-13, 15-16.

penitential times of the year, such as Rogationtide, Advent or Lent.<sup>39</sup> In giving alms during one's life, a man or woman could actively attempt to earn salvation for his or her own soul, yet there was also a strong belief that prayers, masses or almsgiving on behalf of one already dead could help to further expiate that person's sins.<sup>40</sup> The sermons of Ælfric in particular stress the importance of all three for the relief of a soul's torments after death.<sup>41</sup> In the early medieval period, funerary prayers were generally addressed to God Himself, although they could also be addressed to saints, angels or others who were seen to have intercessory power with God. Through these prayers, one could ultimately hope to achieve the salvation of one's soul and entry into heaven after the final judgement, similar to the effect of redemptive almsgiving.<sup>42</sup>

By the tenth and eleventh centuries in England the intercessory power was deemed to be held by bishops and monks who were often called upon to pray for the fate of one's soul. This practice was legislated in law codes such as *V Æthelred* 4.1, which states that not only bishops but also monks and priests were required to intercede spiritually on behalf of the Christian people: '7 huruþinga Godes þeowas – biscopas 7 abbudas, munecas 7 mynecena, preostas 7 nunnan – to rihte gebugan 7 regollice libban 7 for eall Cristen folc þingian georne'.<sup>43</sup> This code further specifies the practice established in *IV Edgar* 1.7 which states, '7 þa Godes þeowas, þe þa sceattas underfoð, þe we Gode syllað,

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, Vercelli XIX-XXI, CH II I: *De natale domini*, and Blickling III: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of this idea in eight-century Ireland, see M. McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY, 1994), pp. 11-13. See also A. Angenendt, 'Missa specialis: Zugleich ein Beitrag zur Entstehung der Privatmessen', *Frümittelalterliche Studien* 17 (1983), pp. 153-221.

<sup>41</sup> This is stressed most clearly in CH II.XXI, *Alia Visio*.

<sup>42</sup> McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, pp. 37-38.

<sup>43</sup> 'And especially the servants of God, bishops and abbots, monks and nuns, priests and women under religious vows, shall submit to their duty, and live according to their rule, and eagerly intercede for all Christian people'.

*libban clænan life, þæt hy þurh þa clænnysse us to Gode þingian mægen*'.<sup>44</sup> Evidence for this practice is apparent in the will of Theodred, bishop of London, dating 942 x c. 951, which clearly illuminates the link between gifts of alms and intercession on behalf of the donor's soul. It begins:

*Ic Deodred Lundeneware Biscop wille biquethen mine quiden mines erfes. þe ic begeten habbe 7 get bigete godes þankes and his halegen for mine soule 7 for min louverde þat ic vnder bigeat and for min Eldrene. and for alle þe mannes soule þe ic foreþingiae. And ic almesne vnderfongen habbe and me sie rithlike for to bidden.*<sup>45</sup>

Here Theodred makes the specific connection between almsgiving to a bishop and the expectation of receiving prayers for one's soul in return, emphasising the perceived role of almsgiving itself in a social system based on obligatory, reciprocal gift-exchange.<sup>46</sup> He clearly states that men have given him alms so that he might pray for their souls and intercede with God on their behalf. This agreement demonstrates an understanding of and participation in both the homiletic ideal of charitable gift-exchange and the legal obligation to provide spiritual intercession.

This practice is further articulated in numerous other wills and bequests. The will of Mantat the Anchorite, dating 1017 x 1035, describes how such gifts of alms could form the basis for one's post-mortem bequests. After greeting the king and queen Mantat states:

*And ic ciðe þæt ic habbe ure almesse Crist betaht 7 his allen halgan ure sawle to frofre 7 to blisse þære it lengest wunian sculen. þæt is ærest. þæt land æt Twitwell into Þornige. þær ure ban resteð. 7 þæt land æt Cuningtun, prestes 7 diaknes þa þe hit æt me earnodon on mine life. And hi habbað god behaten 7 me*

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<sup>44</sup> 'And [it is my will] that the servants of God who receive the dues which we render to Him shall live a pure life, so that, by virtue of their purity, they may intercede for us with God'. See also VI Atr 41.

<sup>45</sup> S 1526/W 1. 'I, Theodred, Bishop of the people of London, wish to announce my will concerning my property, what I have acquired and may yet acquire, by the grace of God and his saints, for my soul and for my lord under whom I acquired it and for my ancestors, and for the souls of all the men for whom I intercede, and from whom I have received alms, and for whom it is fitting that I should pray'.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, pp. 14-16.

*on hande gesealde þæt hi sculen elke geare don for us twa hundred messen 7 twa hundred sauterres. 7 þertoeaken fele holy beden.*<sup>47</sup>

This statement indicates that Mantat expected to receive masses, psalters and prayers on his behalf as a direct result of his gift of alms to the Abbey. In this will Mantat echoes the relationship between alms and prayer recorded in the will of Theodred, although Mantat provides the additional information that the spiritual intercession for his soul is to continue indefinitely. He also reveals that his agreement with the priests and deacons had already been reached during his life, signifying that he had not given his alms to the Abbey in the blind hope that he would receive spiritual intercession in return for his gift. The implication is that with these bequests Mantat had fulfilled his part of the bargain, and he thus expected the priests and deacons to do the same.

Many other wills similarly articulate this link between gifts of land, money or possessions to monasteries and the expectation of receiving spiritual benefit in return. Although some wills do not refer to these gifts specifically as alms, their similarities in content to the will of Mantat make a persuasive case for arguing that these bequests were thought of in terms of almsgiving. A document recording a bequest of Ealdorman Æthelwold, dating 946 x 947, records that Æthelwold wished that 12 hides of land be given to the bishop and community at Old Minster, Winchester for the provision of clothing '*þæt hi me on heora gebeddredenne hæbben, swa swa ic him to gelyfe*'.<sup>48</sup> Æthelwold does not state that he has reached any type agreement with the community, such as that expressed by Mantat, but he expresses

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<sup>47</sup> S 1523/W23. 'And I declare that I have entrusted our alms to Christ and all his saints where it shall remain longest, for the comfort and happiness of our soul. First, the estate at Twywell to Thorney, where our bones shall rest, and the estate at Conington, to priests and deacons who have deserved it of me during my life. And they have promised God and given pledge to me that each year they will recite for us two hundred masses and two hundred psalters and in addition many holy prayers'.

<sup>48</sup> S 1504/SEHD 20. '...so that they [the monks] may remember me in their prayers, as I believe that they will'.

a similar sense of certainty that the monks will meet his expectation of spiritual intercession in return for his gift.

The will of Wulf, dating c. 1050, also records similar bequests, and it is worth quoting these at length:

*Ærest ic beceþe for mine saple Gode 7 sancte Albane þ[æt] land æt Eastune mid mete 7 mid mannon spa spa ic hit læne, 7 eallspa þ[æt] land æt Oxapican, into þære halgan stope æt sancte Albane þær ic licgan pille; 7 þ[æt] betste mæssereaf þe ic hæbbe, 7 calic 7 disc 7 mæseboc 7 an hricghrægl ðicoste þ[æt] mon æfre ælcere pucan gemærsige tpa mæssan for his sauple 7 þone betere pællene kyrtel þe Godgyua ahte 7 þæne oþerne into Hramesige, 7 .iiii. marc gepegenes to Rome to sancte Petre, 7 .iiii. marc pegenes to bicganne mæssan for mine sauple, 7 .iiii. marc gepegenes to heh mynstran her on lande 7 minon feolagan .iiii. marc goldes, 7 ealles þæs landes þe ic læfe, buto[n] þam tþam þe ic Gode hæbbe betæht 7 sancte Albane.<sup>49</sup>*

The will then records a number of bequests to lay men before concluding with this statement: '7 gif þær hwæt belife on golde oððe on seolfre oððe on rægle, hæbbe se mæst þe me betst to geearnaþ 7 mæst fore mine sawwle don wille, 7 .xxx. manna frige mon for mine sawwle'.<sup>50</sup> The arrangements detailed in this will demonstrate Wulf's clear concern for the welfare of his soul, and the individual bequests indicate he was either a prosperous layman or a high-ranking clergyman.<sup>51</sup> He even may have been obeying

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<sup>49</sup> S 1532. Printed with translation as no. 13 in Crick, *St Albans*, pp. 199-200. 'In the first place, I bequeath for my soul to God and St. Alban the land at Aston, with produce and with men just as I lease it, and also the land at Oxwick, to the holy place at St. Albans where I wish to be buried; and the best set of mass-vestments that I have, and chalice, dish and mass-book, and the thickest dorsal, so that for ever, every week, two masses may be celebrated for his soul; and the better costly cloak, which Godgifu owned, and the other one to Ramsey. And 4 marks of weighed (silver) to Rome for St. Peter, and 4 marks of weighed (silver) for the procuring of masses for my soul, and 4 marks of weighed (silver) for the principal minsters in this country, and to my associates 4 marks of gold and (?) all the land which I leave, except for the two (estates) which I have bequeathed to God and to St. Alban'. Cf. S. Keynes, 'The Will of Wulf', *Old English Newsletter* 26 (1993), pp. 18-19.

<sup>50</sup> 'And if there should be anything left over, in gold or in silver or in vestments, the person who best deserves it from me and who wishes to do the most for my soul is to have the most; and 30 men are to be freed for my soul'. Translation from Keynes, 'Will of Wulf', pp. 18-19.

<sup>51</sup> Keynes, 'Will of Wulf', p. 20.

the laws of Cnut which call for the payment of *Romfeoh*, symbolised by his request that four marks of silver be given to Rome for St Peter.<sup>52</sup>

There are distinct similarities between Wulf's will and that of Ealdorman Æthelwold. Whereas Æthelwold gave land so that the monks might pray for his soul, Wulf donated a variety of ecclesiastical items and four marks of silver so that the monks might celebrate masses for his soul. His penultimate bequest, that all of his remaining gold, silver or vestments be given to one 'who wishes to do the most' for Wulf's soul, again reiterates his desire that his wealth and possessions be used in a manner which would most benefit his soul after death. These transactions were not referred to as alms, yet the understanding that such gifts to a monastery would be reciprocated with the monks' intercession on behalf of one's soul clearly underlies this testament. In this way it appears that Wulf's bequests, given with the expectation of spiritual reward, function in the same way as those given by Mantat and Æthelwold and the implicit relationship of mutual exchange detailed by Theodred. While they are not specifically described as such, it is difficult to see any difference between Wulf's gifts and others described as alms.

The link between gifts of land or wealth as alms and the promise of prayer for one's soul was not always so clearly articulated. A charter preserving an agreement between Archbishop Eadsige of Canterbury and Æthelric, dating *c.* 1045, describes a gift of an estate to a religious institution in terms of almsgiving. The agreement states that after Æthelric's death, his estate at Chart was to pass to Archbishop Eadsige. After the deaths of Æthelric and Eadsige, it was to pass to Christ Church, Canterbury, on behalf of both of their souls, to provide food and clothing for the community there. The terms of the agreement are then summed up thusly: '*Æthelric*

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. I Cn 9. The precise amount owed as *Romfeoh* is unknown, but was likely to be one penny per household, not the excessive sum of four marks of silver. Cf. J. Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 441 n. 65.

*gifð þa landboc þe þærto gebyreð on his life Criste 7 þam hirede him to ecere ælmessan*'.<sup>53</sup>

That Æthelric and Eadsige expect to receive spiritual benefit in return for the gift of this estate is implied by their statement that the transaction was effected for their souls. The association of this phrase with the stipulation that the estate was to be used to provide food and clothing for the community of monks may be construed as an allusion to almsgiving; as demonstrated in the sermons of Wulfstan, the provision of food and clothing were to be considered as types of alms.<sup>54</sup> These sermons would certainly have been in circulation by the time this agreement was drawn up, and it is possible that the draftsman of the agreement was drawing a deliberate parallel to this idea. One can certainly not discount the fact that Æthelric and Eadsige expected to receive some type of spiritual benefit in return for their gift, the terms of which were described using the vocabulary of almsgiving. The description of this gift as perpetual alms is noteworthy, and I shall return to this charter in the second half of this chapter.

The connection between almsgiving and the provision of food or clothing for a monastic institution articulated in the agreement between Æthelric and Archbishop Eadsige provides a context for other wills with similar conditions. An earlier charter involving the same Archbishop Eadsige, dating 1032 or 1035, records Eadsige's gift of a number of estates to Christ Church while retaining a life interest in the estates for himself and his brother Eadwine. After the deaths of both Eadsige and Eadwine, the estates were to pass to Christ Church on behalf of Eadsige's soul, and at least three of the estates, Orpington, Palster and Wittersham, were to be used to provide clothing and food for the monks.<sup>55</sup> Additional evidence for gifts of estates intended to benefit monastic communities comes from the will of Æthelric, dating c. 960 x 994. In this document Æthelric grants an estate to St Paul's, London, '*to to geleohtenne 7*

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<sup>53</sup> S 1471/R 101. 'Æthelric presents the title-deeds of this estate during his lifetime to Christ and the community [at Christ Church] in perpetual alms'.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xc: *Her Ongynð Be Cristendome*, lines 159-162.

<sup>55</sup> S 1465/R 86.



*þar on godes folce cristendom to dælenne*'.<sup>56</sup> These wills are important in that they illuminate other ways in which gifts of this sort could be seen to function for the benefit of a monastic community and thus for the benefit of the donor's soul. That Æthelric's will was drawn up before the sermons of Ælfric and Wulfstan were in common circulation demonstrates that this ideal of using a gift of one's estate in order to acquire some benefit for a monastic community in the hope of benefiting the donor's soul was commonly practiced long before it became enshrined in the later homiletic texts.

Other bequests are not so descriptive. Wills such as those of Æthelflæd, Æthelric Bigga, Thurstan and Wulfgyth state merely that estates are to be given to monastic communities '*ðam gebroðran to bigleofan*' (for the support of the brethren) or '*þam hirede to fostre*' (for the sustenance of the community) or some variation thereof.<sup>57</sup> It was apparently left up to the recipient of the donation, presumably the head of the monastery, to decide how individual bequests were to be carried out. It is clear, however, that the donors in these situations intended that the profits or produce from their estates were to be used in a way which was beneficial to the monastic community, and in this way these bequests can be considered to be similar to gifts of alms, as stated in the agreement between Æthelric and Archbishop Eadsige.

It is important to remember that even though these bequests were designated to support monastic communities rather than the anonymous poor, they were nonetheless considered to be gifts of alms. As stated in the introductory chapter to this thesis, between the ninth and eleventh centuries the definition of poverty varied considerably, but in general 'the poor' were conceptualised as those members of the population with a lack of social or military power; thus monasteries and the monks

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<sup>56</sup> S 1501/W16. '...for the provision of lights and for the communication of Christianity to God's people there'.

<sup>57</sup> Quotations from S 1495/W 22 (x/xi) and S 1530/W 30 (1042 x 1043), respectively. See also S 1502 (1048 x 1050); S 1535 (1042 x 1053).

within them were considered to be poor and therefore deserving of alms. Indeed, certain patristic authors, such as Jerome, argued that alms should only be given to those who had been voluntarily poor and thus were considered to be poor in spirit.<sup>58</sup> For this reason, it is possible to equate charitable bequests to monastic houses throughout the period under discussion here with gifts of alms to the poor. The donors who gave such gifts did so in the understanding that they were following the biblical and homiletic injunctions to give alms of food, clothing or money to the poor.

Additional context for bequests of gifts to monastic communities is provided by a small number of other wills. The will of the Reeve Abba, dating 833 x 839, articulates clearly how a gift of alms to a monastery might be tied in with benefits for the soul of the donor. In his will Abba states that if he had no descendants who were able to succeed to his estates then the lands were to pass to Christ Church, Canterbury.<sup>59</sup> There, the monastic community was to take the land and '*hit minum gaste nytt gedoen*', a statement which implies that the produce or profit from the land would be distributed as alms on behalf of Abba.<sup>60</sup> This is similar to Wulf's bequest, discussed previously, which granted the remainder of his possessions to one 'who wishes to do the most for my soul'. Another similar request was made in the will of Ealdorman Ælfheah, dating c. 968 x 971. Ælfheah granted estates to his wife Ælfswith and asked that she '*þanne gæornlicæ of þam god geþæncæ and for uncre sawle geornlicæ beo*'.<sup>61</sup> Dorothy Whitelock has noted that *god* in this passage may be translated as either God or good deeds (benefactions), meaning that the sense of the phrase may be interpreted as Ælfheah requesting his wife to remember God

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<sup>58</sup> B. Ramsey, 'Almsgiving in the Latin Church: the Late Fourth and Early Fifth Centuries', *Theological Studies* 43.2 (1982), pp. 229, 232-233. Cf. J.-C. Dufermont, 'Les Pauvres, D'Après les Sources Anglo-Saxonnes, du VII<sup>e</sup> au XI<sup>e</sup> Siècle', *Revue du Nord* 50 (1968), pp. 189-190, 194; D. Shanzer, 'Bible, Exegesis, Literature, and Society', *Journal of Medieval Latin* 18 (2008), p. 156.

<sup>59</sup> S 1482/SEHD 2.

<sup>60</sup> '...do good with it for my soul'. See also S 1533/R 26.

<sup>61</sup> S 1485/W 9. '...remember God diligently from the property and be diligent for our souls'.

zealously with almsgiving from the property, or requesting her to be mindful of benefactions from the land.<sup>62</sup> Both of these translations provide a similar sense for the bequest, emphasising that the property was to be used in a way which provided good for others. Further context for this passage may be provided by a similar stipulation in the ninth-century agreement between Eadweald Oshering and Cynethryth, which stated that Cynethryth was to arrange for an estate left to her nephew by her late husband to be disposed of after her nephew's death '*swe hit him boem rehtlicast 7 elmestlicast were*'.<sup>63</sup> The use of the terminology of almsgiving in this instance strengthens the conclusion that the land given in each of these wills was to be used to give alms on behalf of the donors and thus to acquire benefits for their souls.

While the wills just discussed make provision for estates to be used in ways which would provide for the souls of the donors, other wills explain in more detail how these wishes could be carried out. At the end of the will of Ælfgifu, dating 966 x 975, Ælfgifu makes provision for a charitable bequest of five pounds of pence to be given to '*ælchum abbodæ*' (each abbot) for repair of his minster. The surplus was to be given to Bishop Æthelwold of Winchester and Abbot Æthelgar of New Minster for the repair of the foundation and '*and earmum mannum for me to dælænne swa swa him þinca þæt mæ for godæ þearflucustþ si*'.<sup>64</sup> Ælfgifu here illustrates the connection that distributing money to the poor for her sake will accrue some benefit on her behalf, presumably in the form of benefitting her soul after death.

Arranging for the distribution of money or goods on behalf of one's soul was a common theme in Anglo-Saxon wills, and sometimes a set amount was arranged for this purpose. The late tenth-century will of Brihtric and Ælfswith, for example,

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<sup>62</sup> Whitelock, *Wills*, p. 125.

<sup>63</sup> S 1200/SEHD 7. '*...as it might be for them both most just and most generous in alms*'.

<sup>64</sup> S 1484/W 8. '*...for them to distribute to poor men for me just as they think will be most profitable for me before God*'.

stipulated that eighty mancuses were to be distributed for the sake of themselves and their ancestors.<sup>65</sup> Bishop Theodred, mentioned previously, set aside a total of twenty pounds to be distributed for his soul on episcopal demesne in addition to the five pounds to be distributed in every bishop's see.<sup>66</sup> Livestock from one's estate could also be distributed for the sake of one's soul, as in the late tenth-century will of Æthelflæd which arranged for the distribution of half the stock in each village for the sake of her soul.<sup>67</sup>

Profits from the sale of one's estate could also provide for the salvation of one's soul through their distribution directly to the poor. This is clearly demonstrated in the will of Ulf and Madselin, dating 1066 x 1068, whereby the testators detail an agreement they had made with Bishop Ealdred (Archbishop of York) before setting off on a pilgrimage to Rome.<sup>68</sup> Ealdred held a mortgage of eight marks of gold on three of Ulf's estates, and if Ulf and Madselin did not return from their pilgrimage, then the estates were to be sold to the bishop and the payment (less the amount of the mortgage) was to be distributed on behalf of their souls. Another will, that of Æthelnoth and Gænborg (805 x 832), contains a similar arrangement, also in the context of selling one's estates in preparation for a pilgrimage. Æthelnoth and his wife state that if they had no children, their estate was to be sold to Archbishop Wulfred '7 ðæt wiroð gedæle fore hiora gastas suæ ælmeslice 7 suæ rehtlice suæ he him seolfa on his wisdom georne'.<sup>69</sup> As with the use of the term *elmehtlicast* in the will of

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<sup>65</sup> S 1511/W 11. For a discussion of how commemoration of ancestors in Anglo-Saxon wills can be linked to the Benedictine Reform movement, see M. D. C. Drout, 'Anglo-Saxon Wills and the Inheritance of Tradition in the English Benedictine Reform', *Selim: Journal of the Spanish Society for Mediaeval English Language and Literature* 10 (2000), 5-54 and M. D. C. Drout, *How Tradition Works: A Meme-Based Cultural Poetics of the Anglo-Saxon Tenth Century*, *Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies* 306 (Tempe, AZ, 2006), chapter 5.

<sup>66</sup> S 1526/W 1.

<sup>67</sup> S 1494/W 14.

<sup>68</sup> W 39. See also S 1531/W 31.

<sup>69</sup> S 1500/R 3. '...and that profit should be distributed for their souls as generously in alms and as justly as he himself can devise in his wisdom'.

Eadweald Oshering and Cynethryth, the use of *ælmeslice* in this context implies that the distribution of money on behalf of the souls of Æthelnoth and Gænborg is conceived of in terms of almsgiving. The wider contextual evidence that both Ulf and Madeslin and Æthelnoth and Gænborg were about to embark on a pilgrimage further enhances the view that they were deeply concerned with their spiritual well-being. It is possible that the creation of a testament which would provide for the welfare of their souls through the distribution of alms on their behalf may be seen as an attempt to make alternative arrangements for their souls in case they were unable to complete their pilgrimage. If this were the case, then each couple had ensured that their property would be disposed of in a way which would provide the most benefit for their souls.

Bequests of moveable wealth to monasteries with specific instructions that the wealth be redistributed to the poor provide important insight into the ways in which the laity conceptualised almsgiving. The will of the Ætheling Athelstan, cited at the beginning of this chapter, contains a bequest regarding the annual distribution of money and food to the poor at Ely, but unlike other testators Athelstan provided specific instructions for how this bequest was to be carried out.<sup>70</sup> He stipulated that 100 pence were to be given to the monastery at Ely annually on the feast of St Æthelðryth and 100 poor people be fed there on that same day.<sup>71</sup> The practice of endowing one's burial place with a legacy of provisions for the poor may be traced back as far as the ninth century.<sup>72</sup> Athelstan refers to these actions as '*seo ælmesse*' and states that they were to be done for the sake of his soul. The use of round numbers such as 100 implies that Athelstan intended for this bequest to be symbolic for the greater population of poor people in England. His establishment of a

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<sup>70</sup> S 1503/W 20.

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of the development of rituals of royal alms-distribution, see V. A. Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving in Medieval England: A Study in the Ritual and Administrative Construction of Kingship' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Binghamton University, 2002).

<sup>72</sup> J. Campbell, 'The Church in Anglo-Saxon Towns', in J. Campbell (ed.), *Essays in Anglo-Saxon History* (London, 1986), pp. 141-142.

ceremonial distribution of alms demonstrates that Athelstan was concerned with the fate of his soul after his death, and the continued distribution of alms shows an awareness of the link between posthumous charitable acts and forgiveness of sin. It is also interesting to note that Athelstan's bequests echo the laws authorised by his father Æthelred which emphasise the duty of all men to render the appropriate dues to God each year, some of which took the form of almsgiving.<sup>73</sup> In particular, this bequest may have been influenced by Wulfstan's *Penitential Edicts* which encouraged repentance for one's sins through the distribution of one's excess as alms to the poor.<sup>74</sup> Athelstan's provision for an annual distribution of alms, while clearly made for the benefit of his own soul, may be interpreted as a desire to fulfil the law requiring the annual payment of church dues through the implementation of one yearly feast-day on which both money and food would be given to the poor.

Arranging for alms to be given in this way indicates that the distribution of alms after one's death could follow a scripted ritual, a pattern which would have been recognisable and familiar to the wider public. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, explicit references to patterns of almsgiving appear rarely in the documentary evidence. Yet when references do emerge, as in the case of Athelstan's will, they served as potent reminders that the performance of almsgiving likely had a much wider social application which adhered to expected behaviours.

Additional evidence for this emphasis on the performance of almsgiving is illuminated in the will of King Eadred, dating 951 x 955.<sup>75</sup> In the final section of his will, Eadred declared that twelve *ælmesmen* should be chosen from each of the estates listed previously and made a provision that if anything should happen to any of these *ælmesmen* another should be chosen to replace him. The word *ælmesmen* is ambiguous here, as it can be translated as either bedesman or beggar depending on

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<sup>73</sup> See especially, V Atr 11, VI Atr 16-21 and 43, and VIII Atr 6-14. Cf. Chapter Three above.

<sup>74</sup> Especially VII Atr 1, 2.2 and VIIa Atr 4-5.

<sup>75</sup> S 1515/SEHD 21.

the context.<sup>76</sup> Eadred's will survives in Old English, Middle English and Latin versions, where the Middle English and Latin versions appear to be later translations of the original Old English will. The Latin translation renders *ælmesmen* as *homines pauperes*, although it should be noted that this version contains many corruptions, and one cannot be sure if this is an accurate rendering of the intended connotation.<sup>77</sup> If we translate *ælmesmen* as beggars in this instance, then it appears that Eadred, like Athelstan, was attempting to establish a stylised distribution of alms to a symbolic number of poor men in order to ensure the continued salvation of his soul after death.<sup>78</sup> This recalls the famous passage in the eleventh-century *Vita regis roberti pii*, which describes how King Robert of France distributed alms yearly during the Lenten season as a means of enhancing his reputation as a pious man.<sup>79</sup> The author of this *vita*, Helgaud of Fleury, presents a highly stylized account of how certain numbers of poor people gathered outside the king's residence in order to receive alms of food and drink and sums of money, and Timothy Reuter has interpreted this

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<sup>76</sup> J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4<sup>th</sup> edn. (Toronto, 1960), p. 8; J. Northcote Toller, *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary Based on the Manuscript Collections of the Late Joseph Bosworth Supplement* (Oxford, 1921), p. 16. Cf. Napier XLVI: *Larspel*, p. 238, line 24 to p. 239, line 5 which also refers to *ælmesmannum* in the context of those to whom alms are distributed: 'We eow biddað, for eowres drihtnes lufan, þæt ge dæghwamlice dælan ælmessan be ðam dæle, þe ælcum men to onhagige, þeah hit ne sy butan feorðan dæl anes hlafes, godes þances ælmesmannum oððe wydeowum oððe steopcildum oððe þeowum mannum oððe ælþeodigum mannum'. There is evidence that Anglo-Saxon kings may have had men appointed for the distribution of royal alms, as in Bede's record of the thegn who managed Oswald's alms, but it is unknown how widespread this practice was in Anglo-Saxon England. Cf. *HE*, iii.6. For the development of the office of a royal almoner after the Conquest, see Cole, 'Royal Almsgiving', pp. 150-159, 167-171, 190-206.

<sup>77</sup> F. E. Harmer (trans. and ed.), *Select English Historical Documents of the Ninth and Tenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1914), p. 119. The Old English text is printed in SEHD no. 21, the Middle English in B 913 and the Latin in B 914.

<sup>78</sup> For similar symbolism in Carolingian monastic registers, see M. Mollat, *The Poor in the Middle Ages: An Essay in Social History*, trans. by A. Goldhammer (New Haven, CT, 1986), p. 40.

<sup>79</sup> Helgaud of Fleury, *Vie de Robert le Pieux: Epitoma Vitae Regis Roberti Pii*, ed. and trans. R.-H. Bautier and G. Labory (Paris, 1965), ch. 21 (pp. 102-104). Cf. B. Geremek, *Poverty: A History*, trans. by A. Kolakowska (Oxford, 1994), pp. 36-37.

as describing a body of 'professional poor' who were kept precisely for rituals such as these.<sup>80</sup>

It seems clear that both Athelstan and Eadred conceived of almsgiving as something which could be done in a similar ceremonial manner, and distributing alms in such a way not only worked toward gaining the salvation of their souls, but also helped to establish the public perception of the two men as pious, charitable individuals. In this way both men demonstrated their expectation that their alms would function within a system of reciprocal gift-exchange, receiving salvation in return for their almsgiving, as well as indicating the high importance they placed on visible demonstration of their piety. Megan McLaughlin has noted that in early medieval monastic funerals, rituals of almsgiving were carefully structured in order to express the identity of the dead person as well as to demonstrate his ties to the community.<sup>81</sup> While monastic almsgiving is a topic beyond the scope of this thesis, McLaughlin's observations offer an insightful comparison as to the ways in which rituals of almsgiving could be constructed in order to emphasise the piety and identity of the donor. This is certainly demonstrated in the *Vita regis roberti pii* and the evidence of the wills of Athelstan and Eadred illuminate one important way in which tenth- and eleventh-century royal men sought to affirm their social status through perpetual gifts of alms.

It is important to note here that explicit evidence for ritualised almsgiving appears only in the wills of present or future kings. This practice does not seem to have been adopted by lesser-ranking individuals and may be reflective to some extent of the power and wealth available only to royalty. One should not imagine, however, that the pious bequests of alms detailed in the other wills discussed in this chapter were

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<sup>80</sup> Reuter, 'Testaments, Hoards and Moveable Wealth', p. 24.

<sup>81</sup> McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, p. 49. Michael Drout has similarly argued that the wills themselves served as a medium for establishing an ancestral tradition, linking from the past to the present and preserving the memory and identity of the donors. Drout, 'Anglo-Saxon Wills', pp. 5-54 and Drout, *How Tradition Works*, chapter 5.



carried out in secret. The oral nature of the *cwide*, in addition to the necessity of confirmation of the testament by the king and his witan, indicate that all of these bequests of alms would have been public to some extent. In this way, each testator may be seen to be visibly demonstrating his piety within his community, utilising his gift of alms to participate in this social value of conspicuous display. In addition, these rituals at their most basic level represent gifts of alms given in the hope of receiving spiritual benefit in return, further demonstrating the ubiquity of a social system of gift-exchange. The wills of Athelstan and Eadred demonstrate the same concern for salvation, belief in redemptive almsgiving and desire for conspicuous piety through gifts of alms as illustrated in the other wills discussed previously, indicating that their behaviour should not be viewed as unique to royalty.

The wills described in this section, while diverse in terms of donors, property and chronology, all demonstrate clear thematic links in terms of the bequests themselves; Mantat, Æthelwold and Wulf each bequeathed property in order to receive prayers or masses for their souls in return. Specific bequests intended to benefit monastic communities such as those detailed in Archbishop Eadsige's charters and Æthelric's will and those described in less detail in the wills of Æthelflæd, Æthelric Bigga, Thurstan and Wulfgyth, were all made for the benefit of the donors' souls.

Although only the agreement between Archbishop Eadsige and Æthelric refers to the transaction as alms, the similarities in the terms of the other bequests indicates that perhaps the donors had a similar idea in mind. The same appears to be true in the wills of Abba, Eadweald Oshering and Cynethryth, Ælfheah, Æthelgifu and the others who specifically requested that profits from their estates be used in a way which was '*ælmeslic*' and which would provide the most benefit for their souls. The use of the terminology of almsgiving is more common in this type of bequest, making it difficult to avoid the conclusion that these donors clearly intended to demonstrate a link between gifts designated for use as alms and the reciprocal gain of spiritual benefit in return. The bequests not described in terms of almsgiving

were again similar enough that we should be cautious about dismissing the connections between them. Finally, the wills of the Ætheling Athelstan and King Eadred demonstrate the importance of a king visibly expressing his piety through a post-mortem distribution of alms. Again, these wills illuminate a connection between gifts of alms and the gaining of spiritual benefit in return.

At the beginning of this chapter we noted that wills can often conceal the true intent of circumstances surrounding a transaction. The evidence of *VI Athelstan* 8.1 showed how acts of almsgiving could be obscured within a more generalised description of a common action such as feasting. Taking the evidence of the wills which clearly describe certain types of bequests in terms of almsgiving and comparing this with similar acts recorded in bequests which do not mention almsgiving, it seems reasonable to conclude that these types of bequests form a coherent group in which the almsgiving played a vital part in earning spiritual benefit for the donor, even if the gifts are not always explicitly described as such. The variety of bequests described in these wills certainly indicates that the idealised practice of almsgiving described in the late Anglo-Saxon homilies and laws could be manifested in a number of ways. Most importantly the wills demonstrate clear thematic links with the homilies and laws, indicating that the practice of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries played such a significant role in lay piety that it often did not necessitate specific mention in the written sources. I shall return to this argument in the second half of this chapter.

### *A Language of Almsgiving?*

Before moving on to a discussion of charters, it is first necessary to highlight a small number of documents which contain the vocabulary of almsgiving but do not actually refer to the practice itself. An example of this is found in the will of Wulfwaru, dating 984 x 1016.<sup>82</sup> Wulfwaru begins her will with the statement, 'Ic

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<sup>82</sup> S1538/W 21.

*Wulfwaru bidde minne leofan hlaford Æþelred kyning him to ælmyssan þæt ic mote beon mines cwydes wyrðe*.<sup>83</sup> This phrase is distinctive in that it only appears in a handful of documents throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. It occurs twice in the previously mentioned will of Æthelgifu, first when Æthelgifu prays to the queen ‘*to ælmessan*’ that she watch over Leofsige, Æthelgifu’s legatee, and second when Æthelgifu begs the king ‘*to ælmessan*’ that he not allow anyone to change her will.<sup>84</sup> The same phrase occurs in the letter concerning land at Fonthill in Wiltshire, in which the author asks King Edward to ratify his actions regarding the land and says that he will be content with ‘*ðe ðe to ælmessan ryht ðincð*’ (that which you [Edward] think right as alms).<sup>85</sup> In this context Simon Keynes has noted that this could be a general appeal to the generosity and charity of the king that he might devise an amenable solution to the land dispute as a gesture of goodwill.<sup>86</sup> The same phrase occurs in a letter from Bishop Denewulf of Winchester, also addressed to King Edward, dating 899 x 908.<sup>87</sup> In this letter the bishop describes the terms under which he has acquired the land and grants it to the king for the remainder of his lifetime, asking that the land be returned to Winchester after his death. He then begs on behalf of himself and the

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<sup>83</sup> ‘I, Wulfwaru, ask my dear lord King Æthelred, as alms, that I may be entitled to make my will.’

<sup>84</sup> S 1497.

<sup>85</sup> S 1445/SEHD 18. Harmer renders this phrase as ‘whatever voluntary gift is, in thy opinion, just’, whereas N. Brooks translates it as ‘what seems to you to be due as alms’. Brooks sees the reference to alms as implying some type of alms payment is linked with the land, especially in light of the earlier description of another hide of land as ‘tithingland’. This does not take into account the possibility of the use of alms terminology in an ephemeral sense, as will be discussed throughout this section. See N. P. Brooks, ‘The Fonthill Letter, Ealdorman Ordlaþ and Anglo-Saxon Law in Practice’, in S. Baxter *et al.* (eds.), *Early Medieval Studies in Memory of Patrick Wormald* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 305, 312. The letter will be reprinted again as edited by Brooks in N. P. Brooks and S. E. Kelly (eds.), *Charters of Christ Church, Canterbury*, 3 vols., Anglo-Saxon Charters 15-17 (forthcoming), no. 104. The author of the letter is generally accepted to be Ealdorman Ordlaþ, mentioned at the beginning of the Letter. For an alternative viewpoint, see M. Boynton and S. Reynolds, ‘The Author of the Fonthill Letter’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 25 (1996), pp. 91-95.

<sup>86</sup> S. Keynes, ‘The Fonthill Letter’, in M. Korhammer, K. Reichl and H. Sauer (eds.), *Words, Texts and Manuscripts: Studies in Anglo-Saxon Culture Presented to Helmut Gneuss* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 92. For similar use of the language of charity and almsgiving in the late Roman period, see P. Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, The Menahem Stern Jerusalem Lectures (Hanover, NH, 2002), pp. 87-90.

<sup>87</sup> S 1444.

community at Winchester that the king 'to *ælmæssan*, for *Godæs lufan* and for *ðæræ haligan ciricean'* (as alms for the love of God and for the holy church) not ask the minster for any more land.<sup>88</sup>

Each of these occurrences demonstrates that the terminology of almsgiving could be used in a way which emphasised the merciful nature of a particular action but did not actually refer to a physical gift of alms. Indeed, in patristic texts the term *eleemosyna* was often considered to have a dual meaning of 'alms' or 'mercy', a duality which was exploited by John Chrysostom in his sermon *On Almsgiving*.<sup>89</sup> It was indicated in Chapter Two that Ælfric rendered the Latin *miser cordia* (mercy) of his Pseudo-Augustinian source as *ælmesse* multiple times in the composition of his homily *Dominica prima in quadragesima*.<sup>90</sup> This signifies that the term *ælmesse* could indeed have connotations of merciful acts in late Anglo-Saxon England, and as such it is possible that the use of the phrase *to ælmæssan* was meant to indicate a request for an act of mercy on behalf of another. Read in this way, the use of this phrase is logical and in keeping with the general definition of almsgiving as providing for the needs of others. That it was used repeatedly in these wills and charters in a consistent manner demonstrates another extent to which the vocabulary of almsgiving had penetrated social interactions, in this case being used idiomatically to represent an act of kindness or mercy.<sup>91</sup> Thus the conception of almsgiving takes on yet another dimension in late Anglo-Saxon England.

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<sup>88</sup> K 1089. Another translation may be found in Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, no. 101, pp. 543-544. The Latin version of this letter, also printed as K 1089, utilises similar terminology: '*ad elemosinam, quod pro amore dei et ipsius sanctae aecclesiae*'.

<sup>89</sup> R. Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire: Christian Promotion and Practice (313-450)* (Oxford, 2006), p. 174.

<sup>90</sup> Cf. CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, esp. lines 57-66; J. E. Cross, 'A *Sermo de Misericordia* in Old English Prose', *Anglia*, 108 (1990), pp. 431-432, esp. lines 17-27.

<sup>91</sup> The use of this phrase in such a way was not restricted to Anglo-Saxon England. One example occurs in an Italian *placita* record from 896, representing the opening statement of the advocate Anselm. It contains the following: '*Unde peto ego Anselmus advocatus, ut in elemosina domni imperatoris, et ut, postquam advocatus ipsius monasterii Aevue nec nullam talem personam invenire possumus...*' (Whence

## *The Charters*

Whereas the previous section addressed the occurrence of references to almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon wills, focusing on the ways in which these sources demonstrated desires on behalf of the laity to put the ideals of almsgiving into practice, this section will survey the evidence for almsgiving in the charters and writs of the tenth and eleventh centuries, determining the extent to which the language of almsgiving was embedded in the diplomatic of the time. For reasons which shall be discussed below, this section will only be able to provide an overview of the place of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon diplomatic, yet it will demonstrate important links between these references to almsgiving and those discussed in the other literary and documentary sources. This section will begin with a survey of the charters themselves, demonstrating their importance for our understanding of the governance of Anglo-Saxon England and discussing the problems inherent in these sources. It will then discuss the relevant charters themselves, establishing that, like the references to almsgiving in homilies, laws and wills, references to almsgiving in the charters and writs provide vital insight into the wider social practice of gift-exchange. It will conclude by highlighting other issues which are raised by the study of almsgiving as a part of the late Anglo-Saxon diplomatic.

It has long been recognised that the surviving charters from Anglo-Saxon England comprise an important body of evidence for understanding many aspects of society prior to the Norman Conquest. Like the Anglo-Saxon wills they are couched in specific types of rhetoric and form, yet the charters are unique in that they preserve records of actual transactions which took place. As a result they function in a way inherently different from the homilies, laws and wills discussed thus far in this thesis

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I, Anselm, the advocate seek, from the merciful lord emperor, that we should not meet with the advocate of the monastery of Reichenau nor any such person...). C. Manaresi, *I Placiti del 'Regnum Italiae'*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1955-57), no. 101 p. 366. Cited with translation in R. Balzaretto, 'Spoken Narratives in Ninth-Century Milanese Court Records', in E. M. Tyler and R. Balzaretto (eds.), *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 16 (Turnhout, 2006), p. 31.

and must be treated carefully as a genre. Despite the inherent difficulties in addressing these texts, a careful reading of the contents may prove to be infinitely rewarding.<sup>92</sup>

Before entering into a discussion of the charters themselves, it is first necessary to highlight some of the intrinsic problems in a study of these sources. That these documents survived at all, either in their original form or as later medieval copies, may be seen as the result of good fortune as much as any other factor. As with Anglo-Saxon wills, the charters which are extant today owe their endurance to their placement in monastic cartularies, often because either the donor or the recipient of the donation was affiliated with the monastery in question.<sup>93</sup> Additionally, charter survival is not evenly distributed throughout the monastic archives; thus studies must take into account potential geographic dimensions and limitations.<sup>94</sup> Charters which recorded transactions of land in which the beneficiary was in some way connected with a monastery were more likely to earn a place in the relevant monastic archive; charters recording transactions involving the laity did not fare so well.<sup>95</sup> In addition to this, even charters which were deposited into medieval archives may have been removed at a later date for a variety of reasons, either by the

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<sup>92</sup> See, for example, recent articles by Ross Balzaretto and Sarah Foot which highlight the possibilities of reading of charters as historical narratives. Balzaretto, 'Spoken Narratives', pp. 11-37, esp. pp. 36-37; S. Foot, 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters: Memory, Record, or Story?', in E. M. Tyler and R. Balzaretto (eds.), *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, Studies in Early Medieval Ages 16 (Turnhout, 2006), pp. 39-65.

<sup>93</sup> The pre-Conquest archive of Christ Church, Canterbury, for example, is uniquely well-preserved in comparison to other Anglo-Saxon archives. Cf. N. Brooks, *The Early History of the Church of Canterbury: Christ Church from 597 to 1066* (Leicester, 1984).

<sup>94</sup> S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978-1016: a Study in their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 13 (Cambridge, 1980), p. 3; P. Wormald, *Bede and the Conversion of England: the Charter Evidence*, Jarrow Lecture 1984 (1985), p. 1; F. M. Stenton, *The Latin Charters of the Anglo-Saxon Period* (Oxford, 1955), pp. 14-15; A. J. Robertson (trans. and ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Cambridge, 1956), pp. xx-xxi.

<sup>95</sup> Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 1-2. Cf. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, pp. 369-384.

medieval archivists themselves or by later antiquarian historians.<sup>96</sup> The Fonthill Letter, for example, was one of a number of documents labelled '*inutile*' by a twelfth-century archivist at Christ Church, Canterbury and apparently destined for removal or destruction.<sup>97</sup> That this and many similar charters survive to this day is thus due more to fortune than design.

In addition to the problems raised by rates of survival, charters are also problematic due to the very nature of the grants they record. That each describes a transaction in which the ownership of land is being transferred from one body to another requires an understanding of the nature of land tenure in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Lands held by an individual generally fall into one of two categories: bookland (*boclond*) and folkland (*folcland*).<sup>98</sup> Bookland is the most common and also the most straightforward of these;<sup>99</sup> its most important defining feature was that the land was given in perpetuity with full freedom of alienation, essentially differentiating it from land acquired by inheritance and therefore subject to customary rights of kinsmen. Thus land acquired as bookland could then be bequeathed to heirs, making it

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<sup>96</sup> Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 2-3. Cf. *Ibid.* p. 2 n.1-3, detailing antiquarian reports of charter destruction in the seventeenth century.

<sup>97</sup> Brooks, 'The Fonthill Letter', p. 306 and n. 5 for a list of similarly labelled charters.

<sup>98</sup> Folkland is mentioned in only four Anglo-Saxon sources, all dating between the mid-ninth and mid-tenth centuries: S 328, S 1508, 1 Ed 2 and the appendix to Alfred-Ine known as *Ymb Æwbricas*. For a definition of folkland, see especially S. Baxter and J. Blair, 'Land Tenure and Royal Patronage in the Early English Kingdom: a Model and a Case Study', in C. P. Lewis (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies: XXVIII*, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 2005 (Woodbridge, 2006), pp. 21-23; P. Wormald, '*On þa wæpnedhealfe*: Kingship and Royal Property from Æthelwulf to Edward the Elder' in N. J. Higham and D. H. Hill (eds.), *Edward the Elder* (London, 2001), pp. 264-279; Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 145-149. See also P. Vinogradoff, 'Folkland', *English Historical Review* 8 (1893), 1-17; P. Vinogradoff, *The Growth of the Manor*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (London, 1911), pp. 142-143, 244-245, 247; F. W. Maitland, *Domesday Book and Beyond: Three Essays in the Early History of England* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 244-258; F. M. Stenton, *Anglo-Saxon England*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. (Oxford, 1971), pp. 306-312; E. John, 'Folkland Reconsidered', in E. John (ed.), *Orbis Britanniae and Other Studies*, Studies in Early English History 4 (Leicester, 1966), pp. 64-79; S. Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (Oxford, 1994), p. 325.

<sup>99</sup> This is not to say that the study of bookland has not been without controversy and confusion. For an overview of the nuances of bookland and the associated bibliography, see Baxter and Blair, 'Land Tenure and Royal Patronage', p. 21.

virtually indistinguishable from land held in hereditary.<sup>100</sup> The properties transferred in the charters and under discussion here are categorised as bookland due to their alienable nature. This means that once the land was granted to the beneficiary, it could not be reclaimed by the heirs of the donor, nor was it expected to revert to the donor after a period of time. As this chapter will demonstrate, the grants of land to churches recorded in the Anglo-Saxon charters raise interesting questions about what it meant to alienate land to a church 'in perpetuity'.

The problematic nature of these grants is a result of the restrictions of bookland. The privilege of owning bookland was one reserved for thegns and other high-ranking members of society. While in theory any person in possession of bookland could dispose of it as he wished, the grants recorded in charters are almost solely restricted to the nobility and upper clergy, and the overwhelming majority of these record the king as the donor. As with the Anglo-Saxon wills, the charters are thus restrictive in the picture they present of land transactions between the laity and ecclesiastical institutions. We cannot view this evidence as representative of all gifts of land in Anglo-Saxon England, but it does represent a very important facet of such transactions.

Another difficulty in assessing the evidence of charters is determining the extent to which one can accept the description of the transaction at face value. For example, James Campbell, in an important article, has demonstrated that many charters actually record the sale of land even though the transaction may be described in terms of a gift.<sup>101</sup> Susan Reynolds has also noted that it is possible that transactions described as royal gifts of land may rather represent royal confirmations whereby

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<sup>100</sup> Wormald, 'Kingship and Royal Property', pp. 264-279; Wormald, *Conversion of England*, pp. 20-23. Wormald also notes that the ability for bookland to be granted in perpetuity should not be seen as creating a form of hereditary tenure; kin could not automatically lay claim to land acquired as bookland. Cf. Baxter and Blair, 'Land Tenure and Royal Patronage', pp. 20-21; Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, pp. 326-328; Baxter, *Earls of Mercia*, pp. 145-147.

<sup>101</sup> Campbell, 'Sale of Land', pp. 23-37.



the gift of a lay man was attributed to the king, thus enhancing the piety of the ruler, although there are no known Anglo-Saxon examples of this practice.<sup>102</sup> These cases are certainly the exception rather than the rule, but they raise important questions about the role of diplomatic formulae in the construction of a charter.

It has been widely noted that the Anglo-Saxon charters predominantly reflect ecclesiastical ideals rather than secular, a point which has led to a lively debate over the existence of a central royal chancery for the production of charters, primarily recorded in the works of Pierre Chaplais and Simon Keynes. In short, while Chaplais argued that the religious vocabulary utilised throughout the Anglo-Saxon charters was indicative of their production in monastic houses, Keynes has demonstrated that in certain periods at least these charters were produced by a royal writing office rather than monastic scriptoria.<sup>103</sup> Regardless of one's conclusions regarding this debate, the potential influences of either ecclesiastical or secular ideals in the production of charters cause one to question the truth behind the rhetoric of generosity recorded in the charters. In particular, it necessitates the re-evaluation of Chaplais' assertion that the use of religious formulae in charters reflects specific

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<sup>102</sup> Reynolds, *Fiefs and Vassals*, pp. 327-8.

<sup>103</sup> For an overview of arguments in favour of beneficiary production of charters, see primarily P. Chaplais, 'The Origin and Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diploma', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3.2 (1965); repr. in F. Ranger (ed.), *Prisca Munimenta: Studies in Archival and Administrative History Presented to Dr A. E. J. Hollaender* (London, 1973), pp. 28-42; P. Chaplais, 'The Anglo-Saxon Chancery: from the Diploma to the Writ', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3.4 (1966); repr. in F. Ranger (ed.), *Prisca Munimenta: Studies in Archival and Administrative History Presented to Dr A. E. J. Hollaender* (London, 1973), pp. 43-62; P. Chaplais, 'Some Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas on Single Sheets: Originals or Copies?', *Journal of the Society of Archivists*, 3.7 (1968); repr. in F. Ranger (ed.), *Prisca Munimenta: Studies in Archival and Administrative History Presented to Dr A. E. J. Hollaender* (London, 1973), pp. 63-87. For a discussion of the evidence for the existence of a royal chancery, see primarily Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 40-61, 79 and *passim*. Cf. D. N. Dumville, 'English Square Miniscule Script: the Mid-Century Phases', *Anglo-Saxon England* 23 (1994), pp. 133-164, which presumes the existence of an Anglo-Saxon chancery in the middle decades of the tenth century and credits this institution with facilitating the development of new scripts, esp. pp. 156-164. See also D. N. Dumville, *English Caroline Script and Monastic History: Studies in Benedictinism, A.D. 950-1030* (Woodbridge, 1993), p. 53, n. 235. For a reassessment of this debate, see C. Insley, 'Charters and Episcopal Scriptoria in the Anglo-Saxon South-West', *Early Medieval Europe* 7 (1998), pp. 179-184

intent on behalf of the donor rather than general formulae.<sup>104</sup> It is perhaps instructive to adopt the approach of Ross Balzaretti, who commented thus on the occurrence of formulae in Italian charters: ‘...even formulaic narratives can be very revealing of shared attitudes, perhaps especially so’.<sup>105</sup> The following discussion will present a more nuanced view of this issue in light of the evidence presented by Campbell, Reynolds, Chaplais and Keynes, looking specifically at the occurrence of references to almsgiving within individual charters and writs and the role which diplomatic formulae play in these.

One additional caveat for the following discussion involves the question of authenticity, important due to the prevalence of forgery in Anglo-Saxon charters and writs.<sup>106</sup> The fabrication of documents recording land ownership and privileges had obvious appeal to those claiming rights to an estate in both pre- and post-Conquest England.<sup>107</sup> Many of these forgeries are so skilfully realised that even an extensive analysis of the document and its text may not bring forth a conclusive result. An example of such a document is S 1119, dating 1042 x 1044 and issued to the monks of Westminster Abbey in the name of Edward the Confessor. Like a number of similar, contemporary writs, the substance of this document is problematic in minor ways, such as the absence of legal terms which one would expect in such a document.<sup>108</sup> Despite the minor qualms raised by this lack, there is nothing else in the writ which conclusively proves its fabrication. Thus, there is no reason to doubt the substance

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<sup>104</sup> Chaplais, ‘Origin and Authenticity’, p. 33.

<sup>105</sup> Balzaretti, ‘Spoken Narratives’, pp. 11-37, at p. 16.

<sup>106</sup> On authenticity of Anglo-Saxon charters, see especially Wormald, *Conversion of England*, pp. 3-5; N. Brooks, ‘Anglo-Saxon Charters: the Work of the Last Twenty Years’, *Anglo-Saxon England* 3 (1974), p. 212; Chaplais, ‘Early Anglo-Saxon Diplomas’, pp. 63-87. For a study which determines the value of the witness list in assessing authenticity, see Keynes, *Diplomas*. F. M. Stenton has cautioned against the unilateral dismissal of charters which may contain seemingly anachronistic formulae. See his comments in Stenton, *Latin Charters*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>107</sup> F. M. Stenton has noted that the absence of a known motive for forgery may point toward the authenticity of a charter. Stenton, *Latin Charters*, pp. 20-22.

<sup>108</sup> F. E. Harmer (trans. and ed.), *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Stamford, 1989), p. 495.

of the recorded transaction, but the method in which it was recorded is suspect; the writ has not been forged, but nor does it represent the original document. The best we can say is that the document is 'probably authentic', and it is difficult to remove the qualification.<sup>109</sup> The academic work of the last thirty years has provided valuable critical commentary on a number of charters and cartularies, particularly through the ongoing publication of the British Academy series of *Anglo-Saxon Charters*. There is still much work to be done in this field, but for many charters and writs we are unlikely to ever be able to definitively use words such as 'authentic' or 'spurious' without subsequent qualifications.

In light of these considerations, only texts which may be determined to be original documents may be seen as representing the authentic choices in formulae and vocabulary chosen by the draftsman;<sup>110</sup> a later forger may have inserted new phrases or vocabulary, for example in terms of almsgiving, in order to give the text an apparently 'original' use of formulae, or he may have done so as a reflection of his own contemporary values.<sup>111</sup> With this caution in mind, for the purposes of this study it seems logical to focus only on charters which may be deemed original, as these original charters would be most likely to represent contemporary attitudes to

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. discussions in Harmer, *Writs*, no. 75 and comments on pp. 307-8, 495; C. N. L. Brooke with G. Keir, *London 800-1216: the Shaping of a City* (London, 1975), pp. 193, 369; M. Gelling, *The Early Charters of the Thames Valley*, *Studies in Early English History* 7 (Leicester, 1979), no. 237.

<sup>110</sup> Simon Keynes has noted that the draftsman had a particular freedom of manoeuvre in assembling the constituent parts of a charter, a fact which is particularly noticeable in the later, more verbose charters of Æthelred II, where the draftsmen seem to make a point of creativity. For his arguments against the existence of an Anglo-Saxon formulary, see Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 41-42, 115-120. For comments on the role played by diplomatic in Italian charters, see R. Balzaretto, 'The Politics of Property in Ninth-Century Milan: Familial Motives and Monastic Strategies in the Village of Inzago', *Mélanges de l'École française de Rome, Moyen Âge* 111.2 (1999) p. 754 n. 43, 758-759.

<sup>111</sup> See, for example, S 370, 391, 538, 746, 804, 1016, post-Conquest forgeries which refer to gifts of land 'in puram et perpetuam elemosinam', a phrase which only enters common use in the late twelfth-century. Cf. S. Miller (ed.), *Charters of the New Minster, Winchester*, *Anglo-Saxon Charters* 9 (Oxford, 2001), p. 40; B. Thompson, 'Free Alms Tenure in the Twelfth Century', in M. Chibnall (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies: XVI*, *Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1992* (Woodbridge, 1993), pp. 221-243.

almsgiving and the use of its vocabulary.<sup>112</sup> Yet doing so restricts the pool of evidence to an unacceptable size: of the forty-six tenth- and eleventh-century charters which contain references to almsgiving, only fifteen may be regarded as acceptably authentic, and only three of these are classed as genuine originals.<sup>113</sup> In addition, there are nine charters which appear to be mostly authentic or have an authentic basis, but as with the case of S 1119, discussed previously, the extent to which they likely resemble the original makes it difficult to determine the veracity of the use of the vocabulary of almsgiving.<sup>114</sup> Of the fifteen authentic and original charters, two of them (S 1444 and 1445) contain the phrase *to ælmessan* and were discussed with the wills in the previous section. Thus, in order to represent the evidence as honestly as possible, the following discussion will use the remaining thirteen charters as our pool of evidence, focusing specifically on the documents which provide the most descriptive accounts of the practice of almsgiving.

At first glance, there appear to be very few similarities in form throughout this group. The majority were composed in Latin but two, S 1471 and 1161, both classified as writs, were composed in Old English. In terms of date, the charters are fairly evenly spread out across the time period in question, with a few being grouped together within a particular king's reign. This is most clear in the reigns of Æthelred, whose three authentic charters were issued in the period 994 x 1001, and Edward the Confessor, who issued three charters in 1045 x 1046 and one dating 1060 x 1066. The charters cannot be any more easily grouped according to the location of almsgiving terminology within the charter: four references appear in the proem, six in the dispositive clause and five in the anathema. Nor does the location of the cartulary seem to be a unifying factor: four charters were placed at Old Minster,

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<sup>112</sup> The pros and cons of this approach were also discussed by Sarah Foot, who also adopted a similar methodology to that outlined here in her 'Reading Anglo-Saxon Charters', p. 46.

<sup>113</sup> Authentic: S 493, 627, 754, 820, 880, 884, 899, 947, 975, 1012, 1015, 1161, 1444, 1445, 1471. Original: S 880, 884, 1015.

<sup>114</sup> Likely authentic: S 904, 915, 1058, 1119, 1129, 1142, 1146, 1148, 1450.

Winchester, two charters come from Christ Church, Canterbury, and the remaining nine charters represent single occurrences within a given archive. The beneficiaries of the individual donations are likewise difficult to categorise: while all of the donations were ultimately intended to benefit a monastic institution, the immediate beneficiaries of the charters include a nun, a noble *matrona*, a bishop and a *fidelis* in addition to religious communities. Cross-referencing the charters between categories does not produce any more satisfactory results; the section of a charter containing a reference to almsgiving does not seem to be affected by date or location. Although these authentic charters do not fit into any easily definable pattern regarding these categories of date, form and location, a few similarities do emerge when one compares the use of almsgiving terminology within a given charter.

#### *Formula or Free Will? – Discerning Religious Motives*

Further emphasising the pious nature of the transactions recorded in the Anglo-Saxon charters is the frequent inclusion of a purported religious motive for the donation somewhere in the text. Again, there is little consistency in use, and this motive may appear in either the proem or dispositive section of a charter. A popular motif seems to have been the use of the phrase '*Date et dabitur vobis*', a reference to Luke 6:38, which appears in two of the authentic charters and many other charters of dubious origin.<sup>115</sup> The authentic charters, S 493 and S 1015, have no obvious similarities between them. The first, S 493, dates from 944 and is addressed from King Edmund to Ælfgyth, a nun at Wilton. It concerns land in Wiltshire, and was preserved in the archive at Wilton.<sup>116</sup> The other, S 1015, dates from 1046 and is addressed from King Edward to the community of St Ouen, Rouen. It concerns land

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<sup>115</sup> See, e.g., S 747, 1006, 1022. Cf. C. R. Hart, *The Danelaw* (London, 1992), p. 508.

<sup>116</sup> Printed in H. Pierquin, *Recueil général des chartes anglo-saxonnes: Les saxons en Angleterre, 604-1061* (Paris, 1912), pt. 2, no. 80.

at Mersea, Essex and was eventually deposited at the archive in Rouen.<sup>117</sup> Despite their differences, both charters do contain lengthy passages of religious prose which provide a general context for the specific acts of disposition outlined within.

The Wiltshire charter, S 493, begins with a traditional invocation, and the proem states that King Edmund had decided to record the transaction of land in writing so that future generations would be able to maintain their claim on the property.<sup>118</sup> The reference to almsgiving occurs in the dispositive section of the charter, where the king states: *'Hanc elemosinam mihi providens prodesse profuturum quicquid piis petitionibus pro Dei amore largitus sum ut evangelica provulgatur oratio. "Date et dabitur vobis"'*.<sup>119</sup> Immediately after this, the charter describes the nature of the gift: three hides of land at Rollington to the nun, Ælfgyth, to be held for her lifetime free from financial obligations and worldly servitude. It ends with an anathema praising those who might amplify this gift and cursing those who might violate it. The mention of almsgiving immediately preceding the recitation of the *'Date et dabitur vobis'* phrase indicates that the gift of land described in the charter should be considered a gift of alms, and this conclusion is strengthened by the later description of the land as being free from financial obligations, a point to which I shall return shortly. The pious motivation of this gift is further emphasised in comparison to a gift of King Eadred in 955 of twenty hides in Somerset to a nun of Wilton in exchange for 120 mancuses of gold.<sup>120</sup> This nun, identified in the charter as Ælfgyth, is likely to be the same Ælfgyth discussed above,<sup>121</sup> and the distinction between these two gifts further

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<sup>117</sup> Printed with translation in C. Hart, 'The Mersea Charter of Edward the Confessor', *Essex Archaeology and History: The Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 12 (1980), pp. 99-101 and in Hart, *The Danelaw*, pp. 505-507.

<sup>118</sup> K 401, B 795.

<sup>119</sup> 'Whatsoever was given for the love of God will do good to benefit these alms, providing for myself with pious petitions, just as that evangelical speech has made known: "Give and it shall be given to you"'.  
<sup>120</sup> S 563.

<sup>121</sup> S. Foot, *Veiled Women: Female religious communities in England, 871-1066*, vol. 2 (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 222-223.

highlights the differences between gifts described in terms of almsgiving and others which are not.

A similar layout can be found in the Mersea charter, S 1015. Unlike S 493, this document places the reference to almsgiving in a lengthy proem which provides valuable context for the recorded transaction.<sup>122</sup> The charter begins with an invocation to almighty God, followed by an elaborate proem which establishes the pious nature of the gift. It is worth quoting the relevant parts of the proem and dispositive section here:

*...nunc ut omnibus necesse est christianis, quamdiu hic in mortali uita persistunt, de perituris celestia de caducis eterna mercari, Ego rex Eaduardus hoc fretus sum consilio, quia eadem ueritas dicit, "Date et dabitur vobis", et item scriptura intonat, "Diuicie uiri redemptio anime eius", et Salomon, "Fili, elemosina animam a morte liberat, et non patitur ire in tenebris". Quapropter istorum preceptorum necnon aliorum auxiliatus adminiculo. Ego rex Eaduardus superius prenotatus, Anglorum atque Northunhymbrorum, do rege omnium regum, domino sanctoque Petro, necnon [almo antisti Audoeno sibi] que] seruiantibus, qui proprius fiscus attenus meorum antecessorum fuit, quandam partem insule quae uacatur, mersege, cum [omnibus terrisque sibi adiacentibus], et cum pratis, siluisque, piscaturiis, sicuti integram hanc et possessiuam habui, curriclo duorum dierum postquam dei gratia [ad apicem regiminis] perueni.<sup>123</sup>*

Although parts of this section, particularly the statement that one must purchase heavenly things with the temporal, are standard in the Anglo-Saxon charters, it is the

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<sup>122</sup> From the beginning to the quotation of *Date et dabitur vobis*, this proem is repeated in S 747. Cf. Hart, *The Danelaw*, p. 508.

<sup>123</sup> Printed with translation in Hart, 'Mersea Charter', pp. 99-101 and in Hart, *The Danelaw*, pp. 505, 507. '...now since it behoves all Christians, so long as they continue in this mortal life, to purchase with things temporal that which is heavenly, and with things which will perish that which is eternal, I King Edward, relying upon this counsel, because Truth itself says: "Give, and it shall be given unto you", and likewise scripture states emphatically: "The riches of man are the redemption of his soul", and Solomon says: "My son, alms deliver the soul from death, and suffer it not to go into the darkness": Wherefore, resting on these and other precepts, I the aforesaid Edward, king of the English and the Northumbrians, give to the King of all kings, and to the blessed lord Peter, and also his beloved priest Ouen, and those who serve him [i.e. the monks of the monastery at Ouen, dedicated originally to St. Peter] that which was formerly the private revenue of my predecessors, a certain part of the island called *Mersege* [Mersea], with all the land and property adjacent to it, and with meadows, woods, and fisheries, just as I held it intact for two days after (by the grace of God) I became head of the kingdom'.

emphasis on almsgiving which gives this charter its charitable connotation.<sup>124</sup> The specific references to redemption and deliverance from death are closely tied to the ideas of reciprocal reward and almsgiving in this sequence of biblical verses. The draftsman of the charter makes an implicit link between almsgiving and the grant of land by placing the statement of disposition immediately after these verses. Thus one is encouraged to see the grant of land itself as Edward's gift of alms to the monastery. The clear implication is that the gift of land at Mersea to the community of St Ouen is to be considered a gift of alms, one which fulfils the biblical precepts described in the proem. Cyril Hart has noted that the likely incentive for this grant, made 'two days after I became head of the kingdom', is that the Confessor was staying at St Ouen when he received news of Harthacnut's death, and thus Edward made the grant in gratitude for his succession.<sup>125</sup> If Hart is correct in his reading of the situation, then it is indeed logical that Edward would imbue his gratitude with overtones of almsgiving, and thus the reference to almsgiving is likely to apply to the grant itself. It certainly seems as if Edward was giving thanks to God for his good fortune through a gift of alms.

It is worth noting here the existence of another charter, S 774, an obvious twelfth-century forgery, purporting to date to 969.<sup>126</sup> It describes a confirmation of privileges from King Edgar to St Peter's, Thorney and contains the passage "*date elemosinam; et omnia munda sunt uobis*". *Ergo dando elemosinam iuxta hoc ipsius dictum*', deliberately linking the biblical injunction to give alms with a phrase describing the confirmation of this gift.<sup>127</sup> It is impossible to know for certain if this formulation is a post-Conquest interpolation or part of the original document, but the blatant emphasis on

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<sup>124</sup> This theme is also extant in the Anglo-Saxon laws. See, for example, I As 4.1.

<sup>125</sup> Hart, 'Mersea Charter', pp. 97-99. Hart compares this charter to a similar grant made by William the Conqueror as thanks for his victory at the Battle of Hastings.

<sup>126</sup> Printed in A. S. Napier and W.H. Stevenson (eds.), *The Crawford Collection of Early Charters and Documents* (Oxford, 1895), no. 6.

<sup>127</sup> "...give alms; and all things are clean for you. Therefore alms will be given by me in like manner to this, its [the gospel's] command'.



giving alms because the Bible tells one to do so seems to fit in with the other charters under discussion here.

The religious context given in these two charters clearly indicates that the gifts of land detailed within were to be considered as alms. The specific references to biblical passages relating to almsgiving are reminiscent of the homiletic texts which encouraged just such types of actions from the laity. Ælfric's homily *Dominica V post pentecosten*, for example, for which the pericope is Luke 6:36-42, states, "*Dælað and doð god, and eow bið god forgifen*". *Se ðe dæleð for Gode, God geeacnað his þing, and him eft be hundfealdum his ælmessan forgylt*'.<sup>128</sup> The emphasis on gift and reward in these charters, and indeed in the Anglo-Saxon wills discussed in the previous section, indicates a desire on behalf of the tenth- and eleventh-century donors to actively participate in the rhetoric of almsgiving espoused in the tenth century by homilists such as Ælfric. That some of these charters reflect this ideal more than fifty years before Ælfric began composing his homilies indicates very clearly that the importance of almsgiving was widely recognised by the laity before it was promoted by the homilists. In addition, the references in both charters to giving in the hope of gaining a reward, particularly the quotation in the Mersea charter which encourages the giving of temporal things in the hope of gaining spiritual reward, emphasise an acknowledgement of and participation in a system of spiritual gift-exchange through the use of alms gifts.

While the use of phrases emphasising gift-exchange and heavenly reward, particularly '*Date et dabitur vobis*', could be combined to form common formulae which one should probably not normally take at face value, the contextual evidence of S 493 and 1015 indicates that sometimes charters did mean precisely what they

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<sup>128</sup> Supp. XIII: *Dominica V post pentecosten*, lines 106-108. "Give [alms] and do good things, and good things will be given to you". He who gives [alms] for God, God increases his things, and repays his alms to him again a hundredfold'. Cf. CH II.VII: *Dominica prima in quadragesima*, lines 38-41; CH II. XIX: *Feria secunda, letania maiore*, lines 132-134.

said.<sup>129</sup> The overt emphasis on almsgiving, gift-exchange and spiritual salvation in these charters implies a desire on behalf of the draftsmen, or perhaps even the kings themselves, that these gifts should indeed be seen as acts of almsgiving.

Similar themes emerge in the other charters which use the terminology of almsgiving in the expression of a religious motive. The authentic charter S 754, dating from 967 and recording a gift of eight hides from King Edgar to a noblewoman named Wynflæd, survives in the archive of Old Minster, Winchester.<sup>130</sup> Like S 1015, it references the book of Tobias in the proem of the charter, stating, *'Regnante in perpetuum domino nostro Jhesu Christo qui cuncta patris imperio ac pariter sancti spiritus gratia vivificante disponit. De qua re magna nobis necesse est per elemosinam largitate precepta Dei implere, sicut in Tobia dictum est "magna nobis fiducia est coram summo Deo elemosina"'*.<sup>131</sup> This is immediately followed by the exposition: *'Quapropter ego Eadgar tocius Albionis basileus libens perpetuali dapsilitate, cuidam matrone nobili generositas prosapia exorte nomine Winflæd Octo mansas terræ loco qui vulgari adstipulatione nuncupater æt Meone 7 to Fernfelda condono ut habeat et possideat cum omnibus utensilibus'*.<sup>132</sup> The proem therefore highlights Edgar's generosity, and implies that the purpose behind the gift described immediately after is to fulfil this biblical injunction to give alms. Thus, while Edgar makes no specific reference to the

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<sup>129</sup> See also the comments by Elizabeth Tyler and Ross Balzaretti that 'convention is not merely textual, it is fundamentally social'. E. M. Tyler and R. Balzaretti, 'Introduction', in E. M. Tyler and R. Balzaretti (eds.), *Narrative and History in the Early Medieval West*, Studies in the Early Middle Ages 16 (Turnhout, 2006), p. 8.

<sup>130</sup> Printed K 535; B 1200. This does not seem to be the same Wynflæd described as Edgar's grandmother in S 744, a confirmation of land to Shaftesbury Abbey at which she may have been a nun. Cf. S. E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Shaftesbury Abbey*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 5 (Oxford, 1996), no. 26.

<sup>131</sup> 'Reigning in perpetuity in our lord Jesus Christ, who, having been brought back to life by the command of the Father together with the grace of the holy spirit, administers all things. Regarding this, there is great need for us to fulfil the command of God liberally by means of almsgiving, just as it is said in Tobias, "Alms are a great confidence to us before the most high God"'. This represents a slight paraphrase of Tobias 4.12.

<sup>132</sup> 'Therefore I Edgar, king of all Britain, pleased by a perpetual abundance, give to a certain matron named Wynflæd, of noble breeding and without family, eight hides of land in a place which is commonly called Meon and at Farnfield, that she might have and possess it with all useful things'.

giving of alms in return for spiritual salvation, his emphasis on providing a biblical precedent for his gift indicates a desire to demonstrate that his actions visibly reflect his piety as a king. God has commanded men to give alms, and in this charter Edgar acknowledges this command and records its fulfilment.

An authentic record of a grant of a *cenobium* and its appurtenant lands from King Æthelred to the nuns of Shaftesbury Abbey in 1001 also follows this pattern.<sup>133</sup> This charter is typical of those from this period in Æthelred's reign, in that it contains a lengthy discourse in the dispositive section recording the circumstances leading up to the present transaction.<sup>134</sup> The proem contains three quotations from the book of Luke, the first of which, Luke 21:31-33, refers to the redemption of souls at the end of the world: '*Cum videritis hec fieri, scitote quoniam prope est regnum Dei. Amen dico vobis quia non preteribit generacio hec, donec omnia fiant. Celum et terra transibunt, uerba autem mea non transibunt*'.<sup>135</sup> This is followed by a conflation of two other verses, Luke 12:33 and Luke 11:41: '*Uendite que possidetis et date elemosinam*', '*et ecce omnia munda sunt uobis*'.<sup>136</sup> This theme of redemption and forgiveness of sins is echoed in Æthelred's statement that he was acting for the salvation of his own soul as well as of those of past and future kings. Æthelred's emphasis on the redemption of souls and the forgiveness of sin should not be surprising given the king's concern with the spiritual health of the nation, as evidenced in his authorisation of a number of law codes stressing repentance and almsgiving.<sup>137</sup> Indeed, a series of diplomas issued in the period 993-1006 express the king's regret that under the influence of his advisors he had made poor decisions, particularly in reducing the privileges and

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<sup>133</sup> S 899. Printed in Kelly, *Shaftesbury Abbey*, no. 29.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 95-98; Kelly, *Shaftesbury Abbey*, pp. xxii, 118.

<sup>135</sup> Luke 21:31-33: 'So you also, when you shall see these things come to pass, know that the kingdom of God is at hand. Amen, I say to you, this generation shall not pass away till all things be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away'.

<sup>136</sup> 'Sell what you possess and give alms', 'and behold all things are clean unto you'.

<sup>137</sup> See especially VII and VIIa Atr.

appropriating the property of certain churches.<sup>138</sup> There is a decidedly penitential tone to these charters, strengthening the impression that the king sought to make amends for his misdeeds in the hope that the misfortunes of his kingdom might be reversed. The Shaftesbury charter fits well with its contemporaries, given its emphasis on redemption and forgiveness. The immediate context for this grant is likely to be the translation of Edward the Martyr's remains from the churchyard to the nunnery at Shaftesbury in the same year, and it is likely that Æthelred sought to enhance his own position with this gift of land.<sup>139</sup> The textual evidence of rhetoric relating to the forgiveness of sins and the salvation of souls implies that the emphasis on almsgiving was meant to enhance the idea of the king's piety.

In each of these charters the religious motive stated in either the proem or the dispositive section was ideologically linked to the gift itself, implying in each case that the donation was considered to be a gift of alms. As stated at the beginning of this chapter, one must ask questions about the nature of charter diplomatic and the interaction between the diplomatic formulae and the grant itself, particularly in the extent to which one may take formulaic phrases at face value. It is widely understood that the draftsmen of charters made use of standard diplomatic phrases, and it is these phrases which help to determine the chronology, authenticity and even the individual scribes of such charters.<sup>140</sup> It is precisely this kind of evidence which has been used in order to help establish the existence of a central writing office where charters were produced.<sup>141</sup> Yet one should not immediately dismiss such formulae as obscuring individual intent behind the creation of the documents

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<sup>138</sup> This is especially apparent in S 876, a grant of privileges to Abingdon Abbey. Cf. Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 176-208.

<sup>139</sup> Kelly, *Shaftesbury Abbey*, p. 119.

<sup>140</sup> Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>141</sup> See especially Keynes, *Diplomas*, esp. pp. 40-61.

themselves.<sup>142</sup> While groups of charters, particularly those linked chronologically or to a certain scribe or cartulary, may exhibit similar characteristics which presume the existence of a standard pattern of formulae available, they are not solely composed of such formulae. Indeed, individual variations are common; as noted earlier many of the later charters of Æthelred, while containing standard formulae, also contain lengthy discursive sections detailing the history of the land in question.

The charters discussed in this section illustrate this middle ground aptly. It has already been noted that there are no obvious links between these documents in content, context or appearance; it should not be expected that they would be any more similar in terms of diplomatic. Indeed, their references to almsgiving, while similar in theme, do not seem to be drawing on any established formulae. The Shaftesbury charter, as noted previously, is thematically similar to its contemporaries in that it expresses an interest in redemption and forgiveness of sins. Yet it is one of only three authentic charters from the reign of Æthelred to contain a reference to almsgiving, and the only such charter to do so in the proem. It is well-known that the later charters of Æthelred may be identified by the florid prose of their proems, but one should not readily dismiss the insertion of a reference to almsgiving as mere scribal whim, especially considering the tone of the rest of the charter and the nature of the gift. A similar argument may be made for the Mersea charter of 1046. In this document the author reuses many formulae which occur in tenth-century diplomas: the first part of the proem is also found in S 747; the phrase '*Date et dabitur uobis*' also occurs in S 1006 and S 1022; and the paraphrase of Proverbs 13:8, '*Diuicie uiri redemptio anime eius,*' appears in S 1032.<sup>143</sup> Yet the reference to Tobias 4:11, '*Fili, elemosina animam a morte liberat, et non patitur ire in*

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<sup>142</sup> See, for example, Chaplais, 'Origin and Authenticity', p. 33, argues that religious element sometimes reflected actual process of charter making and we should not dismiss proems and curses as 'mere verbiage'. Cf. Balzaretti, 'Spoken Narratives', p. 16.

<sup>143</sup> Hart also notes that the anathema is very similar to that of S 881, the dating clause if sound in S 998, 1020, 1022, 1023 and 1025, and use of *libens* in the attestation also occurs in S 999. Hart, *The Danelaw*, pp. 507-508.

*tenebris'*, which provides a thematic link between the two previous verses and the ensuing dispositive section, is not repeated in any other surviving Anglo-Saxon charter. The implication is that the author, while utilising standard phrases in parts of the charter, employed some type of personal initiative in inserting the reference to almsgiving. The evidence of the charters discussed in this section clearly indicates a, perhaps deliberate, ideological link between biblical verses on almsgiving and the gifts of land described in these documents. While the draftsmen may have drawn on the examples of other charters in drafting these, they also added references to almsgiving independent of their sources. Thus it appears that these references have been included in order to create a cohesive sense of piety surrounding the descriptions of the individual transactions. These qualifications are necessary due to the restricted number of charters in this study, yet the evidence is compelling enough to challenge any assumptions as to the formulaic use of alms terminology.

#### *Protecting One's Alms – the Evidence of Anathemae*

Another group of charters also demonstrates this combination of formulae and initiative in their inclusion of references to almsgiving in the anathema clause. The anathema, or sanction, is located near the end of the charter and typically invokes God's protection for the grant and warns of spiritual punishment for anyone who infringes upon the transaction. Some charters also include a phrase blessing anyone who helps uphold the grant, and both the blessings and warnings are generally formulaic, adding another dimension of religious rhetoric to the grant. The charters under discussion here again represent a range of locations and recipients and have no obvious connections between them, although they were each issued within a period of fifty years.<sup>144</sup> This may represent a later development in charter formation and diplomatic, although considering the lack of general concordance between these charters, it seems more likely to be coincidence. Despite this, the evidence of these

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<sup>144</sup> S 880 (994); S 947 (1016); S 975 (1035); S 1012 (1045).

documents provides an interesting context for the previous discussions of both the diplomatic and the religious motive of almsgiving in charters.

The oldest charter in this group is S 880, an original document dating from 994 and recording a grant of privileges from King Æthelred to Ealdred, bishop of Cornwall, namely freedom from royal taxes.<sup>145</sup> This document is the only surviving Anglo-Saxon diploma written partly in gold letters, and Archbishop Sigeric of Canterbury may have been involved in its production.<sup>146</sup> It is also notable for its relationship to a small series of documents commonly referred to as the *Orthodoxorum* charters, particularly in its similarities to S 876, a confirmation and grant of privileges from King Æthelred to Abingdon Abbey, dated 993.<sup>147</sup> The two charters share elements of the proem, dating clause, styles of attestation and sanction, although the draftsman of S 880 has removed almost all references to the Virgin Mary, an important aspect of the *Orthodoxorum* proems.<sup>148</sup> The relationship between these documents is controversial, particularly regarding the order in which they were produced.<sup>149</sup> For the purposes of this study, however, it is more useful to focus on the similarities between the documents. Aside from the word *Orthodoxorum*, which is the first word of the proem in the majority of these texts, the charters are also linked by their verbosity and formulation. Æthelred's grant to Ealdred, while similar to the *Orthodoxorum* charters in general formulation, has been characterised as a 'free

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<sup>145</sup> Printed in A. W. Haddan and W. Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents Relating to Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. 1 (Oxford, 1869; repr. 1964), pp. 683-686.

<sup>146</sup> S.E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Abingdon Abbey, Part 1*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 7 (Oxford, 2000), pp. xc, xciii; P. Chaplais, 'The Authenticity of the Royal Anglo-Saxon Diplomas of Exeter', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 39 (1966), 1-34; repr. with addendum in P. Chaplais, *Essays in Medieval Diplomacy and Administration* (London, 1981), no. XV, pp. 20-21; Insley, 'Charters and Episcopal Scriptoria', pp. 188-189.

<sup>147</sup> The *Orthodoxorum* charters are S 658, 673, 786, 788, 812 and 876.

<sup>148</sup> Kelly, *Abingdon Abbey, Part 1*, pp. lc, lciii, cxi, n. 119.

<sup>149</sup> Kelly, *Abingdon Abbey, Part 1*, pp. lxxxiv-cxxxi and Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 98-101.

adaptation' of the model, due to the apparent alterations of its proem and disposition in comparison with the other charters.<sup>150</sup>

As stated previously, it is the anathema clause which is of the most interest here. The *Orthodoxorum* charters all contain the common sanction which begins, '*Si quis uero tam epilepticus philargirie seductus amentia quod non optamus hanc nostre munificentie dapsilitatem ausu temerario infringere temptauerit...*'. The draftsman of S 880, again adapting from his model, replaced the reference to '*nostrae munificentie*' with '*nostrae elemosinae*'.<sup>151</sup> While it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions regarding the use of almsgiving terminology, especially considering that this charter is known to be an adaptation of a contemporary model, it is certainly interesting that the scribe, or possibly the Archbishop himself, chose to characterise the donation as almsgiving. Indeed, earlier in the charter the gift itself is described as being given '*pro redemptione anime mee et pro absolutione criminum meorum*'.<sup>152</sup> As discussed in the previous section, this charter is one of a group issued by Æthelred in the period 993-1006 which deliberately invoke a tone of redemption and forgiveness. Despite the formulaic nature of the anathema clause, the inclusion of a reference to almsgiving helps to create a coherent picture of piety and redemption throughout the charter, and one should not easily dismiss the decision of the draftsman to do so.

A similar case may be observed in S 947, an authentic charter recording a grant of land from King Edmund the Ætheling to an unidentified 'New Minster' in 1016.<sup>153</sup> Like S 880, this charter is similar in formulation to a group of charters, in particular S

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<sup>150</sup> Kelly, *Abingdon Abbey, Part 1*, pp. lc, lciii, cxi, n. 119.

<sup>151</sup> Cf. Sanction 'S' in Simon Keynes, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: Anglo-Saxon Diplomatic*, <http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/chartwww/diplomatic.html> (accessed 05 November, 2009); Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 98-102. This sanction also appears in similar form in S 553, 658, 673, 756, 786, 788, 811, 812, 836, 838, 876, 888, 892, 911, 953, 954, and 971.

<sup>152</sup> '...for the redemption of my [Æthelred's] soul and for the absolution of my sins'.

<sup>153</sup> Printed in C. R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England* (Leicester, 1966), no. 165. It is possible that this refers to New Minster, Winchester. Cf. D. Whitelock, 'Review of C.R. Hart, *The Early Charters of Eastern England*', *English Historical Review*, 84 (1969), p. 113.



948, a grant from Edmund to Thorney Abbey.<sup>154</sup> Also like S 880, the New Minster charter differs from others in its insertions of phrases relating to almsgiving. In the dispositive section, the king states that, for the love of his redemption and because the holy book states '*Date et dabitur uobis*', he has granted this land to the minster as a perpetual inheritance. This is followed by another statement that the grant is effected for the redemption of the king's soul and for the souls of his wife and Siuerthus, the man to whom part of the land originally belonged. The linking of these two themes, 'give and it shall be given to you' and land being given for the redemption of the donor's soul, implies a pious aspect of the gift itself as seen in the charters discussed previously. The anathema of the charter also indicates the pious nature of the gift, stating that those who amplify '*hanc nostram donationem et elemosinam*' will succeed to eternal glory. The reference to alms places this charter firmly within the tradition of giving alms to a minster with the expectation of prayers for one's soul in return.<sup>155</sup> Again, like S 880, the author of this charter adopts other contemporary formulae in the creation of this document, yet in the references to almsgiving it certainly seems that he is attempting to establish a religious motive for this gift. This cannot be stated with certainty, but it does seem to be the case in these two charters that the draftsman has deviated from a standard formula with his insertion of a reference to almsgiving. At the very least these charters provide evidence that anathema clauses, usually the most formulaic part of the charter, should not always be dismissed as devoid of meaning.

It is perhaps instructive to briefly compare these charters to a group of writs dating between 1042 and 1066, all of which are addressed to the monks at Westminster, where they are preserved. These writs, S 1119, 1129, 1142 and 1146, all seem to have

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<sup>154</sup> Keynes, *Diplomas*, p. 126 n. 136.

<sup>155</sup> See also S 975, a grant of land from Cnut to Sherborne Abbey with a similar clause in the anathema. This charter also asks for prayers on behalf of the king, an apparently unique feature in Cnut's charters. Cf. Mary Anne O'Donovan (ed.), *Charters of Sherborne*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 3 (Oxford, 1988), p. 57.

an authentic basis, but their preservation in post-Conquest manuscripts indicates that they are likely later copies of authentic documents.<sup>156</sup> Each of these writs also shares similarities of formulation in the anathema clause, containing almost identical versions of a statement that the land has been given for the redemption of Edward's soul, and he forbids anyone to alienate these alms: '*ic nelle nateswan gefafian þat anig man atbrede oððer geutige mine gife 7 mine almesse*'.<sup>157</sup> It appears in this case that the references to almsgiving are composed of a specific formula, although whether this is pre- or post-Conquest is impossible to say. This in turn indicates that references to almsgiving cannot always be seen as adding a pious connotation to the charter in which they occur, and it emphasises the need to view each charter in light of as much contextual evidence as possible in order to determine the true intention behind the grant.

### *Giving Land in Alms*

As will soon become apparent, the final three charters under consideration in this study present interesting challenges for their analysis in terms of almsgiving. Each of these charters uses the phrases '*to ælmessean*' or '*in eleemosynam*' to describe the gift itself, rather than as an appeal to the mercy of a third party, as discussed in the previous section. The first of these, S 627, is regarded as authentic.<sup>158</sup> It records a grant of land in Somerset from King Eadwig to Hehelm, his *fidelis*, dated 956. After a lengthy proem, the charter records that five hides of land at Bathampton and everything belonging to them is to be granted to Hehelm as a perpetual inheritance

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<sup>156</sup> These writs are printed respectively in Harmer, *Writs*, as nos. 75, 85, 98, 102. See also S 1148, printed as Harmer no. 104, which also contains reference to almsgiving in the anathema, is preserved at Westminster and is of questionable authenticity. It is also addressed to the monks of Westminster and has a similar date, implying that these five writs may be loosely considered as a group.

<sup>157</sup> 'Therefore I will not on any consideration permit that anyone set aside or alienate my gift and my alms'. Quoted from S 1129. The one exception to this formulation is found in S 1119 which records Edward's confirmation of land which Ulf and his wife Cynegyth have given to Westminster Abbey. The anathema contains the same statement as the others, substituting '*mine gife 7 mine almesse*' with '*heora geofa 7 heore almesse*'.

<sup>158</sup> Printed in S. E. Kelly (ed.), *Charters of Bath and Wells*, Anglo-Saxon Charters 13 (Oxford, 2007), no. 8.

(*in hereditatem perhennem*) without royal tax and without the burdens of military service and the construction of fortresses and bridges.<sup>159</sup> It also records Hehelm's agreement that this land be offered to Bath Abbey '*pro me et pro se post sui obitum...in elemosinam*'.<sup>160</sup>

Susan Kelly has noted that the immediate context for this grant appears to be a larger initiative on behalf of King Eadwig to gather support in the area around Bath through the restoration of estates in case relations should deteriorate between himself and his brother, Edgar.<sup>161</sup> The political unrest in the years of Eadwig's reign explains the nature of the grant itself, however the reason for describing the gift to the monastery 'as alms' is not immediately apparent. Grants in which a property was to revert to an ecclesiastical institution after a donee's death were not uncommon in the tenth and eleventh centuries; similar transactions are recorded in the Anglo-Saxon wills, although such reversionary grants sometimes raise the suspicion that they were inserted at a later date in order to benefit a particular institution.<sup>162</sup> In the Bathampton charter, there is no reason to doubt that this clause was part of the original diploma. Although the reversion is not recorded as a stipulation of the original grant, the fact that it was made on behalf of the king, the initial donor of the property, indicates that it may indeed have been so.<sup>163</sup> The statement that the land at Bathampton was to be given to Bath Abbey 'as alms' may

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<sup>159</sup> '*...sine fisco regali, absque tribus communibus, expeditione uidelicet, arcis pontisque constructione*'. Regarding the granting of estates free from royal taxes, see the arguments of Benjamin Thompson that twelfth-century donations of land given free from secular services were motivated by a spiritual rather than an economic return. Therefore, when one specified that a gift of alms was to be free of secular obligations, it ensured that the profit derived from the estate would be used to sustain the monks and their monastery, who would then pray for the soul of the donor; the donor therefore ensured that it could not be used for any alternative, secular purpose. B. Thompson, 'Free Alms Tenure in the Twelfth Century', in M. Chibnall (ed.), *Anglo-Norman Studies: XVI*, Proceedings of the Battle Conference 1992 (Woodbridge, 1993), p. 230.

<sup>160</sup> '*...for me [King Eadwig] and for himself after his death...as alms*'.

<sup>161</sup> Kelly, *Bath and Wells*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>162</sup> See above, Chapter Four. For reversion in other Anglo-Saxon diplomas, see S 513, 518, 526, 565, 751. Cf. Kelly, *Bath and Wells*, p. 93.

<sup>163</sup> Kelly, *Bath and Wells*, pp. 93-94.

indicate a desire on behalf of the king, and perhaps Hehelm as well, that the transaction be seen in terms of almsgiving and thus gain some spiritual benefit for the donor in return. Its concern that the grant be effected for the sake of Hehelm, the original owner of the land, echoes the provisions for the soul of Siuerthus in the New Minster charter cited above, strengthening the implications of the references to almsgiving.

A similar grant is recorded in its original form in an agreement between Archbishop Eadsige and the Kentish thegn Æthelric Bigga, dating from *c.* 1045, mentioned in the previous section.<sup>164</sup> In this charter, Æthelric made arrangements for the land at Chart (Kent), retaining the use of the estate for his lifetime and bequeathing it to Archbishop Eadsige after his death. Then, after Eadsige's death, the land was to pass to Christ Church, Canterbury, on behalf of the souls of both Eadsige and Æthelric, to provide food and clothing for the community there. The charter then states: '*Æthelric gifð þa landboc þe þærto gebyrð on his life Criste 7 þam hirede him to ecere ælmessan*'.<sup>165</sup> It thus differs from the charter involving Eadwig and Hehelm in that the transaction of the land described as alms was effected during the donor's lifetime rather than after his death.

In the same document Æthelric also states that he and his son Osbern should retain the use of their other estates, and after their deaths these were also to pass to the Archbishop or his successor, who was allowed to lease the estates to men known to Osbern if he wished to do so. There is no indication that these estates were also to pass to the community at Christ Church, thus enhancing the distinction between lands given as alms for one's soul and a straightforward disposition of one's property.<sup>166</sup> This document also shares other distinctive features of formulation

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<sup>164</sup> S 1471/R 101.

<sup>165</sup> S 1471. '*Æthelric presents the title-deeds of this estate during his lifetime to Christ and the community [at Christ Church] as perpetual alms*'. Robertson translates '*to ecere ælmessan*' to 'as a perpetual charitable gift'.

<sup>166</sup> Cf. Brooks, *Church of Canterbury*, pp. 302-303.

common to a series of diplomas issued in 956.<sup>167</sup> Despite these similarities, only the agreement between Æthelric and Eadsige contains a reference to almsgiving, indicating further that the charitable connotation of this transaction should not be dismissed as mere rhetoric. Indeed, this charter implies that Æthelric and Eadsige expected to receive some type of spiritual benefit from this gift, as the estate was given to Christ Church on behalf of their souls. More specifically it states that the estate was intended to provide food and clothing for the monastic community there, which, as it was established in the previous section, were likely to be considered gifts of alms.

The final grant in this group displays thematic similarities to each of the previous two, but demonstrates a slightly different way of conceptualising alms gifts in terms of land. This authentic writ, dating 1060 x 1066, records a grant from King Edward the Confessor to the deacon Ealdred.<sup>168</sup> It is a very brief and succinct document, stating that the minster at Axminster and all of the things pertaining to it were granted with sake and soke as alms (*to almesse*) for St Peter's minster at York. It is unsurprising that this document does not clarify precisely what it means for land to be granted 'in alms', as writs rarely record extraneous information, but its similarities in vocabulary to the other two charters discussed here may indicate that this grant should be considered in a similar way.<sup>169</sup> All three documents describe the land in question as a gift in alms, presumably intended to benefit the religious communities which were the ultimate beneficiaries of each grant. They also display striking similarities to the evidence presented in the Anglo-Saxon wills, discussed in the previous section, in which estates were given to monasteries as alms for the redemption of the soul of the donor. Thus these grants of land may be seen on some level as gifts of alms to the monastic beneficiaries.

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<sup>167</sup> Keynes, *Diplomas*, pp. 51-54.

<sup>168</sup> S 1161; Harmer, *Writs*, no. 120.

<sup>169</sup> For more on the formulation and appearance of Anglo-Saxon writs, see Harmer, *Writs*, pp. 34-38.

The description of the land being given in these charters 'as alms' leads one to consider if this might be evidence for a distinct type of tenure, which in turn raises questions about the nature of land tenure in late Anglo-Saxon England. As stated previously, the land being transferred in these grants is categorised as bookland, but one must ask if the charters might perhaps be referring to a type of land tenure 'as alms', such as that described as *frankalmoin* (*liberam elemosinam* or 'free alms') in the post-Conquest period. The nature of *frankalmoin* is difficult to define precisely, and there has been little academic agreement on the subject. In 1898, F. W. Maitland described it as land immune from secular jurisdiction.<sup>170</sup> Elisabeth Kimball and Audrey Douglas each later argued that it was marked by 'indefinite' spiritual services.<sup>171</sup> More recently Benjamin Thompson has argued that it was the nature of the gift 'in free alms' which set this tenure apart.<sup>172</sup> As certain Anglo-Saxon charters utilise similar terminology, such as the agreement between Archbishop Eadsige and Æthelric Bigga which describes land being given 'as alms', it is useful to further discuss the post-Conquest conception of *frankalmoin* as a means of contextualising the Anglo-Saxon evidence.

In his analysis of the nature of alms tenure in the twelfth century, Benjamin Thompson has evaluated the evidence for the establishment of such a tradition. He notes that in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, grants of land to monasteries 'in perpetual alms' became increasingly popular. This was due in part to the common perception that the foundation or endowment of a church, for example, would

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<sup>170</sup> Pollock and Maitland, *History of English Law*, vol. 2, pp. 240-251.

<sup>171</sup> E. G. Kimball, 'Tenure in Frank Almoign and Secular Services', *English Historical Review* 43 (1928), pp. 341-353; E. G. Kimball, 'The Judicial Aspects of Frank Almoign Tenure', *English Historical Review* 47 (1932), pp. 1-11; A. W. Douglas, 'Frankalmoin and Jurisdictional Immunity: Maitland Revisited', *Speculum* 53 (1978), pp. 26-48; A. W. Douglas, 'Tenure in *elemosina*: Origins and Establishment in Twelfth-Century England', *American Journal of Legal History* 24 (1980), pp. 95-132.

<sup>172</sup> Thompson, 'Free Alms Tenure', pp. 221-243. See also D. Postles, 'Gifts in Frankalmoin, Warranty of Land, and Feudal Society', *Cambridge Law Journal* 50 (1991), pp. 330-346; David Postles, 'Tenure in Frankalmoin and Knight Service in Twelfth-Century England: Interpretation of the Charters', *Journal of the Society of Archivists* 13 (1992), pp. 18-28. For more on Thompson's arguments, see below.

establish perpetual almsgiving on behalf of the donor.<sup>173</sup> Yet despite the increasing interest in these types of donations, it was not until the judicial reforms of Henry II that grants of land ‘in free alms’ gained a consistency of formulation and function which would allow one to speak of a ‘free alms tenure’.<sup>174</sup> Thus, in the late eleventh and twelfth centuries, grants of land as alms began to be described with new terminology, increasingly classifying land as being given in *liberam elemosinam* (free alms). This practice was eventually formalised in the late twelfth-century legal treatise known as *Glanvill*.<sup>175</sup> Due to time and space constraints, a detailed discussion of the evolution of alms tenure prior to the thirteenth century is beyond the scope of this study. I hope to return to this subject in the future, as it holds much promise as a source for understanding both pre- and post-Conquest almsgiving.

For the purposes of this chapter it is sufficient to note that the conclusions drawn by Thompson have intriguing resonances in the Anglo-Saxon period. One may not make any certain conclusions in regard to the three charters discussed here, as they each describe the transaction in slightly different terms. Yet the association of a gift in alms with freedom from secular services, as in the case of King Eadwig’s gift to Hehelm, indicates that transactions of this sort may indeed have been antecedents of those later classified as examples of *frankalmoin*.<sup>176</sup> One should note, however, that this gift of land specifically describes the freedom from royal tax which Hehelm was to enjoy while he held the estate, yet this is entirely separate from the transaction in which the land was ultimately granted to Bath Abbey as alms for Hehelm and

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<sup>173</sup> See, for example, Bishop Erminfrid of Sion’s imposition of penance on those who fought at Hastings and the subsequent qualification that one could found a church instead of performing penance. *C&S*, p. 583. Cf. B. Thompson, ‘From “Alms” to “Spiritual Services”: The Function and Status of Monastic Property in Medieval England’, in J. Loades (ed.), *Monastic Studies: The Continuity of Tradition II* (Bangor, 1991), pp. 233.

<sup>174</sup> Thompson, ‘Free Alms Tenure’, pp. 223-236.

<sup>175</sup> G. D. G. Hall (ed. and trans.), *The Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England Commonly Called Glanvill*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Oxford, 1993), p. 137. Cited in Thompson, ‘Free Alms Tenure’, p. 228.

<sup>176</sup> For the integral necessity of ‘freedom’ and ‘perpetuity’ in the conception of free alms tenure, see Thompson, ‘Free Alms Tenure’, pp. 228-231.

Eadwig. This indicates that the alms were not tied in with the freedom of secular burdens, but rather were to be used to benefit the souls of Eadwig and Hehelm. This conclusion is speculative, and it is impossible to provide more concrete answers without further research of the type indicated above. It is certainly interesting, however, that these charters have such distinct parallels to the post-Conquest evidence, demonstrating that the research and conclusions provided in this chapter may have important resonances in post-Conquest studies.

One final observation regarding these charters must be made here. In each example the lands being granted were clearly categorised as bookland, as they were alienated from the donor to the donee. Yet in some ways these grants do not reflect the nature of bookland: both Hehelm and Eadsige, recipients of grants of land, had been denied the freedom of disposition associated with bookland. Instead, it was arranged that the land in both cases would revert to their local minsters at the end of their lives. Thus the alienable quality of the bookland was temporarily suspended in order for the land to ultimately pass to the intended recipients, Bath Abbey and Christ Church, Canterbury, respectively. In this way these transactions seem to echo original eighth-century grants of bookland, whereby a king granted land to an intermediary, not so that the recipient might retain the land, but rather so that he would use it to found a monastery.<sup>177</sup> It is unclear whether the description of these grants in terms of almsgiving is explicitly connected to this phenomenon, but it is an interesting possibility to explore. It may be hoped that future research will be able to shed more light on the relationship between the two.

#### *A Spiritual Network in Alms? – Possibilities of a Continental Comparison*

This chapter has argued that the authentic Anglo-Saxon charters which contain references to almsgiving follow traditional formulation and phraseology, but also that they show evidence of an attempt on the part of the draftsmen to frame these

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<sup>177</sup> Wormald, *Conversion of England*, pp. 19-23.



grants in a distinctly pious and charitable light. In doing so the authors manipulated the diplomatic of the documents, inserting references to almsgiving in order to emphasise the pious nature of the grant. While these charters have few points of similarity, one common denominator is that almost all of them ultimately involve grants of land to ecclesiastical institutions.<sup>178</sup> I have already examined these transactions in light of the post-Conquest evidence, determining that these grants should be viewed as pious in nature and ultimately functioning within an economy of gift-exchange. Additional context may be provided by the research done on contemporary French charters.

In important studies, Barbara Rosenwein and Stephen White have argued that gifts of land to monasteries were very common in the tenth and eleventh centuries in France. Their independent analyses of charter evidence have demonstrated that gifts of this sort were often used to create a relationship of mutual exchange as donors gave up their land with the expectation of receiving some type of spiritual reward in return.<sup>179</sup> Rosenwein in particular has demonstrated that the laity sought above all to formulate social bonds through gifts of land to the monastery at Cluny, creating an intricate network of social ties based on these exchanges.<sup>180</sup> It is the remarkably high survival rate of charters in French cartularies, especially that of Cluny, which makes such analysis and conclusions possible. Unfortunately, as noted above, the low survival rate of charters from Anglo-Saxon England does not make direct comparisons possible. However, some general observations may be made with

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<sup>178</sup> The exception is S 754, a grant from King Edgar to the noblewoman Wynflæd.

<sup>179</sup> B. Rosenwein, *To Be the Neighbor of St Peter: The Social Meaning of Cluny's Prosperity, 909-1049* (Ithaca, New York, 1989); B. Rosenwein, *Rhinoceros Bound: Cluny in the Tenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1982), p. 34; S. White, *Custom, Kinship, and Gifts to Saints: The Laudatio parentum in Western France, 1050-1150* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1988). See also J. C. Crick, 'Posthumous Obligation and Family Identity', in W. O. Frazer and A. Tyrrell (eds.), *Social Identity in Early Medieval Britain* (London, 2000), p. 401; Dmitri Starostine, '... in die festivitatis: Gift-Giving, Power and the Calendar in the Carolingian kingdoms', *Early Medieval Europe* 14.4 (2006), pp. 474-475.

<sup>180</sup> Rosenwein, *Social Meaning*. Cf. McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints*, pp. 15-16; T. Charles-Edwards, 'The Distinction between Land and Moveable Wealth in Anglo-Saxon England', in P. H. Sawyer (ed.), *Medieval Settlement: Continuity and Change* (London, 1976), p. 181.

regard to the charters discussed in this chapter which may shed light on the remainder of the diplomatic corpus.

The charters under examination in this study also express a social meaning, albeit different than that posited for Cluny. They demonstrate a series of transactions between king and monastery designed to emphasise the king's piety and ultimately to initiate a sequence of gift-exchange whereby the donor would receive spiritual benefit for his charity. This may appear to be an ultimately selfish motive, but as was established in Chapter Three, the role of the king necessitated the acceptance of responsibility for the spiritual and physical welfare of the people. The later charters of Æthelred demonstrate an attempt at the behest of the king to improve the welfare of his people by righting the wrongs he had committed. Thus in gaining redemption for himself Æthelred sought to gain redemption for his kingdom. It is certainly taking the evidence too far to suggest that this was the case with all charters granting land to monasteries or even with all of those referring to these gifts as almsgiving. Yet, as this chapter has shown, one cannot ignore these references, nor can one ignore the charitable implications behind them. I suggest, therefore, that through these gifts, the kings of Anglo-Saxon England sought to utilise an accepted form of land donation in order to create a spiritual network with the monasteries; as nebulous and vague as this network might be, even through single donations the king sought to earn the collective salvation for his kingdom through his individual redemption.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter has discussed a variety of different sources containing references to almsgiving. The first section, focusing on the testamentary evidence from the tenth and eleventh centuries demonstrated that almsgiving played an important part in post-mortem bequests. Above all, this was manifested through relationships of gift-exchange, articulated most clearly in Bishop Theodred's statement that in return for

gifts of alms he offered prayers for souls. That donees clearly expected this type of exchange to take place is evident in the wills of Mantat and Ealdorman Æthelwold, both of whom indicate that they should receive prayers or masses in return for their gifts of land. Gifts of alms were also shown to take the form of food, drink or clothing for the monastic communities who were the beneficiaries of the agreements between Archbishop Eadsige and Æthelric, and Archbishop Eadsige and Eadwine, in addition to those benefitting from the wills of Æthelflæd, Æthelric Bigga, Thurstan and Wulfgyth. Most interestingly, the wills of Eadweald Oshering and Æthelnoth and Gænborg include bequests of money or the profits from estates which utilised the terminology of almsgiving to stipulate that this wealth was to be used '*ælmessic*' in order to benefit the souls of the deceased. These testaments exemplify an understanding of the principles of redemptive almsgiving as outlined in the homiletic texts discussed earlier in this thesis. That they range in date over the whole of the period under discussion here indicates a widespread understanding of almsgiving and its redemptive properties, independent of the teachings promoted by the homilists. Thus, almsgiving played an important role in the distribution of one's property after death, being used in a way which secured the salvation of one's soul. In addition, the ritualistic distributions of alms outlined in the wills of the Ætheling Athelstan and King Eadred indicate an understanding that public displays of almsgiving served the alternative purpose of enhancing one's image of personal piety. Although these wills may be considered unique in their representations of lavish, ritualistic almsgiving, it must be remembered that most gifts of alms outlined in the testamentary bequests would have been public to some degree. In this way, these royal wills reinforce the argument that gifts of alms were one way in which the laity could demonstrate their participation in the social value of conspicuous display, highlighting one's piety and affiliation with normative, Christian behaviour. In addition to the evidence provided by these wills, the existence of the phrase '*to ælmessan*' in a small number of wills and charters shed new light on the conception

of almsgiving in these documents. It was argued that the use of this phrase may likely be attributed to the Latin *eleemosyna* being dually defined as almsgiving and mercy, a phenomenon which may also be observed for the Old English *ælmesse*. Thus, the request that a king or queen do something 'to *ælmessan*' should be seen as a plea that he or she grant this request out of mercy, as a gift of alms. This further enhances the argument that almsgiving could be seen as something which provided for the spiritual well-being of an individual as well as his physical necessities.

This chapter has also demonstrated that while the evidence from many charters is inconclusive, certain transactions may be considered as particularly pious in nature. Some charters, such as Edmund's grant to Ælfgyth, Edward's grant to the community at St Ouen, Edgar's grant to Winflæd and Æthelred's grant to Shaftesbury Abbey, demonstrate that some draftsmen deliberately manipulated established formulae by the insertion of references to almsgiving in order to create a religious motive for the grant of land, therefore highlighting the charitable nature of the grant itself. These charters, taken in conjunction with those which invoke almsgiving in the anathema, demonstrate a conscious decision to utilise both accepted formulae and individual initiative in the creation of these documents. This is perhaps even more clearly highlighted in charters such as Æthelred's grant of privileges to Bishop Ealdred and Edmund's grant to the unidentified 'New Minster'. These documents are each closely related to a group of charters which share similar formulation, yet the draftsmen of these charters have clearly deviated from the norm in order to characterise the gift as alms and thus provide a pious connotation for the entire grant. In addition, the evidence from Eadwig's grant to Hehelm and Archbishop Eadsige's agreement with Æthelric Bigga indicates that donors sought to provide alms for monasteries and receive spiritual services in return, thus participating in a gift-exchange economy. Most interestingly, these grants have revealed that the donors could manipulate the tenure of the land in question, ultimately invalidating the alienable nature of bookland in order to ensure that the

land would revert to the desired monastic foundation. In recording these transactions, the charters strongly resemble eighth-century grants where land was given by kings to lay men in order to found monasteries, perhaps thus preserving the pious spirit of this type of transaction.

Overall, the evidence is too sparse, too problematic, to draw any firm conclusions which may be applied to other charters. Yet as the evidence of the homilies, laws and wills shows, the words *ælmesse* and *eleemosyna* were not without meaning. The pious connotation evoked by their use was unlikely to go unnoticed, a fact of which the authors of these charters could not be unaware. Perhaps these charters were deliberately constructed so that the king might enhance his own piety and thus improve the well-being of his kingdom. It is impossible to be certain, but while the motivations behind the recording of almsgiving in the charters of the tenth and eleventh centuries is elusive, the documents themselves certainly demonstrate the pervasive influence of the ideals of almsgiving within late Anglo-Saxon society.

As a whole this chapter has demonstrated that the references to almsgiving recorded in the documentary sources such as wills and charters reveal new dimensions to the social conception of almsgiving, adding a certain depth to the teaching on almsgiving promoted in the homilies and the regulations recorded in the law codes. The final chapter in this thesis will compare all of these findings together, illuminating the multi-faceted nature of almsgiving and its place in late Anglo-Saxon society.

## Chapter 5 – Conclusion

Through the examination of a range of different sources, this thesis has shown that almsgiving was a multi-dimensional and deeply embedded practice in late Anglo-Saxon society. Chapter One established the biblical and late antique conceptions of almsgiving, demonstrating that these were inherently bound up in a wider discourse on the proper distribution of wealth in a Christian society. It also examined two anthropological theories which explain the ways in which wealth was seen to function within a society, specifically in Anglo-Saxon England: asserting one's identity through the display of wealth, and giving away one's wealth in the expectation of receiving a counter-gift in return. The prevalence of these established value systems in the tenth and eleventh centuries provided a useful framework onto which men and women could apply the biblical and homiletic injunctions to share their excess wealth with the poor, enhancing their own piety and Christian reputations as they did so. Thus this chapter established the existence of a social environment which was conducive to the teachings on almsgiving which would be discussed by the Anglo-Saxon homilists and thus allowed a means by which ideas of almsgiving could penetrate and engage with the existing social values.

Chapter Two analysed conceptions and representations of almsgiving in the Anglo-Saxon homilies, attempting to provide a working definition of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries. It demonstrated that this homiletic ideal was very similar to the type of almsgiving represented in the patristic sources, a fact which was unsurprising due to the heavy reliance of the Anglo-Saxon homilists on such sources. Almsgiving was shown to be inextricably linked with Christian identity, a relationship which was idealised in a number of homiletic examples. As such, gifts

of alms were encouraged as a way of asserting one's identity in a visible way, thus participating in the social practice of conspicuous display. The homilists also conceptualised almsgiving in terms of the relationships constructed through the practice of gift-exchange, relying on a wide cultural understanding of this practice in order to explain the links between almsgiving and the forgiveness of sin and to encourage men to seek redemption for their sins through their gifts of alms. It was also shown that redemptive almsgiving was especially encouraged during penitential times of the year, namely Lent, Advent and Rogationtide. This type of repentance and redemption encouraged in the homilies through gifts of alms was also noted to be distinct from the formal ritual of confession, penance and atonement which involved the guidance of a bishop. This distinction indicates that the type of almsgiving encouraged in the homilies was seen as a voluntary, personal act, one which could be done at any time and lacked a formal setting or ritual. Thus, almsgiving was shown to have been idealised as a practice which could benefit a man or woman in a number of ways.

Chapter Three analysed almsgiving in a very different type of prescriptive text: the Anglo-Saxon law codes. It demonstrated that almsgiving as a legal obligation was conceptualised in two ways. The first, exemplified in Wulfstan's *Penitential Edicts*, highlighted a type of almsgiving very similar to that laid out in the homilies. The *Edicts* themselves were even composed in a form with strong homiletic undertones and drew on a number of images of almsgiving which may be found elsewhere in the homilies, particularly those of Ælfric. Wulfstan encouraged the voluntary giving of alms for penitential purposes in a desperate response to the continued threat of viking invasions like those which had plagued the Anglo-Saxons throughout the reign of Æthelred, but, as in the homilies, almsgiving was not encouraged as a form of formal penance. The two were promoted separately, although it is likely that almsgiving was often prescribed as one aspect of penance. The second type of almsgiving mentioned in the law codes was solely represented by the term

*sulhælmesse*, an enigmatic church due which appeared only in manuscripts associated with Wulfstan himself. The inclusion of *ælmesse* as part of this compound term indicated that it was intended to be seen as a type of almsgiving, although this is uncertain as the word is never defined in any Anglo-Saxon text. It does, however, indicate that the vocabulary of almsgiving had increasingly varied application in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This chapter also demonstrated that the growing interest in legislating religious dues throughout this period functioned in a way which progressively blurred the boundaries between voluntary and obligatory payments. This is most evident in the observation that by the eleventh century the package of church dues as a whole was seen to have redemptive properties previously associated only with almsgiving. This obscuring of the distinction between almsgiving and tithes, in particular, had weak echoes in the homiletic texts, demonstrating that it is difficult to ascribe a unique identity to the act of almsgiving. What may be said with some certainty is that the terminology of almsgiving as used in the law codes had crept beyond the limits established by the homiletic definitions of the term in a way which resonated more deeply with the collective societal consciousness.

Chapter Four exposed even more divergent uses for the vocabulary of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries, illuminating the applications of the practice as they were viewed by the laity. In examining the wills extant from this period it demonstrated clear links between both the homiletic conceptions of almsgiving and the exchange of alms for salvation, articulated in a number of testamentary bequests. The evidence from these sources also indicated that such almsgiving could take varying forms. Most popularly it was seen to provide some benefit for a monastic community in the form of food or clothing in return for the promise of prayers on behalf of the donor's soul. As in the homilies, variants of the term '*ælmeslic*' were also used in a way which stressed the pious intention of an action. In the wills it was used particularly as a way of indicating that the distribution of food or money on



behalf of one's soul was conceptualised as almsgiving, which would in turn gain some type of spiritual benefit for the testator. In these ways the wills demonstrated not only the fundamental understanding of almsgiving as functioning within a system of gift exchange, but also showed how the testators utilised this form of giving in order to conspicuously display their own piety. This chapter also discussed the term '*to ælmessan*', occurring in both wills and charters, showing how the use of this phrase indicated that the general conception of almsgiving as a type of charity had become embedded in a wider social vocabulary. This evidence hints at a wider social understanding of almsgiving which may not have been recorded in the documentary sources simply because it didn't need to be: the understanding of almsgiving was ubiquitous in society.

The section of this chapter which focused on charters reinforced these findings through the examination of a different type of recorded transactions. The charters which contained the phrase '*Date et dabitur vobis*', evocative of the gift-exchange relationship enacted through a gift of alms, demonstrated ideological links with the homiletic representations of almsgiving. Likewise, the charters which inserted references to almsgiving into common formulae have been shown to serve a specific pious purpose on the part of the donor. This may not be the case in all such documents, yet the evidence presented here suggests that one must keep an open mind when reading these documents and not dismiss references to almsgiving as meaningless formulae. Finally, the charters which referred to land given 'as alms' were shown to suggest possible Anglo-Saxon antecedents of the post-Conquest system of alms as a type of land tenure. More certainly, these charters demonstrated that the vocabulary of almsgiving could be used to describe gifts of land in addition to the gifts of moveable wealth outlined in the wills and homilies. As a whole, the combined evidence of the wills and charters reinforced the place of almsgiving within the wider social systems of conspicuous display and gift-exchange. That these examples stretch throughout the entirety of the period under discussion in this

thesis is valuable evidence for a widespread understanding of the principles of almsgiving, independent of the homiletic promotions of this practice. Almsgiving was indeed ubiquitous in late Anglo-Saxon society.

While the conclusions outlined in each of these chapters stand alone in demonstrating how almsgiving was portrayed in each type of source, when these conclusions are assessed together a more coherent picture of late Anglo-Saxon almsgiving emerges. The reiteration of a few key examples discussed in this thesis will make this clear.

The beginning of Chapter Two of this thesis presented a number of homiletic explanations of the act of almsgiving itself, providing a working definition of the term for the remainder of the thesis. It emerged that a very broad definition of almsgiving, as promoted by Ælfric and Wulfstan, involved providing for the spiritual and physical necessities of those in need.<sup>1</sup> Basic physical alms could involve something as simple as food for the hungry, drink for the thirsty or clothing for the naked. Spiritual almsgiving, on the other hand, could comprise more ephemeral gifts such as forgiveness for transgressions or comfort for those who sorrow. These concepts are reiterated in a number of homilies on almsgiving, stressing the importance of both kinds of alms. That detailed descriptions of the process of almsgiving do not occur in the homilies indicates that perhaps there may have already been a widespread understanding of the concept: did authors such as Ælfric and Wulfstan not spend time laying out the particulars of alms gifts because they expected their audiences to have a previously gained knowledge of the process?

One who tries to argue the omnipresence of ideas of almsgiving based on the absence of prescriptive, textual evidence for the practice must be aware of the drawbacks of such an approach. However, contextual evidence from the other

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<sup>1</sup> CH II.VII, *Dominica in quadragesima*, lines 40-46. Cf. Vercelli XX, lines 53-56; Bethurum, *Homilies*, Xc, *Her ongynd be cristendome*, lines 159-162; Vercelli III, lines 154-158.

sources lends credence to this contention. The references to almsgiving in the Anglo-Saxon wills, as discussed in Chapter Four, show a striking concordance with the homiletic descriptions of almsgiving discussed above. The mid-eleventh-century agreement between Archbishop Eadsige and Æthelric records the donation of an estate to Christ Church, Canterbury ‘*to ecere ælmessan*’, mandating that this estate was to be used to provide food and clothing for the monks in that community.<sup>2</sup> Another grant by Archbishop Eadsige records the donation of a different estate to Christ Church which was also to be used to provide clothing for the monks there.<sup>3</sup> A similar bequest of Earl Æthelwold, dating c. 946 x 955, granted twelve hides to the community at Old Minster, Winchester to be used for the provision of clothing.<sup>4</sup> That this donation should be viewed as alms is indicated by the statement that the monks were to supply a return gift of prayers on behalf of Æthelwold’s soul. Each of these donations recalls the definitions of physical alms related in the homilies, providing clothing for those in need, here conceptualised as members of a monastic community. The donors also demonstrate deliberate participation in the system of reciprocal gift-exchange, expecting prayers for their souls in return for their gifts of alms.

Gifts of spiritual alms were also outlined in the wills. In his will dating c. 1000, a certain Wulfgeat granted forgiveness to any who may have sinned against him in addition to granting a year’s rent to his men as a gift, describing both of these gifts as alms (*þa ælmessan*).<sup>5</sup> An additional example comes from the will of Æthelric, a thegn in Essex, dating c. 960 x 994, which granted an estate to St Paul’s, London, for the provision of lights and the communication of Christianity to God’s people.<sup>6</sup> This transaction was not described as alms, yet the implication that the gift was to be

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<sup>2</sup> S 1471/R 101.

<sup>3</sup> S 1465/R 86.

<sup>4</sup> S 1504/H 20.

<sup>5</sup> S 1534/ W 19.

<sup>6</sup> S 1501/ W 16.

used to communicate Christianity recalls the instruction in the Vercelli Homily XX that one type of alms-deed was that man *'þa dweliendan on soðfæstnesse weg gelædde'* (lead the erring in the way of truth).<sup>7</sup>

Although the homiletic definitions of almsgiving do not instruct men specifically to give money to the poor, it is clear that this was one important way in which the Anglo-Saxons interpreted the injunction to share their wealth with the poor. Among other bequests, the will of Ælfgifu (966 x 975) records the instruction that five pounds of pence be given to each minster for repair and the surplus to be distributed to poor men in a way which would profit Ælfgifu's soul.<sup>8</sup> Thurstan, a thegn of the king, declared in his will (1043 x 1045) that a portion of the profit from the sale of one of his estates should be distributed by his heirs for the sake of his soul.<sup>9</sup> The will of Earl Ælfred (871 x 899) establishes that 100 pence be given to Christ Church, Canterbury annually as alms, an action which was echoed in the ritualised distributions of alms found in the later wills of King Eadred (951 x 955) and the Ætheling Athelstan (1014).<sup>10</sup> These bequests each demonstrate a desire on the part of the donor to be viewed as interested in distributing a portion of his monetary wealth as alms for the sake of his souls, echoing the homiletic injunctions through his intended deeds.

These brief examples demonstrate considerable connections between homiletic definitions of almsgiving and bequests of alms outlined in the wills and charters. Yet, as noted earlier, the sample of wills and charters discussed here, in addition to those discussed throughout Chapter Four, comprise a wide chronological range not shared by the homiletic texts. This indicates that a basic understanding of the precepts of almsgiving was indeed present in Anglo-Saxon England before the

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<sup>7</sup> Vercelli XX, lines 53-56. Cf. Augustine, *Enchiridion*, 19, 72 (CCSL 46), p. 88.

<sup>8</sup> S 1484/W 8.

<sup>9</sup> S 1531/W 31.

<sup>10</sup> S 1508/H 10; S 1515/H 21; S 1503/W 20.

composition of the Anglo-Saxon homilies. Thus, it would not have been necessary for the homilists to labour the point on what one should give as alms: the laity at large already knew, understood, and demonstrated this ideal through their actions.

This point is further enhanced by other thematic similarities between the sources. The ideal of redemptive almsgiving, that the giving of alms would earn a counter-gift in terms of forgiveness for sins, was stressed throughout the homiletic texts. One passage in particular comes from Ælfric's homily *Dominica V post pentecosten*, which expounds on Luke 6:36-42 and states that one who gives alms to God may see his alms repaid a hundredfold. In the charters, discussed in Chapter Four, this is exemplified through the use of the phrase '*Date et dabitur vobis*' (Luke 6:38), found in a small handful of authentic charters. In the grant by King Edmund to the nun Ælfgyth in 944, the dispositive section of the charter links almsgiving with this phrase immediately before describing the gift of land itself, encouraging the reader to see Edmund's gift as a means of fulfilling the injunction to give alms.<sup>11</sup> The Mersea charter of King Edward, dating from 1046, contains a dispositive section which also links the phrase '*Date et dabitur vobis*' with almsgiving before listing the grant of land, only this charter adds the idea that all Christians were to purchase the heavenly with the temporal.<sup>12</sup> The effect of listing these ideas in quick succession immediately preceding the disposition of land also encouraged the reader to see the gift as a type of almsgiving which fulfilled the Biblical injunctions recalled within the charter. Again, the chronological range of these charters swells beyond that of the known Anglo-Saxon homilies, indicating a wider understanding of and participation in the principles of almsgiving.

A direct parallel between sources may be found in a comparison of the Rogationtide homilies, particularly those recorded in the Vercelli Book, and the law codes *Æthelred VII* and *VIIa*. It was demonstrated in Chapter Three that in composing the

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<sup>11</sup> S 493.

<sup>12</sup> S 1015.

*Penitential Edicts*, Wulfstan drew heavily on the imagery of redemptive almsgiving and masses portrayed in the Rogationtide homilies, showing distinct similarities to the description of the penitential fast recorded in Vercelli Homily XIX. In doing so he framed his *Edicts* in a way which would be familiar to the Anglo-Saxon laity, so that they might see national penance through almsgiving and masses as a way of receiving forgiveness for their sins and thus deliverance from the viking 'plague'. This emphasis on personal redemption as a means of ridding the nation of the viking threat is also apparent in a selection of charters from the reign of Æthelred, as discussed in Chapter Four.<sup>13</sup> One charter in particular is especially revealing in this respect. Æthelred's grant of land to the nuns of Shaftesbury Abbey in 1001 utilised a number of biblical verses which stress redemption and forgiveness of sins, including a conflation of Luke 12:33 and Luke 11:41: '*Uendite que possidetis et date elemosinam*', '*et ecce omnia munda sunt uobis*', which clearly links this redemption with the gift of alms.<sup>14</sup> In combining these verses with the emphasis that the transaction was effected for the salvation of Æthelred's soul, the charter implies that the grant of land was intended to be viewed as a gift of alms, thus earning redemption for the king as well as the nation, in keeping with the ideals of the earlier homiletic texts and the later *Penitential Edicts*.

One final example demonstrates the ideological links between the homiletic and documentary sources. Homilies such as Ælfric's *Alia visio* placed strong emphasis on the ability of alms-gifts and holy masses to redeem the sins of an individual soul, thus allowing the donor to reduce his time of punishment after death. This ideal is reflected in many of the Anglo-Saxon wills discussed in Chapter Four, as many of these record gifts of money, food, clothing and land as a means of securing the salvation of the donors' souls. However, the will of Mantat, dating 1017 x 1035,

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. S. Keynes, *The Diplomas of King Æthelred 'the Unready' 978-1016: a Study in their Use as Historical Evidence*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Life and Thought, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 13 (Cambridge, 1980), pp. 176-208.

<sup>14</sup> 'Sell what you possess and give alms', 'and behold all things are clean unto you'.

brings together these disparate strands of redemptive thought.<sup>15</sup> It states that Mantat had given two estates as alms respectively to Thorney Abbey and to priests and deacons so that they might earn comfort for his soul. In return for these gifts Mantat had secured a promise from the priests and deacons that they would recite masses, psalters and prayers in his honour, presumably in order to acquire further benefit for his soul. This agreement thus displays two important features of almsgiving illuminated in the homilies. First, it functions within a relationship of obligatory gift-exchange whereby Mantat may expect to receive a counter-gift in return for his alms. Second, in stipulating that this return gift took the form of masses and prayers, both of which, according to Ælfric in the *Alia visio*, were effective in addition to almsgiving for earning forgiveness for one's sins, Mantat ensures that both the gift and the counter-gift work toward securing the ultimate salvation of his soul. This not only represents a clever manipulation of both the ideology of almsgiving and the gift-exchange relationship enacted by a gift of alms in order to receive maximum benefit, but it also demonstrates Mantat's clear understanding of the nature of almsgiving and how it was meant to function in society. Although he does not link his gifts specifically with a homiletic precedent, his actions imply that the basic principles of the homiletic teaching on almsgiving were widespread in the societal consciousness.

While the examples cited thus far have demonstrated that the evidence of the homiletic texts, charters, wills, and to a certain extent the law codes, paints a coherent picture of the conception and practice of almsgiving in society, there are numerous other textual references to almsgiving which indicate that the societal perceptions of the practice may be far more complex. This is most apparent in an assessment of the vocabulary of almsgiving and its disparate uses in different textual sources. The term *ælmesgeorne*, for example, appears frequently as a means of illustrating one's behaviour in a positive, and particularly Christian, way. In

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<sup>15</sup> S 1523/W 23.

homilies such as Ælfric's *Cathedra sancti petri* and *Assumptio sancti iohannis apostoli*, the term is used to describe widows who were raised from the dead by apostles as a result of their extreme piety during life.<sup>16</sup> Ælfric also uses the term to describe the Northumbrian King Oswald, praising his actions after his conversion to Christianity as *'swyðe ælmesgeorne'*.<sup>17</sup> Wulfstan, in his homily encouraging proper Christian behaviour, instructs men to turn to Christianity and become *'ælmesgyfa georne'*, diligent in alms-gifts.<sup>18</sup>

These variations of *ælmesgeorne* appear to be found only in homiletic texts, but a similar word, *ælmeslic*, occurs in two charters in a similar context. In the first, the ninth-century agreement between Eadweald Oshering and Cynethryth states that one of Eadweald's estates was to be disposed of in a manner which would be *'rehtlicast 7 elmestlicast'*, most just and most charitable, for them both.<sup>19</sup> The early ninth-century will of Æthelnoth and Gænborg also stipulates that one of their estates was to be sold and the profits distributed on behalf of their souls *'ælmeslice'*, charitably.<sup>20</sup> This terminology may have faded out of usage by the tenth century, as no extant examples date later than the mid ninth-century, yet other similar bequests do appear in later wills. As argued in Chapter Four, the close parallels between the *ælmeslic* distribution of wealth in the agreement of Eadweald Oshering and Cynethryth and the will of Æthelnoth and Gænborg and the distribution of money or property on behalf of one's soul in wills such as that of Ælfgifu (966 x 975) imply that the latter bequests should also be viewed in terms of almsgiving.

In addition to *ælmesgeorne* and *ælmeslic* as descriptors of charitable behaviour, the phrase *'to ælmessan'* could also be used to describe an action as particularly generous

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<sup>16</sup> LS X: *Cathedra sancti petri*, lines 54-67; CH I.IV: *Assumptio sancti iohannis apostoli*, lines 40.

<sup>17</sup> LS XXVI: *Natali sancti oswaldi, regis et martyris*, lines 83-86.

<sup>18</sup> Bethurum, *Homilies, Xc: Her ongynd be cristendome*, lines 121-124.

<sup>19</sup> S 1200/SEHD 7.

<sup>20</sup> S 1500/R 3. See also the ninth-century will of Badanoth Beotting, S 1510/R 6.



or merciful. The will of Wulfwaru (984 x 1016), begs King Æthelred 'to *ælmessan*' that Wulfwaru might be entitled to make her will.<sup>21</sup> Likewise the will of Æthelgifu (956 x 1002) uses the phrase twice, first to ask the queen 'to *ælmessan*' that she watch over Æthelgifu's legatee, Leofsig, and second to ask the king 'to *ælmessan*' that he not allow the will to be changed.<sup>22</sup> Two letters dating from the reign of Edward the Elder also use the phrase. The first, a letter from Bishop Denewulf of Winchester, begs the king 'to *ælmessan for Godæs lufan*' not to take any more land from the minster.<sup>23</sup> The second, known as the Fonthill Letter, asks the king to make a decision about a disputed property '*ðe ðe to ælmessan rhyt ðincð*'.<sup>24</sup> In each of these instances, the phrase 'to *ælmessan*' was not used to describe a gift of land, money or any other kind of wealth which may be considered as alms, but rather defined the actions of the king or queen in question as being particularly generous. In framing the requests in this way the phrase *to ælmessan* indicates that the decision of the king or queen is regarded as a type of mercy, a favour. This reflects the common patristic translation of *eleemosyna* as either 'alms' or 'mercy', and it is possible that in Anglo-Saxon England the same tradition was adapted for *ælmesse*. The use of this term is strongly reminiscent of the homiletic injunctions that alms could be spiritual as well as physical, and thus these actions could be viewed as a type of almsgiving on the part of the monarch.

What may be more easily demonstrated is that the use of these phrases indicates a wider social understanding of what it meant to give alms in a society. It was not only a gift which might be given to another in return for some type of spiritual reward, but it also was a type of action which defined Christian behaviour. It singled out one who was '*ælmesgeorne*' or who did things '*ælmeslic*' or who granted

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<sup>21</sup> S 1538/W 21.

<sup>22</sup> S 1497.

<sup>23</sup> S 1445/SEHD 18.

<sup>24</sup> S 1444.

favours 'to *ælmessan*' as being particularly worthy of commendation. The deliberate participation in acts of almsgiving visibly demonstrated both one's piety and one's Christianity. The use of these variants of almsgiving to describe one's actions or intentions indicates that the people of Anglo-Saxon England not only took heed of the homiletic instructions to give alms in certain ways and at certain times, but they also adapted these injunctions in a way which reflected the needs of society. The vocabulary of almsgiving was hijacked and utilised in a way which reflected its initial, generous connotation, but also in a way which adapted this vocabulary to matters which extended beyond the simple actions of helping one in physical or spiritual need.

There are two usages of the vocabulary of almsgiving which cannot be fully explained in a study of this length. The first, demonstrated in the charters which describe a piece of land being given to *ælmessan* or *in eleemosynam*, was argued to possibly reflect a type of land tenure which became more prominent and clearly defined in the post-Conquest period. The charters themselves give little in the way of contextual evidence for this statement, making it difficult to argue if a type of tenure free of obligations was intended or not. The second use of the vocabulary of almsgiving is the appearance of *sulhælmesse* in the law codes associated with Archbishop Wulfstan. The due is not defined in any of the codes or the associated homiletic texts, but it is likely that some type of almsgiving was indeed intended to be performed with the money collected by this payment. It was argued in Chapter Three that the presence of *ælmesse* in this compound term indicates that it was in some way recognisable as a type of almsgiving, as the social connotations implied by the use of this root were unlikely to go unnoticed in society. More importantly, it was also argued that study of the legislation of *sulhælmesse* in conjunction with a standard list of other church dues demonstrates that in the tenth and eleventh centuries, the lines between voluntary gifts and legal obligations was becoming increasingly blurred. That *sulhælmesse* was among the payments required in this

legislation indicates that almsgiving could be seen both as a voluntary act and a payment regulated by secular authority.

Correspondingly in the law codes, the distinctions between tithes and alms were also unclear, as the general rhetoric of the Anglo-Saxon legislation touted payment of both as a means by which one could earn God's favour and thus prosperity on earth. This confusion between tithes and almsgiving was also sometimes reflected in the homilies. A comparison between Ælfric's *Dominica prima in quadragesima* and Wulfstan's *In decimis dandis* demonstrates that both utilised the imagery of God withdrawing his support from those who failed to share their wealth; while Ælfric applied this idea to his discussion of almsgiving, Wulfstan remained fixated on the tithe. Additionally, the author of Blickling Homily IV discusses tithes and alms interchangeably, implying that both will earn a reward for the giver's soul.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, the author of Vercelli Homily XX clearly distinguishes between almsgiving and tithing, stating that men should first pay the tithe and then give alms out of the remaining nine parts.<sup>26</sup> Taken together, these homilies imply that while tithing and almsgiving were considered to be two separate acts, there were not firm boundaries between the two and the rhetoric surrounding each could easily overlap. Thus both the law codes and the homilies hint toward a variable conception of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The textual evidence presented throughout this thesis likely has only scratched the surface of the conceptions of almsgiving in the tenth and eleventh centuries, as indicated by the multifarious, diverse allusions to this practice presented throughout this thesis.<sup>27</sup> The perceived function of almsgiving in Anglo-Saxon society is demonstrably more complex than may be clearly defined in a thesis of this length.

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<sup>25</sup> Blickling IV: *Dominica tertia in quadragesima*, pp. 39, 41.

<sup>26</sup> Vercelli XX, lines 28-30.

<sup>27</sup> See specifically the guild statutes preserved in *VI As 8.1*, and the absence of specific references to almsgiving in the Anglo-Saxon wills, discussed above in Chapter Four.

There are a number of avenues which I would have liked to explore given additional time and resources. Many of these were hinted at in the course of the thesis.

Chapter Two noted the importance of almsgiving in the penitential texts, arguing that this type of almsgiving as a formal penitential act was different than the type of voluntary almsgiving promoted in the homilies. It is likely that the study of almsgiving in the penitentials would be profitable and substantial in its own right, providing a valuable addition to the evidence for both the ideology and practice of almsgiving in society as established in this thesis, as well as adding a new dimension to the well-established genre of penitential studies.<sup>28</sup> Likewise, a study of the manumissions mentioned in a number of Anglo-Saxon wills in Chapter Four, always in the context of acquiring spiritual benefit for one's soul, may have been perceived as a type of almsgiving.<sup>29</sup> A study of these acts of mercy may illuminate additional ways in which almsgiving may have been effected in society.

While this thesis has focused specifically on almsgiving among the laity, detailed studies of episcopal and monastic almsgiving would provide important evidence for the systematic receipt and distribution of alms in society, allowing for a wider understanding of the institutional structure underpinning this social activity. In addition, expanding the necessary chronological parameters of this study to include evidence from early Anglo-Saxon England may help to trace the origins of some of the ideas presented here. Likewise, extending this study beyond the Norman Conquest would offer valuable insight into the ways in which the ideology and

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<sup>28</sup> See, for example, S. Hamilton, *The Practice of Penance, 900-1050* (Woodbridge, 2001); R. Meens, 'The Frequency and Nature of Early Medieval Penance', in P. Biller and A. Minnis (ed.), *Handling Sin: Confession in the Middle Ages*, York Studies in Medieval Theology 2 (Woodbridge 1998), pp. 35-61; R. Meens, 'Penitentials and the Practice of Penance in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries', *Early Medieval Europe* 14 (2006), pp. 7-21; A. Frantzen, *The Literature of Penance in Anglo-Saxon England* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1983); A. J. Frantzen, 'The Tradition of Penitentials in Anglo-Saxon England', *Anglo-Saxon England* 11 (1983), pp. 23-56; M. De Jong, *The Penitential State: Authority and Atonement in the Age of Louis the Pious, 814-840* (Cambridge, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> For more on manumissions, see the excellent study by D. A. E. Pelteret, *Slavery in Early Medieval England: From the Reign of Alfred until the Twelfth Century*, Studies in Anglo-Saxon History 7 (Woodbridge, 1995), esp. pp. 109-163.

practice of almsgiving evolved with the changing social and political structure, as hinted at in the discussion of alms tenure in Chapter Four. Equally important and beneficial would be a similar study of almsgiving in Carolingian and Capetian France, providing a starting point from which one might assess the evidence from Anglo-Saxon England in a wider European context.

This brief summary of the many ways in which this study may be, and indeed should be, expanded illustrates not only the surprising dearth of academic research on the ideology and practice of almsgiving, but more importantly the necessity of addressing such an oversight. This study has demonstrated that almsgiving was an intrinsic part of late Anglo-Saxon society, both religious and secular, influencing the ways in which the laity were encouraged to display their Christian piety, seek forgiveness for their sins, distribute their possessions and render payments to their churches. It has also demonstrated that the laity, at least to some extent, did follow these injunctions, arranging for the distribution of their land and their possessions and describing these bequests in terms of almsgiving. Most surprisingly, and perhaps also most tellingly, this study has shown that the terminology of almsgiving was pervasive in late Anglo-Saxon society. It influenced the way people spoke to and interacted with one another, becoming an intrinsic part of the vocabulary one used to describe one's actions even when no discernible act of almsgiving was involved. Each of these conclusions provides compelling evidence for the ubiquity of almsgiving in the fabric of Anglo-Saxon society, demonstrating its importance not only as a religious value but as a central social value. With this thesis I have thus hoped to provide new insight into an understudied yet important aspect of lay devotional practice in Anglo-Saxon society, and also to have contributed to wider understanding of the place of almsgiving within early medieval Christianity.

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