

Chapter I: An Analysis of Selected Themes in Bede's Works

In this chapter three themes are discussed which recur in Bede's homilies and elsewhere in his *oeuvre*. These themes were selected in order to provide a cross-section of Bede's interests, while limiting the size of the study to something appropriate for the thesis as a whole. These particular themes have been chosen because of their especial importance in Bede's theology. Caputa has noted of Bede that he was particularly concerned with 'il mistero antico e nuovo della Pasqua, dell'Ascensione e della Pentecoste, i sacramenti dell'iniziazione cristiana, la Chiesa come tempio in costruzione, la vita di Cristo e dei cristiani come sacrificio sacerdotale.'¹ Jones has stated that: 'Nearly all of the identifiable interests of Bede as teacher attach themselves somehow to the doctrine of the Six, Seven and Eight Days of Creation, the Hexaëmeron, as model or prefiguration of the Six, Seven and Eight historical and chronological Ages of the World.'² I have chosen to include Bede's views on grace and heresy, as Bede seems to react very strongly against heretics in his writings, and this reaction is of interest; also, this theme connects well to the others aforementioned.³ As noted above, Bede has a complex and coherent theology, but one which is not expressed in any systematic fashion.⁴ Therefore Bede's teachings on grace and heresy within the homilies shall be examined, as well as his discussion of the doctrine of the six ages of the world and his ecclesiology.

I. Grace and Heresy

Grace has an important place in Bede's theology, which is strongly influenced by Augustine.⁵ It is rare for him to devote an entire homily to the subject (though he does in homily I.2), but paragraphs or phrases about grace occur frequently. These often reveal the associations Bede made. For example, Bede uses the words *humilitatis gratiam* (the grace of humility),⁶ and *gratiae medentis* (healing grace). The first suggests the special place humility held among the virtues for Bede,

¹ G. Caputa, 'Lineamenti di teologica liturgica nelle omelie di San Beda il Venerabile', *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 111 (1997), 116-131, p. 120: 'the ancient and modern mystery of Easter, of Ascension and of Pentecost, the sacraments of Christian initiation, the Church as a temple under construction, the life of Christ and Christians as a priestly sacrifice.'

² C. W. Jones, 'Introductory Remarks', p. 192.

³ See below, pp. 28-30.

⁴ See Introduction, p. 5 above.

⁵ See chapter II, pp. 52-4.

⁶ I.4.256, p. 28; I.21.6-7, p. 148.

because of its Benedictine associations.⁷ The second suggests that grace has a healing action upon the individual. These short phrases tend to indicate aspects of the gift given by God, rather than providing a complete explanation of a global concept. These aspects could be meditated upon for further understanding and appreciation of grace.

Etymology provides Bede with ideas about the action of grace upon an individual.⁸ The first relevant occurrence of this is in homily I.16, on the calling of the first disciples. Bede takes the biblical verse ‘Tu es Simon filius Iohanna’, and glosses this as ‘tu es oboediens filius gratiae Dei’.⁹ In the preceding lines Bede notes that this name is fitting for the head of the whole Church. This etymology is again used to explain the importance of Peter. In his homily on Saints Peter and Paul, Bede refers again to the meaning of the name John, this time in his commentary upon John 21:15.¹⁰ The example thus provided for the Church is ‘ut liquido cunctis ostendatur hoc quod maiore prae ceteris oboedientia domini iussis obsequitur quod ardentiore illum caritate amplectitur non humani meriti sed muneris esse diuini.’¹¹ Bede uses the interpretation of the name (taken from Jerome’s *Interpretation of Hebrew Names*)¹² to indicate that grace is very much a privilege granted by God – it is not something that humans deserve. Bede also uses this interpretation when writing about John the Baptist. Bede wrote:

ipse specialem prae ceteris sanctis eiusdem praecursionis gratiam accepit et inauditam eatenus mundo caelestis ingressus gratiam praedicare aduenit. Qui ergo et gratia plenus exstitit et ceteris Dei gratiam euangelizauit recte praeconium gratiae ipse etiam suo nomine signauit.¹³

⁷ See H. Mayr-Harting, *The Venerable Bede, the Rule of St Benedict, and Social Class*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow, 1976), especially pp. 6-9, and A. G. P. van der Walt, ‘Reflections of the Benedictine Rule in Bede’s Homiliary’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History (JEH)* 37 (1986), 367-76.

⁸ Bede was particularly fond of this form of exegesis; see below, chapter II, p. 56.

⁹ I.16.151-2, p. 115. The verse in question is John 1:42. CSS 110, p. 161: “‘You are Simon, son of John’ – ‘You are the obedient son of God’s grace.’”

¹⁰ II.22.25-6, p. 343.

¹¹ II.22.27-31, p. 343. CSS 110, p. 221: ‘To make clear to everyone that when one obeys the injunctions of the Lord more eagerly than others, and embraces him in charity more ardently, it is the result not of human merit, but of divine favour.’

¹² Jerome, *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*, ed. P. Antin, CCSL 72 (Turnholt, 1959), 148.4.16-7, p. 146.

¹³ II.19.246-50, p. 324. CSS 111, p. 197: ‘He received a special grace beyond other saints, that of being [Christ’s] precursor, and he came to proclaim a heretofore unheard of grace to the world, that of entry into heaven. Therefore, he who was full of grace himself, and who brought the good news of God’s grace to the rest [of humankind], expressed even by his name a proclamation of grace.’

In the subsequent homily, Bede repeats this interpretation – John has special grace because he is the forerunner of Christ, who, as we will see, gave grace to the world.¹⁴

In Bede's mind, Mary is also full of grace. Her grace also derives from her connection to Jesus – she gave him birth, and as a result of this, grace entered the world.¹⁵ Her dedication of her virginity to God also gave her special status.¹⁶ Bede here echoes the words from the verse upon which he is commenting, which are familiar to us from the Hail Mary: she is indeed 'blessed among women', and 'full of grace'.¹⁷ Her grace derives from her willingness to bear her son, who would give grace to the world. Despite these examples of grace and the individual, Bede's view of grace is very Christocentric. While the Holy Spirit is the immediate agent, without Christ, grace could not be given.

Bede makes it clear that it is through Christ that this grace is available; as mentioned above, John the Baptist is proclaiming the coming of grace into the world, through Christ. It is specifically through Christ's humanity that this grace is available: '*per humiliationem susceptae humanitatis spiritum gratiae fructiferis fidelium cordibus infudit qui excelsus in angelo apparens duris dura quondam dedit mandata populis.*'¹⁸ Grace is connected to the new covenant of Christ, and is given during baptism, after the forgiveness of sins: '*Baptizat quippe spiritu sancto qui munere spiritus sancti peccata dimittit et accepta remissione peccatorum etiam spiritus eiusdem gratiam tribuit.*'¹⁹

The Spirit is usually the immediate source of the grace given, indeed, the grace of the spirit *is* the grace which is given. However, Bede has made it clear that this gift is a consequence of Christ's life. In this sense, Bede calls 'the grace of the Spirit the "mother and progenitrix of the Church."'²⁰ This interconnection of ideas is typical of Bede; he makes many connections between ecclesiology and other

¹⁴ II.20.109-112, p. 331. CSS 111, p. 206.

¹⁵ I.3.64-66, CSS 110, pp. 20-1.

¹⁶ I.3.60-62. CSS 110, pp. 20-1.

¹⁷ I.3.64-70, CSS 110, pp. 20-1.

¹⁸ I.25.124-27; p. 181. CSS 110, p. 249: 'Through the humiliation of the humanity which he had adopted, he poured out the spirit of grace upon the fruitful hearts of the faithful, though once he appeared exalted in [the form of] an angel and gave hard mandates to a hard-hearted people.'

¹⁹ I.1.157-160, p. 6. CSS 110, p. 7: 'He indeed baptised with the Holy Spirit who pardoned sins by the favour of the Holy Spirit; and when they had received forgiveness of sins he also bestowed the grace of the same Spirit.'

²⁰ I.15.99-100, p. 108, CSS 110, p. 151.

subjects. This is indicative of the importance ecclesiology holds for him. Bede notes the multiplicity of gifts which the Spirit can give:

constat innumeros fidelium per donum spiritus sancti praeferre ac praedixisse uentura. Sed quia sunt non nulli qui spiritus gratia pleni infirmos curant mortuos suscitant daemonibus imperant multis uirtutibus coruscant ipsi angelicam in terris uitam gerunt nec tamen quae ibi sint uentura spiritus eiusdem reuelatione agnoscunt.²¹

Bede is essentially paraphrasing the words of Paul: ‘Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit;’²² uncharacteristically, Bede does not quote Paul here, but merely summarises: grace does not produce the same results in all who receive it.

As mentioned previously, the grace of the spirit is bestowed at baptism, which is the entry into the community of Christ.²³ Grace is also bestowed as a consequence of prayer, as Bede notes by his exegesis on this verse:

*Hi omnes erant perseuerantes unanimiter in oratione. Quod nobis est testimonium operis apostolici solerter imitandum uidelicet ut qui caelestia promissa habemus qui pro his accipiendis sedulo supplicari praecipimur et omnes ad orandum conueniamus et in oratione persistamus et unanimes nobis orantibus pius conditor auditum accommodare et spiritus sui gratiam nostris quoque cordibus infundere dignabitur.*²⁴

In effect, homily I.2 is a treatise on grace; as grace is so intimately associated with Christ, it is rarely discussed in most of his other commentaries. The Gospel commentaries are more immediately reliant on Patristic sources, and they are commentaries on two of the synoptic Gospels; most of Bede’s discussion of grace is focussed on John’s Gospel. This is one of the longest continuous pieces of writing on grace that Bede produced. The homily comments upon John 1:15-18, which says:

John bore witness to him, and cried, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me ranks before me, for he was before me.’” And from

²¹ II.11.152-159, p. 257. CSS 111, p. 103: ‘It is true that a countless number of the faithful have foreknown and proclaimed things which are to come as a result of the gift of the Spirit. There are some who, filled with the grace of the spirit, cure the sick, raise the dead, command demons, and shine forth with many virtues; they lead an angelic life on earth; nevertheless they do not know by a revelation of the Spirit the things that are to come about there.’

²² I Cor. 12:4.

²³ See also I.16.118-120, p. 114; CSS 110, p. 160 and Bede, *De templo*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnholt, 1969), I.1613-1621, p.187, I.1721-1730, p. 190 (*Bede: On the Temple*, trans. S. Connolly (Liverpool, 1995), I.16.2, p. 58; I.16.6, p. 61).

²⁴ II.15.179-186, p. 285 (The biblical quotation is from Acts 1:14.) CSS 111, pp. 141-2: ‘*They were all persevering with one accord in prayer.* This testimony to the apostolic work must be meticulously imitated by us: we who have the heavenly promises, [and] are commanded to painstakingly offer supplication to receive them should all come together to pray, and should persist in prayer, and should entreat the Lord with single-minded devotion. And we must not doubt our benevolent Maker will deign to lend us a hearing if we pray in this way, and to pour forth the grace of his spirit into our hearts.’ The modern theologian Karl Rahner also notes the importance of the ‘community of prayer.’ K. Rahner, *Meditations on the Sacraments*, trans. J. M. Quigley et al. (London, 1977), p. 61.

his fullness have we all received grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

The treatise on grace begins with the exegesis for verse sixteen: ‘And from his fullness we have all received grace for grace.’ Bede notes that Jesus contained the Holy Spirit, contained grace and truth because of his divinity: ‘Plenus quippe erat dominus spiritu sancto plenus gratia et ueritate quia sicut apostolus ait: *In ipso habitat omnis plenitudo diuinitatis corporaliter*.’²⁵ It is from this fullness that people receive grace, according to their capacity, which thesis Bede supports with Ephesians 4:7.²⁶ Though grace is granted from fullness, not everyone receives fullness. Bede here cites 1 Cor. 12:8-11 about the diversity of gifts within the Spirit.²⁷ He then points out that, having been granted this grace, the recipient should keep in mind that this is a gift, and that the good actions performed by the recipient are a consequence of the grace given. To this end he quotes Paul, 1 Cor. 15:10: ‘And His grace has not been fruitless in me, but I have laboured more than any of them, not I, however, but the grace of God in me.’²⁸ This he essentially paraphrases in homily II.11.

The grace is twofold – ‘Geminam ergo nos gratiam accepisse testatur unam uidelicet in praesenti alteram in futuro; in praesenti quidem *fidem quae per dilectionem operatur* in futuro autem uitam aeternam.’²⁹ The gift of grace is connected to the gift of future salvation. Bede expands upon this, by noting that good deeds done on earth, on account of which future life may be attained, are graces of God.³⁰ In short, the homily covers the important theological role of grace, giving the Augustinian interpretation to the British, as opposed to that of the British heretic Pelagius, whose followers held that ‘man can take the initial and fundamental steps towards salvation by his own efforts, apart from Divine grace.’³¹

²⁵ I.2.36-38, p. 8. CSS 110, p. 10: ‘The Lord was indeed full of the Holy Spirit, full of grace and truth, because as the Apostle says, *In him dwells all the fullness of divinity bodily*.’ The Pauline quotation is Col. 2:9.

²⁶ I.2.38-40, p. 8; CSS 110, p. 10. ‘De cuius plenitudine nos omnes iuxta modum nostrae capacitatis accepimus quia *unicuique nostrum data est gratia secundum mensuram donationis Christi*.’

²⁷ I.2.45-52, p. 8; CSS 110, pp. 10-11.

²⁸ I.2.52-65, pp. 8-9; CSS 110, p. 11.

²⁹ I.2.71-73, p. 9; CSS 110, p. 11: ‘He is testifying that we have received a twofold grace – namely one grace in the present and another for the future – in the present, *faith which works through love*, (Gal. 5:6) and for the future, life eternal.’

³⁰ I.2.78-82, p. 9; CSS 110, p. 12.

³¹ ‘Pelagianism’ in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (ODCC), 3rd edn, ed. F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (Oxford, 1997), pp. 1248-9.

Bede ‘sottolinea con forza il primato assoluto della grazia.’³² He does not mention the Pelagian heresy by name in the homilies – he simply gives the orthodox theology. In the homilies, he refers to it once, when he says:

quia quod omnibus patet nemo est qui sine corruptione ac dolore uiuere possit super terram, quod omnibus sapientibus patet licet heretici contradicant nemo est qui sine adtactus alicuius peccati uiuere super terram.³³

He mentions Pelagianism twenty-two times by name outside the *HE*, particularly in *De tabernaculo*, when he accuses the Pelagians of hardening their hearts against God’s grace, and twelve times in the commentary on the seven Catholic Epistles.³⁴ The form of this reference in the commentary on the Catholic Epistles is similar to that which is used for most of the heresies mentioned in the homilies; Bede states the orthodox position, then contrasts the errors of the heretics.³⁵ Pelagianism appears to have been of particular concern to Bede, as Pelagianism had originated in the British Isles, and had caused much difficulty.³⁶ He details this origin in book I of the *HE*, describing Germanus’ two visits to Britain for the express purpose of combating this heresy.³⁷ The whole of the *HE* could be regarded as an expression of God’s grace, manifested in the conversion of the British Isles to a unified Christianity. Bede’s account is based on Constantius’ *Life of St Germanus*, which Bede sometimes quoted verbatim.³⁸ In neither the source nor the adaptation is there any detail about the nature of Pelagianism and its doctrinal background. Constantius has Germanus demonstrate the superiority of orthodoxy by the saint’s power to perform miracles, not by an analysis of biblical texts. However, Bede would have been and was able to obtain his doctrinal information elsewhere. Both Augustine and Jerome wrote arguments to refute Pelagianism, which Bede read, and

³² Caputa, ‘Lineamenti’, p. 125: ‘strongly underlines the absolute primacy of grace.’

³³ I.24.131-4, p. 173, CSS 110, p. 239: ‘It is evident to everyone that there is no one who can live on earth without corruption and sorrow; and it is evident to all who are wise, although heretics deny it, that there is no one who can live on earth without being touched by some sin.’

³⁴ Bede, *De tabernaculo*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnholt, 1969), II.1591-1603, p. 82. See fn. 42 below.

³⁵ Bede, *In epistolas septem catholicas*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 121 (Turnholt, 1983), *Iacobus I*, lines 60-65, p. 184; ‘Commentary on James’, *Bede the Venerable: Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, trans. D. Hurst, CSS 82 (Kalamazoo, 1985), James 1.5, p. 9.

³⁶ V. Lozito has written an article about Bede’s anti-Pelagianism. The argument is somewhat confused, but it seems to indicate that Bede thought the Irish had some Pelagian ideas or practices, particularly that their Easter cycle showed traces of Pelagian influence. ‘Le tradizioni celtiche nella polemica antipelagiana di Beda’, *Romanobarbarica* 3 (1978), 71-88.

³⁷ *HE* I.17-24.

³⁸ Constantius of Lyon, *Constance de Lyon: Vie de Saint Germain d’Auxerre*, ed. and trans. R. Borius, Sources Chrétiennes 112 (Paris, 1965), chapter III, pp. 144-59.

used when constructing his homilies, which in effect refute Pelagianism, though not referring to the heresy by name. Of these works, Bede knew perhaps of Jerome's *Dialogus adversus Pelagianos*, and some of his letters on the subject, along with Augustine's sermons, and the relevant books of *De civitate Dei* (books fifteen, sixteen and twenty).³⁹

This approach of refuting a heresy without mentioning it by name may be contrasted with Bede's general attitude to heresy as expressed in the homilies, or indeed, his attitude to Pelagianism elsewhere, where it is mentioned by name. He is strongly averse to heresy of any kind – the account in the *HE* makes this clear, as do his general remarks on heresy.⁴⁰ In the homilies he refutes a fine array of heresies, most of them Christological (he refutes Mani, Photinus, Arius, Sabellius, and mentions Christological heresies in general), but also he upholds the virgin birth, the validity of baptism and the importance of marriage, and he refutes an obscure heresy on Christ's requirement of food after death.⁴¹ Plummer provides an extensive list of the heresies mentioned by Bede. Twenty-nine different heresies are mentioned by name.⁴² The vast majority of these heresies were of academic interest to Bede: even the Moslems in Spain, adherents to another religion, were hundreds of miles from Northumbria. Bede had strong views about the unity of the Church, which perhaps

³⁹ M. L. W. Laistner, 'The Library', Jerome, pp. 248-9; Augustine, pp. 249-51.

⁴⁰ Bede, *In Samuhelis*, CCSL 119, II.2000-2100, pp. 116-118.

⁴¹ Christological heresies: general: I.8.34-71, pp. 53-4, CSS 110, pp. 74-5; I.9.236-40, p. 95, CSS 110, p. 94; Mani and Photinus: I.15.195-99, p. 110, CSS 110, p. 155; Arius: I.25.274-83, p. 169, CSS 110, pp. 232-3; Photinus, Arius, Sabellius: II.24.148-173, p. 362, CSS 111, pp. 246-7. Virgin birth: I.5.106-111, 119-121, p. 35, CSS 110, p. 48; II.1.4-8, p. 184, CSS 111, p. 1; Tatian and Marcion on marriage: I.14.5-6, p. 95, CSS 110, p. 134; Cerinthus: II.9.159-166, p. 243, CSS 111, p. 84; validity of baptism: II.18.42-6, p. 312, CSS 111, p. 179. See chapter II, pp. 53-4 for a consideration of Bede's sources here. There follows a summary of these heresies. Mani: Mani mixed Judaeo-Christian tradition with Gnostic teachings (*ODCC*, pp. 1027-8), Photinus: he denied the pre-existence of Christ, clearly a kind of Sabellianism (see below) (*ODCC*, p. 1283) Arius: Arius and his followers were the authors of the 'principal heresy which denied the full Divinity of Jesus Christ,' holding that Christ was not eternal nor coequal with God (*ODCC*, pp. 99-100). Sabellius: failed to properly acknowledge the independent existence of the Son. (*ODCC*, p. 1102, s.v. 'Monarchianism'). Marcion: Rejected the Old Testament completely, especially the Law. (*ODCC*, pp. 1033-4) Hence, presumably, his rejection of Old Testament marriage laws. Cerinthus: 'He taught that Jesus began His earthly life as a mere man, though at His baptism "the Christ", a higher Divine power, descended upon Him, only to depart from Him again before the crucifixion.' (*ODCC*, pp. 313-4). Presumably, this left him, as a man, requiring food for nourishment after the resurrection, hence Bede's words: 'In this matter, dearly beloved brothers, we must beware of the stupid heresy of the followers of Cerinthus, lest anyone should judge in a childish and absurd way either that the body of God's Mediator and our Lord stood in need of the support of food after it was raised from the dead, or that our own bodies will have to be restored with fleshly food in their life and spiritual mode of existence after their resurrection.' Translation: CSS 111, p. 8; II.9.159-66.

⁴² Plummer, *Venerabilis Baedae Opera Historica*, vol. I, pp. lxii-lxiii. Unfortunately the references given are to Giles' edition of Bede; J. A. Giles, *Opera Omnia*, (London, 1843-4).

accounts for his need to combat potentially heretical thoughts in his teaching.⁴³ I say ‘potentially heretical’ advisedly – it is quite possible to lose sight of, say, an aspect of the person of Christ, in teaching, thus implying things about Christ’s nature which are not in accord with orthodox doctrine. This is one of the reasons Bede and Gregory so frequently play with the dichotomies of Christ’s nature – it is a convenient and thought-provoking way to keep both his humanity and divinity in mind.⁴⁴ Caputa says something of interest:

Le spiegazioni dei dogmi riguardanti le verità rivelate e l’agire cristiano colpiscono per la chiarezza e precisione dei termini, espressione fedele degli enunciati dei grandi concili ecumenici, ai quali esorta ad attenersi con “simplicitas catholica” per non cadere negli errori degli eretici.⁴⁵

Bede is trying to prevent heresy arising. Caputa also notes that the English were only recently converted, thus putting a premium on their doctrinal education.⁴⁶ Bede himself states: ‘The gates of hell are depraved teachings, which by seducing the imprudent draw them down to hell.’⁴⁷ He would not have wanted to be found lacking here. Bede’s seeming obsession with heresy is a result of his desire to point out pitfalls to the unwary, and the mirror-image of his desire for unity.⁴⁸ It is also a result of his passionate engagement with his books; his work thus reflects dangers which were important to Augustine, but which were not so immediately relevant to Anglo-Saxon England.

II. The Six Ages of the World

⁴³ II.16.170-84, p. 295, CSS 111, p. 155.

⁴⁴ See chapter II, p. 53.

⁴⁵ Caputa, ‘Lineamenti’, p. 123. This raises the question of how exactly Bede knew the outcomes of these councils, and how these were transmitted to Anglo-Saxon England. ‘The explanation of the dogma concerning the revealed truths and Christian behaviour are striking for their clarity and the precision of their terminology, faithful expression of the pronouncements of the great ecumenical councils, [is] an exhortation to act with “catholic simplicity”, so as not to fall into the errors of the heretics.’

⁴⁶ Caputa, ‘Lineamenti’, p. 129. See also Leonardi, ‘Il venerabile Beda’, pp. 640-42.

⁴⁷ I.20.135-7, p. 145: ‘Portae inferi doctrinae sunt nequam quae seducendo imprudentes ad infero trahunt.’ CSS 110, p. 201.

⁴⁸ One can also relate it to his desire for uniform practice in the Church, to eliminate schism (as over the Easter controversy), and to the responsibility of a preacher (see van der Walt’s thesis, *The Homiliary of the Venerable Bede*, pp. 20-8).

The six ages of the world are a chronological arrangement of history into theologically significant time periods.⁴⁹ The first age runs from creation to the flood; the second from Noah to the Tower of Babel; the third from Babel to Saul; the fourth from David (Saul's successor) to the captivity in Babylon; the fifth from Babylon to Roman rule; the sixth from the birth of Christ under Roman rule to the second coming. The greater part of the theological importance of these ages arises when they are compared to shorter significant time units in Christian theology, namely the creation, Christ's passion, and the life-span of man. These smaller units are a microcosm of the sweep of sacred history.⁵⁰ As Wallis notes, Bede turns 'the reckoning of time into a figure of eternity.'⁵¹

Table 1:

Ages	Days of Creation	Days of Passion	Ages of Man
1 creation to flood	light	Jesus arrives in Bethany	infancy
2 Noah to Babel	firmament	Entry into Jerusalem	childhood
3 Babel to Saul	dry land	questioned by Jews	adolescence
4 David to captivity in Babylon	sun and moon	questioned by Jews	youth
5 Babylon to Roman rule	birds and fish	questioned by Jews	maturity
6 birth of Christ to Second Coming	mammals and reptiles	Jesus is crucified	ends in senility
7 Age of the Saints	rest	He is laid in the tomb	
8 Eternity		He is Resurrected	

As can be seen in table 1 above, these time periods contain different numbers of ages. The basic idea originated from the verse 'with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day',⁵² and previous chronologists had calculated the time up to the birth of Christ from creation as approximately 5000

⁴⁹ For one example of the theological significance, see Bede, *In Genesim*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 118A (Turnholt, 1967), I.1093-1224, pp. 35-39. Among Bede's major sources for this are Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, PL 34, cols. 190-193, I.xxiii-xxv, and Isidore, *Quaestiones in Vetus Testamentum*, PL 83, cols. 213-4.

⁵⁰ P. Siniscalco has already studied this area of Bede's theology, but reaches a somewhat different conclusion: 'In a time in which the "barbarian" culture and no longer the pagan culture of the Romans represents the alternative to the Christian faith, the valorization of the theory of the cosmic ages helps to tone down the pre-eminence that the *ethnos* holds among the Germanic peoples, and to give birth to a different world from that expressed by the ancient pagan civilization and also from that moulded by the Romano-Christian civilization.' P. Siniscalco, 'Le età del mondo in Beda', *Romanobarbarica* 3 (1978), 297-332, summary, p. 332.

⁵¹ Wallis, trans., *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. lxxi.

⁵² II Peter 3:8, also Ps. 89:4.

years.⁵³ From a very early date this was extended to seven, or even eight, ages, where after the end of time, there was the age of eternity, after all souls have been resurrected.⁵⁴ The seventh age was usually considered to run parallel to the sixth (or even some of the earlier ages) and was the age of the saints in heaven. The eighth age occurs after the Second Coming. Table 1 also shows some of the most common comparisons made between the ages of the world and shorter chronological periods.

Bede took full advantage of the flexibility inherent in these varied chronological interpretations, as can be seen in the homilies. We find short, coherent, expressions of these comparisons, as well as more fleeting references, usually triggered by mention of the number six, seven or eight, designed to bring out a moral.⁵⁵ Homily I.14 is an exception to this; in it, the ages are used to reveal a way of understanding the history of the Church. This homily comments on the wedding at Cana (John 2:1-11), where Jesus turned water into wine. John noted that the water was contained in six stone *hydria* (jars), which led Bede to link the six jars to the six ages of the world.⁵⁶ Bede states that the reason Jesus changed water into wine, rather than creating wine *ex nihilo*, was to show the fulfilment of the Old Testament in Christ's life.⁵⁷ Thus, for key episodes in each age, Bede notes a moral lesson, the equivalent to drinking the water in his eyes, and a prefiguration of Christ and salvation, which, if recognised, is the equivalent of drinking wine. For the third age, Bede uses the example of God testing Abraham's obedience by asking him to sacrifice his son. The immediate moral of the episode is that one should strive to be obedient. But the sacrifice of the son, which should recall the passion of Christ, and the blessing promised to Abraham as a gift fulfilled in the reader, is wine.⁵⁸

In homily II.7, a homily on the resurrection of Christ,⁵⁹ Bede expresses the relationship between the ages and the days of the passion:

Sed alius nobis memorabile mysterium tempore suae passionis sepulturae
et resurrectionis intimare curauit. Sexta quippe feria crucifixus est
sabbato quieuit in sepulchro dominica surrexit a mortuis significans

⁵³ Wallis, *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, p. lxxi. See also D. Ó Cróinín, ed., *The Irish Sex Aetates Mundi* (Dublin, 1983), pp. 1-12.

⁵⁴ 'The Epistle of Barnabas', in *The Apostolic Fathers*, ed. and trans. K. Lake, 2 vols. (1912-13, London), I, pp. 392-7, ch. 15.

⁵⁵ The only time Bede compares the ages of the world to the life of man is in *De temporum ratione*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 123B (Turnholt 1977), ch. 66, 1.1-47, pp. 463-4; *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, tr. Faith Wallis, pp. 157-9.

⁵⁶ John 2:5; I.14.134-245, pp. 99-102, CSS 110, pp. 139-143.

⁵⁷ I.14.124-134, pp. 98-99, CSS 110, p. 139.

⁵⁸ I.14.167-182, p. 100, CSS 110, pp. 140-141.

⁵⁹ For the Easter Vigil, Matt. 28:1-10.

electis suis per sex huius saeculi aetates inter persecutionum bonis operibus insudandum in alia autem uita quasi in sabbato perpetuo requiem animarum sperandum porro in die iudicii quasi in die dominica corporum quoque immortalium receptionem esse celebrandam in quibus deinceps animae superno gaudio sine fine fruuntur.⁶⁰

Bede notes the transition from worldly to eternal history through the progress of Christ's life. Worldly history also provides examples of good works (as seen above in I.14) and an opportunity for them, as seen below. Homily I.23 provides an example of the days of creation compared to the ages of the world, along with the eighth age compared to the day of Christ's resurrection.⁶¹ Bede usually takes the opportunity to mention this age of eternity – the age of reward following the ages of the world in which one must strive to do good. Though the context from which this arises varies, one or both of good works or eternity are stressed when Bede mentions the six, seven or eight ages.⁶² Bede weaves the moral aspect into these chronological comparisons, creating a link between sacred history and current action.

Other passages also do this, though to a lesser extent, owing to the difference in genre. The moral message is largely left implicit, especially in longer discussions. However, the link between these great acts of God (the creation, the passion) and human history still remains. The other major discussions of the six ages occur in Bede's commentary on Genesis, and in *De temporum ratione*. One passage in the Genesis commentary is the great exposition of the relation between creation and the ages. Each age waxes and wanes like a day – there is a zenith, and then a decline towards evening, indicating the fickleness of mankind.⁶³ The *DTR* passage likewise expressed the relation between the passion and the ages.⁶⁴ This covers the same ground as homily II.7. The comparison with creation indicates God's action upon

⁶⁰ II.7.17-26, pp. 225-6, CCS 111, p. 59: 'But he took care to suggest to us another remarkable mystery by the times of his passion, burial and resurrection. He was crucified on Friday, rested in the sepulchre on Saturday, and rose from the dead on Sunday, indicating to his elect that they must toil by good works throughout the six ages of this world amid the dangers of persecutions, and that they should hope for a [period of] rest for their souls in the next life, [enjoying] a kind of perpetual sabbath. Besides this, on judgment day, the Lord's day as it were, they are to celebrate the recovery of their immortal bodies, in which their souls may thenceforth enjoy heavenly happiness without end.'

⁶¹ I.23.209-227, p. 167; CSS 110, p. 230.

⁶² Perfection of works: I.24.85-97, p. 172, CSS 110, p. 237; II.17.299-306 p. 309, CSS 111, pp. 174-5; Resurrection: I.11.147-160 p. 77, CSS 110, pp. 108-9; II.1.266-74 p. 191, CSS 111, p. 11; II.20.152-7 p. 332, CSS 111, p. 208; II.25.248-62, pp. 374-5, CSS 111, pp. 263-4.

⁶³ See V. L. Allan, *Bede's Commentary on the Six Days of Creation and the Six Ages of the World in Genesis I. 1093-1224: Sources and Analogues* (unpublished B.A. thesis, Cambridge, 2000), pp. 12-14. http://tartarus.org/verity/Bede_ug.html

⁶⁴ *De temporum ratione*, CCSL 123B, ch. 71, lines 33-86, pp. 543-4, trans. *Bede: The Reckoning of Time*, ch. 71, p. 247.

the world; the comparison with the passion indicates the hope for the individual manifested through the grace of Christ.

McCready has noted that Bede's account of the ages does not suggest that the end of the world is imminent. He notes that Bede clearly distinguished between his own time, when the Jews were still unconverted, and the end of time, when the Jews would have entered the Christian fold.⁶⁵ This leads Bede to place considerable emphasis on personal reform and salvation, as his fellows would die long before the end of the world.

Shorter references to the ages of the world are scattered throughout Bede's work: there are references in his Gospel commentaries,⁶⁶ his commentary on Samuel,⁶⁷ other of his Old Testament commentaries,⁶⁸ in *De temporibus*,⁶⁹ in his commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles,⁷⁰ *De tabernaculo*,⁷¹ *De templo*⁷² and *De schematibus et tropis*.⁷³ He also wrote a luminous hymn of praise on the subject.⁷⁴ We can even find a reflection of it in his *Prose Life of Cuthbert*: Boisil spent seven days reading the Gospel and died on the eighth day.⁷⁵ The fashion in which the six ages insinuate their way into Bede's writing indicates how important this way of looking at history was to Bede. The ages were a way of linking the Biblical past to the present, in which Bede had a duty as a preacher. These comparisons are there to reveal Christ's saving work in history – both at the level of a day, and at that of an age of the world. It is an example of God's grace in microcosm and macrocosm. The six ages of the world are connected with fundamental theological questions about creation and salvation, both supreme examples of God's grace. Jones states: 'Plummer and Levison emphasise Bede's concern with the Six Ages of the World, though a close reading of Bede's works shows that it was fundamentally a teaching

⁶⁵ W. McCready, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede*, Studies and Texts 118 (Toronto, 1994), p. 95.

⁶⁶ *In Lucam*, CCSL 120, III.ix.1491-1507, p. 204.

⁶⁷ *In Samuhelis*, CCSL 119, IV.xxxi.2563, p. 272.

⁶⁸ *In Ezram et Neemiam*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 118A (Turnholt, 1969), III.951, p. 363.

⁶⁹ *De temporibus*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 123C (Turnholt, 1980) ch. 16, pp. 600-1.

⁷⁰ CCSL 121, II. Petri. II.92, p. 271, *Bede the Venerable: Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, trans. D. Hurst, CSS 82, p. 138.

⁷¹ CCSL 119A, II.967, p. 66.

⁷² CCSL 119A, I.760, p. 166.

⁷³ Bede, *De schematibus et tropis*, ed. C. W. Jones, CCSL 123A (Turnholt, 1975), II.ii.239-257, pp. 166-7.

⁷⁴ 'Hymnus Bedae presbyteri de opere sex dierum primordialium et de sex aetatibus mundi', ed. J. Fraipont, CCSL 122, (Turnholt, 1955) pp. 407-11.

⁷⁵ 'Bede: Life of Cuthbert', *The Age of Bede*, ch. 8, pp. 55-6, B. Ward, 'The Spirituality of St Cuthbert', in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, ed. G. Bonner et al., (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 65-76, p. 70.

device with him, as it was with St Augustine.⁷⁶ However, I would contend that these are not merely a mnemonic or teaching device; the ages were a nexus of complex theological and temporal issues which Bede delighted in exploring.

The nature of this comparison has led scholars to speculate about how Bede viewed time and history. The parallel nature of the seventh age has confused commentators. Jones suggests a purely linear view of time:

Christian historians therefore assumed all temporalities to be linear, with movement from beginning through middle to end. On that historical line rested topics. Hence Christian historiography was basically chronological, and the chronicle was an essential form. The most popular topics of Western writers were Genesis, Advent, and Second Advent including Last Judgment.⁷⁷

This goes a certain way to explaining Bede's preoccupations in the homilies and elsewhere.⁷⁸ It also places certain limits on the conception of time. On the other hand, Davidse stresses Bede's *Zeitlosigkeit* (timelessness), and wonders whether he has a fundamental awareness of time as succession.⁷⁹ Davidse mentions a 'noncontemporaneous contemporaneity' as being characteristic of Christian writing – the knowledge of the Church Fathers (from the past), form part of Bede's present, as does the Bible.⁸⁰ He speaks of these things, and the past of the English Church, equally vividly. McCready states: 'Like Gregory the Great, Bede saw no fundamental cleavage separating biblical times from his own.'⁸¹ This is certainly true; the Bible contained an account of redemptive history that was still continuing in Bede's own day. To exclude either concept seems unwise. Bede clearly had a grasp of time and history as a succession of events – this can be seen in his chronologies at the end of *De temporibus* and *DTR* and in the *HE*. However, he was also well aware of the patterns of history – the microcosm of the week, and the macrocosm of an age of the world, and that the one could inform the other, despite the difference in time and scale. The same is true with regard to the Fathers – their distance in time did not make them distant theologically and morally, in the which sense a

⁷⁶ C. W. Jones, 'Bede as Early Medieval Historian', *Medievalia et Humanistica* 4 (1946), 26-36, p. 36.

⁷⁷ Jones, 'Introductory Remarks', p. 192.

⁷⁸ The homilies are clustered around Advent, Lent and the Easter season (see chapter II, p. 48 for details). Bede's other works show an interest in chronology and eschatology, especially *De temporum ratione* and *In Apocalypsin*, ed. R. Gryson, CCSL 121A (Turnholt, 2001).

⁷⁹ J. Davidse, 'The Sense of History in the Works of the Venerable Bede', *Studi Medievali* 23.2, series 3A (1982), 647-95; p. 654.

⁸⁰ Davidse, 'The Sense of History', p. 657.

⁸¹ McCready, *Miracles*, p. 78.

‘noncontemporaneous contemporaneity’ is operating in Bede’s writing. Bede had the gift of explaining a distant moment in a vivid fashion, making it real and current and relevant.

III. Ecclesiology

In the homilies, Bede explores the composition of the Church in three senses: the Church in the present world, with its hierarchy, and its responsibility for teaching; the composition of the Church in the next world, the Church of the Resurrection, and finally the metaphors which transcend both – the Church as the Temple, the Church as the body of Christ. His presentation of all three areas shall be examined, along with their presentation in *De templo*. The latter is a unified expression of the ideas which are found scattered throughout the homilies. O’Reilly, in her introduction to Connolly’s translation of *De templo*, also connects the ecclesiology therein to the *HE*.⁸²

When considering the action of the faithful in the present world, Bede places special emphasis on the role of preachers.⁸³ This is confirmed in *De templo*. In homily I.6, Bede wrote:

Nam et futurum iam tunc erat ut per orbem uniuersum electi pastores, id est praedicatores sancti mitterentur qui ad ouile dominicum uidelicet sanctam ecclesiam.⁸⁴

This is expanded in I.19, where the additional responsibility of the preacher is noted:

Per auditum quippe disciplinae paternae ac per obseruantiam maternae legis gratia capiti nostro et collo torques additur quia quanto quis diuinis intentus fuerit auscultare praeceptis quanto ea quae didicerit in unitate matris ecclesiae diligentius obseruare studuerit tanto et nunc dignius ad honorem praedicandi et in futuro sublimius ascendet ad beatitudinem cum Christo sine fine regnandi.⁸⁵

⁸² S. Connolly, *Bede: On the Temple* (Liverpool, 1995), pp. xxxiii-xxlv.

⁸³ Echlin, ‘Bede and the Church’, p. 358. Van der Walt, in his thesis, studies the references to preaching found in the homilies. *The Homiliary of the Venerable Bede*, pp. 16-40.

⁸⁴ I.6.210-213, p. 42, CSS 110, p. 59: ‘Now there was already then [an indication] that there would be a time when chosen shepherds, that is, holy preachers, would be sent through the whole world, and they would gather believing people into the Lord’s sheepfold, namely, Holy Church.’

⁸⁵ I.19.70-76, p. 136; CSS 110, pp. 189-90: ‘Indeed, through listening to paternal instruction and through the observance of maternal law, grace is put on our head and a neck-ring on our neck, for the more one gives heed to divine commands [and] strives to observe with greater diligence what one has learned in the unity of mother Church, the more one may now ascend with greater worthiness to the honour of preaching, and may in the future ascend with greater exaltation to the blessedness of reigning with Christ forever.’

Bede stresses the fact that this grace is acquired through unity with the rest of the Church. In the Temple commentary, Bede notes the personal role Christ takes in the formation of preachers: an indication of the hours preachers are meant to spend in prayer.⁸⁶ In the same commentary, he mentions the place preachers have in the metaphorical building of the Church – something he is not so concerned with in the homilies, but which forms the essential matter of the Temple commentary.⁸⁷

The homilies are there in part to provide a template for living. Bede mentions the merits of active and contemplative lives, as a guide.⁸⁸ The Church has a responsibility to pray for those in spiritual difficulty: not just the Church on earth, but the support of the Church in heaven must be sought. Bede makes this clear in his homily upon the Canaanite woman:⁸⁹ the Church has the role of the mother here, and has responsibility for the soul in difficulty. But Bede extends this – the Church has the same duty of persistence as the mother had, and has the additional resource of the saints upon which to call.⁹⁰ Bede uses another woman as an example of the behaviour the Church should adopt – in homily II.4 he uses the example of Mary Magdalene. She anointed the feet of the Lord, as an example of her devotion, which devotion the Church, and every perfect soul, should imitate.⁹¹

As well as indicating the desired spiritual behaviour of the Church on earth, Bede also notes the importance of the hierarchical structure of the Church, mostly to indicate the importance of unity and obedience. He is quite definite that Peter was given authority as head of the Church.⁹² Similar authority is given to the apostles.⁹³ Here the key word is ‘similar’; Peter is given additional responsibility by Christ in the *tu es Petrus* speech.⁹⁴ This allows Bede to reconcile apparently disparate positions: the one supporting the collegiality and autonomy of bishops (still an important point of debate in the Roman Church), the other supporting the primacy and authority of Rome. This squares exactly with Bede’s attitude as manifested in the *HE*: he is quite clear that the English Church is directed from Rome.⁹⁵ Bede also

⁸⁶ *De templo*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 119A (Turnholt, 1969), I.198-208, p. 152; *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 11.

⁸⁷ CCSL 119A, II.595-603, pp. 206-7; *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 84.

⁸⁸ I.9.195-209, pp. 64-5; CSS 110, pp. 90-91.

⁸⁹ Matt. 15:21-28. The Canaanite woman asks for her daughter to be delivered from a demon.

⁹⁰ I.22.90-103, pp. 158-9; CSS 10, p. 218.

⁹¹ John 12:3. II.4.130-132, pp. 210-11, CSS 111, p. 38.

⁹² I.16.193-7, p. 116; CSS 110, p. 163.

⁹³ I.20.165-72, pp. 145-6, CSS 110, p. 202.

⁹⁴ Matt. 16:18.

⁹⁵ *HE* III.4.

indicates that bishops are the successors to the apostles; however, Echlin suggests Bede was ‘unaware of the complex development of the episcopate.’⁹⁶ In my opinion Bede may have been glossing over this complexity in order to present a simple chain of descent, encouraging unity and respect for the office of bishop. As Bede was aware of recent Church councils (such as Whitby), he must also have been aware of how the results of such councils were spread, and the authority of the bishop to enforce them. Despite this hierarchical view, Bede does not always give bishops and priests special status over the rest of the faithful – they are all present in one Church.⁹⁷ As Mayr-Harting has pointed out, Bede notes that bishops, and to a lesser extent priests and even deacons, have a special ministry which sets them apart from the rest of the faithful.⁹⁸ Though Bede resolves in favour of the authority of Rome, there is a tension in his writing between these apparently contradictory positions; the one expressed in *De templo*, where all Christians are part of a community in Christ, equally able to be saved, and the hierarchical Church, which Bede was part of in this present world.

Bede devotes some time to explaining the composition of the Church in heaven. He notes how the elect are different from others:

quia nimirum electi quo sollicitius suam conscientiam discutiendo
examinant eo latiores ex intimo cordis fonte lacrimarum fluuios fundunt
et quia minus perfectos se esse deprehendunt sordes suae fragilitatis
undis paenitentiae diluunt.⁹⁹

The elect are often also virgins – Bede stresses this aspect in his homily on Benedict Biscop.¹⁰⁰ The elect provide an example for the Church on earth, but they also gain special privilege after death. Their death should not be mourned, as they gain eternal life.¹⁰¹ However, not all the elect attain their reward instantly.¹⁰² In homily I.2 Bede discusses how some will have to go through purgatory before attaining their reward, of seeing God:

⁹⁶ Echlin, ‘Bede and the Church’, p. 359.

⁹⁷ *De templo*, II.82-91, p. 194; *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 68. See also G. Caputa, *Il sacerdozio dei fedeli secondo San Beda: Un itinerario di maturità cristiana*, Monumenta Studi Instrumenta Liturgica 16 (Vatican, 2002), p. 2.

⁹⁸ H. Mayr-Harting, *The Venerable Bede*, p. 15 and *The Coming of Christianity to Anglo-Saxon England*, p. 219.

⁹⁹ I.1.75-78, p. 3; CSS 110, p. 4: ‘To the extent that the elect more solicitously examine their consciences by scrutinising them, to that extent they pour forth broader streams of tears from the inmost font of their hearts, and because they apprehend themselves to be less perfect, they wash away the stains of their weakness with the waves of repentance.’

¹⁰⁰ I.13.141-6, p. 92, CSS 110, p. 130.

¹⁰¹ I.10.226, pp. 68-9, CSS 110, p. 97.

¹⁰² J. Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. A. Goldhammer (London, 1984), pp. 102-3.

Me ipsum, inquit, manifestabo dilectoribus meis ut quem in sua cognouere mortalem in mea iam natura patri et spiritui sancto uidere possint aequalem. Verum hoc de apostolis martyribus confessoribus ceterisque artioris ac perfectioris uitae uiris fieri credendum est quorum unus certaminum suorum conscius non dubitauit de se ipso testari: *Cupio dissolui et cum Christo esse*. Ceterum sunt plures in ecclesia iusti qui post carnis solutionem continuo beata paradisi requie suscipiuntur expectantes in magno gaudio in magnis congaudentium choris quando recepto corpore ueniant et appareant ante faciem Dei. At uero non nulli propter bona quidem opera ad electorum sortem praeordinati sed propter mala aliqua quibus polluti de corpore exierunt post mortem severe castigandi excipiuntur flammis ignis purgatorii et uel usque ad diem iudicii longa huius examinatione a uitiorum sorde mundantur uel certe prius amicorum fidelium precibus elemosinis ieiuniis fletibus et hostiae salutaris oblationibus absoluti a poenis et ipsi ad beatorum perueniunt requiem.¹⁰³

Again, the image of the elect is used to encourage similar behaviour by the congregation.

‘Bede transmitted the concept of the universal Church which had been taught by Gregory the Great. The universal Church included angels and the just before Christ as well as the visible, hierarchical, sacramental Church which issued from the redemption.’¹⁰⁴ The humans took the place of the fallen angels.¹⁰⁵ The Church at that time existed both on earth and in heaven.¹⁰⁶ The Church after Christ would principally be drawn from nations other than the Jewish nation:

Vbi manifeste praefiguratur quod post passionem resurrectionemque suam dominus in praedicatoribus suis Iudaeorum perfida corda relicturus et in partes gentium exterarum esset secessurus.¹⁰⁷

This was particularly important to Bede, who needed to justify the place of the English in the church, despite their position at the edge of the world. This did not

¹⁰³ I.2.202-220, CSS 110, pp. 16-17: “I will manifest myself to those who love me,” he says, “so that the one whom they have recognised as mortal in his nature, they may now, in my nature, be able to see as equal to the Father and Holy Spirit.” We must believe that this is occurring with respect to the apostles, martyrs, confessors and other men of a more rigorous and perfect life ... Besides this, there are many just people in the Church, who, after being freed from the flesh immediately gain the blessed rest of Paradise, waiting in great joy among great choruses of fellow-rejoicers for the time when, having received their bodies, they may come and appear before the face of God. But in truth there are some who were preordained to the lot of the elect on account of their good works, but on account of some evils by which they were polluted, went out from the body after death to be severely chastised, and were seized by the flames of the fire of purgatory. They are either made clean from the stains of their vices in their long ordeal up until judgment day, or, on the other hand, if they are absolved from their penalties by the petitions, almsgiving, fasting, weeping and oblation of the saving sacrificial offering by their faithful friends, they may come earlier to the rest of the blessed.’

¹⁰⁴ Echlin, ‘Bede and the Church’, p. 357.

¹⁰⁵ II.3.169-171, p. 209, CSS 111, p. 29.

¹⁰⁶ II.16.138-141, p. 294, CSS 111, p. 154.

¹⁰⁷ I.22.79-82, p. 158, CSS 110, p. 218: ‘Clearly it is prefigured here that after his passion and resurrection the Lord, in his preachers, was going to leave behind the faithless hearts of the Jews and move onto the regions of foreign nations.’

mean that the Jews were excluded from this, however, as Bede writes: ‘utriusque testamenti populus adunandus in Christo ad aeternae uitae sit introducendus coronam.’¹⁰⁸ Bede thought serious sinners excluded themselves from the community of the Church:

Vnde multum tremenda sunt haec, dilectissime, et digno expauescenda timore sedulaque praecauendum industria ne ueniens inprouisus peruersum quid in nobis unde merito flagellari ac de ecclesia eici debeamus inueniat.¹⁰⁹

Heretics have excluded themselves from the Church by lacking unity:

etsi heretici siue scismatici aliquam bonae actionis arcem conscendere uidentur, quia tamen compagem ecclesiae unitatis non habent quasi patentibus et non solidis laterum praesidiis semper ad uitiorum infima relabuntur dum diuino destituti auxilio suae pertinaciae fastu intereunt.¹¹⁰

Though Bede spends much time emphasising the need for good works, this is not sufficient. The unity of the Church is one of its most important characteristics.¹¹¹ However, not all breaches in unity are considered heretical; Bede never refers to those who kept the Irish date of Easter as heretical. Bede seems to class this as a minor difference in practice (such as Pope Gregory permitted St Augustine of Canterbury), as there was no doctrinal problem. Bede was probably also aware that their method of calculating the date of Easter had at one time been widespread, and that, for the most part, the Irish were not perverse in using the old method of calculation, but that they genuinely needed teaching about the superiority of the method Bede used, as happened at Whitby.¹¹²

The Church is unified across time – from both before and after the Incarnation:

unde liquido patet quia una est ecclesia in omnibus sanctis eius eadem fides electorum omnium praecedentium uidelicet et subsequentium carnalem eius aduentum quia nimirum sicut nos per fidem transactae incarnationis passionis ac resurrectionis illius saluamur et illi futuram

¹⁰⁸ *De templo*, II.571-3, p. 206; *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 83: ‘the people of both testaments who were to be unified in Christ were to be brought in to receive the crown of eternal life.’

¹⁰⁹ II.1.61-4, p. 186, CSS 111, p. 3: ‘We should dread them [the wrongdoings] exceedingly with well-deserved fear, and carefully avoid them with painstaking diligence, lest he come unexpectedly and find something evil in us, as a result of which we should rightly be scourged and cast out of the Church.’ See Echlin, ‘Bede and the Church’, p. 358, for details of this in other of Bede’s works.

¹¹⁰ *De templo*, I.677-681, p. 164; *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 27: ‘although heretics and schismatics seem to scale some peak of good work, nevertheless, because they lack the structure of the Church’s unity, the protecting side-walls are, as it were, gaping wide open and weak, and consequently, they are continually falling back into the depths of their vices until, deprived of God’s help, they perish through their arrogance and obstinacy.’

¹¹¹ See *De templo*, I.456-8, p. 158; *Bede: On the Temple*, p. 19.

¹¹² *HE* III.25, pp. 294-309.

ipsam incarnationem passionem ac resurrectionem certissime credentes per eundem uitae auctorem se saluari sperabant.¹¹³

In his next homily, Bede speaks most movingly of the unity that is to come, where there will be no discord of minds nor disharmony of speech, everything in common in God.¹¹⁴ The fact that Bede writes so movingly of this indicates its great importance to him, a fact reflected in his insistence upon unity of the celebration of Easter in the *HE*.

Christ and the Church are intimately entwined; Bede implies the espousal of Christ and Church,¹¹⁵ and Christ was not only present in the Church in the distant past, but also in the present.¹¹⁶ Christ takes on many roles in the Church; he is also there a ruler of the elect.¹¹⁷ These views reinforce the ideal of unity within the Church – the Church is unified within Christ.

The general tenor of Bede's theology is remarkably optimistic. He tends to concentrate on the spiritual benefits of good behaviour, and rarely gives examples of the disadvantages of bad behaviour. When he does give examples of the latter, they tend to be outweighed by examples of the joy to be experienced by the faithful. This general impression is swiftly obtained when reading the homilies; a specific example may be found in the overflowing of joy found in homily I.7 on Christmas. But a counterexample may be found in Bede's poem *De die iudicii*, in which he treats on both the pains of hell and the joys of heaven, and the former outnumber the latter.¹¹⁸ However, the joys of heaven wrap up the whole poem, leaving the reader in a positive and uplifted frame of mind.¹¹⁹

A surprising absence in Bede's picture of the Church in the homilies is the interpretation of Mary as a type of the Church. The interpretation was already

¹¹³ II.15.12-17, p. 280, CSS 111, pp. 135-6: 'Hence it is perfectly evident that the Church is one in all its saints, that the faith of the elect is the same, namely, who preceded and who followed his coming in the flesh. Just as we are saved through faith in his incarnation, passion and resurrection which have been accomplished, so they, by believing most certainly in his incarnation, passion and resurrection to come, hoped that they would be saved through the same author of life.'

¹¹⁴ I.16.170-84, p. 295; CSS 111, p. 155.

¹¹⁵ I.6.51-6, p. 38; CSS 110, p. 54.

¹¹⁶ II.8.184-8, pp. 269-70; CSS 111, p. 76.

¹¹⁷ I.3.114-125, p. 17; CSS 110, p. 23.

¹¹⁸ Not all authorities agree that this poem is by Bede; however, M. Lapidge considers that this poem is by Bede, and discusses it in his Jarrow Lecture, *Bede the Poet* (Jarrow, 1993). He provides a full listing of previous discussion in footnote 31.

¹¹⁹ Bede, 'De die iudicii', in *Liber hymnorum*, ed. J. Fraipont, CCSL 122, pp. 442-4, lines 72-123 about Hell; lines 124-151 about heaven.

prevalent in patristic theology, which Bede then developed further.¹²⁰ He created a new formula found in his Lucan commentary, *dei genitrix ecclesia*.¹²¹ He showed that the mysteries of Mary prefigured those of the Church.¹²² This aspect is explored more fully in Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs. Other aspects of the Church as nurturer are found in the homilies;¹²³ these aspects are of less concern to Bede in this context than the moral qualities needed in the Church on earth, or than the construction of the Church in heaven. Bede does liken the Church to women, or at least to female types; as noted above, he uses Mary Magdalene as an example which the Church should follow.¹²⁴ The two major interpretations are the Church as bride, and the Church as mother. The Church is also the daughter of the Spirit; Bede mentions this once.¹²⁵ The Church is a mother in the sense that she is fruitful in good works, and begets spiritual children, at whose death she is both sorrowful and rejoices, like a woman giving birth.¹²⁶ Christ as the spouse of the Church is mentioned in Bede's sermon on the wedding at Cana.¹²⁷ Bede does not use this metaphor much in the homilies – he seems to regard the Church in a primarily architectural light, perhaps influenced by his own commentaries on the tabernacle and the temple.

Bede mentions that the Church is Christ's body,¹²⁸ that the Temple is like the Church,¹²⁹ and that the people of the Church are likewise a temple of God.¹³⁰ This is partly because Bede can then describe the Church being built up through the ages of the world.¹³¹

As has been shown above, themes in Bede's writing often interconnect. Part of Bede's writing on grace is conditioned by his strong belief that the Church should be unified; heretics have no place in the Church in Bede's view. And grace is what

¹²⁰ A. Muller, 'L'unité de l'Église et de la Sainte Vierge chez les Pères des IV^e et V^e siècles', *Études Mariales* 9 (1951), 27-38, especially p. 27, p. 34.

¹²¹ *In Lucam*, I.1165, p. 48.

¹²² H. Barré, 'Marie et l'Église du Vénérable Bède à Saint Albert le Grand', *Études Mariales* 9 (1951), 59-143, p. 59.

¹²³ See above, p. 38 for some discussion of this.

¹²⁴ See above, p. 38.

¹²⁵ I.1.5.102-7, p. 108, CSS 110, pp. 151-2.

¹²⁶ II.13.78-115, pp. 269-70; CSS 111, pp. 120-1. See also, more fleetingly, I.19.70-76, p. 138, CSS 110, pp. 189-90 and II.17.191-3, p. 306, CSS 111, p. 170.

¹²⁷ I.14.50-55, p. 96, CSS 110, pp. 135-6. See also I.12.224-6, p. 86, CSS 110, p. 121.

¹²⁸ I.1.108-117, p. 4, CSS 110, p. 5.

¹²⁹ II.1.34-130, pp. 185-7, CSS 111, pp. 8-11.

¹³⁰ II.1.70-4, p. 186, CSS 111, p. 4.

¹³¹ II.24.229-275, pp. 364-5, CSS 111, pp. 249-50.

allows the Church to exist; the grace of the Spirit is given to each member of the Church. Grace is given to allow good deeds; good deeds allow a place in the heavenly kingdom, as Bede illustrates using the six ages of the world, which are there as a time in which those works should be performed and the Church built up. Bede's homiliary naturally provides a scattered excerpt of most themes – more coherent accounts can often be found in his other works. The exception to this is Bede's writing on grace – the bulk of it is found in the homiliary. These themes have demonstrated the orthodoxy of Bede's theology, secured by the Benedictine virtue of humility and the divine gift of grace. The themes have a generally optimistic feel when we encounter them in Bede's homilies; he is more interested in providing incentives than in scaring his audience. When separated out into its component themes, Bede's theology looks rather systematic. We find few contradictions, which is rare; in contrast, St Augustine tended to change his mind during his life-time.¹³² Carroll has created a systematic view of Bede's theology in her book.¹³³ This creates a misleading impression; Bede did not impart his information in a systematic fashion, as if he were a twelfth-century scholastic. Rather, he preferred to present glimpses of this coherent theology through a rather more stream-of-consciousness approach, where he took his immediate inspiration from the biblical verse before him.

¹³² As can be seen in his attitude to millenarianism. In his youth, Augustine was strongly millenarianist, but he reconsidered his position as he got older. See G. Folliet, 'La typologie du *sabbat* chez saint Augustin: son interprétation millénariste entre 388 et 400', *Revue des études augustiniennes* 2 (1956), 371-90 for details.

¹³³ Carroll, *The Venerable Bede*, *passim*.