

Chapter II: Bede and Gregory the Great: An Analysis of Bede's Use of his Sources

Gregory the Great (c.540–604) also composed a series of Gospel homilies. It has long been known that Bede knew and was particularly indebted to Gregory's work. Laistner states that the Wearmouth-Jarrow library encompassed 'all Gregory's genuine works except the *Letters*.'¹ However, it has been noted that Bede seemed to be more creative in his use of authority when writing his Gospel homilies.² Gregory's influence upon this work deserves special attention, as he too compiled a Gospel homiliary, drawn from across the four Gospels; this form of collection appears to be a model for Bede.³ In contrast, Augustine's sermons were not structured as an exegetical collection covering the Church year, but are a more eclectic collection of his recorded preaching.⁴ An approach in which we seek Bede's sources involves treating the homilies primarily as a literary genre, and also seeking the influence of Gregory and Augustine in the form of quotations, recollections and borrowed ideas.

In his 1964 Jarrow lecture, Meyvaert summarised the then-current state of research on Bede's theological sources and influences.⁵ Despite the emergence of new editions in the CCSL, our understanding has not significantly advanced. It is true, as Meyvaert noted that Capelle predicted, that we have a greater understanding of Bede's originality. However, such research has been carried out piecemeal, and most editors and translators of Bede have been content to identify sources in their notes, and perhaps devote a page or two of introduction to the question.⁶ The last general survey was that of Carroll in 1946.⁷ So while Bede's debt to the Church Fathers is well known (in the forms of direct quotation, verbal reminiscence and

¹ Laistner, 'The Library', p. 248.

² L. T. Martin, *Bede the Venerable: Homilies on the Gospels: Book One Advent to Lent*, CCS 110 (Kalamazoo, 1991), p. xvii.

³ Indeed, Bede's homiliary has been thought of as a complement to Gregory's. J. Hill, *Bede and the Benedictine Reform*, p. 3.

⁴ His Tractates on John's Gospel are rather different, as they effectively provide a commentary on the Gospel.

⁵ P. Meyvaert, *Bede and Gregory the Great*, Jarrow Lecture (Jarrow, 1964), p. 16.

⁶ So, for example, the edition of the homilies, *Homiliae*, ed. D. Hurst, CCSL 122, contains no discussion of sources, and Martin's introduction includes a small section (see note 2 above).

⁷ Carroll, *The Venerable Bede*. See also J. N. Hart-Hasler's thesis, *Vestigia patrum sequens: The Venerable Bede's Use of Patristic Sources in his Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Cambridge, 1999), and her article 'Bede's Use of Patristic Sources', *Studia Patristica* 28 (1993), 197-204. The Fontes Anglo-Saxonici project is working to catalogue (amongst other things) all the citations of other authors in Bede's work. Fontes Anglo-Saxonici Project, ed., *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>, last accessed August 2005.

concepts), the precise extent and nature of that debt requires further examination. My approach here will be similarly specific, focussing as it does on the homilies of Bede and Gregory, with some reference to Augustine for further comparison, though Bede used a much wider range of sources, as recourse to the *apparatus fontium* of any CCSL edition of his works will show. Augustine is of particular interest in this context, as J. Hill characterises the homilies as ‘more Augustinian in style and less Gregorian, unlike the commentaries, where the affinity is more obviously to Gregory.’⁸

At this point it is worth considering for a moment why Gregory and Augustine exercised such influence over the Venerable Bede. It seems self-evident that Bede would have been influenced by these people who had such great influence on the thought and practice of the Church in the Middle Ages and beyond. Was this eminence nearly so evident in the early eighth century? Is it possible that it was mostly the books available which determined the influence upon Bede? At one level, this might look plausible – Bede’s library can be reconstructed to a certain degree, and it is apparent that the library is dominated by the works of Gregory and Augustine.⁹ This still leaves us to determine why these writers so influenced him. It is known that the agreement between patristic texts is important – the *consensus patrum* – and Gregory and Augustine help define and hold the common ground.¹⁰ Even before Bede, other authors were referring to them, giving these Fathers extra authority. Where authors did not refer to Augustine or Gregory, but gave substantially the same opinion, they reinforced their authority as authors who held the orthodox opinions. Moreover, the four great Western Fathers – Ambrose, Augustine, Gregory and Jerome – between them wrote commentaries on specific books of the Bible and provided guidance on doctrine, on education and on pastoral practice.¹¹

First, let us examine the construction of the homiliaries themselves. Tables of the pericopes, stories and the time of the church year for which the homilies were

⁸ J. Hill, *Bede and the Benedictine Reform*, p. 3.

⁹ Laistner discussed this in his above-mentioned article ‘The Library of the Venerable Bede’, pp. 237-66; in 2001, Michael Lapidge delivered the Lowe lectures, which included an updated discussion of the contents of Bede’s library. The frequency of use can be examined in the list of Patristic citations on pp. 401-3, CCSL 122.

¹⁰ For a brief indication of this, see ‘Fathers of the Church’ in the *ODCC*, p. 600.

¹¹ For example, Ambrose’s commentary on Luke (CCSL 14, ed. M. Adriaen (Turnholt, 1957)), Augustine’s *De doctrina christiana* (CCSL 32, ed. J. Martin (Turnholt, 1967)) and Gregory’s *Regula Pastoralis* (*Règle pastorale: Grégoire le Grand*, ed. and trans. F. Rommel and C. Morel, Sources Chrétiennes 381-2 (Paris, 1992)).

intended have been constructed. The data for the latter are somewhat problematic. The current arrangement of the homilies may reflect neither the precise order nor the date in the Church's calendar on which they were originally given. Neither collection survives in a manuscript with close connections to the author; in the manuscripts in which the collections survive the homilies come in varying order. Some can be fixed easily, because they were for a specific feast, such as Pentecost, but for Lent, the homilies could be assigned to almost any date in the Lenten season.¹² Liturgical changes and local practice give a considerable amount of variation for the readings used;¹³ but with all the manuscripts originating at a geographical and temporal point considerably removed from the original, there has been plenty of opportunity for the order and date of the homilies to become disrupted. For some homilies, there is internal evidence to show the date for which they were intended, with words such as 'on this Christmas day' providing the necessary information in homily I.7. For other homilies, we are forced to rely on the information from the manuscripts, or from manuscripts containing biblical texts marked up with the Gospel readings for the day, whether missals, bibles or lectionaries. Morin, in a series of articles in *Revue Bénédictine*, found a series of manuscripts that preserved readings which, in his opinion, reflected the liturgical usage of Wearmouth-Jarrow.¹⁴ A comparison of these manuscripts provides a reasonable approximation of the order of homilies.¹⁵ Whilst the date on which most homilies were given remains difficult to determine, the seasonal distribution of the homilies is sufficiently accurate for this analysis to be fruitful.

Using appendix A,¹⁶ it at first appears that Bede's homiliary is structurally different from Gregory's, if we use the dates to which the homilies are assigned in the CCSL edition. However, my manuscript research suggests that the two homiliaries are more similar in structure than they might at first appear. Both are

¹² For further details, see appendix F, where I propose an ordering of the homilies.

¹³ As is shown by the tables at the front of Hurst's edition, showing various early lection lists (such as those in the Lindisfarne Gospels) with Anglo-Saxon links, pp. ix-xvi.

¹⁴ The articles are 'Le liturgie de Naples au temps de saint Grégoire', *RB* 8 (1891), 481-93 and 529-37; 'Le recueil primitif des homélies de Bede sur l'Evangile', *RB* 9 (1892), 316-26; 'Les notes liturgique de l'Évangelaire de Burchard', *RB* 10 (1893), 113-26; 'Liturgie et basilique de Rome au milieu du VII^e siècle', *RB* 28 (1911), 296-330.

¹⁵ I have used the information given in Hurst's edition of Bede, CCSL 122, pp. vii-xvi (which is modified from the original ordering given by Morin) and in Dom Hurst's translation of Gregory's homilies, in which he uses a similar procedure for assigning them a date: *Gregory the Great: Forty Gospel Homilies*, CSS 123 (Kalamazoo, 1990). The probable date for each homily is provided in the notes at the end of that homily, as on p. 61, n. 1.

¹⁶ See pp. 128-31, especially table 2, p. 128.

structured around the Church year. Naturally, because of this structure, both have Christmas, Easter and Ascension homilies. The two homiliaries show a similar balance: Gregory wrote 30% of his homilies for Saints' days (as both manuscript evidence and internal evidence shows), whereas Bede wrote 22%. Bede devoted most of his homilies to the two great seasons of the Church year – Advent and the Christmas season, and Lent and the Easter season, with 26% on the former and 34% on the latter. Gregory shares this interest in the Easter season, with 30% of his homilies for that time, but a mere 15% for the Christmas season. Other important feasts (Pentecost, Ascension), naturally make a more slender contribution to the total: 7.5% of Gregory's and 14% of Bede's. There remain the homilies which cannot be fixed to a date, or which were for weekdays, or for other occasions (Gregory wrote two homilies for various gatherings of bishops; Bede wrote two for the dedication of the churches at Wearmouth and Jarrow). This alone shows the differing interests of the men: Gregory is there concerned with the pastoral role of the bishop, and Bede with the construction of the physical and spiritual Church.¹⁷ Superficially, the homiliaries share a common structure, but the individual choice of readings shows the differences between the two authors.

Of their Gospel homilies, only one shares a pericope – Gregory's seventh homily and Bede's sixth share the pericope Luke 2:1-14. This is the only narrative of the birth of Christ in any of the Gospels, so this coincidence of pericope is of no significance. Martin considers that this overlap may be because Gregory only wrote a short Christmas homily, and that Bede therefore felt he could expand on the start made by Gregory.¹⁸

It is not possible to state conclusively that this lack of overlap is a result of design – some of it may be the result of the differing lections in use in fifth- to sixth-century Rome and in seventh- to eighth-century Wearmouth-Jarrow. That some of it at least is due to the lections is suggested by the evidence of the early manuscripts, where different places have the homilies attached to different dates, presumably because of those local variations in the lections.¹⁹ For example, John 11:55-12:11,²⁰ which is the text for Bede's homily II.4 and which Hurst assigns to *Maiores*

¹⁷ If we accept that Bede's homiliary was intended for his monastery, then surely Bede was also concerned with the spiritual welfare and development of his community.

¹⁸ Martin, *Homilies on the Gospels*, CSS 110, p. xvi.

¹⁹ Hurst, CCSL 122, p. xvi, homily II.22.

²⁰ Not all the verses in a given pericope need be commented upon.

Hebdomadae, is in Würzburg, Universitätsbibliothek, MS Mp.Th.F.62 assigned to ‘feria ii post dominicam sextam in Quadragesima’, in London, British Library, MS Cotton Nero D.IV (better known as the Lindisfarne Gospels) to *Dominica vi de indulgentia*, and in Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, MS lat. 9472 to *in symboli traditione*.²¹

On occasions Bede wrote a homily based on the same Gospel story as Gregory, only using a different Gospel. This is particularly noticeable when we examine the pericopes for the Christmas and Easter seasons. The stories are those which can be heard today in churches: before Christmas, there are Gospel readings centred on John the Baptist; at Christmas there are the Christmas narratives; after Easter, there are the tales of Christ’s appearances, and the Ascension narrative. Interestingly, they have two different stories for Epiphany – Gregory the conventional visit of the Magi, but Bede the baptism of Christ in the Jordan. It would have been difficult for Bede to construct a Gospel homiliary which did not contain similar pericope narratives for the major feasts.²² This still leaves the question of whether the different pericopes are a result of Bede’s choice, or a result of the different lectionaries.

Could Bede possibly have composed a homiliary avoiding all the major feasts which had already been covered by Gregory? No matter what function the homiliary served (for private devotion, public reading, a source-book for preachers), omitting those feasts would have produced an inadequate homiliary, which did not encourage reflection on those key festal days.

Each homiliary has an internal consistency – each works as a separate entity, reflecting the subtly different concerns of the two men. The pericopes provide evidence for their differing interests. While the pericope for any given day would be determined by the lectionary, the selection of days for which to write homilies is more personal: Bede and Gregory had considerable room for choice. There were many pericopes from which to choose and each wrote homilies on only a small fraction. Only two of Bede’s homilies are on Mark’s Gospel, and one of those pericopes is similar to that found in another Gospel.²³ Matthew and Luke have a roughly equal number of pericopes, thirteen and fourteen respectively, making up a

²¹ Hurst, CCSL 122, p. xi, with the sigla listed on p. ix.

²² Indeed, since preaching did not necessarily occur outside Sundays and feast days, it would be exceptionally difficult to write an entirely non-overlapping homiliary. See Introduction, p. 19.

²³ I.1 and II.6, which latter appears also in Matt. 15:29-31.

little over half of the homiliary. But the majority of the homilies are on pericopes from John's Gospel.²⁴ The majority of these focus on the first two chapters of John; then most of the rest are from the chapters associated with the Last Supper and the resurrection.

Gregory similarly has only two pericopes from Mark, the contents of one of which is also found in another Gospel.²⁵ The distribution of Gregory's homilies is otherwise quite different: the majority of the pericopes come from Luke's Gospel. It is notable that neither writer comments upon the Beatitudes. A certain bias can also be detected in their selection of pericopes. Bede seems concerned with quite different things from Gregory.

Bede has four main themes which seem to govern his choice of pericope. He is particularly interested in the birth of Christ, John the Baptist, the resurrection and the promise of the heavenly kingdom, whether after death or at the second coming.²⁶ This latter ties in with his interest in ecclesiology, which is occasionally revealed in the homilies, especially in the final two, for the dedication of the church.²⁷ He comments upon *no* parables, and only five miracles: three healing miracles, and two 'Eucharistic' miracles.²⁸ Perhaps he considered that the parables, with their explanations already provided, required no further commentary. His relative lack of comment upon miracles is more surprising, for he is fond of using the metaphor of Christ's healing.²⁹ These miracles are not included as 'wonder-stories', but as metaphors for Christ's relationship with his Church and its people.³⁰ Perhaps Bede found the miracles largely self-explanatory, and therefore did not comment on them.

There is also an interest in visions and prophecy in the Gospels: Bede includes six homilies which comment upon foretelling events to come.³¹ Gregory, by contrast, has only two.³² Gregory is also largely silent about the mission of the

²⁴ See tables 3, 4 and 5, appendix A, pp. 141-4.

²⁵ Gregory, homilies 21 and 29. The latter is told in John 21:1-23.

²⁶ See Introduction, p. 22.

²⁷ This interest is primarily expressed in his commentaries upon the Tabernacle and the Temple.

²⁸ The two relevant homilies are I.14 (the wedding at Cana) and II.2 (feeding the 5000); the healing homilies are I.22, I.23 and II.6. All but the wedding at Cana are for Lent.

²⁹ This lack of concern with miracles might reflect Bede's attitude in the *Historia abbatum*, in which, as Ward has pointed out, Bede deliberately does not include miracles. It might be that he did not include miracles in the homilies for the same reason he did not do so in the *Historia Abbatum*. Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, p. 88, p. 106. For example, we have *gratiae medentis*, at I.21.6-7, p. 148.

³⁰ For example, see I.23.1-30.

³¹ Homily I.1, John's preaching; I.5, Joseph's dream; II.11, Jesus prophesies about the Spirit; II.13, Jesus foretells his return to the Father; II.16, Jesus tells of the coming of the Spirit; II.19, Zechariah's vision.

³² Gregory, homily 6, John's preaching; homily 30, foretelling of Pentecost.

disciples and apostles. Some of these silences are interesting when Bede is compared to Gregory: Gregory talks about mission in general (and John the Baptist in connection with this).³³ Gregory is less interested in things before Christ's ministry began – in addition to mission, he emphasises the parables, Christ's interaction with the Jews, the good shepherd and the resurrection.³⁴ Like Bede, he comments on relatively few miracles, both of healing, though there are often miraculous events in the stories Gregory included in his homilies.³⁵ This is one of the most striking differences between Bede and Gregory; contemporary miracle stories are completely absent from Bede's homilies.³⁶ Both men show an interest in the calling of the disciples, perhaps because of their calling to monasticism and the priesthood.³⁷ Bede's interest in John the Baptist, John the Evangelist and Mary is something very personal to him, and cannot be explained with reference to Gregory's collection.³⁸

Ten of the twenty-one pericopes from John's Gospel used by Bede are from the first six chapters of the Gospel. These chapters (especially the first, on which Bede wrote no less than five homilies), are concerned with Christ's divinity and the call of the Apostles.³⁹ This is something which Bede wished especially to communicate to the Anglo-Saxons; Cuthbert's letter on the death of Bede shows this, as Cuthbert tells us that on his deathbed, Bede was occupied in translating those first six chapters.⁴⁰ We can also see this love of the Gospel in the prose *Life of Cuthbert*, where Bede tells us that Boisil and St Cuthbert spent the week before Boisil's death reading a commentary upon John's Gospel.⁴¹ It is also worth noting that Mynors, in his discussion of the Stonyhurst Gospel, hints strongly that Bede might have been the scribe, saying: 'Great men in those days did not disdain to write books with their own hands, and the text of this book gives one the impression that it might well be

³³ Gregory, homilies 2, 6, 17 and 19.

³⁴ Parables: homilies 9, 10, 11, 12, 18, 31, 34, 36, 38; Christ's interaction with the Jews: homilies 5, 16, and to a lesser extent 1, 4; good shepherd: homilies 15, 34; resurrection: homilies: 3, 9, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 29.

³⁵ Gregory, homilies 13 and 28.

³⁶ McCready, *Miracles*, p. 86.

³⁷ Bede: homilies I.17 and I.21; Gregory: homily 2.

³⁸ John the Baptist: homilies I.1, I.2, I.15, I.16, II.19, II.20, II.23; John the Evangelist: I.8, I.9, II.9, II.22; Mary: I.3, I.4, I.6, I.7, I.10, I.11, I.14, I.18, I.19, II.7, II.10.

³⁹ H. Mayr-Harting, *Two Conversions to Christianity: The Bulgarians and the Anglo-Saxons* (Reading, 1994), pp. 25-6.

⁴⁰ 'Cuthbert's Letter on the Death of Bede', in *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, pp. 582-3.

⁴¹ Bede, 'Life of Cuthbert', in *The Age of Bede*, pp. 55-6, ch. 8.

the work, not just of a monastic scribe however good at his craft, but of some highly qualified scholar.⁴² Such work may exemplify the virtue of humility. The selection of pericopes from John's Gospel demonstrates the same bias of distribution across all pericopes selected by Bede. The notable difference is that three of the five miracle stories discussed previously are taken from this Gospel. After the miracles early in Christ's ministry, we move on to Palm Sunday, the last days of Jesus and his resurrection.⁴³ These homilies demonstrate Bede's interest in the saving power of Christ as he entered into the world, called all people and revealed to them the way to eternal life. This call to eternal life is also seen in the content of his homilies, not just the subject of them. This preponderance of John was not simply to avoid overlap with Gregory (and indeed, would have caused him to be compared to Augustine, who wrote his *Tractates* on John's Gospel), but to reveal the divine and human aspects of Christ so favourably displayed in that Gospel. It should be noted that Bede used Augustine's tracts on that Gospel as the basis for much of his thinking. This is particularly evident in homily I.8, on the first fourteen verses of John's Gospel, where Bede uses Augustine as the foundation for his theological exposition.⁴⁴

We can see this most clearly in this homily, where Bede recalls the *Tractates*: 'Homines namque qui ad imaginem Dei facti sunt percipere sapientiam possunt animalia non possunt.'⁴⁵ Christ has given mankind the ability to use divine wisdom.⁴⁶ Bede is comfortable using the terms used in Christological debate, as we see in a later homily: 'una nobis substantia, una est divinitas una aeternitas perfecta aequalitas dissimilitudo nulla.'⁴⁷ These terms would have been familiar to him from

⁴² R. A. B. Mynors, 'Technical Description and History of the Manuscript' in *The Relics of St Cuthbert*, ed. C. F. Battiscombe (Oxford, 1956), pp. 356-61, on p. 357. T. J. Brown says nothing to contradict this in his discussion of the manuscript, and places the scribe in Northumbria (p. 36), with close connections to Wearmouth-Jarrow (p. 6), suggesting the man was active around 720 (p. 12); *The Stonyhurst Gospel of Saint John* (Oxford, 1969). M. P. Brown notes that this Gospel book is bound in twelve quires, and suggests that there may be a 'sacred codicology', in *The Lindisfarne Gospels: Society, Spirituality and the Scribe* (London, 2003), p. 71. This might increase the likelihood that Bede was involved with its production, for he was very conscious of numerology and its revelations of the sacred.

⁴³ Homilies I.25, II.1, II.2, II.4, II.5, II.11, II.12, II.13, II.16. See also table 3, p. 128-30.

⁴⁴ Homily I.8.8, pp. 52-3, CCS 110, p. 73; (Augustine, *Tractates in Iohannem*, CCSL 36, p. 323, 16/20).

⁴⁵ Bede, I.8.90, p. 54; Augustine, CCSL 36, 10.117. CSS 110, p. 76: 'Human beings, who are made in the image of God, can attain wisdom; beasts cannot.'

⁴⁶ Bede, I.8.80-100, p. 54; CSS 110 p. 76.

⁴⁷ Bede, II.24.148; CSS 111, p. 246: 'We have one substance, one divinity, one eternity, one perfect equality, no dissimilarity.'

Augustine's writings, though he does not discuss them in detail. However, there are two notable features in the presentation of his Christology: first, his use of paradox and second, his reaction to heresy.

Gregory the Great is notable for his use of paradox and oxymorons in his presentation of Christ.⁴⁸ Bede does something very similar in one of his Christmas homilies, where he states that Christ was *in* the world through his divinity, but he came *into* the world by his incarnation.⁴⁹ He opposes the static attribute of divinity with the mutability and motion of humanity. Bede also makes frequent mention of God as mediator – a quotation from I Timothy 2:5 of which Gregory is also very fond.⁵⁰

Bede has very strong views about heresy; he mentions many heresies by name throughout his works.⁵¹ An example of his strong reaction may be found in his account of Pelagianism in the *HE*.⁵² Bede had little or no contact with actual heresy – his contact with and knowledge of it came almost exclusively from books, except when he was accused of heresy himself.⁵³ It is notable that his Christological discourses are often constructed, at least in part, as refutations of heresy.⁵⁴ He mentions the heretics by name (if infrequently), where he will not mention the orthodox fathers whose theology he uses.⁵⁵ Some of this visceral opposition to heresy may have come from Gregory, who hated heretics and extremists.⁵⁶ But it was Augustine who wrote against Manichees, was involved in active debates with heretics, and wrote tracts against Donatists, against Pelagianism.⁵⁷ I think here we may determine a strong Augustinian influence upon Bede, particularly in his theology on grace.

⁴⁸ C. Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection*, (Berkeley, 1988), p. 21.

⁴⁹ Homily I.8.164ff; CSS 110, p. 79.

⁵⁰ Bede cites this verse twelve times (information in CCSL 122, p. 398), for example at I.6.7, I.15.146, II.2.212. Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, ed. R. Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnholt, 1999), p. 425, has nine references.

⁵¹ See chapter I, p. 30, fn. 42.

⁵² *HE* I.10.

⁵³ See Introduction, p. 6.

⁵⁴ I.8.35ff and II.24.148ff.

⁵⁵ Bede mentions Photinus at II.24.154, Arius at II.24.159, Sabellius at II.24.165.

⁵⁶ Mayr-Harting, *The Coming of Christianity*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ Some of Augustine's anti-Manichaean writings include his *Acta contra Fortunatum Manichaeum* and his *Contra Faustum Manichaeum* (both in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* (CSEL) 25, ed. J. Zycha (Vienna, 1891)) and his anti-Pelagian writings include: *Contra Julianum* (CSEL 85, ed. E. Kalinka and M. Zelzer (Vienna, 1978)).

At first sight, the structure of the individual homilies is identical. Both Bede and Gregory adopt a verse-by-verse method of exegesis, whereas Augustine's sermons are very different. However, this is the very stuff of homilies, and as it is this technique that defines the genre, this is of little significance.⁵⁸ Any moral exegesis then imparted arises from the consideration of the literal meaning of the verse. Both end their homilies with doxologies in praise of the Trinity. Olivar notes that many ancient sermons end with a doxology;⁵⁹ this suggests that it is possible that Bede's doxologies were not necessarily written in imitation of Gregory's. If it is an important feast day, Bede and Gregory devote some time to discussing the feast, as well as the Gospel reading. (This is particularly relevant to their Pentecost homilies, where the Gospels do not provide an account of events.)⁶⁰ However, such conscientious men as Bede and Gregory could scarcely pass over such an important feast without some discussion.

Upon closer examination, differences may be observed. Gregory places much more weight on his moral exegesis, expanding his remarks.⁶¹ He is more apt to include digressions, such as the extended discussion of angels in homily 34.⁶² The most important difference is that Gregory frequently includes edifying narratives (some of which also appear in his *Dialogues*).⁶³ These stories can take up to a quarter of the homily, as in homily 12. Ten homilies contain some kind of contemporary moral story or example. Bede includes *no* such stories, though their influence may be seen in the edifying miracle narratives in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.⁶⁴ This confirms the slightly differing aims of the two: Gregory tends to offer specific examples, in the lives of good people, bad people and saints, whereas Bede expounds the general precept. This may reflect an attempt at a more populist approach on Gregory's part – as d'Avray suggests, edifying stories of this kind were designed to capture popular attention, and in the later Middle Ages were

⁵⁸ In other words, Bede and Gregory are working within a slightly different genre from Augustine.

⁵⁹ Olivar, *La Predicación Cristiana*, p. 524.

⁶⁰ The events are detailed in Acts 2, which was probably read in place of the epistle.

⁶¹ Though his Christmas homily (7) is notable for its brevity.

⁶² Gregory is a peculiarly angel-conscious author, as H. Mayr-Harting has pointed out in *Perceptions of Angels in History: An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the University of Oxford on 14 November 1997* (Oxford, 1998), p. 16.

⁶³ Homilies 1, 10, 11, 12, 28 and 34-40 all contain an edifying story; the stories of 10-12, 35-8 and 40 are repeated in the *Dialogues*, though occasionally in a modified form. Gregory, *Dialogues*, ed. A. de Vogue (Paris, 1978).

⁶⁴ For examples, see *HE* I.18, II.7, III.9, IV.30, V.3 amongst others.

even collected as preaching aids.⁶⁵ This might point to a more exclusive audience for Bede's homilies.⁶⁶

Bede uses his sources variably: sometimes he quotes verbatim, sometimes he has a subtle verbal reminiscence. Examples of the former technique can be found at the end of book I of Bede's commentary on Genesis, and in book VII of his commentary on the Song of Songs;⁶⁷ examples of the latter technique in his commentary on the Temple, and in the Gospel homilies.⁶⁸ I shall not distinguish between direct quotations and reminiscences in this analysis, though Martin notes only one instance of direct quotation from a non-scriptural source in all fifty homilies: it seems to have been a policy of Bede's to eschew direct quotation in this genre.⁶⁹ In the Gospel homilies, Bede includes quotations or reminiscences of Gregory's writing relatively rarely: he uses Gregory's Gospel homilies twenty-four times, and quotes other Gregorian works a further twelve times. This does not begin to compare with his use of Augustine: there are forty-two reminiscences of his Sermons alone. Bede also uses commentaries on individual Gospels: Ambrose's commentary on Luke is used twenty-three times, Jerome's commentary on Mark thirty-three times, Augustine's *Tractates* eighty times.⁷⁰ Gregory, then, has little impact on the wording of the homilies.

Beyond frequency of reference, we can consider how the reminiscences are used: are they essential to the argument, are they additional authority for the argument, or are they decoration? In the homilies, it is rare for the argument to depend wholly upon the authority of another; Bede very rarely makes explicit reference to his sources, as Laistner has pointed out.⁷¹ Bede mentions neither Gregory nor Augustine by name in these homilies. Examining the totality of the

⁶⁵ d'Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars*, pp. 65-7.

⁶⁶ See Introduction, p. 12 for a discussion of the audience of Bede's homilies.

⁶⁷ 'The seventh book of Bede's commentary on the Song of Songs is nothing more than a *florilegium* of Gregory.' Laistner, 'The Library', p. 248. Jones' article, 'Introductory Remarks', pp. 166-7 contains some account of Bede's use of Augustine in his commentary on Genesis.

⁶⁸ The Gospel homilies contain only verbal reminiscences, and one can find considerable stretches written without recourse to Patristic authority, such as II.8.146-201, II.9.1-112, II.15.20-119. Similarly in *De templo*, CCSL 119A, I.1642-1715; II.80-550 amongst other locations.

⁶⁹ Either a quotation or reminiscence shows Bede's debt to a text. A reminiscence may suggest a deep knowledge of the text has permeated Bede's thinking, but this cannot be proven. It does not matter for this analysis whether or not the audience or reader was intended to spot the reference; its simple existence shows its importance to Bede. Martin, 'Augustine's Influence', p. 357.

⁷⁰ The list of citations may be found at CCSL 122, pp. 401-3. The authors are listed alphabetically.

⁷¹ Laistner, 'The Library', p. 240.

verbal reminiscences and quotations from Gregory, the broad outline is this: rarely does the argument depend entirely on the quotation from Gregory, as will be demonstrated.

Four of the total citations of Gregory may be discarded from our discussion, as there are two or more possible sources for the reference in question; any slight inclination of wording towards one source over the other could well be coincidental, and therefore unable to be used as evidence.⁷² For the rest, on two occasions, Gregory is used as an etymological source; there is nothing particularly significant in Bede using Gregory's etymology, in view of Bede's interest in the subject. It is difficult (and possibly unwise) to suggest that Gregory inspired Bede's interest in etymology, as Isidore wrote a whole book on the subject.⁷³ Nevertheless, it is telling that this feature of Gregory's exegetical style also found its way into Bede's composition. On three occasions, they quote the same Biblical verse as evidence.⁷⁴ Both men knew the Bible thoroughly, and it is possible that they could independently use the same verse. These examples cannot show conclusively that Gregory influenced Bede's thinking; at best they demonstrate that Bede had read Gregory carefully. On one other occasion, Bede uses Gregory as a source of information for an historical fact.⁷⁵ This is of similar significance to the other points: it demonstrates Bede's knowledge of Gregory, but no deeper influence.

For the points which remain, the Gregorian reminiscences either summarise, expand, support, or form a small part of Bede's argument. With these reminiscences removed, Bede's argument would not collapse: it might look a little weaker. An example of this is Bede's use of the *Moralia* where a snippet of Gregory is used in Bede's interpretation of John the Baptist's clothing.⁷⁶ But in the absence of direct quotation from or reference to an author, we can assume that Bede was not calling upon their authority to reinforce his argument, though these references are a further indication of his comprehensive knowledge of Gregory.⁷⁷ They are not of key

⁷² As at I.14.49, where both Augustine's *Sermo* 110, line 1 (PL 38, col. 638) and Gregory's homily 31; see also II.1.38, II.8.21, II.10.152.

⁷³ I.3.20, I.6.108. Isidore's *Etymologiae* and Jerome's *Nomina Hebraica* are also frequently cited: twenty-eight and nine times respectively (see pp. 402-3, CCSL 122).

⁷⁴ I.1.133, I.24.38, II.14.79.

⁷⁵ I.8.61-2.

⁷⁶ Bede: I.1.108, Gregory: CCSL 143B; p. 1582, lines 1-17.

⁷⁷ Not all verbal reminiscences would be picked up by an audience, and therefore they are unlikely to have been included by Bede as pointers for his readers to ascertain his (Bede's) authority.

importance to the concepts being discussed, though they may refine them, which cases indicate a profounder influence on his thought.

With this in mind, let us recall Martin's comment, mentioned earlier, that it seems to have been Bede's policy to use verbal reminiscence rather than direct quotation. This could reflect his method of composition, suggesting an *extempore* delivery, with consequential slight inaccuracies and misrecollections.⁷⁸ Or it could be deliberate: a concealing of authority from all but the most alert. There is a precedent for this in Bede's handling of his verse life of Cuthbert. Lapidge has shown that one of Bede's practices in his revision of this verse life is the alteration of lines to make a quotation or inspiration less visible.⁷⁹ The same mechanism may be at work in the homilies – Bede is concealing the tracks that he has followed, leaving us with his opinions, opinions which have clearly been influenced generally by his predecessors, but from which specifics are difficult to extract by design.

It is clear that Gregory's ideas have underpinned Bede's thinking, even if Bede does not directly acknowledge the influence. It appears that Gregory's writing was less influential on the words chosen (for those, we see that Bede tended to choose Augustine) but was used for the broader moral approach. Gregory was Bede's social and pastoral model – hence we see Gregorian influence, since Bede discusses themes such as baptism, discipleship, ecclesiology, forgiveness of sins and the role of the pastor. Yet for numerology and eschatology, a more Augustinian influence may be detected, as will be discussed below. Augustine is also noted for his attention to the literal meaning of the biblical text (he wrote, after all, *De Genesi ad litteram*); Bede begins by analysing the letter (with due attention to names, places and numbers therein). One might broadly characterise Gregory's influence as pastoral and Augustine's as scholarly,⁸⁰ though it would be misleading to suggest that Gregory had little scholarly influence on Bede, or that Augustine gave little pastoral help.⁸¹

A slightly more detailed analysis of the key reminiscences reveals the areas where Bede was significantly influenced by Gregory. Bede states that John the

⁷⁸ This is less likely; see Introduction, pp. 12-13.

⁷⁹ M. Lapidge, 'Bede's Metrical *Vita S. Cuthberti*,' in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, ed. G. Bonner *et al.* (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 74-94, p. 82.

⁸⁰ This is given more weight when one observes that at I.8.89, Bede follows the verse division proposed by Augustine in *Tractates in Iohannem* 1.16, CCSL 36, pp. 9.1-10.25.

⁸¹ Martin notes that Augustine has a strong stylistic influence on Bede, discussed further in chapter III. Martin, 'Augustine's Influence', p. 360.

Baptist only preached a baptism of the forgiveness of sins; only Christ could actually impart this forgiveness, a point derived from Gregory.⁸² Many of these points concern Bede's Christology. Some also connect to Bede's ecclesiology: Bede uses Gregory's homilies on Ezekiel to demonstrate that Christ led both Jews and Gentiles to the heavenly Jerusalem.⁸³ This is of particular importance to Bede, whose *HE* demonstrates the salvation of the English people. There is one interesting point where Bede followed Gregory: they both believed that there would be an immediate judgement, followed by a final one (this latter ties in with Bede's eschatological beliefs). This is implied in: 'martyres ... mox soluti carcere carnis debita suo certamini praemia sortiuntur'⁸⁴ and expanded later on, where Bede states that the elect get their *final* reward after the *final* judgement (my italics).⁸⁵ Straw notes that Gregory believed the same.⁸⁶

Augustine and Bede were greatly interested in numerology, as Jones points out.⁸⁷ In the homilies we can see this in two ways: Bede has adopted Augustine's interpretation of the number forty-six, relating to Christ's formation in the womb.⁸⁸ The significance of this number has informed other works by Bede: both his *Lives of Cuthbert* have forty-six chapters.⁸⁹ But more interestingly, there is a profound influence with regard to the handling of the numbers six, seven and eight, which Augustine uses in his descriptions of the ages of the world.⁹⁰ This numerological interpretation is essential to Bede's view of the end of time, where we may detect an interesting synthesis of Gregorian and Augustinian thought.

This importance of numerology can be examined in his homily on the dedication of the Church.⁹¹ This is a reference to Bede's belief, expressed more clearly in his commentary on Genesis,⁹² that the world progressed through six

⁸² Bede I.1.10 (Gregory, Gospel homilies 20.25).

⁸³ II.3.38-9; Gregory, *Homiliae in Ezechielis*, ed. M. Adriaen, CCSL 142 (Turnholt, 1977), pp. 275.33-276.37, II.v.2. See also Bede's analysis of Apocalypse 7:4-5 in ch. 9.42-165 of his commentary, *In Apocalypsin*, ed. R. Gryson, CCSL 121A (Turnholt, 2001), pp. 311-23.

⁸⁴ II.24.111.

⁸⁵ II.24.317.

⁸⁶ Straw, *Gregory*, p. 59.

⁸⁷ Jones, 'Introductory Remarks', p. 192.

⁸⁸ II.24.264, p. 365 and II.1.193, p. 189, following Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus* 83, ed. A. Mutzenbecher, CCSL 44A (Turnholt, 1975), p. 363.181-202.

⁸⁹ W. Berschin discusses this in his article 'Bede's *Opus deliberatum ac perfectum*' in *St Cuthbert, His Cult and His Community*, ed. G. Bonner *et al.* (Woodbridge, 1989), pp. 95-102, pp. 99-101, where he also includes an account of Augustine's treatment of the number.

⁹⁰ For a useful survey of Augustine's writings on the matter, see Folliet, 'La typologie du *sabbat*'. The position closest to Bede's is outlined on p. 384, from Augustine's *Confessions*, book XIII.

⁹¹ II.24.240-50.

⁹² *In Genesim*, CCSL 118A, I.1093-1224.

temporal ages, with a seventh, spiritual age in parallel to those six, and the sixth and seventh ages ended with the Final Judgement, beginning the eighth age of eternal life.⁹³ Bede's numerological interests lead him to refer to this idea when the number six, seven or eight appears in a biblical text. These six, seven or eight ages may be compared to shorter spans of time: the seven days of creation (as in the Genesis passage), or the eight days of the Lord's suffering and death (from Palm Sunday to Easter Sunday), as in the homily passage. These ages are vital for determining the limits of time; they show the beginning and end of the world. It is no coincidence that chapter sixty-six of Bede's *De temporum ratione* contains a discussion of these ages. As I have shown, Bede's conception of these ages is heavily influenced by Augustine.⁹⁴ This tight-knit interlacing of numerology and history is Augustinian, but Bede's interpretation of the sixth age is most Gregorian. Augustine believed that the sixth age (that following Christ) was not prophesied, and that it was false to assume that 'any slice of secular history, of any nation, institution or society, could have an indispensable place in the historical realisation of God's purpose.'⁹⁵ Bede quite clearly believed the opposite – the *HE* is in effect one long exposition of the historical workings of divine Providence. This is in line with Gregory's extremely interventionist beliefs: as Straw puts it so strongly, for Gregory 'natural causation is eclipsed by supernatural intervention.'⁹⁶ Gregory saw the revelation of God's plan everywhere.

It is not difficult to demonstrate that Bede was familiar with the writings of the Church Fathers, sufficiently familiar to include both direct quotations and verbal reminiscences from many of their works. It is much more difficult to demonstrate the precise influence a particular author had on his thinking: while Bede may recall Augustine's or Gregory's words when stating a common theological concept, Bede could have encountered this concept in many places. In the absence of finding a theological statement that is confined to one author (though there are a few such), one is left to try to uncover a general 'inclination' by Bede towards a particular author's ideas or ideals. While Gregory appears to provide a close match for the

⁹³ This is discussed more fully in chapter I, pp. 32-7.

⁹⁴ See my unpublished B.A. dissertation, *Bede's Commentary on the Six Days of Creation*, pp. 12-9.

⁹⁵ R. A. Markus, *Saeculum: History and Society in the Theology of St Augustine*, revised edn (Cambridge, 1988), p. 157.

⁹⁶ Straw, *Gregory*, p. 10.

ideas and ideals revealed in the *HE* and the Life of Cuthbert, finding these traces in the Gospel homilies is much more difficult: Bede is occupying some middle ground between Gregory and Augustine, different from both yet not completely so. The choice of a series of Gospel homilies is a homage to Gregory, but, as noted above, the style can be described as Augustinian. But the work has its own internal coherence, assimilating and augmenting the wisdom of both men, to make something appropriate for its Anglo-Saxon audience. Perhaps the best analogy we may find is that Bede is writing a student's commentary on the Gospels – he does not seek to challenge established ground – he synthesises and arranges the work of former scholars in a way that is all his own.