

DRYTHELM'S DESIRE COMPUNCTION AND BEDE'S CELESTIAL TOPOGRAPHY

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Modern critics usually read the vision of Drythelm as an account of a man frightened into penitential asceticism even though Bede explains that Drythelm lived out his days in the desire for heaven, not fear of punishment. While fear is an important part of Drythelm's conversion, Bede depicts the process according to the doctrine of compunction as it is received from Gregory the Great, who presents compunction as a process by which fear of punishment yields to love and the desire for heaven. Reading the conversion of Drythelm as a process of Gregorian compunction reveals both Bede's fundamental optimism about the vision Drythelm has seen and a spirituality in the text that is more nuanced and positive than the fire and ice that figure so prominently in it. Proceeding from these observations, the paper argues that the celestial topography of Drythelm's vision is a spiritual topography — a map of personal and emotional progress through compunction, as understood by Gregory the Great and received by Bede, and only incidentally a map of celestial regions deemed logically necessary by later theologians. These conclusions complicate hellfire and brimstone readings of this and other Anglo-Saxon texts about judgment and penance, and they call for nuanced readings of compunction as a complex and productive experience.

INTRODUCTION

In Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* 5.12, a layman named Drythelm dies and is taken on a tour of the immediate hereafter, where he first sees souls suffering in a valley of fire and ice, then damned souls trapped in balls of fire rising from and falling back into the mouth of hell; from these terrors, Drythelm's angelic guide takes him to a beautiful area where good but imperfect souls wait to be admitted to heaven on Judgment Day, explaining that even the tormented souls in the valley of fire and ice are being purified for eventual salvation. Drythelm revives (to his wife's terror), gives away his worldly goods, and takes up a life of monastic discipline and famously rigorous asceticism.¹

For their comments on various stages of this project, I would like to thank Andrew Scheil, Andrew Rabin, Kevin Jones, and Francesco Tarelli. Any deficiencies in it belong to the author alone.

¹ All references to the text of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum* are to Bertram Colgrave and R. A. B. Mynors, eds. and trans., *Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 1969), hereafter abbreviated in the text as *Ecclesiastical History* and in notes as HE. All translations of this and other texts are mine unless otherwise noted.

The story of Drythelm's conversion fits the general theme of the *Ecclesiastical History* as an account of the conversion of the English and the growth of monasticism among them, but the episode has mainly been discussed as an extract in the context of other vision literature with an interest in the concept of the soul and visionary experience² or in the context of eschatology and the developing doctrine of Purgatory.³ This range of responses to the vision of Drythelm has produced a wealth of insights, but still to be desired is an account of the spiritual interest Bede displays in the vision. Critics who study the vision of Drythelm with the other wonder and vision stories in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* generally consider them to have a didactic, rather than historical, purpose⁴ that supports the theological concerns that shape the whole work,⁵ especially as it treats the conversion of the English in the context of salvation history.⁶

There has been firm critical agreement on the didactic purpose of Drythelm's vision: it is supposed to frighten Drythelm, and so readers, into repentance.

² Peter Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart, 1981), 136–37, 149, 199–203; Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà d'après la littérature latine: Ve–XIIIe siècle* (Rome, 1994), 194–226; Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford, 1987), 28–32.

³ Whether Drythelm's vision of souls being tried and castigated with tortures of fire and ice constitutes an account of Purgatory is a matter of critical debate. Le Goff concedes that purgation is at work but does not accept this passage as pertinent to the later doctrine: Jacques Le Goff, *The Birth of Purgatory*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago, 1984), 115–16. See, however, Helen Foxhall Forbes, "'Diuiduntur in Quattuor': The Interim Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England," *Journal of Theological Studies* 61 (2010): 659–84, at 668; Isabel Moreira, *Heaven's Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2010), especially chap. 6, "Purgatory and Bede and Boniface"; Ciro Flamarion Cardoso, "O Purgatorio no mundo de Beda," *Signum: Revista da ABREM; Associação Brasileira de Estudos Medievais* 5 (2001): 47–71, at 60–63; M. Bradford Bedingfield, "Anglo-Saxons on Fire," *Journal of Theological Studies* 52 (2001): 658–77, at 663; Sarah Foot, "Anglo-Saxon 'Purgatory,'" in *The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (Woodbridge, 2009), 87–96, at 88–89; Ananya Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday* (Cambridge, 2001), 90–91. See also Linda Miller, "Drythelm's Journey to the Other World: Bede's Literary Uses of Tradition," *Comitatus* 2 (1971): 3–15.

⁴ See Bertram Colgrave, "Bede's Miracle Stories," in *Bede, His Life, Times, and Writings*, ed. A. H. Thompson (New York, 1932; repr. 1966), 201–29; Henry Mayr-Harting, "Bede's Patristic Thinking as an Historian," in *Religion and Society in the Medieval West* (Burlington, VT, 1994; repr. 2010), 367–74; Benedicta Ward, "Miracles and History: A Reconsideration of the Miracle Stories Used by Bede," in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner (London, 1976), 70–76, at 73.

⁵ Jan Davitse, "On Bede as Christian Historian," in L. A. J. R. Houwen and A. A. MacDonald, eds., *Beda Venerabilis: Historian, Monk, & Northumbrian* (Groningen, 1996), 1–15; Roger Ray, "Bede, the Exegete, as Church Historian," in *Famulus Christi*, 125–40, at 126.

⁶ Ralph Walterspercher, "Book V of Bede's *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum*: Perspectives on Salvation History and Eschatology," *Archa Verbi* 1 (2004): 11–24. Cf. Ray, "Bede the Exegete," 126.

Several critics point to an “emphasis on the judgement of the individual” in Bede’s writings rather than on the general apocalypse,⁷ and they direct their attention overwhelmingly to the prospect of punishment. Sarah Foot suggests that the cluster of visions in book 5 of Bede’s history “far from providing their recipients with the reassurance of a promised share in the heavenly kingdom ... offer profoundly unsettling accounts of the tribulations suffered by the wicked,” so that “Drythelm’s example served to make Bede’s readers so fear judgment and eternal punishment that they would repent and reform their lives.”⁸ Yet Drythelm’s guide explicitly reassures him that, if he mends his ways, he will have a place among the joyful souls waiting for the opening of heaven. Ralph Walters-pacher declares that “it is clearly the fear of Judgment and eternal punishment that speaks” when Drythelm tells “everybody” about his vision.⁹ Most recently, Jesse Keskiaho, who characterizes the vision as “a call to penance,” states that Drythelm tells his vision only “to those who were terrified of judgement and ready to make use of his words.”¹⁰ But in Bede’s account, Drythelm’s audience is neither “everybody” nor just the “terrified”: He wanted to tell his vision “not randomly to all the slothful or those negligent of his life,” but rather to a mixed group of those who, “either terrified by the fear of torments or delighted by the hope of eternal joys, wished to drink up an advancement of piety from his words.”¹¹ Bede reports that the visionary disciplined his body through asceticism not in penitential terror but “in the indefatigable desire for heavenly goods.”¹² If the established critical reading of this episode accounts for those readers or auditors who might be terrified, this essay reads Drythelm’s vision for the possibility of delight, to show that reading it as a drama of compunction can allow a fresh interpretation of Bede’s strangely depicted celestial realm.

Bede’s account of Drythelm’s vision certainly describes a place where “the souls [of those who confessed just before they died] are tried and purified,”¹³ but they are all due to be redeemed in time; it also shows Drythelm leaving that vision of misery to see a beautiful place where righteous souls joyfully

⁷ Foot, “Anglo-Saxon Purgatory,” 87. See also Miller, “Drythelm’s Journey,” 13; Walters-pacher, “Book V of Bede’s *Historia*,” 16.

⁸ Foot, “Anglo-Saxon Purgatory,” 87 and 88.

⁹ Walters-pacher, “Book V of Bede’s *Historia*,” 17.

¹⁰ Jesse Keskiaho, *Dreams and Visions in the Early Middle Ages: The Reception and Use of Patristic Ideas, 400–900* (Cambridge, 2015), 65.

¹¹ “Haec et alia, quae uiderat, idem uir Domini, non omnibus passim desidiosis ac uitae suae incuriosis referre uolebat, sed illis solummodo, qui uel tormentorum metu perterriti, uel spe gaudiorum perennium delectati profectum pietatis ex eius uerbis haurire uolebant.” HE 5.12.

¹² “Infatigabili caelestium bonorum desiderio.” HE 5.12.

¹³ “Examinandae et castigandae sunt animae illorum, qui differentes confiteri et emendare scelera quae fecerunt, in ipso tandem mortis articulo ad paenitentiam confugiunt, et sic de corpore exeunt.” HE 5.12.

await passage into heaven at the final judgment.¹⁴ As Sharon Rowley shows, some uncertainty about the future is inherent in Drythelm's experience;¹⁵ however, the idea that Drythelm's vision should merely frighten people into repentance cannot stand in the face of Bede's point that Drythelm shares it with some who are delighted by hope. A more complex understanding of conversion and penitence is at work here, and Bede envisions it working for a diverse audience. Andrew Rabin, noting the complexity of Bede's presentation of this conversion, has argued that Bede's narrative technique implicates the reader as an interpreter of Drythelm's experience so that, like Drythelm, Haemgils, and Bede, readers become witnesses to the vision; this becoming involves a real transformation of the self because properly understanding the vision means undergoing the same conversion that Drythelm did, from the nominal believer to one who is "self-consciously penitent."¹⁶ One of Rabin's contributions to Drythelm scholarship is a reading that directs attention towards Drythelm, his experience, and its effects rather than at the context of the experience.¹⁷ An account is still needed both of the nature of this experience of conversion that distinguishes the self-consciously penitent and also of self-conscious penitence in Bede's understanding. Both can be explained in terms of Gregorian compunction.

GREGORIAN COMPUNCTION

While compunction is a familiar idea to readers of medieval texts, only a few modern authors have addressed compunction at length, with only occasional attention to Anglo-Saxon England,¹⁸ and, for a variety of reasons, the concept is often discussed in theological terms that belong to the thirteenth or fourteenth

¹⁴ Dinzelbacher underscores the proximity of the two intermediary zones by tracing Drythelm's passage between them in *Vision und Visionsliteratur* (n. 2 above), 149. See also Sarah Foot, "Anglo-Saxon Purgatory" (n. 3 above), 89–90; Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l'âme* (n. 2 above), 233.

¹⁵ Sharon Rowley, "The Role and Function of Otherworldly Visions in Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*," in *The World of Travellers: Exploration and Imagination*, ed. Kees Dekker, Karin Olsen, and Tette Hofstra (Leuven, 2009), 163–81, at 165.

¹⁶ Andrew Rabin, "Bede, Drythelm, and the Witness to the Other World," *Modern Philology* 106 (2009): 375–98, at 377, 379 n. 10, 389–92.

¹⁷ Rabin, "Bede, Drythelm, and the Witness to the Other World," 389.

¹⁸ The necessary starting point is Irénée Hausherr, *Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the Christian East*, trans. Anselm Hustader (Kalamazoo, 1982); this is the most comprehensive treatment available of compunction in patristic thought. For a more recent account and a survey of intervening scholarship, see Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk* (Oxford, 1986). Also see Sandra McEntire, *The Doctrine of Compunction in Medieval England: Holy Tears* (Lampeter, 1990), 22–23; Joan M. Petersen, *The Dialogues of Gregory the Great in Their Late Antique Cultural Background* (Toronto, 1984), 160–64; Robert Gillet, "Grégoire le Grand," in *Dictionnaire de spiritualité ascétique et mystique, doctrine et histoire* 7 (1994), 893–94.

centuries, not the seventh or eighth.¹⁹ It is necessary, therefore, to identify the nature and source of the doctrine of compunction for Anglo-Saxon England in texts known to be available to Bede, most importantly the writings of Gregory the Great. Doctrines of compunction are first elaborated in the East and reach the West principally through the writings of John Cassian,²⁰ especially in the four-part model he describes in the ninth conference of the *Collationes*. Gregory condenses compunction into a two-part form that suits his moral theology and that eventually overshadows its source in the spiritual culture of the early medieval West,²¹ and it is Gregory's doctrine that appears in Bede's works.²²

Gregory the Great describes compunction most succinctly in *Dialogues* 3.34, *quot sunt compunctionis genera*.²³ Simplifying Cassian's four-part schema, Gregory outlines compunction as an experience of two complementary impulses,

¹⁹ As McEntire (*Doctrine of Compunction*, 4) observes, western scholars too frequently give compunction a small part in the later doctrine of contrition. For a succinct account of this difficulty, see G. H. Gerrits, *Inter Timorem et Spem: A Study of the Theological Thought of Gerard Zerbolt of Zutphen (1367–1398)* (Leiden, 1986), 178–79 n. 103; see also M. T. A. Carroll, *The Venerable Bede: His Spiritual Teaching* (Washington, DC, 1946), 162–64, particularly n. 148.

²⁰ The identity of John Cassian, and therefore the authorship of his works, has recently been questioned by Panayiotis Tzamalikos in *A Newly Discovered Greek Father: Cassian the Sabaites Eclipsed by John Cassian of Marseilles* (Leiden, 2012) and *The Real Cassian Revisited: Monastic Life, Greek Paideia, and Origenism in the 6th Century* (Leiden, 2012). However, reviewers identify crippling flaws in his argument: see Columba Stewart, "Another Cassian?," *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 66 (2015): 372–76 and Augustine Cassidy's review in *Journal of Medieval Monastic Studies* 3 (2014): 119–25.

²¹ Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, 122–29. Gregory's preeminence as the "doctor of compunction" is noted at 123. Jean Leclercq acknowledges Gregory's mark on the western understanding of compunction by titling the second chapter of *Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture* (New York, 1974) "St. Gregory, Doctor of Desire." The importance of Gregory's teaching, and particularly *Dialogues* 3.34, is noted by Emily Thornbury in "Aldhelm's Rejection of the Muses and the Mechanics of Poetic Inspiration in Anglo-Saxon England," *Anglo-Saxon England* 88 (2007): 71–92, at 86–87. James Palmer outlines compunction in Anglo-Saxon England not inaccurately but less satisfactorily with reference to Defensor's *Liber scintillarum* and Climacus's *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, both of which reach England comparatively late: see his "Compunctio and the Heart in the Old English Poem *The Wanderer*," *Neophilologus* 88 (2004): 447–60. On the late arrival of Climacus's works to the Latin tradition, see Walther Völker, *Scala Paradisi: Eine Studie zu Johannes Climacus und zugleich eine Vorstudie zu Symeon dem neuen Theologen* (Wiesbaden, 1968), 8; also see Muriel Heppell, "The Latin Translation of the Ladder of Divine Ascent of John Climacus," *Mediterranean Historical Review* 4 (1989): 340–44.

²² Carroll, *Venerable Bede*, 162–64. Bede's interest in Gregory has been widely observed. For a recent discussion and survey of scholarly tradition, see Scott De Gregorio, "The Venerable Bede and Gregory the Great: Exegetical Connections, Spiritual Departures," *Early Medieval Europe* 18 (2010): 43–60.

²³ All references are to Adalbert de Vogüé, ed., *Gregoire Le Grande: Dialogues*, SC 251, 260, 265 (Paris, 1978), hereafter abbreviated *Dialogues* and referred to with book and chapter numbers.

both experienced as emotion and expressed with tears. First, the believer fears judgment and grieves for sins, then, having experienced mercy, the believer feels his distance from heaven and grieves over the separation. While the process begins with fear, it culminates in the desire for heaven. In Gregory's words,

Principaliter uero compunctionis genera duo sunt, quia Deum sitiens anima prius timore compungitur, post amore. Prius enim sese in lacrimis afficit, quia, dum malorum suorum recolit, pro his perpeti supplicia aeterna pertimescit. At uero cum longa moeroris anxietudine fuerit formido consumpta, quaedam iam de praesumptione ueniae securitas nascitur et in amore caelestium gaudiorum animus inflammatur, et qui prius flebat ne duceretur ad supplicium, postmodum flere amarissime incipit quia differtur a regno. Contemplatur etenim mens qui sint illi angelorum chori, quae ipsa societas beatorum spirituum, quae maiestas interna uisionis Dei, et amplius plangit quia a bonis perennibus deest, quam flebat prius cum mala aeterna metuebat. Sicque fit, ut perfecta compunctio formidinis tradat animum compunctioni dilectionis.²⁴

Gregory does not present compunction as the sting of remorse familiar from later, especially scholastic, models of ritual penance, but rather as a complex and persistent process of transformation: the believer fears judgment and is motivated to righteousness, experiences forgiveness and, healing from the grief over his sin, finds himself impatient for heaven, and so is motivated to righteousness now by desire. Compunction of the heart (*compunctio cordis*) comprises the compunction of fear (*compunctio formidinis*, *compunctio poenitentiae*) and the compunction of love (*compunctio amoris*, *compunctio dilectionis*).²⁵ Compunction,

²⁴ *Dialogues* 3.34. "In truth there are principally two kinds of compunction, because the soul thirsting for God is first pierced by fear and afterwards by love. For first, it afflicts itself with tears because, when it mulls over its evils, on their account it fears to endure eternal punishment. But truly when dread has been consumed by the long anxiety of mourning, then a certain security is born of the anticipation of pardon, and the spirit is inflamed with the love of heavenly joys, and he who first wept lest he be led to punishment, afterwards begins to weep most bitterly because he is kept waiting for the kingdom. And indeed the mind contemplates what choirs of angels might be, what very society of blessed spirits, what majesty of the inward vision of God, and laments the more because it fails to obtain perennial goods than it previously wept when it feared eternal evils. And thus it happens that the completed compunction of fear hands over the spirit to the compunction of love."

²⁵ Scholarship tends to emphasize certain parts of this process at the expense of Gregory's synthesis, and the result sometimes misrepresents the process. Christopher Vaccaro argues cogently in agreement with Sandra McEntire for translating Old English *onbryrdnes* as *compunction*, but appears to conflate *compunctio amoris/dilectionis* with the hypernym *compunctio cordis* in a misreading of Aelfric in "Inbryrde Breostsefa: Compunction in Line 841a of Cynewulf's *Elene*," *Notes and Queries* 52 (2005): 160–61, at 161. James Palmer quotes Leclercq's explanation that *compunctio cordis* tends to become *compunctio dilectionis* without noting Leclercq's move from hypernym to hyponym and elision of the compunction of fear; this does not disrupt his argument about the emotional force of *The Wanderer*, but in its emphasis on desire, it provides an imbalanced summary of the doctrine of compunction ("*Compunctio* and the Heart," 449).

rather than causing a moment of repentance and conversion, initiates a turn towards God and then persists as a habit of constantly turning towards God in changing circumstances; it is telling that Gregory introduces the concept to account for the lifelong virtue of Eleutherius, rather than in the context of a discussion of dramatic moments of reversal and conversion.

Compunction involves a new awareness of the soul's own state, and in his *Moralia in Job* Gregory describes the process with language that evokes the experience of a vision and anticipates the dramatization that Bede offers in his presentation of Drythelm's vision; through the contemplation of higher things, the mind rises to a clearer view of itself: "Super se enim rapitur dum sublimia contempletur; et semetipsam iam liberius excedendo conspiciens, quicquid ei ex seipsa sub seipsa remanet, subtilius comprehendit." The mind is called out or awakened (*excitata*) to observe its condition in light of the eternal and in contrast to its ordinary state of numb frigidity: "Hinc est quod saepe mens nostra quamuis frigida in conversationis humanae actione torpescat, quamuis in quibusdam delinquat et nesciat, quamuis peccata quaedam quasi nulla perpendat; cum tamen ad appetenda sublimia orationis compunctione se erigit, ipso suae oculo compunctionis excitata ad circumspiciendam se post fletum uigilantior redit."²⁶ Bede imitates this description and echoes Gregory's interest in visions in his Homily 1.9 *On St. John the Evangelist*, describing the contemplative life as one shaped by the compunction of tears and the desire for heaven, which may include visions of its joys:

Contemplatiua autem uita est cum longo quis bonae actionis exercitio edoctus diutinae orationis dulcedine instructus crebra lacrimarum compunctione adsuefactus a cunctis mundi negotiis uacare et in sola dilectione oculum mentis intendere didicerit gaudiumque perpetuae beatitudinis quod in futura percepturus est uita etiam in presenti coeperit ardentem desiderando praegustare et aliquando etiam quantum mortalibus fas est in excessu mentis speculando sublimiter.²⁷

²⁶ *Moralia* 32.3. "Therefore [the mind] is carried up above itself when it contemplates heavenly things; and, now observing itself more freely by rising above itself, whatever remains of it outside itself, below, it more accurately perceives... . Hence it is that often our mind, however much it may grow numb, frigid in the activity of human affairs, however much it may offend in or be ignorant of certain things, however much it may weigh certain sins as nothing, nevertheless, when it raises itself up through the compunction of prayer to earnestly desire heavenly things, it returns after weeping incited to examine itself more attentively with the eye of its compunction."

²⁷ All references to Bede's homilies are to D. Hurst, ed., *Bedae Venerabilis Homeliarum Evangelii Libri II*, CCL 122 (Turnhout, 1955), hereafter referred to by series, number, and line. The current reference is to *Homilies* 1.9.168–71. "The contemplative life, however, is when someone taught by long exercise of good work, instructed by the sweetness of long prayer, accustomed to frequent compunction of tears, has learned to be free from all the business of the world and turn the eye of the mind to love alone, and may have begun to gain a foretaste of the joy of perpetual blessedness which he is to obtain in the future life by ardently

In his account of Drythelm's life, Bede's expression remains consistent with Gregory's; on his revival, Drythelm explains that he must leave off his former habits and take up a new *conversatio* or way of life.²⁸ When onlookers marvel at his asceticism by exclaiming about what frigid water he bathes in, Drythelm replies "frigidiora ego uidi,"²⁹ which must refer to the icy punishments he sees in his vision, but in the context of his new *conversatio*, this reply simultaneously contrasts the physical frigidity of asceticism with the spiritual frigidity Gregory attributes to a life grown numb in the business of worldly cares in his *Moralia*. Bede transmits the causes and effects of compunction in not only the form but also the words he finds in Gregory's writing: in the expository context of a homily he imitates Gregory's language and, in a narrative passage, he attributes those terms to the person who has experienced compunction, dramatizing his endorsement of Gregory's doctrine.

Bede takes care to emphasize the bipartite process of compunction in other expository writing where he explores the significance and effects of the process. In Homily 1.18, *On the Purification of the Virgin*, Bede exhorts the faithful to compunction as he receives the concept from Gregory and sees it indicated in the sacrifice of doves or turtledoves described in the second chapter of Luke, a symbol that Gregory treats differently in the *Moralia*. Bede sets aside Gregory's exegesis of the two fowl as sins of commission and omission and instead allegorizes them as the compunctions of fear and love as they are outlined in *Dialogues* 3.34.³⁰ In doing so, Bede shifts our attention away from the necessity of penitence and foregrounds the experience of the compunction suffered by the penitent.

Bede's interest in the origins and experience of compunction colors his reading of the pericope, where he examines the emotional reactions of witnesses to the life

desiring it in the present, and sometimes even, insofar as is appropriate to mortals, by seeing it in the ecstasy of the mind." André Crépin notes this moment in his introduction to a recent edition of the *Ecclesiastical History*: Michael Lapidge, ed., *Histoire ecclésiastique du peuple anglais*, trans. Pierre Monat and Philippe Robin, 3 vols., SC 489, 490, and 491 (Paris, 2005), 1:24. In line 166 Hurst gives "a *cunctis* mundi negotiis," though *cunctis* is certainly meant, as recorded by J. A. Giles, *The Miscellaneous Works of Venerable Bede*, 6 vols. (London, 1843), 5:263.

²⁸ "Non tamen ea mihi, qua ante consueveram, conuersatione sed multum dissimili ex hoc tempore uiuendum est." HE 5.12.

²⁹ "I have seen colder things." HE 5.12.

³⁰ Lawrence Martin recognizes Bede's interest in compunction in this passage and connects it to *Moralia* 32.3, noting that Bede connects the two birds with "two stages in the psychological process of repentance" and notes that it is "quite different" from Gregory's interpretation of the sacrifice, which is based on those of Augustine and Jerome. See his chapter "Bede and Preaching" in *Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott De Gregorio (Cambridge, 2010), 156–69, at 167. See also the discussion of this passage in Martin's introduction to his book *Gospel Homilies* (Kalamazoo, 1991). An "echo" of Gregory in this passage is noted by Scott De Gregorio, *Innovation and Tradition in the Writings of the Venerable Bede* (Morgantown, WV, 2006), 190–91; De Gregorio also notes Martin's attention to the resemblance. It is noteworthy, however, that Bede's passage duplicates the language of *Dialogues* 3.34 directly.

of Christ. Bede sees the variety of responses by Jesus's Jewish contemporaries: Herod and the establishment are worried, the Pharisees are offended, the masses both fear and glorify God; at the Passion, the impious foolishly rejoice while the pious mourn (these positions are to be reversed in the heavenly kingdom). In this variety of responses, Bede sees a universal pattern where any single person's reaction to Christ may be found, and he generalizes these reactions as tendencies of fear or desire, a long-standing and familiar opposition. Bede used Gregorian compunction to give his readers or auditors a handle on the paradox of complementary fear and love: to Bede, Mary and Joseph's postnatal offering at the temple signifies *compunctio cordis* and the two birds its complementary modes. His explanation of compunction incorporates the language of fire and immolation that Gregory uses to explain compunction elsewhere in the *Moralia* but is mainly taken verbatim from *Dialogues* 3.34.

Duo sunt namque genera compunctionis quibus semet ipsos domino fideles in ara cordis immolant quia nimirum sicut ex patrum dictis accepimus Deum sitiens³¹ anima prius timore compungitur postea amore. Prius enim sese in lacrimis afficit quia dum malorum suorum recolit pro his perpeti supplicia aeterna pertimescit quod est unum turtorem siue pullum columbae pro peccato offerre. At dum longa maeroris anxietate fuerit formido consumpta quaedam iam de praesumptione ueniae securitas nascitur et in amorem caelestium gaudiorum animus inflammatur. Et qui prius flebat ne duceretur ad supplicium postmodum flere amarissime incipit quia differtur a regno quod est de altero turture siue pullo columbino holocaustum facere.³²

Bede's intellectual and spiritual sympathy for Gregory is most clearly visible in his exposition, where he imitates, or simply borrows, Gregory's authoritative explanation and language.³³ In narrative writing, generic demands limit such borrowing and digression; however, we can discern this pattern of Gregorian

³¹ In Hurst's edition, the verb is *sentiens*, "feeling," which reflects the majority of the manuscripts he uses, but he notes the presence of *sitiens*, "thirsting," in three manuscripts of early insular origin or character. De Vogüé records *sitiens*, "thirsting" in this setting in *Dialogues* 3.34. Both the textual tradition and the metaphorical character of *sitiens*, in light of *lectio difficilior*, recommend it here.

³² *Homilies* 1.18.173–92. "For there are two kinds of compunction by which those faithful to the Lord offer themselves on the altar of the heart, because certainly, just as we have received it from the words of the fathers, the soul thirsting for God is first pierced by fear and afterwards by love. For first it afflicts itself in tears because, when it mulls over its evils, on their account it fears to endure eternal punishment, which is to present one turtle or young dove as an offering for sin. But when dread has been consumed by the long anxiety of mourning, then a certain security is born of the anticipation of pardon, and the spirit is inflamed with the love of heavenly joys, and he who first wept lest he be led to punishment afterwards begins to weep most bitterly because he is kept waiting for the kingdom, which is to make a sacrifice of the other turtle or young dove."

³³ Scott De Gregorio, "Affective Spirituality: Theory and Practice in Bede and Alfred the Great," *Essays in Medieval Studies* 22 (2005): 129–39, at 132.

compunction when Bede writes that Drythelm's life after the vision, even if he had not spoken a word, would attest that he had seen "multa ... uel horrenda uel desideranda." We can also see Gregorian compunction at play when Drythelm chooses to live in a different *conuersatio* of asceticism and devotion, during which time he relates his vision only to those who are prepared to advance their piety because they are "uel tormentorum metu perterriti, uel spe gaudiorum perennium delectati."³⁴ By declaring that Drythelm was revived "for the calling of the living out from the death of the soul," Bede indicates that this pattern of compunction ought to extend to readers. Indeed, Sharon Rowley has argued that Bede positions himself as a guide for the reader analogous to the angel who leads Drythelm in the vision.³⁵

Compunction is as integral to Drythelm's visionary experience as it is to Bede's discussion of his subsequent conversion and piety. Through the celestial topography it reveals, the vision gives Drythelm a coherent experience of compunction. The landscape Drythelm travels through is arranged to show a spatio-temporal path to salvation, one that Drythelm also traverses as an emotional journey from fear to desire. As in Gregory's formula, in the vision the compunction of fear comes first, when Drythelm sees the punishing valley of fire and ice. From this point the guide leads him, "spectaculo tam horrendo perterritum,"³⁶ to the mouth of hell and leaves him there. He is now *pavidus*, utterly terrified at the demonstration of hell's inescapability, as souls rise from it only to fall back in, and as he hears the terrible wailing behind him, presumably in the purgatorial valley. He does not know what to do or where to turn until his guide finds him and leads him away into the light.³⁷

Where the compunction of fear is indicated with a vision of both castigation in the valley and perdition at the hellmouth, the compunction of love, the desire for heaven, is indicated with an approach to paradise that leads to less direct experience. Turning to the southeast, the guide leads Drythelm through growing light until they enter a beautiful plain wondrously situated on top of an immense wall.³⁸ This plain is full of pleasures, such as the gathering of joyful souls, angelic singing, and beautiful lights and scents, that echo the joys of heaven,

³⁴ "Many things ... to be abhorred or desired ... either terrified by the fear of torments, or delighted by the hope of eternal joys." HE 5.12.

³⁵ "Ad excitationem uiuentium de morte animae." HE 5.12; Rowley, "The Role and Function of Otherworldly Visions" (n. 15 above), at 171, 181.

³⁶ "Terrified by such a horrifying spectacle." HE 5.12.

³⁷ HE 5.12.

³⁸ I am not aware of a reading that locates the pleasant zone on top of the wall. However, Bede's text seems to require this interpretation: "cum ergo peruenissemus ad murum, statim nescio quo ordine fuimus in summitate eius. Et ecce ibi campus erat latissimus ac laetissimus." No mention is made of descending or looking down from the wall, and the emphatic introduction of the field suggests that its situation is surprising.

which, according to Gregory, souls in the state of *compunctio dilectionis* contemplate.³⁹ In this region, the narration of pleasures, including blessed society, music, smell, light, and beauty, leads to the narration of desire when the guide leads Drythelm to the margin of a more beautiful place into which Drythelm is not allowed to travel or even to look directly. Drythelm declares “aspicio ante nos multo maiorem luminis gratiam quam prius”⁴⁰ and that he can sense more delicious scents and more beautiful music. The guide will later explain that even this realm is not heaven, but a neighboring place, where the pleasures can be perceived, but not partaken of: it is the apex of desire, not its consummation.⁴¹ Drythelm sums up this experience and the effects of this desire as he describes his return to life: “multum detestatus sum reuerti ad corpus, delectatus nimirum suauitate ac decore loci illius, quem intuebar, simul et consortio eorum, quos in illo uidebam.”⁴²

Drythelm wakes up to feel his distance from heaven: he is left only with desire. During the progress of his vision, he was first struck by the incapacitating fear of punishment and then led to overwhelming desire for heaven. His journey dramatizes the emotional progress of Gregorian compunction from the compunction of fear to the compunction of love, and it is the compunction of love, or desire, that this narrative persistently emphasizes. The final image Bede offers of Drythelm is of witnesses marveling at his indifference to discomfort and austerity, but in the next sentence Bede emphasizes Drythelm's desire for heavenly goods, explaining “sicque usque ad diem suae uocationis infatigabili caelestium bonorum desiderio corpus senile inter cotidiana ieiunia domabat.”⁴³ Bede depicts Drythelm living in Gregory's “completed compunction of fear,” which “hands the soul over to the compunction of love,” where it “laments more because it fails to obtain eternal goods, than it wept before when it feared eternal evils.”⁴⁴ Though Drythelm does not express his compunction through weeping, he is moved to asceticism by his distance from heaven, not his proximity to hell. This is not a simple replacement of fear with joy, for as Bede and Gregory remind us, the soul after compunction “begins to weep most bitterly”⁴⁵ over its separation from heaven, and

³⁹ “Contemplatur etenim mens qui sint illi angelorum chori, quae ipsa societas beatorum spirituum, quae maiestas internae visionis Dei.” *Dialogues* 3.34.

⁴⁰ “I see before us a much greater grace of light than before.” HE 5.12.

⁴¹ HE 5.12.

⁴² “I hated to return to my body, truly delighted by the sweetness and beauty of that place I had looked at, and also the fellowship of them whom I saw in it.” HE 5.12.

⁴³ “Thus he subdued his old body between daily fasts until the day of his calling [away, i. e. death] in the indefatigable desire for heavenly goods.” HE 5.12.

⁴⁴ As a result of compunction, the soul “amplius plangit quia a bonis perennibus deest, quam flebat prius cum mala aeterna metuebat. Sicque fit, ut perfecta compunctio formidinis tradat animum compunctioni dilectionis.” *Dialogues* 3.34.

⁴⁵ Bede, *Homilies* 1.18.182 and *Dialogues* 3.34 (nn. 33 and 24 above, respectively).

Gregory writes of a *reverberatio* that sustains mourning for sin and for distance from heaven.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, such a transformation is a fundamental change of perspective, and against the backdrop of the grimmer visions that follow Drythelm's in the *Ecclesiastical History*, Bede tunes this one to emphasize *compunctio dilectionis*.

The desire for heaven is the optimal result of this ambivalent experience, but both Bede and Drythelm recognize that other responses are possible. Bede anticipates a diverse audience and a range of responses to Drythelm's vision. Some people are interested in spectacle, and while Bede makes the vision available to them, he prescribes it to be shared with those who desire spiritual discipline and growth. Bede attributes this distinction between spiritually idle and diligent audiences to Drythelm, who "haec et alia, quae uiderat, ... non omnibus passim desidiis ac uitae suae incuriosis referre uolebat, sed illis solummodo, qui uel tormentorum metu perterriti, uel spe gaudiorum perennium delectati profectum pietatis ex eius uerbis haurire uolebant."⁴⁷ In his depiction of Drythelm's choice about how to share the vision, Bede recognizes that readers will be interested in its details as well as its effects, and he explicitly endorses the latter. Bede connects eschatological visions to compunction more directly when he writes elsewhere that Fursa only wanted to recount his vision to those who "propter desiderium compunctionis interrogabant."⁴⁸ Drythelm wastes no time on the idlers: Bede tells of two receptive listeners who are prepared to recognize and learn from the pattern of fear and desire, holding up Haemgils on the one hand as a monastic auditor and King Aldfrid on the other as a secular reader who is "undecumque doctissimo" and attuned to the monastic spirituality that Drythelm offers.⁴⁹

If Haemgils and King Aldfrid are signs that Bede anticipated a monastic or a similarly spiritual lay readership in part of his audience, we may look for signs that the text was designed to support the practice of monastic reading. Bede offers a cue for such a reception when he refers the reader of Drythelm's vision to similar miracles and visions in the *Dialogues* by classifying the event as a "miraculum memorabile et antiquorum simile."⁵⁰ By contextualizing Drythelm's vision among those recounted in a cornerstone of monastic literature, Bede prompts monastic readers to treat his writing as fodder for *ruminatio*,⁵¹ the

⁴⁶ Carol Straw, *Gregory the Great: Perfection in Imperfection* (Berkeley, 1988), 229–35.

⁴⁷ "These and other things which he had seen, he did not care to relate randomly to all the slothful or those negligent of his life, but only to those who, whether terrified by fear of torments or delighted by the hope of eternal joys, wished to drink up an advancement of piety from his words." HE 5.12.

⁴⁸ "Asked because of a desire for compunction." HE 3.19.

⁴⁹ HE 5.12.

⁵⁰ "A memorable miracle, and like those of old." HE 5.12. William D McReady, *Miracles and the Venerable Bede* (Toronto, 1994), 179.

⁵¹ Rabin, "Bede, Drythelm, and the Witness to the Other World" (n. 15 above), 393.

meditative, prayerful reading during which the reader utters and so internalizes and re-creates the text and the spiritual experiences it narrates. Jean Leclercq places *ruminatio* at the foundation of monastic spirituality, an endeavor whose sole end is compunction, which Leclercq defines as the prayerful cultivation and expression of desire for heaven.⁵² Drythelm's vision offers the ruminating reader specific and strategically placed moments of vicarious experience: abandoned at the hellmouth, Drythelm switches to the present tense to say "I perceive (*cerno*)" damned souls trapped in balls of foul flames that rise from, and fall back into, the mouth of hell, as well as to say "I suddenly hear (*audio subitum*) behind me the sound of an immense and wretched wailing."⁵³ In the antechamber to heaven he declares, "I see (*aspicio*) before us a much greater grace of light than before."⁵⁴ Finally, returning to earthly life, he states, "I hated to return to my body, truly delighted by the sweetness and beauty of that place I had looked at, and also the fellowship of them whom I could see in it. Nor yet did I dare to ask anything of my guide; but amid these things, I know not (*nescio*) by what means, suddenly I perceive (*cerno*) myself to live among men."⁵⁵ A sprinkling of present-tense narration is in itself unremarkable, but the potential effect on a ruminating reader is noteworthy: at the moments of greatest fear, joy, and desire, a ruminating reader is implicated in the text by pronouncing these verbs of perception in the first-person and present tense, vicariously experiencing Drythelm's vision and his compunction.

READING THE SPIRITUAL TOPOGRAPHY OF DRYTHELM'S VISION

The topography that Drythelm traverses in his vision (that is to say, his spatial experience, the most corporeal aspect of his vision) has attracted more scholarly attention than the spiritual experience that Bede emphasizes at the beginning and end of the passage.⁵⁶ In keeping with Bede's acknowledgement that different audiences will find distinct interests in Drythelm's vision, critics have responded diversely to the complex layout of the afterworld Bede depicts. While Bede asserts that he is reliably transmitting an authoritative report of Drythelm's own experience, literary convention and Bede's own interest in

⁵² Leclercq, *Love of Learning and the Desire for God* (n. 21 above), 72–73. See 29–32 for Leclercq's definition of compunction, which is a theme of the whole book. His discussion of the *Canticum Canticorum* on 84–86 is particularly illuminating.

⁵³ "Audio subitum post terga sonitum inmanissimi fletus ac miserrimi." HE 5.12.

⁵⁴ "Aspicio ante nos multo maiorem luminis gratiam quam prius." HE 5.12.

⁵⁵ "Multum detestatus sum reuerti ad corpus, delectatus nimirum suauitate ac decore loci illius, quem intuebar, simul et consortio eorum, quos in illo uidebam. Nec tamen aliquid ductorem meum rogare audebam; sed inter haec nescio quo ordine repente me inter homines uiuere cerno." HE 5.12.

⁵⁶ See nn. 2 and 3 above.

orthodox theology and church politics cannot be discounted as influences: even a rigidly credulous acceptance of Bede's neutrality and veracity would have to consider how these influences might have shaped Drythelm's perceptions and understanding. Neither should we discount Bede's capacity as an author and exegete whose work goes beyond collating source material.⁵⁷

How we read the topography of Drythelm's celestial experience — and most especially the apparently innovative, quadripartite division of the beyond into eternal and temporal regions, each with pleasant and painful divisions — is bound up with our judgments about Bede's sources and intentions for the episode. Generally analogous accounts of visionary realms are well known, notably the roughly contemporary vision of the Monk of Wenlock and the later vision of Tundal; if, as St. John D. Seymour argued,⁵⁸ these and the vision of Drythelm show the influence of Celtic folklore in their depictions of the beyond, the question remains of why Bede considered this an important episode to provide to his readers. One explanation, already discussed, is that by dividing the interim realm into good and bad areas, Bede employed some hellfire and brimstone preaching to frighten his readers into repentance. This explanation must be partly true, but it does not accord with the general optimism of the episode: all the people in the interim zone, including Drythelm, are due to be redeemed at the final judgment.⁵⁹ The visions of Fursa and the Monk of Wenlock seem better suited to this purpose, with their specific and detailed discussions of sin. From a more political perspective, the angel's explanation that intercessory prayers and masses can shorten souls' punishments and help them into the pleasant celestial anteroom supports arguments that Bede has structured this view of a divided interim realm to promote these activities and to garner financial support for them — a reading that accords with Bede's promotion of monastic establishments and his dedication of the history to a secular monarch, but which places great emphasis on one sentence in the psychopomp's explanation of the vision.⁶⁰ The

⁵⁷ See Paul Meyvaert, "Bede the Scholar," in *Famulus Christi* (n. 4 above), 40–69; Frederick Biggs, "Bede's Use of Augustine: Echoes from Some Sermons?" *Revue bénédictine* 108 (1998): 201–13, at 202; Benedicta Ward, "Bede the Theologian," in *The Medieval Theologians*, ed. G. R. Evans (Oxford, 2001), 57–64, at 57 and 60; Joseph Kelly, "Augustine and Bede on the Gospel," in *Congresso internazionale su S. Agostino nel XVI Centenario della conversione*, 3 vols. (Rome, 1986), 3:159–65, at 160–61; Scott De Gregorio, "The Venerable Bede and Gregory the Great" (n. 21 above).

⁵⁸ St. John D. Seymour, "The Eschatology of the Early Irish Church," *Zeitschrift für celtische Philologie* 14 (1926): 179–211, at 191–97, particularly 196.

⁵⁹ The angel refers to the souls in pain as those "qui tamen, quia confessionem et paenitentiam uel in morte habuerunt, omnes in dies iudicii ad regnum caelorum perueniunt." HE 5.12.

⁶⁰ Carol Zaleski describes the episode as "a manifesto for Benedictine Monasticism, ascetic discipline, and masses for the dead" in *Otherworld Journeys* (n. 2 above), 32. Also see Ananya Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday* (n. 3 above), 47–48, 106.

search for textual antecedents has turned up no simple sources⁶¹ but rather led to discussion of how the structure of the region reflects Bede's eschatological and soteriological ideas: Isabel Moreira and Helen Foxhall Forbes have shown how Bede's divided waiting area satisfies theological necessities of orthodox eschatology and so provides an innovative narrative depiction of established doctrine on penitence and judgment.⁶² In addition to this analogical significance, Bede's afterworld provides a spatial setting for Drythelm's progress through a "moral topography," as Andrew Rabin has noted.⁶³ More specifically, it offers a tropological map of Gregorian compunction.

Whether Bede's afterworld is truly quadripartite or tripartite hinges on the division of the interim realm into zones of pain and pleasure: if the realm is formed as a site for compunction, then it makes sense that the realm is divided into two regions separated by a space that may be, and is meant to be, traveled.⁶⁴ Just as Drythelm traveled from terror to joy, so eventually will all who are presently in the darkness; presumably some of them have already made the same journey, as the guide explains to Drythelm: "omnes in die iudicii ad regnum caelorum perueniunt. Multos autem preces uiuentium, et elemosynae, et ieiunia, et maxime celebratio missarum, ut etiam ante diem iudicii liberentur, adiuant."⁶⁵ The interim realm has two sides but only one exit: salvation. The hellmouth is on display, but not an option; presumably, anyone who can see it must feel a salutary fear that initiates compunction. By mapping the states of fear and desire onto adjacent spaces between which the soul must travel, Bede stages compunction for Drythelm as well as for the sympathetic auditors that Bede describes and holds up as models for reading the vision. Reading Drythelm's vision in sympathy with the spirituality it represents recommends a tripartite afterworld

⁶¹ See Kabir, *Paradise, Death, and Doomsday*, 97. Kabir speculates that Bede's account is a "direct response" to Boniface's account of the Monk of Wenlock, which she in turn regards as dependent on the *Prognosticon* of Julian of Toledo (97, 102). The argument proceeds from this speculation, cautiously advanced, to assertions of influence founded on it: these, in turn, are presented as evidence that "confirms both this dependence [of Bede on Boniface] and their divergent approaches towards the ideas conveyed in the *Prognosticon*." This begs the question. Helen Foxhall Forbes refutes Kabir's reading of the *Prognosticon* and rejects it as a potential source: see Foxhall Forbes, "Diuiduntur in Quattuor" (n. 3 above), at 3–4.

⁶² Moreira, *Heaven's Purge* (n. 3 above), 162; Foxhall Forbes, "Diuiduntur in Quattuor," 10–13.

⁶³ Rabin, "Bede, Drythelm, and the Witness to the Other World," 389.

⁶⁴ On the permeability of this boundary, see Dinzelbacher, *Vision und Visionsliteratur* (n. 2 above), 149. Also see Foot, "Anglo-Saxon Purgatory" (n. 3 above), 89–90; Carozzi, *Le Voyage de l'âme* (n. 2 above), 233.

⁶⁵ "On the day of judgment, they all will reach the kingdom of Heaven. The prayers of the living, and almsgivings, and fasting, and most of all the celebration of masses, help many to be liberated even before the day of judgment." HE 5.12.

with a complex interim realm, its parts unified by the coherent experience they provide, an experience that results in a single desire.

CONCLUSION

I have argued here that the vision of Drythelm in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* is foremost an account of compunction, which Bede understood according to the outline given in Gregory's *Dialogues* 3:34. In this Gregorian mode, *compunctio cordis* is understood as a spiritual experience that begins with *compunctio formidinis/timoris*, the fear of punishment for sins committed, and culminates in the *compunctio amoris/dilectionis*, intense desire for closeness to God expressed as mourning because of the distance that remains. The celestial regions Drythelm sees are arranged to present to him "many things to be abhorred or desired" precisely in order to inspire this experience of compunction. This vision accordingly leads Drythelm to adopt a new *conversatio* of monastic asceticism. Bede introduces Drythelm's legendary asceticism as his living "in ... mentis et corporis contritione,"⁶⁶ but he ultimately explains this life as an expression of the desire for heaven when he shows Drythelm fasting to subdue his body "infatigabili caelestium bonorum desiderio."⁶⁷ Drythelm's contrition ought to be read in a general sense as grief for both sins committed and distance from heaven, not in its later and narrower sense as a term for the regretful response to sin as a specific stage in penitence; rather, for Bede *contritio* belongs, with *luctus* and *compunctio lacrymarum*, to the vocabulary of Gregorian compunction, which emphasizes the complexity of a mourning that changes with the changing heart. To gloss *contritio* as "penance," as Colgrave and Mynors do, is to see Drythelm motivated by guilt and fear, as most modern critics do, and not by desire, as Bede does.

By narrating the experience of compunction through Drythelm's voice in the first person, Bede exposes the spiritual function as well as the spiritual content of this text. A ruminating monastic reader recites a script of compunction and enacts, through prayerful *lectio*, the progress from *compunctio formidinis* to *compunctio dilectionis*. Bede suggests this pattern of reading when he indicates that Drythelm's vision has been told to those who are moved to advance in piety either because of their fear of torment or their delight in considering perennial joys and also when he introduces Drythelm's resurrection as a miracle presented "ad excitationem uiuentium de morte animae."⁶⁸ In this way, the passage is a work of spiritual literature offered to monastic and lay readers alike in the prototypes of Haemgils and King Aldfrid.

⁶⁶ "In ... contrition of mind and body." HE 5.12.

⁶⁷ "In the indefatigable desire for heavenly goods." HE 5.12.

⁶⁸ "For the calling of the living out from the death of the soul." HE 5.12.

Like this pair of spiritual and political readers, political and spiritual readings of this and other passages of the *Ecclesiastical History* follow one another. Dryhthelm's vision reveals a particular and personal eschatology with the specific spiritual effect of compunction, and it has related moral implications for the value of asceticism, the efficacy of prayers for the dead, and the support of monastic communities that carry on these beneficial practices. The topography of Dryhthelm's vision is arranged to produce these results. The topological support this surreal landscape provides for Gregorian compunction may be its most direct connection to orthodox thought, even while the topology of the vision finds analogues and inspiration, if not definite sources, in the visionary and eschatological tradition. Though Bede stands on tradition when he compares this miracle with those of the ancients and adopts Gregory's theory of compunction, he need not confine himself to tradition in expressing desire.

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Keywords: Bede, Dryhthelm, vision, spirituality, compunction, fear