

# Virgin spouses as model Christians: the legend of Julian and Basilissa in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*

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Of the several hundred saints venerated in early medieval England, Julian and Basilissa did not claim much hold in the minds of Anglo-Saxon Christians. Their legend is but one of five stories of virgin spouses circulated by authors from Aldhelm to Ælfric, and there is no evidence of widespread devotion to them in England during the period.<sup>1</sup> Few who read or heard the *Lives of Saints*, Ælfric's late-tenth-century collection of Old English hagiography and homiletic material, would have been familiar with the legend.<sup>2</sup> And in light of the paucity of references to the couple in Anglo-Saxon liturgical books, even English monks, whose preferences Ælfric says the *Lives* reflect, would not likely have known their story well.<sup>3</sup>

Yet there is no mistaking the prominence Ælfric gives to saintly couples in the *Lives*. He tells the uncommon tale of chaste marriage and martyrdom not once but three times, and his interest in this type of narrative merits attention, especially given that the collection was composed for the royal military adviser Æthelweard and his grown son Æthelmær. All three legends can in fact be understood as instructing Christians generally about how to practise their faith. *Julian and Basilissa* underscores the necessity of steadfast belief, *Cecilia and Valerian*, the duty to transmit Christianity, and *Chrysanthus and Daria*, the hope of eternal reward for one's faithfulness.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The five are: Amos, Cecilia and Valerian, Chrysanthus and Daria, Julian and Basilissa and Malchus. For an overview of the literary history of these legends in Anglo-Saxon England, see E. G. Whatley's entries for these saints in 'Acta Sanctorum', *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, I, ed. F. Biggs *et al.* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2001), 22–486.

<sup>2</sup> *Ælfric's Lives of Saints* [hereafter cited in references as *LS*], ed. W. W. Skeat, 4 vols. in 2, EETS os 76, 82, 94 and 114 (London 1881–1900, repr. 1966). All translations are my own.

<sup>3</sup> *LS* I, 2 (lines 5–9). Entries for the pair appear in only five of the nineteen calendars printed in *English Calendars before A.D. 1100*, ed. F. Wormald, HBS 62 (London, 1934), 41 (no. 3), 58 (no. 5), 100 (no. 8), 129 (no. 10) and 254 (no. 20). No entries are recorded in the early-tenth-century Hampson calendar (P. McGurk, 'The Metrical Calendar of Hampson: a New Edition', *AB* 104 (1986), 79–125) or the eleventh-century calendar in *The Missal of Robert of Jumieges*, ed. H. A. Wilson, HBS 11 (London, 1896), 9–20. They appear in only two of the sixty-one litanies published in *Anglo-Saxon Litanies of the Saints*, ed. M. Lapidge, HBS 106 (London, 1991), 194 (line 77, Julian) and 200 (line 326, Basilissa) (no. 23), and 290 (line 123, Julian) and 293 (line 256, Basilissa) (no. 44). I know of no prayers to them in Anglo-Saxon liturgical books.

<sup>4</sup> *Julian and Basilissa* is found at *LS* I, 90–115 (no. 4), *Cecilia and Valerian* at *LS* II, 356–77 (no. 34) and *Chrysanthus and Daria* at *LS* II, 378–99 (no. 35). See my 'The Legend of Chrysanthus and

In this article I would like to concentrate on *Julian and Basilissa*, the legend least familiar to a wider Anglo-Saxon audience but most useful for demonstrating Ælfric's emphasis on constancy and its centrality to the Christian faith. Altering verbally and structurally his putative Latin source, he draws these saints from hagiographical and liturgical peripheries to a prominent position in the *Lives* because the couple presents Anglo-Saxon Christians with models of asceticism and orthodoxy he feels are lacking among his flock. His alterations promote the types of lay chastity and purity that are favourite topics in his preaching, and his reshaping of the legend emphasizes the degree to which his hagiography reinforces his homiletic advice. In short, as odd a choice as *Julian and Basilissa* may seem, the legend is well suited to his intention of rekindling the faith of the English laity with the *Lives*, and his selection is altogether consistent with the larger programme of pastoral care by which he sought to invigorate and educate them near the end of the first millennium.<sup>5</sup>

ÆLFRIC'S LATIN VERSION OF *JULIAN AND BASILISSA*

Although the exact version of the *Passio SS martyrum Iuliani et Basilissae* from which Ælfric worked has yet to be identified, the text he used bears a strong resemblance to the one preserved in London, British Library, Cotton Nero E. i, pt i.<sup>6</sup> Along with Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 9, the Cotton manuscript forms a huge collection of saints' lives (approximately 160), which, though preserved in these eleventh-century manuscripts, has been shown by Patrick Zettel to be a witness to a hypothetical legendary he called

Daria in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*, *SP* 101 (2004), 250–69, and my 'Homiletic Contexts for Ælfric's Hagiography: the Legend of SS Cecilia and Valerian', which is forthcoming. Both Liesl R. Smith and I have written PhD dissertations on the married saints in the *Lives*, and we arrive independently at some of the same conclusions about Ælfric's efforts to redirect the monastic ideal of virginity to the laity. See my 'The Hagiography of Chaste Marriage in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, City Univ. of New York, 2001) and her 'Virginity and the Married-Virgin Saints in Ælfric's *Lives of Saints*: the Translation of an Ideal' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Univ. of Toronto, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> For his purpose in writing the *Lives* to revivify the faith of English Christians, see *LSI*, 2 (lines 14–17). M. Lapidge has suggested that a liturgical calendar informs Ælfric's selections for the *Lives* ('Ælfric's Sanctorale', *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints' Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. P. E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1996), pp. 115–29, at p. 116). In view of Ælfric's reasons cited in the lines above and his remark in the Old English Preface that he writes the *Lives* 'mannum to getrymminge' (*LSI*, 6 (line 71): 'for the strengthening of men'), it is also possible that the collection reflects his individual preferences for those legends which best addressed the spiritual needs of the English laity as he saw them.

<sup>6</sup> London, British Library, Cotton Nero E. i, pt i (Worcester Cathedral, s.xi<sup>3/4</sup>), 77va17–85vb16. Another version that seems to have been copied from the same exemplar as the Nero E. i. text is preserved in Salisbury, Cathedral Library, 221 (Salisbury Cathedral, s.xi<sup>ex</sup>), 37r–47r. On the relationships between these manuscripts, see the reference to Whately in the next note.

'Cotton–Corpus' and a guide to the sorts of texts Ælfric knew.<sup>7</sup> J. H. Ott first identified the legend of Julian and Basilissa in the Cotton manuscript as the type numbered 4532 in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*, an abridgement of the most common version of the legend, which is numbered 4529 by the Bollandists and printed in their *Acta Sanctorum*.<sup>8</sup> Zettel confirms Ott's observation and remarks further that the Cotton text 'differs markedly' from BHL 4529, but a more thorough description of the shorter version was beyond the scope of his study.<sup>9</sup> The general structure and themes of BHL 4532 merit comment here because Ælfric's rewriting of it confirms that he deliberately chose the legend for its usefulness in reinforcing his preaching.

Totalling nearly 10,000 words, BHL 4532 is, in Hippolyte Delehaye's words, a *passion épique* and bears the marks of the *produit industriel* of early medieval hagiographers who move their saints through programmatic interrogation, torture, proselytizing and martyrdom.<sup>10</sup> The legend's structure is twofold. The *vita*, which accounts for roughly the first third of the narrative, chronicles Julian's parents' attempts to pressure him to marry, his divinely sanctioned, secretive chaste marriage to Basilissa and their establishment of monasteries in the Egyptian desert near Antinoe (modern Esna) after their parents' deaths.

<sup>7</sup> P. Zettel, 'Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in B. L. MS Cotton Nero E I + CCC MS 9 and Other Manuscripts' (unpubl. PhD dissertation, Oxford Univ., 1979). E. G. Whatley's entry for 'Cotton–Corpus Legendary' in *Sources of Anglo-Saxon Literary Culture*, vol. 5, ed. T. Hall *et al.* (Kalamazoo, MI, forthcoming) provides an excellent overview of the existing copies of the legendary, the scholarship relevant to them and important questions regarding the dating of the 'lost archetype'.

<sup>8</sup> J. H. Ott, *Über die Quellen der Heiligenleben in Ælfrics Lives of Saints I* (Halle, 1892), pp. 14–17. *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis* [hereafter referred to in the text and references as BHL], *Subsidia Hagiographica* 6 (Brussels, 1899). See too the entry in *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina antiquae et mediae aetatis: Novum Supplementum*, ed. H. Fros, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 70 (Brussels, 1986). For the version of BHL 4529 printed by the Bollandists, see *Acta Sanctorum* [hereafter cited in references as *AS*], ed. J. Bollandus *et al.*, 68 vols. (Brussels, 1643–1940), Ian. I, 575–87. BHL 4532 lacks the prologue and final chapter of BHL 4529 and, as the result of a general programme of abridgement, is nearly 2,100 words shorter than the longer version.

<sup>9</sup> Zettel, 'Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources', p. 202. He also remarks on the same page that the version of BHL 4532 in Nero E. i. 'does not correspond perfectly to the Ælfrician exemplar'. While this is true, the Cotton text does not differ radically from the thirty-three copies of BHL 4532 that I have studied (Guy Philippart has helped me to identify a total of thirty-eight). None of these texts can account completely for the divergences that Zettel identifies between the Cotton text and Ælfric's adaptation (*ibid.* pp. 304–5), so perhaps, as M. Lapidge and P. Jackson suggest by their identification of the source of the legend as BHL 4529 and BHL 4532, Ælfric worked from a hybrid of the two versions, which has yet to come to light ('The Contents of the Cotton–Corpus Legendary', *Holy Men and Holy Women*, ed. Szarmach, pp. 131–46, at p. 135).

<sup>10</sup> H. Delehaye, *Les Passions des Martyrs et les Genres Littéraires*, *Subsidia Hagiographica* 13 (Brussels, 1966), 171.

The attention initially lavished on the couple's chaste marriage shifts by the end of the *vita* to their relationships with their monastic spiritual children, and the section concludes with the ascension of Basilissa's nuns to heaven and her death and burial prior to an outbreak of persecution.<sup>11</sup>

The remaining two thirds of the legend comprise a *passio*, which builds from the outbreak of persecution to a climatic showdown between Julian and the pagan governor Martianus wherein the saint feigns a desire to sacrifice to the gods and calls down destruction on the pagans, their priests and their temple. As the conflict escalates, Julian cures a man of blindness, brings another back to life and converts twenty soldiers from Martianus's retinue, Martianus's wife Marcionilla and Martianus's only son Celsus. Eventually, Martianus martyrs Julian and his company, at which point God devastates Antioch. Though the governor escapes immediate destruction, he soon dies a gruesome death, and his injured body is found seething with maggots. As a counterpoint to the death of the pagan persecutor, the legend ends with the saints being reverently buried inside a church, where a healing spring miraculously bubbles up.

Although BHL 4532 lacks the prologue that accompanies the longer version, the final lines of the prologue offer some clues as to why the work is structured in this way and helps to explain why Ælfric recognized its potential for modelling constancy for Anglo-Saxon Christians. The principal trope of this introductory rhetorical exercise is based on John XX.29, although the author translates the verse rather loosely when he recalls that Jesus told Thomas "Beati qui viderunt et crediderunt, beatiores autem qui non viderunt, et sic crediderunt."<sup>12</sup> In this way the hagiographer justifies his work of writing down the legend before moving on to suggest how those who have not seen the events described therein can believe and be encouraged by them. The penultimate sentence of the prologue indicates most clearly why the work combines

<sup>11</sup> BHL 4532 pays less attention to ascetic language and behaviour than BHL 4529 does. For example, when describing the nature of Julian's commitment to Christianity, Ælfric's exemplar reports simply that he *gratia sanctitatis florebat* (Nero E. i., 77va41–2: 'flourished in the grace of holiness') and does not mention his *perfecta caritas* ('perfect charity') or the fact that he *se ab omnibus vitiis et concupiscentiis carnis mundo castrauerat* (*AS Ian. I*, 576 (para. 2): 'castrated himself of all vices and fleshly desires in the world'). The best example of this tendency is the substitution in BHL 4532 of *gratias Deo referebat* (Nero E. i., pt. i, 78ra5–6: 'he gave thanks to God') for Julian's monkish, scripture-laden prayer of thanks to God for allowing him to marry and remain a virgin (*AS Ian. I*, 576 (para. 4)). BHL 4532 thus lacks the repetition from the prayer that later links Julian's ascetic zeal as a young man to his success as abbot in BHL 4529.

<sup>12</sup> *AS Ian. I*, 575 (para. 1): "Blessed are those who have seen and have believed, but more blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." John XX.29: 'dicit ei Iesus "quia vidisti me credidisti beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt"' (*Biblia Sacra*, ed. R. Weber, 3rd ed. (Stuttgart, 1969): 'Jesus saith to him: "Because thou hast seen me, Thomas, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and have believed"' (*Douay Rheims Bible* [Baltimore, MD, 1899, repr. Rockford, IL, 2000])).

features of a standard *vita* and *passio*, explaining that ‘Beati igitur Martyris Iuliani passionem scripturus, qualiter se ab infantia sua Deo carum exhibuerit prius intimate disposui; vt qui cupit gloriam acquirere passionis, primo sequatur innocentiam vitæ.’<sup>13</sup> Understood in light of this comment, the legend’s myriad tortures and encounters with evil thus come to symbolize the trials of every Christian who, like Julian, earns ‘glory’ for the ‘blamelessness of his life’, the ultimate victory over death for an unwavering faith in God.

A thematic coherence bolsters this structural unity because both the *vita* and *passio* reiterate that the benchmark by which God judges blamelessness and metes out everlasting reward is an undeviating fidelity to Him. Family loyalty represents the primary challenge to one’s complete submission to God, and the narrative insists on redefining kinship spiritually. In the *vita*, for example, Julian’s chaste marriage to Basilissa contravenes his parents’ desire that he wed and produce an heir, and transforms the Old Testament injunction to marry and multiply into its New Testament equivalent, spiritual fecundity. To affirm the couple’s decision to pursue celibate marriage, Christ, the Virgin Mary and multitudes of angels appear in Julian and Basilissa’s bedroom, where an angel, paraphrasing Matt. X.37, sums up the essential criterion for meeting God’s standard of blamelessness. He explains that those whose names are written in the Book of Life must “‘amori Domini nihil pretulerunt, non patrem, non matrem, non uxorem, non filios, non diuitias, non cetera quę in hoc seculo inpedimenta sunt’”.<sup>14</sup>

Even when Julian alone becomes the focal point of the *passio*, the redefinition of kinship and the redirection of loyalties continue. Celsus repudiates his natural father, claiming that Julian is *patrem secunde natiuitatis*, and declares publicly to his parents that “‘. . . ego pro Christo Domino meo nego uos parentes . . . Nec plus faciam uos quam me, nec amorem uestrum prepono aeternę letitiae.’”<sup>15</sup> Later, after Martianus attempts to burn Julian and his followers, Julian explains that the Christian who merits God’s protection *nihil amori Christi preponat*, especially

<sup>13</sup> *AS* Ian. I, 575 (para. 1): ‘When I wrote down the martyrdom of the blessed martyr Julian, I arranged to tell first how he showed himself dear to God from his infancy, so that anyone who desires to acquire the glory of martyrdom first must follow the example of the blamelessness of his life.’

<sup>14</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 78va30–3 (*AS* Ian. I, 577 (para. 7)): “‘have preferred nothing to the love of the Lord, neither father, mother, wife, children, riches, or the rest of the things which in this world are impediments’”. To facilitate comparisons between the manuscript and the version printed in *Acta Sanctorum*, I cite both throughout the article. Rohini Jayatilaka lists the corresponding lines of these versions in her ‘The Sources of Lives 4 (SS Julian and Basilissa) (Cameron B.1)’, 1996, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register* [hereafter cited in references as *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici*] at <<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>>, accessed June 2004.

<sup>15</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 81va41–2 (*AS* Ian. I, 581 (para. 29)): “‘father of [my] second birth’”; Nero E. i, pt. i, 82ra18–19, 22–3 (*AS* Ian. I, 582 (para. 32)): “‘I renounce you, my parents, in favor of Christ my Lord . . . I will not esteem you more than myself, nor do I prefer your love to eternal joy.’”

neither *patrem nec matrem*.<sup>16</sup> When Celsus's mother Marcionilla converts soon after, she becomes in his words, a *ueram matrem* ('true mother') and a *ueram genitricem* ('true parent').<sup>17</sup> Once she assures him that *nihil amori eius prepono quem tu sic diligis*,<sup>18</sup> the Latin text reports that Celsus becomes *pater . . . in gratia baptismi* ('father in the grace of baptism') to his biological mother.<sup>19</sup> In the final articulation of what may be identified as the *nihil praeponere* theme, Antonius the priest quotes Matt. X.34–5 and Luke XIV.26 to explain that because Christ came with a sword to divide families and demands unalloyed devotion from His disciples, Julian and his mother have rejected Martianus and are willing to die for their newfound faith.<sup>20</sup> Throughout the legend early medieval notions of family loyalty and deference are juxtaposed with an especially unsentimental brand of Christianity, and Christian kinship takes precedence over biological and social bonds. By means of a chaste marriage that replaces a physical family with a spiritual one, the story insists that real kinship exist only between those fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters of the faith who will spend eternity glorifying and glorified by the Creator himself, true parent of all created beings.

ÆLFRIC'S OLD ENGLISH *JULIAN AND BASILISSA*

When Ælfric rewrites the legend of Julian and Basilissa, he downplays the divineness of Christianity to focus more squarely on the necessity of steadfast belief. He does not translate verbatim or paraphrase any of BHL 4532's iterations of the *nihil praeponere* theme; he also muffles Celsus's public renunciations of his family and silences Antonius's explanation of why the boy's mother rejects his father.<sup>21</sup> Rather, to stress the need for constancy Ælfric rewrites the legend with an emphasis on the protagonists' purity. In this way Julian and Basilissa become models of the celibacy and orthodoxy Ælfric demands of all believers whose Christianity he wants to strengthen with the *Lives of Saints*.

For Ælfric steadfast faith is essential not only to personal salvation but to national security. In his Mid-Lent homily, which is included in the *Lives*, he links the laity's ability to live *æfter rihte* ('according to what is proper') with God's willingness 'fore sceawian / ure gesundfulnysse and sibbe mid us / and ðærtoecan us syllan ða ecan myrhðe mid him' ('to provide for our prosperity and peace among us and, in addition to that, to give us everlasting joy with Him').<sup>22</sup> In other homilies he defines proper living as obedience to church law and adher-

<sup>16</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 83vb7 and 9 (*AS Ian. I*, 584 (para. 46)): "'will prefer nothing to the love of Christ . . . [neither] father nor mother.'" <sup>17</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 84ra23–4 (*AS Ian. I*, 584 (para. 49)).

<sup>18</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 84ra28–9 (*AS Ian. I*, 584 (para. 49)): "'I prefer nothing before His love whom you love so.'" <sup>19</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 84rb23–4 (*AS Ian. I*, 585 (para. 50)).

<sup>20</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 84va42–84vb12 (*AS Ian. I*, 585 (para. 53)).

<sup>21</sup> Perhaps the point was too extreme and uncompromising for English Christians whose distinctiveness vis-à-vis their families and cultural mores Ælfric is not eager to emphasize.

<sup>22</sup> *LS I*, 292 (lines 135 and 136–8, respectively).

ence to Christian doctrine, and it is by these means that laymen preserve their *clænnyss*, their 'chastity' or 'purity'. *Clæne* couples are monogamous, respectful of one another and observant of rules about when they may and may not engage in sexual intercourse. Less literally, husbands and wives – indeed, all Christians – remain spiritually pure by cleaving to orthodox beliefs and practices. The homilies indicate that Ælfric expects his lay audience to be familiar with literal and figurative interpretations of *clænnyss*, and his editorial decisions signal that he rewrites *Julian and Basilissa* as an exhortation to physical celibacy and spiritual purity.<sup>23</sup>

*Married saints as models of physical celibacy*

Ælfric's reworking of the opening scenes of BHL 4532, in which Julian and Basilissa undertake chaste marriage, reflects his concern to promote greater asceticism among English Christians. As he subtly broadens the applicability of this model union to his contemporary audience, he is careful to resolve the tension in the legend between Julian's desire to remain chaste and his parents' hopes for a grandchild, as well as the tension between laudable but individualistic ascetic impulses and one's societal responsibilities. In the Latin version Julian's zeal for Christianity worries his parents, who begin to wonder if he will provide them with an heir, and the early episodes of the narrative depict the solution to their differences. Most interesting is the legend's use of visions to justify Julian's decision to marry Basilissa and live chastely with her in secret. Both Christ's appearance to Julian prior to the wedding and the couple's visitation by Christ, Mary and the angels after it override the biblical injunction to be fruitful and multiply put forward by Julian's father and mother.

The first vision occurs in response to Julian's parents' reminder that St Paul counselled young men to marry and procreate, although a reader who knew the Vulgate well would realize that they substitute *iuuenes* ('young men') for the original *iuueniores* ('younger widows') of I Tim. V.15.<sup>24</sup> In spite of the misquotation, the legend never calls into doubt the parents' sincerity or questions the

<sup>23</sup> See my 'For Pastoral Care and Political Gain: Ælfric of Eynsham's Preaching on Marital Celibacy', *Traditio* 59 (2004), 39–78.

<sup>24</sup> They advise, "Audi genitorum tuorum salubre consilium, quo in [uenerabili] lege a magistro omnium Christianorum docemur qui dicit: 'Uolo iuuenes nubere, filios procreare, patres familias esse, nullam dantes occasionem maligno.' Pro qua re non solum ut nobis consentias hortamur, sed tantum ut [legi] diuine obediens esse uidearis" (Nero E. i, pt i, 77vb2–9) (*AS* Ian. I, 576 (para. 3)): "Listen to the beneficial advice of your parents, which we are taught in the venerable law by the teacher of all Christians who says, 'I desire young men to marry, to beget children, to be heads of their households, giving no opportunity to the devil'. We do not urge you to agree with us for this reason alone but also that you may be thought to be obedient to divine law"). The substitution of *iuuenes* for Paul's *iuueniores* occurs in the Greek original of the legend (F. Halkin, 'La Passion Ancienne des Saints Julien et Basilisse (BHG 970–1)', *AB* 98 (1980), 241–96, at 246 (lines 8–9) and n. 4 in the apparatus).

accuracy of their advice; indeed, when their deaths are reported, we learn that they both had been Christians.<sup>25</sup> Still, in light of their counsel, Julian asks for a week to pray during which ‘parentes erant nimio tedio afflicti et cogitationibus tabescebant’ (‘his parents were greatly oppressed with sorrow and were consumed in thought’).<sup>26</sup> In response to Julian’s prayer for guidance, Christ appears, instructs him to take a virgin for a wife and promises that they will convert multitudes of others to Christianity. When later Basilissa converts and agrees to live chastely with Julian, he cries out for verification that God is pleased with their decision, at which point the second vision occurs: Christ and Mary accompanied by an angelic host appear in the newlyweds’ bedchamber to bless the chaste marriage, show the couple their names in the Book of Life and confirm their future as spiritual parents of thousands of monks and nuns.<sup>27</sup>

Ælfric retains the same justification for Julian and Basilissa’s chaste marriage – it is pleasing to God and will produce innumerable spiritual offspring – but alters the motivations for the visions by omitting the parents’ challenge altogether. Cast in this fashion, the union does not represent a solution to differences of opinion regarding the boy’s zealousness. Rather it becomes a vehicle for him to please his parents, who request only that he marry, and to merit favour with God, who approves of his desire to remain chaste. Ælfric tailors the narrative from the outset to achieve this result: Julian’s family is never alarmed by his piety; although his father and relatives press him to marry because he is eighteen, they do not invoke scripture to urge him to do so; and never do his parents mention or fret about a grandchild. Consequently, the visions that follow do not rationalize chaste marriage but rather dramatize and sanctify it.<sup>28</sup>

Most telling in this regard is Ælfric’s decision to dispel the secrecy that shrouds the arrangement in the Latin text. It is helpful to remember that in his homily for Rogation Monday he permits married couples who prefer *bealican clennyse* (‘exalted chastity’) to *bohfullan galnyse* (‘anxious lust’) to undertake chaste marriage in the manner of Julian and Basilissa.<sup>29</sup> Yet he counsels them ‘on sinscipe. hi sylfe bedyglian. and hæmed forgan. gif him swa god gewissað’ (‘to hide themselves in marriage and refrain from sexual intercourse if God so

<sup>25</sup> Nero E. i., pt i, 78vb4–5 (*AS Ian. I*, 577 (para. 9): ‘fuerant enim parentes et ipsi Christiani’ (‘the parents in fact had themselves been Christians’)). This helps to account for Ælfric’s remark at the outset of the legend that Julian ‘wæs æðel boren of æwfestum magum’ (*LS I*, 90 (line 3): ‘nobly born of a pious family’), for which there is no equivalent in the Latin version.

<sup>26</sup> Nero E. i., pt i, 77vb24–6 (*AS Ian. I*, 576 (para. 3)).

<sup>27</sup> Julian’s vision is found at Nero E. i., pt i, 77vb27–78ra6 (*AS Ian. I*, 576 (para.4)). That of the couple occurs at 78rb21–78va36 (*AS Ian. I*, 577 (para. 7)).

<sup>28</sup> *LS I*, 90 (lines 11–21 (Julian’s vision)) and 92 and 94 (lines 53–74 (the couple’s vision)).

<sup>29</sup> *Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies. The Second Series. Text* [hereafter cited in references as *CHII*], ed. M. Godden, EETS ss 5 (Oxford, 1979), 185 (lines 167–8).



directs them?).<sup>30</sup> The secrecy seems expedient given that chaste marriage runs counter to the procreative purpose of marriage as the church saw it and to the mores of a society that valued the transfer of wealth, property and influence through biological families, not spiritual ones. However, Ælfric can idealize in a hagiographical text the prudent course of action he recommends in a homily, and so he depicts Julian and Basilissa adopting celibacy more openly. Whereas BHL 4532 reports that ‘ceperunt spiritu esse coniuncti non carne fructificantes et ita mysterium diuine gratiae in se conlatum occultabant [ut] a Domino Christo et sanctis angelis sciretur, quod agebant’, he removes any suggestion of the secrecy of the saints’ union.<sup>31</sup>

Hwæt þa Iulianus ungewæmmede heold his bryde,  
and hi wæron geðeodde mid soðre clænnysse  
gastlice þeonde on Godes gewytnysse.<sup>32</sup>

Julian and Basilissa are not compelled to hide their chaste marriage from their Christian parents out of a fear of not providing them with an heir, and Ælfric further sanctifies their decision by removing any hint that it would have been divisive.

Other alterations to the early parts of the legend suggest that Ælfric seeks to broaden the relevancy of the chaste marriage modelled therein to include less ascetically-minded couples. After all, most husbands and wives would not adopt chaste marriage, nor would Ælfric have wanted them to do so, but all could and were expected to preserve the chastity appropriate to their state. Most generally this meant having sex only for procreation and only at times when the church did not require abstinence in observance of a special Sunday, saint’s day or liturgical season such as Lent. Neither were couples to have intercourse when the wife was pregnant, menstruating or post-menopausal.<sup>33</sup> *Ælcum menn gedafenað clænnys* (‘chastity is befitting to every man’),<sup>34</sup> Ælfric declares in one sermon, and the preponderance of words with the stem *clæne* in the pillow talk that precedes Julian and Basilissa’s decision to remain chaste illustrates how he alters the Latin text to focus less on the saints’ exceptional physical commitment and more on a generalized notion of purity.

<sup>30</sup> *CHII* 185 (lines 168–9). P. Jackson mentions this passage and that cited in n. 33 in his discussion of Ælfric’s ideal of marriage in his ‘Ælfric and the Purpose of Christian Marriage: a Reconsideration of the *Life of Æthelbryth*, Lines 120–30’, *ASE* 29 (2000), 235–60, at 241–7.

<sup>31</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 78va40–3 (*AS* Ian. I, 577 (para. 8)): ‘Having been joined in marriage, they began to be fruitful in spirit not in the flesh, and thus they kept secret the mystery of divine grace bestowed upon them, so that what they were doing was known (only) to the Lord Christ and the holy angels.’

<sup>32</sup> *LSI*, 94 (lines 75–7): ‘So then Julian preserved his bride undefiled, and they were united with true chastity, spiritually thriving in the knowledge of God.’

<sup>33</sup> A representative passage is that at *CHII* 56 (lines 118–26). <sup>34</sup> *CHII* 57 (line 136).

Ælfric rewrites the conversation to broaden the legend's singular focus on the necessity of corporeal virginity, thereby making the episode more accessible to a wider audience. In the Latin account of Basilissa's conversion to Christianity and the chaste life, virginity is mentioned three times in the space of just over 170 words.<sup>35</sup> In the corresponding Old English passage of 113 words in lines 34–48, Ælfric uses some form of the word *clæne* five times and the word *mægðhade* ('virginity') twice.<sup>36</sup> Typically he uses *mægðhade* to denote physical virginity and *clænnyss*, especially where the laity is concerned, to connote various types of marital celibacy that comprise the chastity of the layman. Because the *clæne*-stem words have a greater semantic range, their repetition calls to mind more inclusive kinds of chasteness. Ælfric's treatment of Julian's explanation of the origin of the fragrance that has overwhelmed Basilissa demonstrates this point:

þes wynsuman bræð þe ðu wundrast þearle  
 næfð nan angin ne eac nænne ænde.  
 þes bræð is of Criste se ðe is clænnyssse lufigend.  
 Gif wit þurhwuniað on ansundum mægðhade  
 and hine clænlice lufiað, þonne cume wit to his rice,  
 and wit ne beoð totwæmede ac a to worulde blyssiað.<sup>37</sup>

*Clænnyssse lufigend* renders verbatim *amator castitatis*, the epithet for Christ in BHL 4532, and the adjective *ansundum* ('uncorrupted') describes in no uncertain terms the physical nature of the marriage signalled by *integritatem corporis*.<sup>38</sup> Yet when Ælfric adds *clænlice* ('purely') to Julian's advice about how they are to love Christ, he indicates that their chastity must consist of more than intactness and must involve their frame of mind and spirit as well.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, the alliteration of *clænlice lufiað* with *clænnyssse lufigend* permits the stress of Julian's response to fall on the word for chastity and purity that in Ælfric's lexicon has the widest possible range of connotations and, hence, the greatest applicability to his audience.

<sup>35</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 78ra35–78rb21 (*AS* Ian. I, 576–7 (para. 6)).

<sup>36</sup> *Clænan* (line 34), *clennisse* (line 38), *clænnyssse* (line 42), *clænlice* (line 44) and *clænnum* (line 46). *Mægðhad* appears in lines 43 and 46.

<sup>37</sup> *LS* I, 92 (lines 40–5): “‘This delightful fragrance at which you wonder greatly has no beginning nor any end. This fragrance is from Christ, who is a lover of chastity. If we persevere in uncorrupted virginity and love him purely, then we will come to his kingdom, and we will not be separated but will rejoice for ever.’”

<sup>38</sup> Julian's explanation is found at Nero E. i, pt i, 78rb2–13 (*AS* Ian. I, 576–7 (para. 6)).

<sup>39</sup> It is interesting to note that Basilissa agrees to live with Julian *on clænnum mægðhade* (*LS* I, 92 (line 46): ‘in pure virginity’), a phrase that glosses *uirginitas* in BHL 4532 (Nero E. i, pt i, 78rb14 (*AS* Ian. I, 577 [para. 6])).

While Ælfric rewrites the legend in a manner consistent with his preaching on marital celibacy, the majority of his semantic and structural changes indicate that he envisions it primarily as an inspiration to spiritual purity, that is, to steadfast belief. His sermons make clear his keen awareness that once people embrace Christianity, then they must remain faithful, choosing repeatedly not to abandon their faith when tempted to disobey its laws or disregard its tenets. This need for constancy accounts for the sermons in which he inveighs against idolatry or calls attention to the church as the virgin bride of Christ whose collective virginity depends on individual believers' fidelity to orthodox doctrine and practice. Consequently, his particular interest in stories such as *Julian and Basilissa* with its chaste marriage, multiple conversions and dozens of refusals to apostatize has a context in the homilies urging Anglo-Saxon Christians to preserve their 'gelefan mægðhad' ('virginity of faith') and to avoid objectionable practices or behaviour.<sup>40</sup>

Common to Ælfric's homilies exhorting lay folk to steadfastness is a cluster of semantically similar verbs such as *gebugan* ('to turn, submit'), *gebigan* ('to bend, turn, convert'), *onbugan* ('to submit, yield, give way') and *abugan* ('to bow down, turn away'). These verbs, which are italicized in the following excerpts, furnish him with verbal cues for focusing his audience's attention on the necessity of an unfaltering faith. For example, among the non-hagiographical pieces in the *Lives* is the sermon *On Auguries*, where he deems as an idolater the apostate who will 'his drihten forlæte and his cristendom and to deofollicum hæðenscype *gebuge* bysmrigende his scyppend'.<sup>41</sup> More abstractly, Ælfric judges as guilty of idolatry the unrepentant believer who easily and repeatedly will '*onbugan* ðam bysmorfullum leahtrum' ('yield to shameful sins') such as fornication, drunkenness, cursing or theft.<sup>42</sup>

Even when discussing Old Testament instances of idol worship Ælfric makes more personal to contemporary Christians the sin of 'a whoring after other gods'.<sup>43</sup> Following *On Auguries* is the sermon or reading piece *Book of Kings*, a pastiche of biblical vignettes of the faithful and wicked kings of Israel. Wicked rulers dominate the narrative, but lest Anglo-Saxon Christians miss the relevance to their own lives of these stories of ancient kings 'ðe fram gode *bugon* to bysmorfullum hæðenscype' ('who *turned* from God to shameful paganism'), Ælfric supplies the moral for them: 'se þe synnum gehyrsumað / and godes beboda forsyhð nu on þæs godspelles timan / þæt he bið þam cynincgum gelic

<sup>40</sup> *CHII* 329 (line 80).

<sup>41</sup> *LS I*, 366 (lines 47–8): 'forsake his Lord and his Christian belief, and *turn* to devilish heathenism, defiling his Creator'. <sup>42</sup> *LS I*, 368 (line 62).

<sup>43</sup> The phrase is from Judg. II.17 in the King James Version.

ðe gecuron deofolgild / and heora scyppend forsawon'.<sup>44</sup> Though less specific than *On Auguries* in its enumeration of individual sins, the *Book of Kings* stresses that impenitence and faithlessness constitute idolatrous behaviour.

Ælfric equates inconstancy and idolatry in two other sermons where *bugan* and the related *abugan* appear. Only this time he evokes idolatry in the context of the patristic allegory of the spiritual marriage between Christ and the church and equates a lack of steadfastness with the sin of spiritual adultery. In *On the Feast-Day of Holy Virgins*, which features his exegesis of the Parable of the Wise and Foolish Virgins, he explains that the church, 'ðe stent on mædenum. and on cnapum. on ceorlum and on wifum' ('which consists in girls and in boys, in husbands and in wives'), maintains her purity because she 'wurðað ænne soðne god. and nele forligerlice to leasum hæðengylde *bugan*' ('honours one true God and does not wish adulterously to turn to false idolatry').<sup>45</sup> The first time in the *Nativity of the Virgin Mary* that Ælfric personifies the church as a wife, she refuses to be diverted from her faith and so avoids adultery because she 'nele *abugan* / to nanum hæðenscipe fram þæs hælendes geleafan / fram hyre brydguman to bysmorfullum deofolgyldre, / ne to wiccecræfte, ne to wiglungum . . .'<sup>46</sup> Later Ælfric switches to a metaphor of abandonment, noting that the church, 'nele forlætan godes geleafan næfre, / ne oðerne wer wolice geceosan', but the point about steadfastness stands.<sup>47</sup> Just as there is no room for deviation in a worldly marriage, the union of Christ and his church can brook no turning aside.

*Julian and Basilissa* presents Ælfric with ample opportunities to call attention to choices between spiritual purity and impurity with which contemporary Christians, Old Testament kings and the church are faced in the sermons mentioned above. As with those homilies, he employs a set of verbs in the legend that focuses attention on a character's decision to turn to or away from God. *Gebigan* is most prominent, but *wipsacan* ('to renounce, reject, deny') and *gecyrran*

<sup>44</sup> *LS I*, 386 (line 43) and 412 (lines 476–9): 'he who obeys sins and despises God's commandments now in the time of the Gospel is like the kings who chose idolatry and despised their Creator'.

<sup>45</sup> *CH III* 329 (lines 81–2 and 80–1, respectively). Godden points out that by having the church refuse to fornicate with other gods, Ælfric's reason for imputing virginity to all Christians is 'strikingly different' from Augustine's. (*Commentary*, 657).

<sup>46</sup> *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. B. Assmann, repr. with a supplementary introduction by P. Clemons (Darmstadt, 1964), p. 28 (lines 96–9): 'does not wish to turn away to any paganism from the Saviour's belief, from her bridegroom to shameful idol-worship, or witchcraft or sorcery . . .'

<sup>47</sup> *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. Assmann, p. 29 (lines 126–7): 'never wishes to abandon God's belief nor falsely choose another man'. The passage continues, 'ac [heo] hylt þone sinscipe þæs soðan hælendes / on gastlicum þeawum and on gastlicum bearnteamre, / on clænnyse wunigende swa swa Cristes bryd' (lines 128–30): 'but [she] keeps the marriage of the true Saviour in spiritual behaviour and in the spiritual procreation of children, dwelling in chastity as Christ's bride'.

(‘to turn, turn aside’) also work to create thematic unity.<sup>48</sup> Because he uses repetition as a stylistic device, these verbs sharpen the legend’s focus on purity and steadfastness, and attest that his interests in these themes in his sermons extend to his saints’ lives.<sup>49</sup>

Hoping to exhort Anglo-Saxon believers to constancy, Ælfric constructs semantic parallels to strengthen connections between various moments when pagan persecutors endeavour unsuccessfully to turn Julian and his company from their faith. Verbally linked, these episodes at once acknowledge pressures Christians may face to reject their faith and bear witness to successful resistance. An early example occurs when Martianus and Julian face off for the first time (lines 119–80). After the pagan priests fail to heal Martianus’s soldier who was blinded while beating Julian, the governor enters the temple only to discover that his idols are shattered. In the Latin text, Martianus rationalizes that the gods allowed themselves to be destroyed in order that they might *subicere* (‘put under their control’) their former devotee.<sup>50</sup> Ælfric, however, has him surmise that his *soðfaestan godes* (‘true gods’) permit the sacrilege so that they *gebigan mihton* (‘might turn’) Julian to their worship.<sup>51</sup> This is the third of eight times in the legend that Ælfric employs *gebigan*, and it recalls both God’s earlier promise to Julian to ‘turn’ or convert Basilissa to His love and the angels’ praise of Basilissa for her decision to ‘turn her mind’ away from worldly delight to Julian’s counsel.<sup>52</sup> Here, Ælfric’s use of the verb to describe the activity of God and the gods demonstrates the one’s superiority and the others’ impotency, just as it highlights two central actions of Christian life, turning away from earthly pleasures or other gods towards God and remaining steadfast in one’s faith after doing so.

*Gebigan* also connects Basilissa’s conversion and Julian’s first trial to later episodes that highlight Celsus’s constancy and his mother’s conversion. Yet this set of alterations imbues the narrative with an irony not present in BHL 4532 as Ælfric uses the theme of turning to call attention first to Martianus’s frustration over Celsus’s abandonment of the gods and then to his attempt to win the boy back to their worship, which backfires when his wife also becomes a

<sup>48</sup> To these might be added the occurrences of the verbs *gebugan*, *geweman* (‘to seduce, entice, persuade, lead’) and *awendan* (‘to turn’) (*LS I*, 96 (line 112), 102 (line 199) and 108 (line 312), respectively).

<sup>49</sup> The observation about repetition and style is J. C. Pope’s (*Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, ed. Pope, 2 vols., EETS OS 259–60 (London, 1967–8) I, 109–10).

<sup>50</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 81ra29 (*AS Ian. I*, 580 (para. 24)).

<sup>51</sup> *LS I*, 100 (lines 167 and 169, respectively).

<sup>52</sup> *LS I*, 90 (line 18, *gebige*) and 94 (line 60, *gebygdest*), respectively. In the first instance Ælfric uses *gebigan* to translate *convertere* (Nero E. i, pt i, 77vb43–78ra1 (*AS Ian. I*, 576 [para. 4])) and in the second *consentire* (Nero E. i, pt i, 78rb33 (*AS Ian. I*, 576 [para. 7])). The five other occurrences of *gebigan* are: *gebygde* (line 253), *gebigde* (line 343), *gebigde* (line 357), *gebigde* (line 358), and *bigdon* (line 406).

Christian. To begin with, Celsus, having seen angels attending to Julian as he is marched around the city, ‘wiðsoce þam sceandlicum godum and crist andette mid ealre heortan’.<sup>53</sup> Refusing to be of *þam geleafan gebringan* (‘led from the faith’), the boy then publicly renounces his gods and his father, and is imprisoned with Julian.<sup>54</sup> Martianus’s discovery that God has comforted the prisoners, converted his soldiers and provided a priest for their baptisms prompts him to write to the emperor for advice on how best to deal with Julian. In BHL 4532 Martianus complains that Julian has ‘*separauit*’ (‘divided’) him from Celsus, whereas in Ælfric’s account he grouses that Julian ‘*minne sunu gebygde / fram me to his cristē*’ (‘turned my son from me to his Christ’).<sup>55</sup> Yet, after learning that his son and the other Christians have survived being burned alive (as the emperor suggested), Martianus agrees to let Celsus’s mother visit him in prison in hopes *þat heo þone sunu gebigde* (‘that she might turn her son’) away from his belief.<sup>56</sup> By making her motives more purposeful and pernicious than the Latin text, which reports simply that she *ad omnia parata est* (‘has been made ready every way’) to meet Celsus, Ælfric points up the irony of the father perpetrating on his son that which Martianus so bitterly resents about Julian.<sup>57</sup>

If Martianus fails to recognize this irony, then Ælfric seems to find it rather delicious. To make the most of the father’s failure to divert Celsus from his belief, he abbreviates the conversation between Celsus and his mother in prison from just over 900 words in Latin to about 100 in Old English. This compression reduces the time that elapses between Martianus’s unsuccessful gambit and the moment when Ælfric, using *gecyrran*, a synonym for *gebigan*, reports that it was Marcionilla who was ‘fullice gecyrrred to ðam soðan geleafan’ (‘fully turned to the true faith’).<sup>58</sup> He then employs *gebigan* to maximum effect in the exchange between father and son which follows. In BHL 4532 Martianus demands to know if Celsus asked for his mother ‘*sub hac ratione . . . ut tibi consentiret*’ (‘under this pretence . . . so that she might assent to you’), to which the boy responds, ‘*Gratias ago Domino qui uoluntatis mee fructum ita compleuit, ut in eternum possideam matrem et illa me filium amodo cognoscat*’.<sup>59</sup> Ælfric translates *consentire* with *gebigan* in the accusation and substitutes a metaphor of turning for one of fruitfulness, thus repeating the Old English verb when there is no prompt to do so in the Latin:

<sup>53</sup> *LSI*, 100 (lines 191–2): ‘renounced the shameful gods and confessed Christ with all his heart’.

<sup>54</sup> *LSI*, 100 (line 193).

<sup>55</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 82va41 (*AS Ian. I*, 582 (para. 37)) and *LSI*, 104 (lines 253–4).

<sup>56</sup> *LSI*, 110 (line 343). <sup>57</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 83vb37 (*AS Ian. I*, 584 (para. 47)).

<sup>58</sup> *LSI*, 110 (line 352).

<sup>59</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 84rb40–1 and 84rb43–84va2: “‘I thank God who fulfilled the fruit of my desires, so that I might have my mother in eternity and she henceforth might recognize me as her son’” (*AS Ian. I*, 585 (para. 51)).

*The legend of Julian and Basilissa in Ælfric's Lives of Saints*

‘Bæde þu forþi þinre modor spræce  
þæt þu hi *gebigest* to þinum bigenge fram me.’  
Se cnapa þancode gode þe hi swa *gebigde*  
to his soðan geleafan þæt heo ne losode mid him.<sup>60</sup>

The *gebigan* of Martianus's accusation recalls his complaint to the emperor and thus intensifies the irony of a situation that begins with the father's attempt to 'turn' his son from his belief and ends with him complaining that Celsus has accomplished with his mother the very thing he has failed to effect. The *gebigan* in Celsus's reply recalls an even earlier point in the narrative. Just as God 'turns' Basilissa to the faith so that she and Julian may never be separated, even in death, Marcionilla is 'turned' so that she might live with her son for ever.<sup>61</sup> Although this passage marks the end of the repetition of *gebigan* that links earlier and later episodes, Ælfric's use of the verb here enables him to accomplish several other objectives. He satirizes Martianus, highlights Celsus's steadfastness and, at the same time, accounts for Marcionilla's constancy when her husband kills all but five of the Christians in Julian's company in hopes of persuading her and her son to recant.<sup>62</sup>

Though they are fewer in number than his verbal alterations, Ælfric's appreciable structural changes to the plot enhance the thematic unity of the narrative. This is especially true of the changes he makes when the focus of the legend returns to Julian as the leader of a stalwart but dwindling group of followers. That Ælfric still concentrates on steadfastness is most evident in his omission of Julian's feint to sacrifice to the gods. In the Latin legend, Martianus remains convinced that the saint and his band will apostatize to save themselves, and he orders the temple prepared and sacrifices readied. Of course dramatic irony surrounds the moment when with smug satisfaction Martianus orders Julian to be unfettered so that he may sacrifice freely, only to have the saint call down destruction on the pagans.<sup>63</sup> Ælfric's Julian does not pretend even for a moment that he will sacrifice to the gods. Upon entering the temple, he drops to his knees, watches as the ground swallows the heathens and spells out Martianus's destiny in the one moment of direct speech (of a possible twenty) Ælfric preserves from the remainder of the *passio*:

<sup>60</sup> *LSI*, 110 (lines 356–9, my italics): “‘You therefore asked for a conversation with your mother so that you might *turn* her from me to your religion.’ The young man thanked God who so *turned* her to his true faith so that she might not be lost with him.”

<sup>61</sup> Julian promises Basilissa that if they live together chastely, ‘þonne cume wit to his rice / and wit ne beoð totowæmede ac a to worulde blyssiað’ (*LSI*, 92 (lines 44–5): ‘then we will come to his kingdom, and we will not be separated but will rejoice for ever’).

<sup>62</sup> *LSI*, 110 and 112 (lines 362–8).

<sup>63</sup> The episode, which Ælfric treats in twenty lines (*LSI*, 112 (lines 369–88)), occupies a lengthy section of BHL 4532 (Nero E. i, pt i, 84vb13–85rb26 (*AS* Ian. I, 585–6 [para. 54–7])).

‘Swa swa hi besuncon on ðone sweartan grund,  
swa sceole ge hæðene on helle grund besincan,  
þær bið æfre ece fyr and undeadlic wyrm  
þe eowre lichaman cywð and ge þeah ne sweltað  
ac bið æfre se lichama geedniwod to ðam witum.  
þær ge biddað mildsunga ac eow biþ forwyrned.’<sup>64</sup>

If Julian’s trick in the Latin legend supplies a moment of mordant humour for the Christian, then its absence from the Old English version allows Ælfric to present Anglo-Saxon believers with a Julian who is utterly constant, never willing even in jest to turn to the pagan gods.

In the remainder of the legend Ælfric moves beyond demonstrations of steadfastness to illustrations of the consequences of turning to or away from God. BHL 4532 likewise addresses the rewards for faithfulness and the punishments for unbelief, but not in the manner or with the force that Ælfric does. He begins by accelerating the narrative. After Martianus vows to avenge his gods following the destruction of the temple, Ælfric moves directly to the saints’ tortures and concludes summarily with their decapitations (lines 392–409), omitting from the Latin account their return to prison, their vision of Basilissa and the other martyrs summoning them to heaven and Martianus’s final exchanges with his family.<sup>65</sup> This streamlining crisply juxtaposes the governor’s wild attempts at vengeance and the saints’ constancy, this time unto death.

Always keen to accentuate the eternal stakes of choosing whether or not to turn to God, Ælfric restructures the conclusion of the Latin version, which moves rapidly from the martyrdoms to the miraculous retrieval of the saints’ bodies from among piles of corpses and finally to the appearance of a spring that bubbles up in the church where the saints are buried.<sup>66</sup> To the cursory account of the saints’ burial and the obligatory posthumous miracle, Ælfric prefers a catalogue of those martyred in the legend that builds name by name and group by group to its jubilant final line, ‘and hi ealle nu mid gode on ecnyse blyssiað’ (‘and they all now with God rejoice for ever’).<sup>67</sup> This most substantial addition to the story is accompanied by his most significant structural change. Unlike BHL 4532, which records the pagans’ damnation before

<sup>64</sup> *LS I*, 112 (lines 383–8): ‘Even as they sank into the dark depths, so will you heathens, sink into the depths of hell, where there will always be everlasting fire and the immortal worm that will chew your body, and nevertheless you will not die, but always your body will be restored for the torment. There you will pray for mercy, but it will be refused you.’

<sup>65</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 85rb27–41 (return to prison and vision) and 85va27–34 (final exchanges) (*AS Ian. I*, 586 (paras. 58 and 61, respectively)).

<sup>66</sup> Nero E. i, pt i, 85va36–85vb14 (*AS Ian. I*, 586–7 (para. 62–4)).

<sup>67</sup> *LS I*, 114 (lines 411–21, at 421). Ælfric does not mention the blind man whom Julian cures and who is then martyred by Martianus (*LS I*, 100 (lines 172–80)). Neither is he included among the martyrs who appear to Julian in prison just prior to his death (see below, n. 69).



moving on to its hasty, colourless ending, he celebrates the martyrs first and finishes with a scene of divine retribution from the Latin text in which lightning, an earthquake, terrifying thunder and hail pound the pagans and their temple, and mortally wound Martianus.<sup>68</sup> Ælfric thus leaves his audience with vivid, dual images of victorious saints and defeated sinners not unlike those on a diptych of Judgement Day wherein the saved ascend to and rejoice in heaven while demons drag the damned off to hell.<sup>69</sup>

The internal rhyme of *ecnysse blyssiað* in the final line of the catalogue of saints recalls Julian's promise to Basilissa that should they remain virgins, they would 'ne beoð totwæmede ac a to worulde blyssiað' ('not be separated but will rejoice for ever'). This verbal parallel furnishes evidence of the connection in Ælfric's mind between the couple's celibate marriage at the outset of the legend and the throng of lay and religious folk rejoicing in heaven at its end.<sup>70</sup> It also functions as a reminder that God has fulfilled his initial promise to Julian that 'þurh eow me bið gehalgod manegra oðre clennesse' ('through you both the chastity of many others will be consecrated unto me').<sup>71</sup> The 'others' as the legend bears out and the catalogue makes clear are both religious and lay folk, and their *clennesse* is both corporeal and spiritual. The catalogue's *beorbtum mædenum* ('bright virgins') and the *halga beap* ('holy company') are those monks and nuns over whom Julian was *fæder* and Basilissa was *modor*.<sup>72</sup> In addition to Celsus and his mother, members of the laity whose unflinching faith was emblematic of their spiritual purity include a dead man Julian resuscitated, the twenty soldiers who had been guards in the prison where Julian and Celsus were held, and the seven brothers and their priest Antonius, who willingly incarcerated themselves so that Antonius might baptize the guards, Celsus and his mother.

As counterpoint to the saints' victory stands the pagans' damnation, and Ælfric finishes by demonstrating that God punishes those who refuse to turn to him. He uses more subordinating conjunctions in the depiction of the pagan's damnation than in the catalogue of saints, which slows the narrative just enough to allow individual details of the devastation to pile up for effect. He follows closely the Latin account of Martianus's grisly death but concludes emphatically that 'se arleasa gewat mid wite to helle' ('the wicked one departed with torture to hell').<sup>73</sup> This addition shows that the irony of the

<sup>68</sup> *LSI*, 114 (lines 422–31).

<sup>69</sup> Perhaps the catalogue was prompted by the vision of the previously departed saints who summon Julian and his companions to heaven (Nero E. i., pt i, 85rb31–3 (*AS Ian.* I, 586 [para. 58])). Even if he has transferred (and rearranged) the episode, the matter of emphasis stands.

<sup>70</sup> *LSI*, 92 (line 45). <sup>71</sup> *LSI*, 91 (line 20).

<sup>72</sup> *LSI*, 94 (lines 84 and 85, respectively). There is no parallel for *modor* in the Latin text.

<sup>73</sup> *LSI*, 114 (line 431).

torturer's torture is not lost on Ælfric, for the reference to the governor's maggot-filled body recalls the Promethean punishment with which Julian earlier taunted his nemesis. Boiling with *wurmas* at the end of his earthly life, Martianus's body will be renewed and consumed anew by the *undeadlic wyrm* in the life everlasting.<sup>74</sup> The apposition of hellish torment and heavenly joy thus completes Ælfric's transformation of a programmatic account of divine retribution and posthumous miracles into a spirited exhortation to constancy.

#### CONCLUSION

While Ælfric rewrites the legend of Julian and Basilissa as a dramatization of the believer's ongoing struggle to remain spiritually pure, providing a model of constancy does not necessarily tell Christians how to achieve it. How might he have wanted readers or auditors to understand this model? Or more precisely, how did he expect them to modify their own behaviour to meet his expectations? Above I touched briefly on the sermon *On Auguries*, quoting from it Ælfric's dual definitions of idolatry, but I return to it here because the homily takes up the ideas staged in the legend. Their shared themes and verbal correspondences suggest how Ælfric might have wanted Anglo-Saxon Christians to interpret *Julian and Basilissa* as an inspiration to steadfast belief and how he might have wanted them to apply the lessons of the hagiography to their own lives.

The opening segment of *On Auguries* makes clear that Ælfric thinks about spiritual struggle in terms of making choices whether or not to yield to idolatry, an idea that opens up the possibility of understanding the legend's conflict between Christians and pagans as representative of every believer's fight against temptation and the devil. The first sixty-six lines of the homily constitute a freely composed rumination on spiritual warfare and idol worship, which serves as a prelude to the survey of idolatrous practices Christians should avoid and the discussion of free will and determinism that follow (lines 67–271).<sup>75</sup> Passages from Paul's epistles account for a majority of lines 1–66, as Ælfric focuses on a Christian's battle between flesh and spirit (lines 1–23) and the works of the flesh to be avoided (lines 23–9), to which he adds his own description of the hellish consequences of yielding to such sins (lines 29–34).<sup>76</sup> A second list of fleshly sins from I Corinthians follows (lines 34–44), as does Paul's reminder to the church at Corinth that they have been cleansed, sanctified and justified (lines 44–6). Then, in what appears to be an effort to summarize the preceding material and to anticipate the remainder of the

<sup>74</sup> *LSI*, 114 (line 430) and 112 (line 385), respectively. <sup>75</sup> *LSI*, 364–82.

<sup>76</sup> For a line by line sourcing of the homily, see M. Godden, 'The Sources of Lives 17 (On Auguries) (Cameron B.1)', 2002, *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici* at <<http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/>>, accessed June 2004. See also A. Meaney, 'Ælfric's Use of his Sources in his Homily *On Auguries*', *ES* 66 (1985), 477–95.

homily, Ælfric turns abruptly to his own definition of idolatry (lines 47–51) before enumerating from Galatians the fruits of the spirit that the believer who rejects sinful behaviour will bear (lines 52–9). He draws the section to a close by balancing the earlier vision of the idolater's eternity in hell with a promise of everlasting bliss for steadfast Christians who will not *onbugan ðam bysmorfullum leabtrum / ne ðam yfelum gewilnungum* ('yield to shameful sins nor evil desires').<sup>77</sup>

Verbal cues common to *On Auguries* and *Julian and Basilissa* suggest that Ælfric saw a connection between these texts and their central ideas. His use of *onbugan* to characterize the defining action of the *gewinn* ('conflict') between flesh and spirit in the homily, and his decision to use *gewinn* and *gecamp* ('warfare') to name the looming confrontation between Christians and pagans in the legend indicate as much.<sup>78</sup> That Ælfric requires considerable interpretative sophistication from his audience is well known, so it is not difficult to imagine that he would expect them to construe the saints' refusals *gebugan to [Martianus's] deofolgyldum* ('to turn to Martianus's idols') as symbolic of their own refusals *to deofollicum bæðenscype gebug[an]* ('[to] turn to devilish heathenism') and of their rejection of the sins he mentions in *On Auguries*.<sup>79</sup> Likewise the sermon's identification of the Christian *qua idolater* as one who *ðurbwunað on yfelnyse and forsihð his scyppendes beboda and deofla gecwemð* ('continues in wickedness and despises his Creator's commandments and propitiates devils') also applies to the legend's pagan antagonist and promotes connections between the works.<sup>80</sup>

Ælfric's treatment of the fates of idolaters and faithful Christians in the homily intimates yet again ways in which he might have expected Anglo-Saxon believers to apply the lessons of the legend to their spiritual lives. Most striking are the verbal parallels between the punishment he promises in *On Auguries* to the sinner who refuses to repent and Julian's prediction that Martianus will burn in hell and be eaten by the deathless worm.<sup>81</sup> In the sermon Ælfric guarantees the idolater, whether apostate or impenitent Christian, that

seal he unðances on ecnysse ðrowian on  
ðam unadwæscendlicum fyre betwux ðam wyrrestan wurmcynne

<sup>77</sup> *LSI*, 368 (lines 62–3).

<sup>78</sup> *Onbugan* and *gewinn* are found at *LSI*, 368 (lines 62 and 65, respectively) and *gecamp* and *gewinn* at *LSI*, 96 (line 103) and 98 (line 128), respectively, for which there are no analogous words in the Latin text.

<sup>79</sup> *LSI*, 96 (lines 112–13) and 366 (line 48), respectively. For the lists of sins in *On Auguries*, see *LSI*, 364 and 366 (lines 23–7 and 38–44). He also equates the idolater and the superstitious Christian in homilies in the First Series (*Ælfric's Catholic Homilies. The First Series. Text*, ed. P. Clemoes, EETS ss 17 (Oxford, 1997), 229–30 (lines 162–99, at 186–8) and 450 (lines 312–15)). A. Meaney surveys practices Ælfric considered idolatrous in 'Ælfric and Idolatry', *Jnl of Religious Hist.* 13 (1984), 119–35. <sup>80</sup> *LSI*, 366 (lines 30–1). <sup>81</sup> See above, p. 212.

þe næfre ne bið adyd ac ceowað symle þæra arleasra lichama on  
ðam hellican lige.<sup>82</sup>

Read against a passage like this, Martianus can symbolize the unregenerate Christian of the homily who, like the governor, refuses *yfeles geswican and gebetan* ('to cease from evil and amend') and is damned for it.<sup>83</sup>

*On Auguries's* description of the victorious Christian is also consonant with the depiction of Julian and Basilissa and their company rejoicing in heaven. The martyrs who turn from their gods to God and remain steadfast stand in for Christians who earn everlasting life because they 'nellað onbugan ðam bysmorfullum Leahtrum / ne ðam yfelum gewilnungum ac winnað him togeanes / oð þæt hi sigefæste siðiað to criste'.<sup>84</sup> In the same way that Julian and Basilissa conquer corporeal desire in order to remain physically chaste and spiritually pure, so Christians who *cnylmiað beora flæsc* ('mortify their flesh') will produce spiritual fruits, *modes clænnysse* ('purity of mind') and *forbæfednysse butan bigeleaste* ('abstinence without folly') among them.<sup>85</sup> And like the saints, true believers in the homily refuse to submit to sin and earn everlasting glory, whether their *sceortan gewinne* ('short struggle') is to shun exceptionable practices, to observe church laws regulating marital intercourse or to uphold orthodox doctrine.<sup>86</sup> It therefore seems no coincidence that Ælfric closes the opening section of the homily with an echo of the triumphant finale of the catalogue of martyrs in *Julian and Basilissa*, for eventually the conflict between the spirit and flesh ceases and steadfast Christians *bhysiað on ecnysse bliðe mid criste* ('rejoice for ever happily with Christ').<sup>87</sup>

Both *Julian and Basilissa* and *On Auguries* work to comfort the faithful and goad the lax, and Ælfric reshapes the legend into a compelling dramatization of the spiritual warfare he discusses in the homily. Of course, for him the Christian life is one in which the believer's *clænnys* is constantly under siege by internal and external forces, but this must have seemed especially true in late-tenth-century England as reformers competed with non-reformers for support among the laity, as the Danes arrived more and more frequently and as the year 1000 approached.<sup>87</sup> It is little wonder then that Ælfric chose *Julian and Basilissa*

<sup>82</sup> *LS I*, 366 (lines 31–4): 'he will unwillingly suffer for ever in the inextinguishable fire among the worst kind of worm that will never be destroyed but will always chew the bodies of the wicked in the fire of hell'. <sup>83</sup> *LS I*, 366 (line 29).

<sup>84</sup> *LS I*, 368 (lines 62–4): 'do not wish to submit to shameful sins nor evil desires but will fight against them until they journey victoriously to Christ'.

<sup>85</sup> *LS I*, 368 (lines 61, 58 and 59, respectively). <sup>86</sup> *LS I*, 368 (line 65).

<sup>87</sup> *LS I*, 368 (line 66).

<sup>88</sup> On the social, political and ecclesiastical climates in which reformers were operating at the end of the century, see, for example, M. Godden, 'Apocalypse and Invasion in Late Anglo-Saxon England', *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E. G. Stanley*, ed. M. Godden, D. Gray and T. Hoad (Oxford, 1994), pp. 130–62; C. Jones, *Ælfric's Letter to the*

*The legend of Julian and Basilissa in Ælfric's Lives of Saints*

to bolster the faith of the English, considering that the legend provides Anglo-Saxon Christians with an opportunity to see themselves, or what they might become, reflected in the images of their saintly predecessors, rewarded for their asceticism and orthodoxy, rejoicing for ever together for their faithfulness to God.<sup>88</sup>

*Monks of Eynsham*, CSASE 24 (Cambridge, 1998), 42–51; and P. Stafford, 'Political Ideas in Late Tenth-century England: Charters as Evidence', *Law, Laity and Solidarities: Essays in Honour of Susan Reynolds*, ed. P. Stafford, J. Nelson and J. Martindale (Manchester, 2001), pp. 68–82.

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