FROM BEOWULF TO ST. GUTHLAC:

THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIANS

ON THE

PORTRAYAL AND CHARACTERIZATION OF HERO FIGURES IN OLD ENGLISH POETRY

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PREFACE

It is not simply the retelling of ancient tales of heroes at war with other heroes. It is a literature that describes the conflict of humankind with the powers of darkness and evil, and it belongs to an age in which nature was felt as unsubdued, in which the elements were ever dangerous and unfriendly. Everywhere in Old English Literature we have the sense of people trying to survive in a savage and menacing world--in the scenery, the stormy seas, the dark forests, the wild unpenetrated country that lay beyond the boundaries of their small tribal lands. In the foreground of the Old English landscape are the shore, the bold headlands, the wind swept sea. Beyond is a vague region of gloomy fens and shaggy woods, where there is neither sunshine nor warmth and where terror overpowers beauty. The world here is stark and uncompromising and the literature that has come to us across the centuries tells of life filled with strain and pressure, of days and nights spent tossing upon the sea--the bitter North Sea--in open vessels; of unremitting battles with foes human and inhuman; the fierce quarrels, the ferocity of invasion and war, the bodily strain, the sleepless mental vigilance, the rage and storm and slaughter, the uncouth terrors. Nowhere was there a harbor of refuge, nowhere a place of lasting peace or beauty--and the only hope were the heroes who through deeds of valor and unsurpassed bravery might keep the forces of evil and destruction at bay.

In many ways the continuing appeal of Old English Literature in modern times lies in its presentation of heroes who struggle against deadly odds. Their deeds are projected in images of such vividness and power that they at once attain a strange familiarity, and emerge before the reader like bright-edged hallucinations, with a clarity so intense that intellect and imagination are immediately engaged. When we ask why we are so strangely stirred by words written hundreds of years ago, by a body of literature that seems remote in date and thought, we find that it is because on the one hand, it presents emotions that are universal, stripping the images and stories of all that was peculiar to time and place; and secondly, it possesses the power of visualization, the ability to place before the mental vision of the reader not only tales of heroic deeds, but also the eternal conflict between good and evil as seen by a society that has long ago faded away into the mists of an almost forgotten history. It was a society that was rude in nature, savage in its features of daily life, its people barely surviving in bleak and dismal surroundings. Yet it also expressed a certain magnificence of humanity, a willingness to strive for better things in spite of all, and it produced a body of literature unique in its variety and excellence.

The heroes presented in Old English Literature are the product partly of an ancient culture which had come to England with the Germanic invasions of the fifth and early sixth centuries, and partly of the transforming influences of the age in which it was written, an age of change and growth during which Germanic strains were slowly modified by the influence and culture of the Christian Church. How this process of modification may have influenced the characterizations of the hero figures presented in Old English Literature is the subject matter of this senior honors thesis.

If there is any virtue in the work presented here, it lies not so much in originality of interpretation, but rather in originality of approach. A number of scholarly studies have established the impact of the Christian Church on the literature of the Old English period. And some few have put forth the theory that the Early Church Fathers established a literary program that served as a guide to the Anglo-Saxons as they adapted the oral poetry of their Germanic ancestors to the themes and lessons of Christian theology. Yet no one has sought to test this theory through an examination of the several hero figures that are extant in this literature. This thesis seeks to provide such a test, and to offer conclusions which, it is hoped, the reader will find both plausible and helpful as a basis for further study. It is also hoped that the analysis presented here has not sacrificed a map of the forest for a wandering among trees.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Anglo-Saxons who came to Britain in the fifth and sixth centuries A.D., brought with them a vigorous oral poetic tradition. This oral poetry used heroic images adapted to the celebration of wars and leaders, or to the expression of folklore or pagan religious rituals. The great event in the early story of Old English poetry was the adaptation of its heroic warlike style and diction to the imaginative expression of Christian thought patterns and themes. This major revolution is symbolized by the work of the seventh century poet Caedmon as described by the Venerable Bede in his *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum.* Caedmon, a peasant lay-brother miraculously granted the gift of poesy through a vision, is said to have dictated a series of poems based on free adaptations of biblical material: but instead of the peasant language that might have been expected, he used all the technical diction and stylistic devices of the native Germanic tradition. The nine lines of a hymn to the creation are all that is left of Caedmon's poetry, but the impulse he gave set the pattern for the whole art of Old English verse.

About thirty thousand lines of a vastly larger quantity of the poetry from this period have survived. It includes works originally composed from dates throughout the whole period, surviving mostly in copies made in monasteries during the tenth century. There are four main collections that

have served as source material for the translations utilized in the course of this research project: the Beowulf manuscript, which besides containing the most important of all the Old English heroic poems, from which it takes its name, includes a late one on *Judith* as well as prose pieces of marvels and didactic entertainment from Latin sources; the (so called) Caedmon manuscript containing the biblical pieces *Genesis, Exodus, Daniel,* and some others; the Exeter Book containing works such Cynewulf's *Juliana and Christ (The Ascension);* and the Vercelli book containing such works as *The Fates of the Apostles* and *Elene* (on the finding of the cross by St. Helen). Other poems outside these collections, e.g., *The Battle of Brunanburh* and *the Battle of Maldon* are also examined. And though these poems are all that remain of the verse developed by the Anglo-Saxons, they constitute a rich and unique body of material marked by an high degree of literary excellence.

Much of this poetry might have been lost had Christianity sought to eliminate pagan and secular prose and poetry as it strove for dominance over other belief systems. Fortunately, as has been shown by several studies, one of the ways the Church gained acceptance in new areas was by adopting and then changing the legends, myths, and stories of pagan cultures in such a way that, in time, they came to reflect Christian messages and themes. And a number of scholars have theorized that the Early Church Fathers established a literary program that served as a guide for the Anglo-Saxons who took on the task of adapting and Christianizing the literature derived from their Germanic heritage.

It can be demonstrated that one of the major changes in the literature of the Old English Period was the gradually increasing use of heroic imagery to set forth Christian ideals and themes. This would seem to be an example of

the process of adaptation. Most of the Old English poems that are known to modern scholars contain a mixture of Germanic and Christian elements. This was noted by Arthur R. Skemp in 1907 and demonstrated again by B. J. Timmer in 1944. Michael D. Cherniss in his *Ingeld and Christ* examined the mixing of Christian and Germanic elements in several of the Old English poems.[1] His work makes clear the fact that Germanic elements dominated the earliest poems. But as time passed Christian values came to play a larger and larger role, finally becoming the dominant themes in the works of the later years of the Old English Period. Cherniss also examined the transformation of the Germanic heroic code and the hero figures who represented it into characters that exemplified Christian values and ideas. However, he does not attempt to explain the reasons for this evolution or the possible influence of the Early Church Fathers on this process of adaptation.

J. D. A. Ogilvy, in his *Books Known to Anglo-Latin Writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin (670-840)* and *Books Known to the English, 597-1066,* provides an extensive list of the works of early Christian theologians that were known by the writers of the Old English Period. He states that works such as St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* were known to the Anglo-Saxons. This lends credence to the possibility that the ideas promulgated by St. Augustine concerning the use of pagan literature could have influenced the way in which heroes were portrayed in Old English literature. Bernard F. Huppe, in his *Doctrine and Poetry: Augustine's Influence on Old English Poetry,* set forth such a theory as he examined what he held to he the influence of St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* on Old English verse through an analysis of

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[1] Michael D. Cherniss, Ingeld and Christ: Heroic Concepts and Values in Old English Christian Poetry (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1972).

the language and structure of several poems. He concluded that the guidelines set forth by St. Augustine for the use of pagan literature became the foundation for a literary program that influenced Anglo-Saxon writers as they sought to adapt oral poetry to Christian themes. But a major problem with this approach is the fact that many of the words used in the Old English poems examined by Huppe--which he purports may be interpreted as having a Christian connotation or meaning--can actually have several different meanings in translation. This leads to the danger that Huppe could have unintentionally translated key words so that they contained the meanings he wished them to in order to prove his thesis. And Huppe, like Cherniss (and most other scholars), does not examine the possibility that the theory concerning the influence of the literary program set forth by the Early Church Fathers might be validated by an examination of the changing characterizations of the heroes in Old English literature, from characters based in Germanic value systems to figures that portrayed a truly Christian hero, while still retaining those Germanic traits that the Church considered worthy of a hero of the faith of Christ.

Examples of both Germanic and Christian hero figures can be found within the corpus of Old English Poetry. But there are no specific characterizations that can be pointed to as the definitive model of a Germanic or Christian hero. Rather, as Cherniss has clearly established, we find a number of hero characterizations presented in the literature. Some are predominantly Germanic such as Adam and Eve in *Genesis B*; some are predominantly Christian such as St. Juliana in Cynewulf's *Juliana*; and some are a mixture of both as exemplified by St. Andrew in *Andreas*. Thus, if Huppe's theory is to be tested through an examination of the changes that took place in the portrayal of the

hero figures in Old English Literature, the patterns of these characterizations must be examined.

This thesis is divided into four major sections. The first reviews the attitudes and ideas of the Early Church Fathers concerning pagan literature and its use by members of the Christian Church. Particular emphasis is placed on St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* and its guidelines for the adaptation and utilization of pagan literature to present the message of the Bible to the People of God. The second section examines the qualities, traits and virtues that can be found in the Germanic and Christian characterization patterns found in Old English hero figures. Several hero figures found in specific poems are examined in the third section, and attention is given to the ways in which these figures relate to the process of adaptation set forth by St. Augustine and other Early Church Fathers. The fourth section summarizes the research findings of this thesis and offers conclusions as to the probable validity of Huppe's theory concerning the influence of the literary program of the Early Church Fathers on the development of Old English Literature.

CHAPTER TWO

The Ideas of the Early Church Fathers on the Use of Pagan Literature

A major problem that faced the Christian church from the very beginning was how to deal with secular and pagan literature. Many early Christian writers and theologians were greatly disturbed by the fact that pagan literature appealed to so many in the Church, arguing that the ideas and images set forth in these works had a negative effect on the Christians that heard them. Typical of their concerns were the thoughts of St. Jerome who asks in one of his letters, "What fellowship can there be between light and darkness? What agreement between Christ and Belial? What has Horace to do with the Psalter, or Virgil with the Gospels, or Cicero with the Apostle?...We ought not drink both from the chalice of Christ and from the chalice of demons."[1] As the centuries unfolded and the Church carried its message to the borders of the Roman Empire and beyond these concerns took on a greater

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[1] St. Jerome, Epistolae, vol. XXII, no. 29, cited by Edward Kennard Rand, Founders of the Middles Ages (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1941), p. 12. The reader will note that this work is the major source for the quotations of the Early Church theologians and writers cited in this chapter. There are several reasons for this. Rand is the one of the few medieval scholars who has translated the letters and writings of these men and gathered them in one volume. A representative sample of his translations was compared with the original Latin passages by a scholar well versed in the work of the Patristic Fathers. He established the fact that Rand's translations were correct and accurate thus validating their reliability. No other English translations were available in the Texas A&M University library. This led to the decision to use Rand as the major source for the citations set forth in this chapter. The exception to this are the quotes taken from the work of St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana.*

urgency. Pope Gregory the Great, who held the Pontificate from 590 to 604 A.D., sharply rebuked Bishop Desiderius of Vienne in a letter for "holding conferences on ancient literature" because "the same lips cannot sound the praises of Jupiter and the praises of Christ."[2]

However, there was another stream of thought in the early Christian church that believed there were things of value to be found in secular literature. A number of the Church Fathers, and other theologians, realized that the concepts and language found in many of the works of non-Christian writers, such as Homer and Virgil, could be adapted for the use and benefit of Christianity. Over time, they developed principles that encouraged the use of secular and pagan literature, if it added positive support or strengthened the presentation of the Christian message. Thus, even though St. Jerome emphatically declared that the faithful should not drink from the cup of Christ and the cup of demons, he read secular literature, and his works reflect the influence and used the style of the great Roman rhetorician, Cicero.[3] Likewise, in a letter containing instructions for St. Augustine of Canterbury, who was sent to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, Pope Gregory the Great instructed

> that the temples of the idols among that people [the Anglo-Saxons] should on no account be destroyed. The idols are to be destroyed, but the temples themselves are to be aspersed with holy water...For if these temples are well-built, they must be purified from the worship of demons...In this way, we hope that the people, seeing their temples are not destroyed, may abandon their error and, flocking more readily to their accustomed resorts, may come to know and adore the true God.[4]

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[2] Gregory the Great, Epistolae, vol. xi, no. 54, cited by Rand, pp. 25-6.

[3] Rand, p. 120.

[4] Bede, A History of the English Church and People, trans. Leo Sherley-Price (Baltimore, MD.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1972), bk. I.30.

Both of these men realized that pagan literature could have real value if used in the proper fashion.

In *De Doctrina Christiana*, St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, set forth rules that could serve as guidelines for the adaptation of pagan literature for use by the Christian Church. He explained not only the means for deciding which aspects of pagan and secular literature to use, but also how to give those images and ideas set forth in that literature a Christian focus. The principles recommended by Augustine and others gradually became standards which influenced the rhetoricians and writers of succeeding generations and guided their efforts to make Christianity's message more appealing to non-Christian listeners. The development of this process of adaptation was slow and arduous, taking centuries to complete, but eventually gained broad acceptance as a means of presenting Christian ideas to a pagan world.

By the 325 A.D., after centuries of fierce persecution, Christianity had become the dominant religion in the Roman Empire. But the persecutions had left a residue of bitterness and hostility toward pagan religion, artifacts, and literature. For many Christians they represented evil forces that had sought to destroy the Church, had martyred thousands for professing their faith, and sought to blame Christians for all the ills besetting the empire. Thus, as they looked at the past of multiple persecutions, many Christian theologians moved quickly to eradicate the last vestiges of paganism.

They saw many of the worst aspects of paganism in the works of such men as Homer and Virgil, believing that the contents of these writings made them extremely dangerous to the young Christian religion, and fearing that new members might be influenced to return to their old ways upon hearing these stories. For example, Homer's *Iliad* presented a story in which the worldly

glory a man achieved in his lifetime was all important. This was contrary to the Christian idea that the glories of this world meant nothing. Rather it was the greatness of the afterlife and the rewards to come in Heaven that were most important. Thus the church tried to control the influence of pagan literature by issuing decrees, such as the one put forth by the Church Council at Carthage in 398 A.D. that forbade the reading by Christians of works such as the *Iliad*.[5]

Yet, it was more than just the fear of the paganism within the works of antiquity that inspired this distrust of secular literature. It was also the view that it represented a stale and dead past that should be forgotten. Christianity was a new and vibrant religion whose members firmly believed it was the wave of the future. The idea that Christianity represented progress is perfectly illustrated in the debate that took place in A.D. 384 between Symmachus, the prefect of Rome, and St. Ambrose concerning the removal of the Altar of Victory from the Roman Forum by the Emperor Gratian in A.D. 375. Symmachus appeals to the two Emperors who are hearing the debate to allow the return of the altar asking "that we who are old men may leave to posterity that which we received as boys."[6] In his appeal to the traditions of the past, Symmachus becomes the voice of the Eternal City eloquently pleading with his listeners to see that both Christian and pagan "all look up at the same stars. We have a common sky. A common firmament encompasses us. What matters it by what kind of learned theory each man looketh for the truth?"[7] St. Ambrose rejects Symmachus' appeal to the past by pointing to "the ancient

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[5] Rand, p. 12.

[6] Symmachus, Relatio, cited by Rand, pp.15-16.

[7] Ibid., p. 16

days of chaos, when elements were flying about in an unorganized mass."[8] He argued that order emerged from this chaos with the coming of the sun, and the world continued to move on even though "the conservative particles objected to the advent of the novel and vulgar sunlight."[9] And just as the protests of the particles that favored chaos could not stop the march of progress, so those of the pagans should not be allowed to stop benefits brought by the growth of Christianity. Twenty years later, Prudentius, in the course of his epic poem, *Contra Symmachum*, also rejected Symmachus' argument that Christians and pagans lived under a common sky which could be reached by many pathways. He acknowledged that all people share the same earth, air, and water, but states that the merits of individual citizens are vastly different.[10] Thus, just as Romans were infinitely more civilized and meritorious than the Huns, so it is that Christians tower above the poor, miserable pagans who are still shackled by vain superstitions.

Another major concern of the early theologians was that Christians would find pagan stories such as those of Homer and Virgil more attractive and interesting than the tales of the heroes of the Bible. Often this concern was based in personal experience. There is ample evidence of this in the writings and letters of Church Fathers, such as Jerome and Alcuin. St. Jerome loved to read works by pagan authors such as Plautus and Cicero so much so that he often preferred them to the works of the prophets. He continued in his habits until one night when he dreamed that

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[8] St. Ambrose, Epistolae, nos. XVII and XVIII, cited by Rand, p. 17.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Rand, p. 20.

> I was caught up in the spirit, and haled before the judgement-seat of God. Blinded by its light and by the brightness of those who stood about it, I fell prostrated to the earth, not daring to look up. When the voice asked me concerning my condition, I replied that I was a Christian. "Thou liest," answered He that sat upon the throne. "Thou art a Ciceronian, not a Christian; for where thy treasure is, there shall thy heart be also."[11]

Following this incident, Jerome vowed that he would never again read a secular book and decided to study "divine books...with a zeal far greater than that with which before I had read the works of mortals."[12] Alcuin, Charlemagne's favorite scholar, once rebuked Hygebald, the Bishop of Lindisfarne, for listening to the old Germanic heroic sagas rather than to Christian tales by asking "What has Ingeld to do with Christ?"[13] Yet, he and other Church Fathers seem to have realized that if the Church could not eliminate the yearning to hear pagan literature from men's hearts, they must make it possible for them to channel this yearning into a more productive endeavor. Thus a major impetus for developing a process of adaptation was an understanding of human nature and of the attractions of pagan tales, both oral and written.

The roots of this system of adaptation can be found in the life and work of St. Paul, who lived and preached in the middle of the first century. The Book of *Acts* of the Apostles--found in the New Testament--describes how Paul addressed the people of Athens as he stood atop the Mars Hill. He did not belittle the citizens of a city that had been one of the intellectual capitals of the ancient world by saying, as others might, that the knowledge and

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[11] St. Jerome, Epistolae, Vol. XXII, no. 30, cited by Rand, p. 106.

[12] Ibid., p. 107.

[13] Alcuin cited by Stanley B. Greenfield, A Critical History of Old English Literature (New York, N.Y.: New York University Press, 1965), p. 1.

philosophies they had developed over hundreds of years were inferior to the message that he was seeking to lay before them. Rather he pointed out that the basic tenets of Christianity had already been proclaimed by some of their most famous philosophers and poets. For instance, in his speech Paul quoted directly from the Greek philosopher Cleanthes when he pointed out that some Greek poets had said: "For we are all his offspring."[14]. This could easily be transformed to have a Christian meaning, and Paul saw the value of doing just that, presenting material that they would find thoroughly familiar in order to win over a hostile audience.

Other problems were encountered during the process of adaptation. Many of the early theologians saw that while some pagan doctrines, such as the brotherhood of man, could easily be adapted by Christianity, a critical question still remained unanswered. How could these pagan doctrines be incorporated into a religion whose very nature necessitated a break with the past.[15] An example of the solution used by the early church to solve this dilemma can be found in the works of Municius Felix--a Roman lawyer and Christian apologist who lived at the end of the second century. Felix wrote a dialogue, named for its chief character *Octavius*, a Christian who engages a pagan named Caecilius in a lively debate. Felix uses the dialogue to show that Christianity is far superior to the pagan philosophy of Epicureanism. In addition, Felix finds reflected in the Christian faith what he considers to be the best in ancient thought--Stoicism and Platonism. The pagan Caecilius states that man is a creature whose weak mind can not possibly comprehend the true nature of the universe. It is best to do as he does and subscribe to the

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[14] Acts, bk. xvii, cited by Rand, p. 34.

[15] Rand, p. 37.

tenets of Epicurius, a Greek philosopher, who said that our whole lives are guided only by chance. Therefore, we should not worry about the future or the wrath of various gods. Caecilius then goes on to set forth a number of the traditional accusations made by pagans against Christianity: Christians hold wild orgies that involve all kinds of debaucheries, including the worship of a donkey's head...Christians worship an omnipotent, solitary God who is so forgiving and kind that he will one day destroy the world he created with fire...the members of the Christian religion are forever doomed to a life of poverty, totally bereft of the pleasures that fill this world...Christians are miserable for they shall not rise again in an afterlife, since there is none, and their lives in this world are dead and useless.[16]

In his response, Octavius calmly answers each accusation levelled against him by Caecilius. He states that the human mind is indeed capable of comprehending greater truths, although it is impossible to achieve knowledge of God. Yet we can certainly see proof of His existence in the beauty of the world and in every aspect of nature. He must be supremely powerful or else He would not deserve to be called God.[17] In support of his arguments defending Christianity, Felix has Octavius draw upon the philosophers and poets of antiquity. He quotes from Virgil who said that:

> The heavens and the earth and all the frame
> Of this broad universe are fed within
> By the spirit and the infusing mind that stirs
> The sluggish mass. Thence comes the race of man
> And every kind of beast.[18]

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[16] Ibid., pp. 43-5.

[17] Ibid., p. 45.

[18] Minicius Felix, Octavius, cited by Rand, p. 46.

Octavius then goes on to state that Virgil identified that infusing mind and spirit of the world as God:

> God goeth everywhere throughout the lands,
> The stretching ocean and the skies profound,
> Whence men are sprung and beasts and rain and fires.[19]

Octavius uses quotes from other philosophers, such as Thales who represents the Stoics. But the most important position is given to Plato and the philosophy expressed in his *Timaeus* which was to become the standard for the teaching of his works in the later days of the Roman Empire.[20]

At the close of the dialogue, Caecilius declares that they have both won a victory in the debate--Octavius has defeated him, but more importantly, he has helped Caecilius to triumph over his pagan beliefs by making him see the error of his ways. *Octavius* is an excellent example of a Christian work that presents just enough of the basic tenets of the new religion to interest his listeners into further inquiry. The appeal of this work is that it presents Christianity to pagan audiences by showing how its teachings can be seen in the works of pagan philosophers. Another important aspect of this work is its use of a pagan literary form--a form that would be apparent to those who listened to it in Felix's time.[21]

A later writer who provides an excellent illustration of the evolution of the process of adapting pagan literature is Lactantius. Writing in the early fourth-century he was, like many others, a pagan before becoming a Christian. Thus, he was well grounded in Greek and Roman literature. In his works, Lactantius tried to make the doctrines of Christianity more acceptable to the

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[19] Ibid.

[20] Rand, p. 46.

[21] Ibid., p. 48.

educated classes of the Roman Empire by identifying it with the philosophies of the ancient world. He also sought to show them that this new religion was not dangerous to the order and steadfastness that was forever symbolized by the Roman Empire. Lactantius' most important work, the *Divine Institutes*, was written between 311 and 324, and is addressed to the first Christian emperor, Constantine I. In it he praises the new emperor "who, first of Roman rulers to renounce error, hast known and honored the majesty of the one true God."[22] His goal "is to write on divine institutes...of hope, of life, of salvation, of immortality, of God, that we may set at rest death-dealing superstitions and loathsome errors."[23]

In writing about Christian theology, Lactantius utilized his knowledge of the classics of antiquity and drew from the works of Virgil, Horace, Ovid, Lucan, and Lucretius to illustrate his points. He also used fragments from many lesser known Roman writers--such as the comedies of the Roman playwright Plautus--to set forth Christian moral judgments. Like Minicius Felix, Lactantius owes a great deal of his style to Cicero, whom he compliments by calling him original.[24] And like Felix he utilizes themes from pagan literature that were well known to contemporary readers and audiences. Thus in the fifth book of the *Institutes*, Lactantius describes the Golden Age when pagan poets told of a time when man had lived in paradise. And he states that in doing so the poets actually prophesied the true golden age that began when Christ was born. He also notes that the poets told of the fall of man and the

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[22] Lactantius, Divine Institutes, bk. I, cited by Rand, p. 50.

[23] Ibid., p. 51.

[24] Rand, p. 52.

miseries that beset humanity during the reign of Jupiter which reflected the wretched state of mankind before the coming of Christ.

The *Divine Institutes* are an excellent example of how an early Christian writer adapted pagan literature to a format designed to present Christian ideas. Lactantius continuously drew from pagan writers and philosophers to reinforce his arguments as when he used the classical poets vision of a Golden Age to represent the Garden of Eden and the birth of Christ. Lactantius was well aware that although there was much in pagan literature that Christians should avoid, it was impossible to forget the past and he believed that the new religion could actually draw inspiration from its use. It is important to note that the *Institutes* were written in a time when Christianity had gained prominence in the Roman Empire. Rather than joining with those that wished to burn anything that could serve as a reminder of the pagan past, Lactantius' *Divine Institutes* reflect a voice of moderation that would eventually prevail over the radicals. His work would serve as one of the models for the future adaptation of the classics of antiquity. Lactantius is praised by both St. Jerome and St. Augustine, two of the most prominent Patristic theologians, as a good example of how pagan literature could be put to use by the new religion.[25]

Although the idea that pagan literature could be used to Christianity's benefit was gaining wide acceptance, the important problem of how far this adaptation should go was still unanswered in the fourth century. There was a fine line between the use of pagan literature for the furtherance of Christianity, and the reading of it for the sake of simple pleasure. It was still all too easy for people to lose themselves in the tales of the great

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[25] Ibid., p. 63.

heroes of old and devote less attention to Christian literature. As noted in an earlier passage, St. Jerome was racked by guilt over his great love of pagan literature. Yet this did not stop his continued use of pagan works, both in his own writings and in teaching others. Eventually however, Jerome came to the realization that there were limits to the ways in which pagan literature could be adapted to the use of Christianity. He was highly critical of the numerous attempts to piece together parts of lines from Homer and Virgil into a patchwork, called a *cento* in Latin, to show that the poets knew the basic mysteries of Christianity long before it existed. In a letter to Paulinus, he sharply criticizes the idea that Virgil predicted the birth of Christ:

> As though we were not familiar with Homer-centones and Virgil-centones and had not learned to call Virgil a Christian without Christ for singing
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> > Now comes the Virgin, Saturn's reign returns,
> > And a new race drops down from lofty heaven.
>
> All that is childish stuff. It is like the performance of a mountebank. It is bad enough to teach what you do not know, but even worse (if I may be allowed to relieve my feelings) not even to be aware that you do not know.[26]

In his seventieth letter, Jerome clearly states that the best literature and thought of the ancient world should be preserved and adapted to Christian use.[27] But Christians needed a clear and understandable guide as to how this adaptation could be properly accomplished.

St. Augustine's sought to provide this in *De Doctrina Christiana*, a book primarily concerned with the Holy Scriptures and how the lessons contained within them could be made easily understandable to those that heard them. But

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[26] St. Jerome, Epistolae, vol. LIII, nos. 6-7, cited by Rand, p. 116.

[27] Rand, p. 64.

he does not ignore or reject the use of pagan or secular writings. Instead, if a Christian writer should find that "those who are called philosophers, especially the Platonists, have said things which are indeed true and well accommodated to our faith, they should not be feared; rather, what they have said should be taken from them as from unjust possessions and converted to our use."[28] Expanding on this idea, St. Augustine uses the flight from Egypt by the Hebrews as a metaphor to further illustrate his argument:

> Just as the Egyptians had not only idols and grave burdens which the people of Israel detested and avoided, so also they had vases and ornaments of gold and silver and clothing which the Israelites took with them secretly when they fled, as if put to them to better use. They did not do this on their own authority but at God's commandment while the Egyptians unwittingly supplied them with things which they themselves did not use well.[29]

Augustine states that the Christian writer working with pagan literature must be like the Israelites, taking the "gold and silver" that he finds within the works of antiquity, while shunning the rest as being simply superstitions and unfit for adaptation. He asks his readers to recall "with how much gold and silver and clothing bundled up the most sweet teacher and most blessed martyr Cyprian fled from Egypt? Or how much Lactantius took with him? Or how much Victorinus, Optatus, Hilary carried with them?"[30]

St. Augustine doesn't simply advocate the use of pagan literature in *De Doctrina Christiana*, he also provides the techniques and guidelines that he believes writers should use in their attempts to adapt these works. The foundation for any adaptation must be based in the distinction between use and

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[28] St. Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr. (Indianapolis, IN.: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1958), Bk. 2. 40. 60.

[29] Ibid.

[30] De Doctrina, Bk. 2. 40. 61.

enjoyment. Those things we enjoy should "make us blessed" in the eyes of the Lord, while the things that we use should "help and...sustain us as we move toward blessedness in order that we may gain and cling to those things which make us blessed."[31] But the writer who is trying to adapt pagan literature to the use of Christianity must remain aware that if he loves those works for their own sake then it is a form of abuse rather than of use.

Augustine further aids the process of adaptation by providing the means to distinguish language which is figurative from that which is literal. He cites as an example of language that can be seen as literal:

> whatever is read in the Scriptures concerning bitterness or anger in the words or deeds of the person of God or of his saints is of value for the destruction of the reign of cupidity. If it is obviously so intended it is not to be referred to something else as though it were figurative.[32]

Similarly "those things which seem almost shameful to the inexperienced, whether simply spoken or actually performed wither by the person of God or by men whose sanctity is commended to us, are all figurative, and their secrets are to be removed as kernels from the husk."[33] Augustine also cautioned those adapting pagan literature to Christian themes to pay close attention to what is proper for the time, place, and persons that they are studying, lest they condemn someone who deserves their respect.

Once the process of adaptation had been accomplished, it was vital that Christian scholars and speakers have a method of "teaching what we have learned."[34] The teacher and interpreter must above all else present his

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[31] De Doctrina, Bk. 1. 3. 3.

[32] De Doctrina, Bk. 3. 10. 16.

[33] De Doctrina, Bk. 3. 12. 18.

[34] De Doctrina, Bk. 1. 1. 1.

material in a such a way that its meaning will be clear and understandable to all his listeners. Augustine attacks speakers that fill their rhetoric with needless euphemisms and flowery language in an attempt to make themselves sound eloquent. By doing so, the basic meaning of the message they are trying to convey will often become hidden, making it very hard, if not impossible, for an uneducated audience to discover the true message the speaker is attempting to deliver. Thus he encourages Christians to speak in clear and plain language.

It is important to note that there is no evidence of the presence of St. Augustine's *De Doctrina Christiana* existing as an extant work in the manuscripts or catalogs of libraries that have survived from Anglo-Saxon England. However, if St. Augustine's work was indeed a major influence in the development of the Christian doctrine concerning the use of pagan literature, it is quite possible that one might find evidence of the precepts and rules he set forth in *De Doctrina* in the writings of the period. The discovery of such evidence would tend to confirm the likelihood that *De Doctrina* was known in England during this period and influenced at least some development in Old English literature.

The best proof that we have of the presence of *De Doctrina* in England is to be found in the Venerable Bede's *Explanation of the Apocalypse.* In the preface to this work, Bede lists the seven rules for the interpretation of the Scriptures set forth by Tyconius Afer, an African who lived in the late fourth century. St. Augustine also lists these rules in Book III, chapters 42-56 of *De Doctrina Christiana.* In the process of listing Tyconius' rules, Augustine amends several of them to better suit his purposes. These changes are also

incorporated into the list that Bede provides of Tyconius' rules.[35] Upon examination of the original Latin manuscripts found in J. P. Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, one finds that Bede not only used the same Biblical quotes as Augustine did, but he also copied some of the sentences from *De Doctrina* word for word.[36] All of this, combined with the fact that Bede mentions in his preface that Augustine modified the rules twice, provides compelling evidence that *De Doctrina Christiana* was known in England at least during the time of the Venerable Bede.

The precepts of St. Augustine can also be found in the works of Aelfric, a late tenth-century English monk. In several of his works, Aelfric states that one of the goals of his writing is to present his material in a clear and simple manner that could easily be understood by those who read or listened to it. For example, he states in the preface to the second volume of his *Catholic Homilies* that he has avoided "garrulous verbosity and strange expressions, and seeking rather with pure and plain words, in the language of their nation, to be of use to my hearers, by simple speech, than to be praised for the composition of skillful discourse."[37] These statements are strongly reminiscent of the guidelines for the teaching and the presentation of Biblical material that Augustine set forth in *De Doctrina Christiana*.

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[35] Eleanor Shipley Duckett, Anglo-Saxon Saints and Scholars (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1967), pp. 257-9; J. D. A. Ogilvy, Books Known to Anglo-Latin Writers from Aldhelm to Alcuin (670-804) (Cambridge, Mass.: The Medieval Academy of America, 1936), p. 86.

[36] St. Augustine, De Doctrina Christiana, ed. J. P. Migne, Patrologia Latina, vol. 34 (Paris, France: Bibliothecae Cleri Universae, 1887), pp. 82-90; Bede, Explanatio Apocalypsis, Migne, vol. 93, pp. 131-4.

[37] Aelfric, Catholic Homilies II, cited by James Hurt, Aelfric (New York, N.Y.: Wayne Publishers, Inc., 1972), p. 121.

Thus, there is a strong likelihood that writers in Anglo-Saxon England were aware of the literary rules that had come to serve as guidelines for the adaptation of pagan literature for use by the Christian Church. These guidelines were the culmination of a long tradition--developed over several centuries--that believed it was important to save what was best in the literature of non-Christian peoples, changing and adapting it in ways that would allow it to be used to present Christian lessons and themes. But the presence of some lines from *De Doctrina Christian* in the writings of Bede, and the reflection of Augustine's principles in the works of Aelfric, is not enough in and of itself to support the thesis that the literary rules set forth by the Early Church Fathers influenced the development of Anglo-Saxon literature. If these guidelines were known and used in Anglo-Saxon England, then it should be possible to see that influence in the development of the hero figures portrayed in the literature of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. But before analyzing the hero figures found in specific poems, it is important that the values used by Germanic and Christian as the basis for the characterizations of their hero figures be clearly understood. It is this task of analysis that becomes the focus of the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Germanic and Christian Hero Figures: Patterns of Characterization

After the murder by Grendel's mother of Aeschere, one of Hrothgar's thanes, Beowulf advises the grieving king that

> The days on earth for every one of us
> are numbered; he who may should win renown
> before his death; that is a warrior's
> best memorial when he has departed from this world.[1]

In these few lines Beowulf clearly states that the ultimate goal for any hero was to perform such deeds of bravery and valor in their brief lifetimes that they would be worthy of being immortalized in songs and tales long after their deaths.[2] Yet, in order to be truly worthy of admiration, a hero had to be much more than a warrior who always defeated his opponents in combat. The greatest heroes would be remembered and praised because they were the embodiments of the values and ideals that people expected to find in their champions.

The hero had to exemplify, above all other things, that perfect loyalty expected of each member of the warrior society. This concept was the foundation on which the pillars of Germanic heroic society rested. The maintenance of a relationship of mutual trust and respect in the bond of loyalty was unbreakable, and required that both a lord and his followers

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[1] Beowulf, in The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology, ed. and trans. Kevin Crossley-Holland (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 108.

[2] Greenfield, p. 80.

loyalty was unbreakable, and required that both a lord and his followers fulfill all the obligations that were laid upon them. The good king gave his retainers protection from hostile foes, comradeship in the mead-hall, the guarantee that their deaths would be avenged, as well as a bountiful supply of wealth. The thanes were expected to repay their lord by faithfully serving him without hesitation, knowing that they might be called upon to lay down their lives in his defense. They were also expected to give the lord the plundered treasure which they had gained in battle or in raids against a neighboring tribe, with the assurance that they would be given an even more generous gift in return. If all of these obligations were met by both parties, a smooth and harmonious relationship was maintained between a lord and his thanes, one that greatly enhanced the chances of achieving personal glory. The lord's generous gifts of treasure were material symbols of the bond of loyalty and trust that existed between a king and his thanes. Treasure was not simply a means of exchange in Anglo-Saxon society, rather it was a symbol of a man's value. Thus, in the world of Old English secular poetry a man's moral character and worth could often be instantaneously judged by the amount of wealth he possessed. It is important to remember that treasure was not simply gold and silver, but anything that would seem desirable to possess such as a good sword, shield, or spear.

The strength of the loyalty which bound the warrior society together was also shown in the necessity of avenging the violent death of a fallen comrade or of one's lord. Old English heroic poetry is literally filled with tales of vengeance. The act of avenging the death of a lord or kinsman was a necessary fulfillment of the oaths of fealty that men made with each other and their leaders. There are some very rare examples in Old English poetry of men who

had no one to take vengeance for them after they had been slain. These men, such as the vile King Heremod of *Beowulf*, had committed acts of cowardice and avarice, and had proven themselves unworthy of the loyalty of their thanes or fellow warriors. If they were lucky such men were killed, but if not they suffered exile, a fate which many Anglo-Saxons viewed as worse than death. The exile faced a lonely existence in a mysterious and dangerous world without any companions to protect him from the great unknown, and could only look forward to a life of wandering from one place to another, bereft of all human companionship, with little hope of being accepted by any other tribe. It was a miserable and lonely life which, in the end, only death could alleviate.

The German heroic tradition was destined to play a large role in the shaping of Old English poetry, but the Christian religion would prove influential in the formation of the hero figures celebrated in the literature developed by the Anglo-Saxons. The basic values of Christianity, as expressed in the Gospels, were different than those portrayed in the characterizations of the Germanic heroes. The ultimate goal of any Christian was not the achievement of worldly glory, for all things in this plane are ephemeral. Rather, the christian sought to be worthy of everlasting life with God in Heaven. The Christian did not have to embark on a campaign of vengeance whenever he felt that his honor had been tarnished by an insult. And the Christian was willing to endure many hardships, secure in the knowledge that no matter what tortures might have to be endured in this life, the rewards of Heaven were well worth the wait. Many Christians, especially the simple clerics, did not place as much importance on the possession of material wealth since all worldly goods were transient. The best life for a Christian hero was one of non-violence in a lonely, abandoned place where he could

contemplate the mysteries of God and the beauty of His creations. Christian heroes would never have to fear a life of exile, for God would always be with them no matter how far they wandered.

The patterns of characterization found in Germanic and Christian hero figures were based in two very different value systems. Yet, it can be seen that the best aspects of the Germanic hero were preserved and presented in a way that would ultimately benefit Christianity. The eventual adaptation of Germanic heroic qualities by Christianity spawned many poems and prose works which have given Old English literature a character all its own. However, in the process of adaptation, the differences between the two conflicting sets of values sometimes became blurred and often seemed to merge into one.

As noted earlier, the bond of loyalty that existed between a lord and his retainers formed the foundation of the Germanic warrior society and virtually every aspect of life within the comitatus system was tied to it.[3] The vital role loyalty played in Anglo-Saxon life is reflected in most of the extant Old English poems. Two different types of loyalty are defined in this literature. The first was the mutual bond that existed between warriors who were friends or kinsmen in a comitatus. The other, and by far the most important, was the loyalty and trust in the relationship of the lord and his thanes. The most tragic situation for any Germanic hero arose when there was a conflict of loyalty between his duties to his lord and his responsibilities to his family. When such a conflict occurred, the warrior's duty to his lord had to take precedence, no matter how close the relationship between he and his kinsmen. For example, in the Old High German poem, *Hildebrandslied*, the hero,

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[3] Charles W. Kennedy, The Earliest English Poetry: A Critical Survey of the Poetry Written before the Norman Conquest with Illustrative Translations (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 6.

Hildebrand, the commander of the Hunnish army, is forced by his duties a lord to face his enemy, Hadubrand, in battle, even though the latter is also his son.[4]

The two types of loyalty each had a set of obligations which all the parties involved had to meet in order for the bond of trust to be maintained and strengthened. The only important obligation of a Germanic warrior to his fellow thanes or kinsmen was to give his support to them in their feuds and a promise that he would seek vengeance in the event of their deaths.[5] The *Beowulf* poet recognized the importance of this obligation when he described the how Beowulf's nephew, Wiglaf, rushed to the defense of his kinsman, compared Wiglaf's courage with the cowardice of the great hero's thanes, who fled rather than support their lord in the desperate battle against the dragon. The poet exclaims that only one man respected "the claims of kinship" which "can never be ignored by a right-minded man."[6] Similarly, Beowulf predicts the eventual destruction of the alliance between the Heathobards and the Danes sealed by the marriage of Ingeld to Freawaru. He describes how a young Heathobard warrior will be taunted by a grizzled, old fighter who asks:

> Do you not recognize that sword, my friend,
> the sword your father, fully armed, bore into battle
> that last time, when he was slain by the Danes...
> See how the son of one of those
> who slew him struts about the hall;
> he sports the sword; he crows about that slaughter,
> and carries that heirloom which is yours by right.[7]

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[4] Cherness, p. 31.

[5] Ibid., p. 34.

[6] Beowulf, p. 139.

[7] Ibid., p. 129.

Beowulf foresees that this constant taunting will cause the young Heathobard to seek vengeance against the Danes in possession of his father's sword. Thus, the fragile peace between the two tribes will be forever shattered because the loyalty that bound a father to his son was so powerful that the young warrior was forced to seek vengeance, even though it would spell disaster for his tribe should they lose the battle.

The relationship between a lord and his thanes was far more important than familial ties. The personal glory that any individual could achieve depended largely on the trust and loyalty that existed between a leader and his followers. Since the primary goal of a Germanic hero was the achievement of glory, it was in the best interests of both sides to meet the obligations that would ensure a relationship in which the bonds of trust were unbreakable. The good king should try to emulate a king like Scyld Scefing from *Beowulf* who

> prospered under heaven, won praise and honor,
> until the men of every neighboring tribe,
> across the whale's way, were obliged to obey him
> and pay him tribute. He was a noble king![8]

The king who conquered neighboring tribes and made them pay tribute to him would naturally attract a large retinue of men who wished to serve such a powerful monarch. Yet the king had to be much more than a mighty warrior in order to ensure his men's loyalty. He must also be virtuous and generous lest his men overthrow him. Hrothgar elaborates on this when he warns Beowulf against the kind of behavior that led to the destruction of King Heremod. He had once been considered a good king by the Danes over whom he ruled, but eventually pride and avarice got the better of him, transforming him into a tyrant. Heremod was condemned because of the greed and violence that marked

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[8] Ibid., p. 74.

his relationship with his comitatus and his people. He slew his followers in fits of drunken rage, and "never gave gifts to the Danes, to gain glory,"[9] thus failing in the generous bestowal of rewards which the ethics of the comitatus relationship required. The relationship between a king and his warriors had to be based on mutual trust and respect, rather than subordination or subjugation. A good king must be generous and kind to his followers offering them respect, trust, and rewards of treasure for their deeds of heroism on his behalf. Hrothgar warns Beowulf to be eternally vigilant against the "seed" of arrogance lest he like Heremod begin "to hoard his treasures,"[10] never distributing gifts to the warriors whose support is the basis of a king's rule. If Beowulf's vigilance should fail he to might suffer the fate of Heremod who was forced to flee and "fell into the power of fiends, and was at once done to death."[11]

Under the leadership of a good king such as Scyld Scefing or Beowulf, the warriors of the comitatus were expected to show their loyalty to their monarch by fighting in his battles and giving the king whatever treasures they gained from their foes. In return the comitatus would not only receive treasure back from the king as a reward for their service, but also protection from their enemies and the commitment of the king to avenge their deaths, as when Beowulf takes the life of Grendel's mother after she had murdered Hrothgar's thane, Aeschere. In addition, the warriors of the comitatus had the duty to stand with their king and kinsmen even in the face of oncoming annihilation. Those warriors, such as Wiglaf, who stood with their lords at the final moment were

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[9] Ibid., p. 117.

[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., p. 96.

greatly rewarded for their actions, but those who succumbed to fear and displayed cowardice or disloyalty, such as the thanes that fled when Beowulf was fighting the dragon, were severely punished. Both kings and thanes must resist avarice, fear, and pride, temptations that could ultimately destroy the relationship between a lord and his followers. Further, if both a king and his thanes fulfilled their obligations to each other and served one another faithfully then they could easily work together toward achieving the kind of glorious deeds that would become a part of legend. The lord always won glory and improved his reputation when his thanes performed great deeds and acts of incredible bravery. For example, when Beowulf achieves what so many other could not do in killing Grendel and his mother, Hygelac, Beowulf's lord, is justifiably proud of his thane's accomplishments for his own glory was all the greater since his thane had performed these almost impossible deeds.

The most important signs of glory for any lord were the size of his retinue and the bravery of his thanes. Therefore the Germanic lord naturally placed great importance on the lives of each and every man within his comitatus. The loss of even one retainer caused great anguish for the lord in Old English poetry. Thus, Hrothgar is racked by grief at the murder of his retainer Aeschere by Grendel's mother, and calls upon Beowulf to avenge his thane's death. The personal glory of thane and lord was also increased when they carefully observed the customs and traditions that governed Germanic heroic society. Beowulf shows himself not only to be the best warrior in all the world, but also the perfect thane when he gives to Hygelac all the treasures Hrothgar gave him as a reward including

> a standard bearing the image of a boar,
> together with a helmet towering in battle,

a grey corslet and a noble sword.[12]

Hygelac then adds to both his and Beowulf's glory by repaying his thane's generosity when he

> ordered that Hrethel's gold-adorned heirloom
> be brought in; no sword was so treasured
> in all Geatland; he laid it in Beowulf's lap,
> and gave him seven thousand hides of land,
> a hall and princely throne.[13]

In the exchanging of gifts both Beowulf and Hygelac added to their reputations by observing the maxims of German heroic society.

The trading of gifts between Beowulf and his lord also illustrates the important role of treasure in heroic society. The exchange of treasure in this case serves as a material symbol of the bond of loyalty that exists between the lord and his thane. Beowulf was perfectly willing to give up the vast wealth he had been given by Hrothgar because he had no doubt that Hygelac would give him even greater treasures in return since it was the obligation and duty of the king to do so. The generous gifts of treasure to a lord's thanes also served as a symbol and reminder of their duty to serve their liege faithfully, so that they many be worthy of the wealth they had received. For example, in the *Battle of Maldon* the poet attacks the coward, Godric, and those who fled with him from the battle saying that they all forgot "the former rewards that the prince had given them."[14] Similarly, in *Beowulf*, Wiglaf exhorts the hero's thanes to go to Beowulf's aid in the battle against the dragon by reminding them of

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[12] Beowulf, p. 128.

[13] Ibid., p. 129.

[14] The Battle of Maldon, in Crossley-Holland, p. 18.

> `that evening we emptied the mead-cup
> in the feasting hall, partook and pledged our lord,
> who presented us with rings, that we would repay him
> for his gifts of armor, helmets and hard swords,
> if ever the need, need such as this, arose.'[15]

Out of all the thanes that Beowulf thought worthy of rewarding with treasure, only Wiglaf proves himself truly worthy of these gifts by helping his lord to slay the dragon.

Wiglaf is also a good example of another important function of treasure in the world of the comitatus. In heroic society the amount and quality of the treasure a man possessed served as an indication of the strength of his moral character.[16] Even though Wiglaf had never before been tested in the heat of combat, he was shown to be a worthy thane through possession of "his ancient sword, reputed to be the legacy of Eanmund."[17] The poet then gives a brief history of the heroes who had possessed the sword before Wiglaf. The fact that Wiglaf was carrying such a famous blade would clearly indicate to most listeners that this man was likely to be a great hero in the future. The possession of treasure also helped to preserve the names of great heroes and the glory they had achieved in their lifetimes long after they had died. Thus both Scyld Scefing and Beowulf are buried with vast hordes of gold as an indication to future generations that these men were the greatest heroes of their age.

The amount of treasure that a lord gave to his thane also served as an indication of the amount of honor that man had earned through deeds of courage and valor. For example, the vast rewards given to Beowulf by Hrothgar after

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[15] Beowulf, p. 140.

[16] Cherness, pp. 81-2.

[17] Beowulf, p. 139.

the hero slew both Grendel and the monster's mother, served as a message to the entire world that this was a man worthy of the greatest respect. Yet, because of this, a lord could not give up treasure to those who had not earned it since he would lose honor in doing so. Thus, in the *Battle of Maldon*, Byrhtnoth categorically rejects the message sent by the Danes:

> 'The brave seafarers have sent me to say to you
> that they will be so good as to let you give gold rings
> in return for peace. It is better for you
> to buy off our raid with tribute than that we,
> so cruel, should cut you down in battle...
> If you, most mighty over there,
> wisely decide to disband your men,
> giving money for peace to the seafarers
> on their own terms, and make a truce,
> we'll take to the sea with the tribute you pay
> and keep our promise of peace.'[18]

If Byrhtnoth accepted this offer he would be forever humiliated in the eyes of his thanes because the Vikings were nothing more than bandits and thieves and had done nothing whatsoever to make them worthy of a gift of rings. Without the slightest hesitation, Byrhtnoth flings back the demands in the messenger's face saying that:

> 'We would be shamed greatly
> if you took our tribute and embarked without battle
> since you've barged so far and brazenly into this country.
> No! You'll not get your treasure so easily.
> The spear's point and sword's edge, savage battle-play,
> must teach us first that we have to yield tribute.'[19]

Similarly, it was extremely dishonorable for a warrior to demand treasure beyond that which he had been offered. In the Old English fragment, *Waldere*, Hildegund rebukes the warrior Guthhere who refused the "treasure and precious

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[18] Maldon, p. 12.

[19] Ibid., pp.12-13.

vessels" that Waldere had offered to him.[20] The story of this fragment is further elaborated by the extant Latin poem, *Waltharius,* in which it is revealed that not only had Guthhere refused the Waldere's offer of treasure, but he also demanded all of the hero's treasure.[21] Thus, in the upcoming battle described in *Waldere*, Guthhere would gain no honor because of his greed and avarice.

Treasure was a material symbol of the immeasurable value of a human life even after death in heroic society. Thus, in order to prevent the bloody feuds that could erupt between families and tribes due a quest for retribution the system of *wergild* was developed. In this system, a person who had caused a violent death had the opportunity to pay a "man-price" to the victim's family or tribe in order to placate them. The system had a graduated scale so the death of a slave did not cost as much as the slaying of a king or thane.[22] From a modern perspective this system appears to simply be the replacement of the loss of a human life with material goods, but when it is examined from the Germanic view of treasure, *wergild* takes on a much different form. Thus a murderer was not only giving up treasure in paying the man-price and losing much of his honor by admitting that he committed the crime, but he was also acknowledging the incalculable value of the man he had killed. However, in Old English poetry, the vast majority of violent deaths were not settled with the payment of *wergild*, but rather with the spilling of the killer's blood.

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[20] Waldere, in Crossley-Holland, p. 10.

[21] Kennedy, p. 37.

[22] George K. Anderson, The Literature of the Anglo-Saxons, rev. ed. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1966), pp. 15-16.

The quest to avenge a comrade's death is one of the best examples of the strength of the loyalty that exists between members of heroic society.[23] Old English poetry is full of acts of vengeance that show the importance of the vows and promises of loyalty within the comitatus . It was not just a loyalty that bound men to each other during life. It reached far beyond the grave and could endure for years on end until vengeance was taken. When Grendel's mother slew Aeschere, Hrothgar, the Danish lord, was grief-stricken, but Beowulf tells him it is far better that "each man should avenge his friend than deeply mourn."[24] And the poet tells us that Grendel's mother attacked Heorot because the warriors within had murdered her son and she was obligated to avenge his death. Neither human or monster were exempt from this principle in Old English poetry, for vengeance must be taken because the oaths and promises which created the bond of loyalty demand that it be done.

The vast majority of the acts of vengeance described in Old english Literature were sparked by the violent death of a thane or lord. Yet there are some examples which show that any insult to a warrior's honor called for prompt retaliation. In *Beowulf*, Unferth insults the honor and bravery of the hero by claiming that he lost a swimming race to Breca and therefore did not fulfill his boast that he would win. Beowulf responded to this attack on his honesty and physical prowess by telling how he had to fight many monsters while he was swimming, and how he had been separated from Breca during a storm on the sea. He then discussed Unferth's dark past:

> `I have not heard tell
> that you have taken part in any such contests,
> in the peril of sword play....

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[23] Cherness, p. 60.

[24] Beowulf, p. 108.

> though of course it is true that you slew your own brothers,
> your own close kinsmen....
> I tell you truly, son of Ecglaf,
> that if you were in fact as unflinching
> as you claim, the fearsome monster Grendel
> would never have committed so many crimes
> against your lord, nor created such havoc in Heorot.'[25]

In his speech Beowulf not only questioned his rival's bravery, he also greatly reduced his standing with those in Heorot by mentioning Unferth's murder of his kinsman, a heinous crime that was held in utter contempt by Germanic society. In this example, Beowulf was forced to seek retribution because of the damage caused to his honor, and the loss of the faith and confidence which his men and the Danes placed in him to kill Grendel.

It was imperative in the world of the comitatus for a warrior to fulfill his oath to his liege lest he lose all his honor.[26] Therefore, in order to maintain honor and fulfill that oath, it was an absolute necessity that a comrade's violent death be avenged no matter how long it took. For example, in *Beowulf*, the story-teller of Heorot relates the tale of Hnaef of the Scyldings who was slain in battle with Finn, lord of the Frisians. The remnants of the Scyldings, led by Hengest are forced to come to a truce with the last survivors of Finn's thanes because of the harshness of the winter to come. Throughout the fierce weather and blizzards, the oaths that had been sworn to each other by the Frisians and the Scyldings held. Then at long last

> winter was over,
> the face of the earth was fair; the exile [Hengest]
> was anxious to leave that foreign people
> and the Frisian land. And yet he brooded
> more about vengeance than about a voyage,

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[25] Ibid., p. 88.

[26] Cherness, p. 50.

> and wondered whether he could bring about a clash
> so as to repay the sons of the Jutes.
> Thus Hengest did not shrink from the duty of vengeance...
> And so it was that cruel death by the sword later
> cut down the brave warrior Finn in his own hall. [27]

Even though Hengest and his men had sworn oaths to Finn, the obligation to their former lord, Hnaef, took precedence and could never be settled until his killer had been slain. Thus, although Hengest was forced to wait through the long winter to avenge the death of his lord, he still gained honor in the eyes of his men by fulfilling his oath to Hnaef.

There are cases in Old English poetry when the quest for vengeance was not successful, but if a warrior died in the attempt to avenge his lord or friend he still gained honor and glory for having tried to fulfill his oath. During the *Battle of Maldon*, Byrhtnoth, the leader of the English army was slain by some unnamed Danes. Immediately after his death Godric, one of Byrhtnoth's thanes, leapt upon his lord's horse and fled the battle along with his brothers. This led many of the regular soldiers in the army to join in the retreat thinking that Byrhtnoth himself was fleeing the battle. The poet rightly criticizes these men for their cowardly flight and the breaking of the oaths they had sworn to their lord. However, many of Byrhtnoth's thanes stayed behind and fight to the death in order to avenge their lord. The poet states that

> Then the proud thanes went forth there,
> the brave men hastened eagerly:
> they all wished, then, for one of two things -
> to avenge their lord or to leave this world. [28]

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[27] Ibid., p. 102.

[28] Maldon, p. 16.

All of these men fought to the death in a hopeless battle in order to gain a small measure of vengeance for their slain leader. The attitude of these men is epitomized in the speech of Leofsunu who swears

> `that I will not retreat
> so much as one foot, but I will go forward
> and avenge my lord in battle.
> Now that he has fallen in the fight
> no loyal warrior living at Sturmere
> need reproach me for returning home lordless
> in unworthy retreat, for the weapon shall take me,
> the iron sword.'[29]

In their attempt to avenge their lord all of these men died in combat against the invaders. But by standing and fighting they gained a lasting place among the heroes of Old English literature as a shining example of the kind of loyalty that was so desperately needed if the Danes were ever to be defeated.

The world of the comitatus was far from perfect for not all of a lord's thanes would stand by him in the hour of his greatest need and others would flee and save themselves rather than avenging his death. The men who did such things violated the oaths they had sworn to their lords and were subject to the scorn of rest of the comitatus.[30] For example, in the *Battle of Maldon*, Offa rebukes the cowardice of Godric and his brothers, Godwine and Godwig, and the shattering consequences it had for the English army:

> `Godric, the cowardly son of Odda, has betrayed us all.
> When he rode on the horse, the proud steed,
> all too many men thought it was our lord;
> and so they followed him, and here on the field
> the shield-wall was broken: may fortune frown on him
> whose cowardice has caused this catastrophe.'[31]

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[29] Ibid., p. 17.

[30] Katherine O'Brien O'Keeffe, "Heroic Values and Christian Ethics," unpublished work to appear in The Cambridge Companion to Old English Literature, pp. 26-7.

[31] Maldon, p. 17

The coward Godric had earned the curse which Offa called down upon him because his action ensured that the English could not possibly triumph over the Danes, even though Byrhtnoth had fallen. In time most of the men who betrayed the oaths they gave to their lords would suffer severe punishment for their actions. The traitors would not be executed or tortured to death for their crimes, rather they would suffer the hellish life of an exile.

The man who was exiled is described in Old English poetry as facing a living death as he wandered the world alone without any companionship. The exile would become like Grendel and wander around the edges of civilization, yearning to return to the comforts of the mead-hall, but being rejected wherever he went due to the nature of his crimes. He was deprived of all the pleasures of being in a comitatus--the endless feasts, the camaraderie that existed between warriors and their lords, and the protection that the mead-hall offered against an unknown and dangerous world. The exile could only look forward to a miserable life, as Wiglaf made clear when he rebuked the ten thanes of Beowulf who fled rather than fight the dragon as their oaths required them to:

> 'Now you and your dependents can no longer delight
> in gifts of swords, or take pleasure in property,
> a happy home; but, after thanes from far and wide
> have heard of your flight, your shameful cowardice,
> each of your male kinsmen will be condemned
> to become a wanderer, an exile deprived
> of the land he owns. For every warrior
> death is better than dark days of disgrace.'[32]

Such was the fate of all traitors in the Germanic heroic tradition.

Yet the fate of exile was not deserved by all those on whom it fell. Some men were driven into exile because of circumstances over which they had

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[32] Beowulf, pp. 146-7.

no control whatsoever. For example, in *Beowulf* the poet describes the lament of a lonely thane who buried the horde of treasure which the dragon would discover with the passage of time. He had been forced to become an exile because he was the last survivor of his tribe. The poet tells us that "the last survivor mourned time passing,/ and roamed about by day and night,/ sad and aimless, until death's lightning/ struck at his heart."[33] The fate of these men is one of the most tragic in all of Old English literature for they have committed no crime and did not deserve to be condemned to a life of loneliness and misery. The exile had a slim hope of being taken in by another lord, but such cases were very rare in the Old English poetry that has survived. The most powerful and eloquent statement of the tortures that faced an exile can be found in the Old English elegy, the *Wanderer*. Alone on the sea, the lonely thane thinks back on his past until

> it seems that he clasps and kisses
> his lord, and lays hands and head
> upon his lord's knee as he had sometimes done
> when he enjoyed the gift-throne in earlier days.
> Then the friendless man wakes again
> and sees the dark waves surging around him,
> the sea-birds bathing, spreading their feathers,
> frost and snow falling mingled with hail.[34]

Only death could put a merciful end to the torturous existence faced by an exile.

The Germanic heroic tradition would continue to survive as a vital force that shaped the secular poetry of the Anglo-Saxons into the tenth century. It would also play a large role in the formation of the first Christian poems

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[33] Ibid., p. 131.

[34] Wanderer, in Crossley-Holland, p. 51.

composed by the Anglo-Saxons.[35] By using the old traditions in their poetry, early Christian writers in the Old English period hoped to make the message of Christianity easier to understand. However, as time passed the influence of the values of the German heroes weakened, and was replaced by a pattern of characterization that portrayed men and women in a predominantly Christian light. The values that were to serve as guidelines for Christian hero figures--as set forth in the *Gospels*--differed in many ways from those of the comitatus society of the Anglo-Saxons. The illustration of the contrasts between Christian and Germanic hero figures can be seen in a brief account of some of the aspects of the new religion that were different from the traditions of the past.

The main goal for any Germanic warrior was the achievement of worldly glory, but this was not true for the Christian hero. The eyes of all Christians should be forever focused toward Heaven as they strove to be worthy to enter God's domain. The members of the new religion ideally viewed all material objects as being transient. Therefore, it was an exercise in futility to devote one's life to seeking glory in a world where it would soon be forgotten. It would be far, far better for a man to achieve fame among the angels in heaven where his glory would indeed be everlasting in the eyes of God and celebrated in the songs of the Heavenly Host. This attitude is illustrated in the Old English poem *St. Guthlac A* where the poet tells how the

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[35] Arthur R. Skemp, "The Transformation of Scriptural Story, Motive, and Conception in Anglo-Saxon Poetry," Modern Philology IV (1907), pp. 424-5.

saint had spent his early life in "many vicious courses."[36] Nevertheless, God decided to give him a new opportunity at life and sent

> an angel unto Guthlac's mind,
> so that his lust for sin might be allayed.
> The time was near; two guardians
> watched about him, who kept strife--
> an angel of the Lord and the fell spirit...
> the one [the angel] declared to him that all this earth
> was transient 'neath the sky, and praised
> the lasting good in heaven, where the souls
> of holy men possess in glorious triumph
> the Lord's delights.[37]

Naturally, Guthlac chose to follow the teachings of the Lord rather than the temptations of Satan. Also, since the Christian religion rejected the importance of worldly goods, the role of treasure in the lives of the Christian heroes was severely limited and did not have the great significance that it did in the world of the comitatus. For example, in *Andreas*, St. Andrew tells the sailor on their voyage to Mermedonia that he has little gold to give him in exchange for his friendship, but the apostle does possess knowledge of Christ and also promises the sailor that he will be rewarded by God. The sailor is really Christ in disguise.[38]

In the world of the comitatus, a mighty warrior would boast of the great deeds that he had accomplished in the past, along with those that he would achieve in the service of his lord in the future. Yet, the Christian man had no need to do this, for pride was considered to be a grave sin by the Church. Therefore, a Christian hero such as St. Andrew or St. Guthlac showed far

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[36] Guthlac A, in The Exeter Book, Part I: Poems I-VIII, Early English Text Society vol. 104, ed. and trans. Israel Gollancz (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1895), p. 111.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Kennedy, p. 271.

greater humility than a Germanic warrior such as Beowulf or Unferth. For example, in *Guthlac A*, a group of devils that are threatening the saint accuse him of being the most arrogant man they have ever met for daring to challenge them. Guthlac calmly accepts their verbal attacks and simply tells them that God has sent him to this spot to drive them away. He goes on to say that he has no need to fear them since

> my hope is with God.
> I care naught for earthly wealth.
> nor earnestly desire I much for me,
> but each day, by the hand of man,
> God sendeth me my need.[39]

Guthlac can not be accused of being arrogant for he is attributing his success to God and is humbly thanking the Lord for all that he has given him.

The humility of the Christian hero also served to eliminate the need--prevalent in Germanic society--to seek vengeance for every insult directed against his person. Rather, the Christian was the epitome of patience and fortitude in the face of suffering. In the *Andreas*, St. Andrew is captured by the cannibalistic Mermedonians, who serve the devil, and is tortured and humiliated for three days. He endures all of these with a patience and tolerance that one would never find in a hero set in the Germanic tradition.[40] All of these deeds cried out for vengeance, but he endured them all by placing his faith in the Lord, secure in the knowledge that God would free him and set things aright. The need for vengeance or for violence against foes was very small. Members of the Church were taught that it was far better to forgive your enemy than to seek retribution. Thus in the *Juliana* of Cynewulf, the heroine captured a devil and forced him to reveal the secrets of how he and

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[39] Guthlac A, p. 123.

[40] Cherness, p. 187.

his ilk deceive and corrupt mankind. Yet, rather than destroying an evil fiend who is her mortal foe as a servant of God she

> loosed the enemy of souls, after his time of punishment to seek out darkness in the black abyss, in tormenting distress. And he, the announcer of evil, was wiser than to tell unto his fellows, the ministers of torment, how if befell him on his journey.[41]

Juliana had plenty of reason to kill the devil as well as the power to do it, but she set him free instead knowing that the humiliation he had suffered would be pain enough for his vile deeds. Even though the Christians did not feel the need to seek personal vengeance for every insult, they also knew that those who tortured them, such as the Mermedonians who abused St. Andrew, would often be subject to divine vengeance. Thus, when God frees St. Andrew of the chains that bound him, He sent a flood to punish these men who served evil. Yet, when the Mermedonians repent their deeds and plead for forgiveness, St. Andrew asks God to

> grant His grace
> To all the youth who had lost their lives
> In the flowing waters, the grip of the flood,
> That their souls be not carried to the church of fiends,
> The anguish of torment, empty of good
> And deprived of glory.[42]

God fulfills his request and restores the fallen Mermedonians to life.

The members of the Christian religion could be secure in the knowledge that they would never be alone in the world for God would always be with them. Thus they had no need to fear exile because the fear of the unknown world would be alleviated by the knowledge that the Lord would protect them. The exile could also find comfort by looking forward to his death when he would

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[41] Cynewulf, Juliana, in The Poems of Cynewulf, trans. Charles W. Kennedy (New York, N.Y.: Peter Smith, 1949), p. 146.

[42] Andreas, in Early English Christian Poetry, trans. Charles W. Kennedy (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 164.

ascend to Heaven and forever end his separation from God. Thus heroes, such as St. Guthlac, would voluntarily exile themselves to a remote part of the world in order to serve God's purpose. At the very end of the *Wanderer* the lonely exile finds some comfort in the knowledge that life on the material plane is transitory and knows that "it is best for a man to seek/ mercy and comfort from the Father in heaven, the/ safe home that awaits us all."[43] The only beings that truly had to fear exile were those that were cursed by God such as Grendel and his hideous mother, and the most infamous exiles of them all--Satan and his rebel angels.

It can be seen from the information set forth in this chapter that there were significant differences in the values and ideals portrayed by the hero figures found in Old English literature. But there were also a number of similarities, and the patterns used to characterize hero figures could be influenced by a process of adaptation such as that established in the literary program set forth by St. Augustine. For example the critical importance placed on the concept of loyalty in the characterization of the German hero found in early Old English poetry, could easily be adapted to emphasize the Christian's need to be loyally committed to the Lord of Lords, a concept found in the later poems of the period. As the next chapter will show, this is indeed the kind of transformation that can be identified by a closer study of specific poems taken from Old English literature.

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[43] Wanderer, p. 53.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Transition from Germanic to Christian Hero Figures

The adaptation of the characteristics found in Germanic hero figures for the use of the Christian faith took different paths to suit the secular and religious audiences for whom the poems were composed. The tales and traditions of the Germanic past would continue to be very strong in the hero figures of secular poetry throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. One of the main reasons for this was the continuous fighting among the kingdoms of the Anglo-Saxons and the two invasions of the Danes. Heroes that portrayed the qualities necessary to save society were important to a people who lived in darkness and fear. Still, the evidence shows that the characterization of these secular heroes underwent a process of transformation that caused the Germanic concepts they represented to became part of the Christian message expressed within the poems.

The *Finnesburh Fragment,* which contains no references to Christianity in the few lines that have survived, is an excellent example of the nature and style of the Old English poetry that existed before the process of transformation began. In another fragment of what must have once been a great epic, *Waldere,* Christianity takes on a more prominent role as God is mentioned several times.[1] The great Old English epic poem, *Beowulf,* is the best example of the completion of the process of adaptation for secular literature for it

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[1] Cherniss, pp. 122-3.

of the completion of the process of adaptation for secular literature for it has been thoroughly Christianized, yet still retains the martial spirit and heroism that appealed to so many Anglo-Saxons. In *Beowulf,* the traditional heroic concepts have merged to become one with the Christian values set forth in the poem. Finally, in the *Battle of Maldon,* the last extant Old English poem, the greatest virtues of the Germanic heroes are reconfirmed in a stirring tribute to the Englishmen who fell in battle defending their homeland from the Danes.[2] The merging of the Germanic heroic tradition with Christianity that had worked so well in *Beowulf* is also prominent in this poem, thus reconfirming the possibility that a program of adaptation influenced the development of the hero figures portrayed in the secular works of this period.

A similar transformation can be seen in Old English religious poetry. In these works Christian values eventually achieved a dominant position over the virtues characterized by the Germanic hero figures. The first attempts at adaptation can be seen in early poems such as *Genesis B* and *Exodus,* in which tales from the Old Testament are set forth by the use of Germanic heroic traditions. These tales were much easier to use in a process of adaptation than the stories of Christ and His disciples, since the tribal society of the Hebrews was in many ways similar to that of the Anglo-Saxons. Another problem came from the fact that the moral system presented in the Gospels was in many ways contradictory to that of Germanic heroic society. Therefore, the heroes

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[2] Charles Leslie Wrenn, A Study of Old English Literature (New York, N.Y.: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967), pp. 185-6.

of Old English religious poetry had to be transformed into patterns that characterized them as Christian heroes.[3]

The tribulations of St. Andrew described in *Andreas* mark a half-way point in the development of the adaptation program. The hero of the poem is thoroughly Christian, but his story is presented through the use of the Germanic vocabulary and concepts found in the early Old English epic poems. Unlike *Beowulf*, the union of Christian and Germanic patterns of characterization is not successful, and at times various parts of the poem seem to be rough and haphazard. The importance of *Juliana*, one of the signed poems of Cynewulf, lies in the fact that it has a Christian heroine, but its villains are portrayed as being warriors of a Germanic comitatus.[4] The poem marks the most important step in the process of adaptation. Now the poet could freely use Germanic heroic concepts and language in a way that allowed him to criticize their worst aspects. Finally, the stories of St. Guthlac present a clear and straightforward message: that the Christian hero was better than the champions of the secular world. Guthlac could have been a great secular warrior. Had he chosen to do so he would have achieved great fame and material glory. But the saint chose a far better path, one that led to a higher level of heroism when he chose to become a Christian and sallied forth to face the devil's minions in the middle of a lonely swamp. The poems concerning the exploits of St. Guthlac still use the heroic vocabulary and concepts of the Germanic past to express the saint's heroism and to better illustrate various theological points. The stories of St. Guthlac marked the culmination of the

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[3] Cherness, p. 250.

[4] Earl R. Anderson, Cynewulf: Structure, Style, and Theme in His Poetry (Madison, WI: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), pp. 90-1.

program set forth by St. Augustine and others for the adaptation of pagan literature and concepts for the Christian church. The heroes had been transformed from Germanic warriors to Christian saints, but both types could still be described through the use of heroic vocabulary and concepts that had been adapted by the Church.

The years of the Anglo-Saxon era in England were violent times with almost continuous fighting amongst rival kingdoms and against invaders broken only by very rare outbreaks of peace. The history of this race and their greatest achievements were recorded for all posterity in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.[5] Its pages contain a long tale of the type of violence and destruction that enabled the heroic traditions of the past to retain their strength within the world of secular poetry. The development of the process of Christianization put forward by the Church Fathers can also be seen in the pages of the Chronicle. The early entries of the *Chronicle* are mainly concerned with the battles of the Anglo-Saxons and make very little mention of Christianity. However, the records of the last years of the tenth century definitely show the influence of the Christian religion.

The earliest entries in the Chronicle relate how the Anglo-Saxons first came to England from their Germanic homelands at the invitation of the British king, Vortigern, in the year 449 A.D. The king hoped that these Germanic sea raiders would be able to repel the Pictish and Scottish invasions which had plagued the hapless British. The Anglo-Saxons, led by the chieftains Hengest and Horsa, easily drove off the marauders. However, after observing that their British hosts were practically defenseless, the Anglo-Saxons decided to

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[5] Greenfield, pp. 39-40.

take the new land for themselves.[6] In the course of the following years, more and more tribes of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes voyaged to England to establish permanent homes. In spite of what became a heroic defense of their homeland, the native Britons were soon overwhelmed by the hordes of invaders and were pushed back to the depths of the forest in Wales and the hills of Cornwall. The majority of the early entries tell the tale of these battles between the British and the invaders, and after the former had been permanently vanquished, the inter-tribal strife amongst the seven kingdoms established by the Anglo-Saxons.

One of the most fascinating of these early entries concerns the events of the year 757 A.D. It tells of the heinous crimes of Sigeberht, King of the West Saxons (Wessex), and of his overthrow by Cynewulf and his counsellors. The entry then tells of the subsequent usurpation and death of Cynewulf at the hands of Sigeberht's brother, Cyneheard. Finally, the entry describes how this last usurper and his followers were slain by the thanes of Cynewulf in a bloody battle. The importance of the story of Cynewulf lies in its reaffirmation of the virtues that served as the foundation for the comitatus system. Like King Heremod from *Beowulf*, Sigeberht was deprived of his realm "because of his unjust acts."[7] However he still retained the small province of Hampshire until he killed "the ealdorman who stood by him longest."[8] Sigeberht's heinous act of betrayal was one of the worse crimes that a man could commit in the Germanic code, and justice was served when he was exiled

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[6] The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, in English Historical Documents, Vol I:c. 500-1042, ed. Dorothy Whitelock (New York, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 142-3.

[7] ASC, p. 162.

[8] Ibid.

by Cynewulf to the swamps. In murdering his most loyal thane, Ealdorman Cumbra, Sigeberht called down upon himself the wrath of the followers of his former servant. Thus vengeance finally caught up with Sigeberht and he was ignominiously slain in the swamps by a lowly swineherd who had been a servant of the slain Ealdorman Cumbra.[9]

During the next thirty-one years of his reign, Cynewulf proved himself to be an able king of the West Saxons, and fought numerous battles against the remnants of the Britons. However, Cynewulf's reign came to a violent end when he decided to exile Cyneheard, the brother of the long dead Sigeberht. Cyneheard naturally did not want to be driven out of the kingdom, and so he waited until the king "was at Meretem visiting his mistress with a small following"[10] and there overtook and trapped him. Cynewulf, realizing that he was surrounded, went to the doorway of the bedroom "and nobly defended himself until he caught sign of the atheling and thereupon he rushed out against him and wounded him severely."[11] In spite of his heroic effort, Cynewulf was finally overwhelmed and slain by Cyneheard and his men. It might be logical to assume that this was an act of vengeance against Cynewulf for the exile of Sigeberht, but this possibility seems unlikely since Cyneheard had waited almost thirty years to avenge his own brother, and only took action because he was threatened by exile himself. If Cyneheard had ever been truly serious about avenging his brother's death he could have found ample opportunity to do so during those thirty-one years.

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[9] O'Keeffe, p. 9.

[10] ASC, p. 162.

[11] Ibid.

The thanes that had accompanied Cynewulf to the home of his mistress heard her cries and rushed to the scene of the battle only to find their lord foully murdered. Cyneheard made an offer of gold and the sparing of their lives to each of the slain king's thanes if they would not seek to avenge their lord. Rather than accept such an offer, which would serve to brand them as cowards and traitors for the rest of their lives, Cynewulf's thanes did the right thing according to the Germanic tradition, and attempted to avenge their lord's death.[12] And even though all were killed in the ensuing battle, Cynewulf's thanes were worthy of admiration for not accepting the offers of their lord's slayer and placing the bond of loyalty that existed between Cynewulf and themselves before their own lives.

The rest of Cynewulf's thanes soon heard of his death and, under the leadership of Ealdorman Osric and the thane Wigfrith, rode to site of the murder only to find that Cyneheard had barricaded himself within the castle. Cyneheard "offered them money and land on their own terms, if they would allow him the kingdom, and told them that kinsmen of theirs who would not desert him, were with him." [13] The rejection of the offer by Cynewulf's thanes once again confirmed that the strength of the loyalty that bound a lord to his thanes was far greater than that which tied kinsmen together, and meant more than the gaining of any amount of treasure. Cynewulf's men state emphatically "that no kinsman was dearer to them than their lord, and they would never serve his slayer."[14] They in turn offer their kinsmen a chance to escape

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[12] Rosemary Woolf, Art and Doctrine: Essays on Medieval Literature, ed. Heather O' Donoghue (Ronceverte, WV: The Hambledon Press, 1986), pp. 183-4.

[13] ASC, p. 162.

[14] Ibid.

unharmed. The thanes of Cyneheard showed that their loyalty was just as strong by rejecting the offer. A vicious and bloody battle ensued around the gates of the house until Cynewulf's men finally broke through, and Cyneheard and all of his men were slain except for the godson of Osric.

The tale of Cynewulf and Cyneheard serves as an illustration of the critical importance of loyalty in the world of Germanic society. Rather than accepting the offers of gold and land and the sparing of their lives, the thanes of both Cynewulf and Cyneheard stayed loyal to their lords, even in the face of death. If these offers had been accepted the thanes would not only have broken the vows of loyalty which they had sworn to their lord, they would have also been humiliated and lost honor in the eyes of other men. Thus the bond that existed between a lord and his men was once again shown to be more important than any ties of kinship as relatives on either side of the battle refuse to abandon their liege.

The importance of vengeance in Germanic society also played a key role in the maintenance of the social order in Germanic society.[15] If Cyneheard had been allowed to live, a terrible and destructive precedent would have been set that could have led to many more disasters. Any overly ambitious ealdorman who felt that he could murder the king, and then buy off the dead man's thanes with offers of land and treasure, might feel free to proceed against his lord. A rash of such actions would throw the land into torrential chaos, as petty lords continuously vied with one another for power. Fortunately, such a scenario could never develop because the earldomans knew that a king's thanes would continue to seek vengeance until his killer was dead.

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[15] O'Keeffe, p. 11.

The entry for A.D. 757 in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* relates a story of civil strife within the secular world and has nothing to do with Christianity. But some signs of the increased use of Christian themes can be seen after the year 787. The entry for this year describes how

> there came for the first time three ships of Northmen and then the reeve rode to them and wished to force them to the king's residence, for he did not know what they were; and they slew him. Those were the first ships of the Danish men which came to the land of the English.[16]

The Danish conducted numerous raids along the English coast and burned many famous monasteries, including those at Lindisfarne and Jarrow. The raids continued sporadically until 866 when an immense Danish army landed in East Anglia. In the fifteen years that followed its landing, the Danish army conquered the entire eastern half of England. The majority of the entries in these war-torn years that describe the battles between the Danes and the English refer to the invaders as "heathens." The use of this word by the chroniclers implied to all good Christians that these evil men, who were burning and pillaging all over England, were in the service of the devil.

Finally, in the year 871 the Vikings attacked the kingdom of Wessex ruled by Ethelred. Thanks in great measure to the help of his brother, Ethelred succeeded in winning a decisive victory over the marauding Danes. Following Ethelred's death a year later, his brother took possession of the throne. He was destined to fight the Danes for the vast majority of his long reign and in doing so he became one of the greatest kings that England ever produced. He was the only English monarch to bear the title of "the Great" after his name. He is known to history as Alfred.

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[16] ASC, p. 166.

During the first years of his reign, Alfred is described by the entries in the *Chronicle* as triumphing over the Danes in numerous battles. But the invaders continued to challenge him and in 878 Alfred suffered a series of disastrous defeats. The losses led to the conquest of most of Wessex by the Danes. Alfred was forced to travel "in difficulty through the woods and fen-fastness with a small force."[17] Alfred quickly rebounded from these disasters and, in that same year, scored an immense victory over Guthrum, the Danish king of East Anglia. The defeated monarch not only promised to leave Wessex in peace for all eternity, he also agreed to be, and three weeks later was, baptized by the hand of Alfred.[18]

During the rest of his reign, which lasted until 901, Alfred was able to keep the Vikings in check and prevent them from overrunning his kingdom. This relative stability enabled Alfred to attempt to remedy the decline of the educated population in England. He noted with some concern in his preface to his translation of Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* that "learning had declined so thoroughly in England that there were very few men on this side of the Humber who could understand their divine services in English, or even translate a single letter from Latin to English."[19] Alfred attempted to solve this problem by translating several books into English from Latin. He developed a plan of education in which a person who had become good at writing and speaking the English language through the use of these books, could then proceed to the learning of Latin. Due to the efforts of Alfred and his

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[17] Ibid., p. 179.

[18] Ibid., p. 180.

[19] Alfred the Great, Prose Preface to Gregory's Pastoral Care, in Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources, trans. Simon Keynes (New York, N.Y.: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 125.

successors, new life and vibrancy was injected into English monasticism and brought a new flowering of scholarship among the monks and lay brothers who lived within the monastery walls.

The majority of entries in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* concerning Alfred focused on his military victories, and contain little reference to Christianity, except when the Danes are called "heathens."[20] This stress on martial spirit was also reflected in the secular world of Old English poetry. The constant warfare against the Danish invaders was one of the major factors that insured the survival of values portrayed by Germanic hero figures. It is not hard to imagine that after a victory against a Danish army, the English would want to be regaled with tales of heroes such as Beowulf or Waldere who, like them, lived and died in a world filled with violence and danger. The Anglo-Saxon warriors would naturally be interested in heroes who were mighty warriors for these were men that they could easily understand and admire. This point is illustrated in a heroic poem that has been preserved in the pages of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. The poem* commemorates the victory of the English over the Danes at the Battle of Brunanburh.[21]

It would fall to Alfred's heirs to drive the Danes from English soil, and to consolidate the Anglo-Saxons into one nation under the mantle of the kingdom of Wessex. The entry for the year 937 commemorates one of the key victories in the process of expelling the Danes from England, the *Battle of Brunanburh.* The English army was led by two of Alfred's descendants, King Athelstan and his brother, Edmund, who led their forces to victory over a large Danish and Scottish army. This poem is most important because it shows

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[20] The entries for years 841, 851, 855-8 are examples in ASC, pp. 173-4.

[21] Wrenn, pp. 182-3.

that the Anglo-Saxons continued to portray their great heroes in the light of the Germanic heroic tradition. The very first lines of the poem immediately confirm this when they describe Athelstan as an excellent lord. The poet hails him as a "dispenser of treasure to men."[22] The opening lines also reflect the continuing importance of the quest for worldly glory in the live of the Anglo-Saxons, as the writer proclaimed that both Athelstan and Edmund "won by the sword's edge undying glory in battle."[23] The poet goes on to describe in the vivid language of Old English epic poetry such as *Beowulf* the bloody remains of the vanquished Danes and Scots. He naturally emphasizes the bravery of the English army in battle and how they had ruthlessly pursued the fleeing Danish army until the invaders had been driven back to the sea. In the course of the poem, the writer mentions that "five young kings lay on the field of battle, slain by the swords, and also seven of Olaf's earls, and a countless host of seamen and Scots."[24] This roll call of slain kings and earls served to show that the victory was indeed one of the greatest that any English army had ever won, for those enemies that had fallen were not simple foot-soldiers, but some of the most important leaders of the Danish army.

The poet then goes on to describe the loss of honor which accompanied the defeat of the Danish and Scottish forces. By doing so the poet once again emphasizes the glory that has been achieved by the English, for both the Danish and Anglo-Saxons adhered to the basic concepts of the Germanic heroic code. Thus any loss of honor or the humiliation of their defeated foes could only add to the glory which the English had gained by their victory. For

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[22] ASC, p. 200.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., p. 201.

example, the Danes had lost a great deal of honor by fleeing the site of the battle and, in the process of retreating, leaving important earls and kings forever unavenged. And, the English gained glory for being so courageous and strong that their foes could never have hoped to avenge their fallen comrades. Thus, the English could be very pleased for the Danes would not only be considered cowards for fleeing the battle rather than standing fast beside their fallen lords, but they would also be eternally haunted by the guilt of knowing that the deaths of those kings and earls would never be avenged.

The main focus of the *Battle of Brunanburh* is once again on the secular world and the martial qualities so prominent in the Germanic code that were emphasized in these heroes who successfully fought against the Danes. Except for a brief mention of the sun as the creation of God, there is no obvious Christian influence upon this poem. The English army and its leaders are praised for their Germanic qualities. The constant violence and warfare against invaders left little room for the emulation of the peaceful methods of Christ and his followers because doing so would quickly prove fatal. However, once the Danes had been driven back to the continent, and it appeared as if England would be in for a long period of peace and prosperity, the influence of the Christian religion upon both the monarchs and the people of the Anglo-Saxon realms could be greatly increased. The kings would no longer have to be first and foremost military leaders since the threat of the Danes had at long last disappeared, and the thanes could now afford to be more than soldiers, thus living more peaceful lives.

Thus, in the year 959 A.D., Christianity begins to play a much larger role in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. These entries not only reflect the growing influence of Christianity in a time when England was free from outside

threats, it also contains evidence of how the basic concepts portrayed by Germanic hero figures were successfully adopted and sometimes changed by the Christian religion. In 959 Edgar succeeded to the throne of Wessex upon the death of his brother, King Eadwig. The chronicler states that during Edgar's reign

> God granted him that he lived in peace as long as he lived, and, as was necessary for him, he laboured zealously for this; he exalted God's praise far and wide, and loved God's law; and he improved the peace of the people more than the kings who were before him in the memory of man.[25]

This is the first entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* in which an Anglo-Saxon king's achievements had been attributed to God.[26] In addition, the chronicler clearly states that Edgar's success lay in his following of God's law and ways rather than his ability as a warrior. The writer further reinforces this view when he reveals that Edgar had God's support in causing kings and earls to submit to him. Therefore he was able to place them under his rule without the use of violence. Edgar was honored, not for his numerous military victories, but because of his faith in God and his following of His laws (i.e. the Christian religion). However, the writer does not shy away from criticizing Edgar because "he loved evil foreign customs and brought too firmly heathen manners within this land, and attracted hither foreigners and enticed harmful people to this country."[27] The writer finds it hard to strike a balance between the love of "heathen" customs, and the numerous good deeds that Edgar accomplished as a Christian king.

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[25] Ibid., p. 206.

[26] No other entry prior to the one for the year 959 attributed the deeds of a monarch to God, even for the greatest kings such as Alfred, Edward, and Athelstan.

[27] ASC, p. 206.

In the year 975 Edgar died and went to "the other light, beautiful and happy, and left this wretched and fleeting life."[28] Yet within the same entry that clearly expressed the Christian view that life on earth was transient, Edgar was called a "dispenser of treasure to warriors."[29] As has been stated before, the giving of treasure by a king to his thanes was a critical part of the relationship that existed between them. Yet, in the light of Edgar's deeds during his life, "treasure" seems to refer to much more than simply money. It also meant that Edgar gave his people great spiritual gifts which would prove far more valuable to him and his follower in the long run. Edgar was followed by his son, Edward, who was still a child at the time of his father's death.

Only a few years later, in 978, Edward was murdered and quickly "buried at Wareham without any royal honours."[30] The chronicler justly states that this horrible crime was by far the worse deed of the English people since they had arrived in England. It would seem logical to expect the kinsmen and followers of Edward to seek retribution for his murder, but they took no action whatsoever. It was left to a higher power to avenge the murder of this young king. The earthly followers of Edward failed in their duty to seek vengeance, but the Lord of Lords did not fail to avenge the death of his servant by making him a saint. The chronicler relates that the slayers of Edward hoped to erase his memory from the world, but "the heavenly Avenger has spread abroad his memory in heaven and in earth. Those who would not bow to

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[28] Ibid., p. 208.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid., p. 210.

his living body, now bend humbly on their knees to his dead bones."[31] This passage is immensely important for it clearly shows that the Germanic concept of vengeance for a murder had been taken over by the Christian religion. And it had been modified so that it was no longer necessary to kill the offenders. Instead God did something far more lasting and important as He ensured that the memory of the fallen king would be forever honored by all men.

Edward was succeeded by the hapless Ethelred Unraed (Unadvised) whose disastrous reign would witness the return of the Danes to the shores of England. This new series of invasions was marked by many crushing defeats for the English, one of which was immortalized in the *Battle of Maldon*--a poem commemorating the glorious last stand of Byrhtnoth and his men against the new hordes of Danes. Yet the bravery of the men celebrated in this poem was the exception to the rule in a time that was rife with multiple betrayals.[32] After the deaths of Ethelred and his son, Edmund Ironside, in 1016, one of the most important Danes, Cnut, was chosen to be king of England. Alfred's line would finally be restored in 1042 with the accession of Edward the Confessor, but only for fourteen short years. In 1066 the Anglo-Saxon era came to an end with the invasion of William the Conqueror and his subsequent victory at the Battle of Hastings.

The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* not only provides evidence of why the Germanic heroic tradition continued to be strong in the world of secular poetry, it also shows how Christianity adapted some of the key principles of the heroic

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[31] Ibid.

[32] Dolores Warwick Frese, "Poetic Prowess in *Brunanburh* and *Maldon*," in Modes of Interpretations in Old English Literature: Essays in Honour of Stanley B. Greenfield, eds. Phyllis Rugg Brown, Georgia Ronan Crampton, and Fred C. Robinson (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1986), p. 95.

world. The entries concerning both Edgar and Edward, late in the *Chronicle*, reveal that by the tenth century the adaptation and modification of the key concepts of the Germanic heroic tradition had been completed.

The only heroic poem in Old English literature that is entirely free of Christian references is the *Finnesburh Fragment*.[33] The surviving forty-eight lines were obviously once part of a much larger poem which has unfortunately been lost. However, the story told in the poem itself has survived in a digression in *Beowulf*. It is the story of the conflict between the Danes, led by Hnaef, and the Frisians, whose lord is Finn. In the course of the combat between the two tribes, Hnaef was killed in battle. The struggle continued with many men falling on both sides until a stalemate was reached where neither side could possibly achieve a victory without annihilating both tribes. Hengest, the new leader of the Danes, reached a truce with Finn, and swore an oath to the Frisian leader that he would respect the peace. The fragile peace lasted through the cold winter until the spring when more Danes arrived from across the sea. Once he had been reinforced, Hengest took vengeance on Finn, killed many of the surviving Frisians, and then returned to his homeland. The surviving lines of the fragment tell of the successful struggle by Hengest's men to hold the hall of the Frisian king after Hnaef has fallen.

The lines of the poem are full of battle imagery as the poet describes how the Danes bravely resisted the attacks of the Frisians. The fragment begins in the middle of a speech by Hengest, the new king, urging his men into battle. Here Hengest was fulfilling one of the most important duties of a king by speaking words of encouragement to his men as he himself, a novice in

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[33] Cherniss, p. 121.

battle, prepared to fight. His thanes responded to his calls by going forward to one door of the hall and preparing for battle knowing that "Hengest himself followed in their footsteps."[34] The Frisians soon broke through the door and a raging battle began between them and the Danes. The Danes fought very well and the poet solemnly proclaims that he has

> never heard of sixty warriors
> who bore themselves more bravely in the fight
> and never did retainers better repay glowing
> mead than those men repaid Hnaef.
> They fought five days and not one of the followers
> fell, but they held the doors firmly.[35]

The Danes had met the obligations impressed upon them by the Germanic heroic code for they had succeeded in taking a measure of vengeance for their lord's death, and fighting bravely for and alongside their new king. The surviving lines of the *Finnesburh Fragment* are clearly rooted in the traditions of the Germanic past and entirely free of Christian references to God. This does not mean that any of the rest of the missing lines did not contain Christian references. It is simply impossible to prove this unless a full copy of the poem is discovered. Therefore, it is best to view this fragment as an example of a poem that was free from Christian references.

Two fragments have also survived from the Old English epic poem *Waldere*. These fragments contain examples of how the Christian religion adapted the Germanic heroic tradition. In the sixty three lines that have survived from this poem, there are two clearly Christian references. The first is in the speech of Hildegund to Waldere urging the young hero to "win renown with deeds

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[34] The Finnesburh Fragment, in Crossley-Holland, p. 8.

[35] Ibid., p. 9.

of daring while God defends you."[36] The second is contained in the other fragment in which Waldere challenged Gutthere to battle. He dared his foe to take his armor and gold from him since he knew that his armor would not betray him. Finally, Waldere states that

> `Yet He who is always active and wise
> in all men's affairs can grant victory.
> A man who puts his trust in the holy one,
> in God for support, will be sustained in need
> if he has made of his own life a sacrifice.'[37]

These quotes show that it is no longer just a man's ability, or the quality of his armor that would determine his fate in battle. It is acknowledged that only God determined who would triumph in the affairs of men or win glory by deeds of daring. In her speech, Hildegund clearly stated that in order for a man to achieve greatness he must have the Lord's support, and Waldere added in his speech in the second fragment that if a man trusts in God and is willing to sacrifice himself for others he will receive divine help. The hero, Waldere, evidently retained all of his martial qualities, but he was shown to be Christian by acknowledging the supremacy of God in all things. The basic concepts of the Germanic heroic code had remained intact and were still emphasized, but the characters had become Christian warriors. This is exactly the form of adaptation seen in both *Beowulf* and the *Battle of Maldon*, but, as with the *Finnesburh Fragment*, the extent of Christian influence within the rest of *Waldere* can only be a matter of speculation.[38] Therefore, it is best to take these two fragments as examples of how the Christian religion had began to adapt the best aspects of the Germanic heroic tradition. Fortunately,

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[36] Waldere, p. 10.

[37] Ibid., p. 11.

[38] Cherniss, pp. 122-3.

the final form of the process of adaptation for the world of secular poetry can be clearly seen in the greatest poem to survive from Anglo-Saxon England--*Beowulf*.

Beowulf is not a story of heroes at war with other heroes, but a tale of the conflict of humankind with powers of darkness and evil. The hero of this epic set himself against this onrushing wall of evil that threatened to engulf the lands of the Danes and the Geats, and succeeded in stemming the tide of darkness during his lifetime. As a young man, who had not yet fully proven himself, Beowulf not only defeated Grendel and his mother, but also showed himself to be the perfect thane to both Hrothgar, the king of the Danes, and his own lord, Hygelac. Many years later, once Beowulf had become the lord of the Geats, he exhibited all the qualities which a good king was expected to possess in the comitatus society. There can be no doubt that during the course of the epic, Beowulf rises to the highest level that any hero could possibly could achieve by being both a perfect lord and follower. However, the slayer of Grendel was only one of the heroes of the epic that are portrayed as the ideal representatives of the Germanic heroic code. Hrothgar, the lord of the Danes, and Wiglaf, the lone thane of Beowulf who supports his lord in combat against the dragon, are both presented as great Germanic heroes in their own right. Although the deeds of these men definitely place them within the bounds of the Germanic heroic tradition, their speeches reveal them to be people who firmly believe in the existence of God.[39]

Beowulf's numerous adventures in Denmark in the service of King Hrothgar show him to be a man who firmly followed the obligations set upon him by the Germanic heroic code. He swore that he would slay both Grendel and his mother

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[39] Kennedy, pp. 88-9.

for Hrothgar, or else die in the attempt. Whereas so many others had died in the attempt to carry out such an oath, Beowulf fulfilled his promises by slaying the foul beasts, and by killing both monsters, Beowulf succeeded in avenging the death of one of his own men at the hands of Grendel and the murder of Hrothgar's thane, Aeschere, by Grendel's mother. He thus observes one more part of the Germanic heroic code. Beowulf does not fail to give Hrothgar the treasures that he gains in combat against both Grendel and his mother as shown in a memorable scene where the hero

> once more entered Heorot to greet Hrothgar.
> Grendel's head was carried by the hair
> onto the floor where the warriors were drinking,
> a ghastly thing paraded before the heroes and the queen.[40]

Beowulf also gave Hrothgar the hilt of the giant-forged sword that he had used to slay Grendel's mother. Earlier Beowulf had presented the Danish lord with Grendel's arm as evidence that the threat to Heorot and its inhabitants was at long last ended. Although these treasures sound grotesque and horrid, it must have been truly been a pleasure for Hrothgar and his followers to at long last have in their possession the head and arm of the creature that had hunted them for over twelve years.

The Geatish hero was given a vast amount of treasure by Hrothgar as a reward for his incredible deeds. Yet, once Beowulf returned to his homeland, he did not hesitate to fulfill his duty to his lord, Hygelac, by giving him all the treasure that he had been given by Hrothgar. The Geatish lord did not hesitate in his obligation to give his faithful retainer an even greater reward than he had received in the land of the Danes. Beowulf served Hygelac faithfully until the latter was slain in combat with the Frisians. Hygelac's

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[40] Beowulf, p. 115.

widow, Hygd, offered Beowulf the kingdom of the Geats "for she feared/that her son would be unable to defend it/from foreign enemies now that Hygelac was gone."[41] Yet, Beowulf was so faithful to the son of his former lord that

> he declined
> absolutely to become Heardred's lord,
> or to taste the pleasures of royal power.
> But he stood at his right hand,
> ready with advice, always friendly,
> and respectful, until the boy came of age
> and could rule the Geats himself. [42]

It is one of the greatest tributes to the strength and power of the oaths of loyalty which bound a monarch to his followers and to the spirit of this great hero, that Beowulf chose to remain faithful to the son of his former lord rather than taking power for himself when it was offered to him. Beowulf indeed proved himself to be one of the greatest Germanic heroes for by his actions he fulfilled all the obligations placed upon him and never once deviated from the ideals set by Germanic tradition.[43] However, once Heardred fell in battle against the Swedes, there was no longer any reason why Beowulf could not, at long last, become the king of the Geats as there were no members left of Hygelac's family to assume the throne.

Beowulf proves himself to be the model of a good king just as he was the best example of all that a thane should be in the Germanic tradition. During the course of his long reign, Beowulf did not fail to play a key role in the events that led to the avenging of the death of Heardred, thus fulfilling the promises of loyalty that he had made to his dead lord. He never failed to

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[41] Ibid., p. 133.

[42] Ibid., pp. 133-4.

[43] Mary A. Parker, Beowulf and Christianity, American University Studies--Series IV: English Language and Literature, Vol. 51. (New York, N.Y.: Peter Lang, 1987), p. 124.

give out generous rewards to his followers, and always protected the kingdom and his people from the threats that surrounded them. He still does not fail in the performance of his duty, even after a long reign of fifty years, when as a very old man Beowulf once again protected his followers and his kingdom from the greatest threat it had ever faced--the dragon. Beowulf chose, in the ultimate act of courage, to face the dragon alone in single combat. In the ensuing fight, Beowulf finally succeeded in slaying the foul worm with the help of Wiglaf. Yet victory only came to the great hero at the cost of his own life, and, in a final act of generosity, Beowulf gave the hoard that he had won from the dragon to the Geats so that his people could protect themselves against hostile tribes by hiring mercenaries.

Beowulf was one of the greatest of all secular heroes for he not only achieved incredible feats of valor and bravery, he had also fulfilled, above and beyond the call of duty, the obligations of both a retainer and a lord. Yet Beowulf never let the glory of his achievements go to his head, for he knew that his victories were due to the will of God. Thus before he entered combat against Grendel, Beowulf asked that "the holy Lord, give glory in battle/to whichever of us He should think fitting."[44] Beowulf knew that the Lord was the final controller of his fate, and when God decided that he should pass to the great beyond, that would be the day of his death and no force could change it. Until that fated moment, however, Beowulf would never fail to thank God for the victories that he achieved. In relating the story of his triumph over Grendel's mother to Hrothgar, Beowulf stated that at his most desperate moment

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[44] Beowulf, p. 91.

> 'the Ruler of men -- how often He guides
> the friendless one -- granted that I
> should see a huge ancestral sword hanging,
> shining, on the wall; I unsheathed it.
> Then, at the time destiny decreed, I slew
> the warden of the hall.'[45]

Once again Beowulf was shown to believe in the Lord by acknowledging that God helped him to see the sword. It cannot be denied that Beowulf was a very proud man and often boasted of his achievements, e.g., his confrontation with Unferth, but he always showed deference and humility to the Lord of Lords by thanking Him for his victories.

Beowulf is also shown to believe in the power of God when the dragon launches its first vicious assault upon his kingdom.[46] Once word of its ravages reached Beowulf, he believed that "he must have angered God, the Lord Eternal, by ignoring some ancient law."[47] He does not question God's power or think that the Geats have committed some horrible sin, but rather he wonders about himself, and worries that he may have offended the Lord in some unknown fashion for which his people are now being punished. Thus Beowulf not only shows his belief in God by having the humility to question whether he was responsible for the coming of this monster, he also shows that he is a good king by thinking that it might be his fault rather than something one of his people had done. Once Beowulf has slain the dragon with Wiglaf's help, he asked his thane to retrieve the horde of gold in the monster's barrow. Upon seeing the huge amount of treasure he had succeeded in winning for himself and his people, Beowulf says

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[45] Ibid., p. 115.

[46] Parker, p. 174.

[47] Beowulf, p. 132.

> `With these words I thank
> the King of Glory, the Eternal Lord,
> the Ruler, for all the treasure here before me,
> that I in my lifetime I have been able
> to gain them for the Geats.'[48]

The greatest hero of all Old English literature did not forget to thank the Lord for the treasure that he had won for the Geats at the cost of his own life. Beowulf is both a Germanic and a Christian hero, and he represents the best of both worlds. It can easily be imagined that a pagan audience listening to *Beowulf* would naturally find the heroic qualities of the Geat admirable, but they would also be very curious about the Christian religion because this great man firmly believed in the Lord.

The importance of the Christian role in *Beowulf* is further emphasized in that most of the other heroic characters believe in God as well.[49] Hrothgar is portrayed as the ideal king for the Danes, since he is willing to builds a huge hall for his men so that they can feast and drink to their heart's content. Yet he is also shown to be a man who believes in God and acknowledges His power when, after Beowulf has at long last killed the beast that had ruined life at Heorot for twelve years, Hrothgar looked at Grendel's beast's arm and said

> `Let us give thanks at once to God Almighty
> for this sight. I have undergone many afflictions,
> grievous outrages at Grendel's hands; but God,
> Guardian of heaven, can work wonder upon wonder.'[50]

Wealtheow, the wife of Hrothgar and a very noble woman, also gave thanks to

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[48] Ibid., p. 144.

[49] Cherness, p. 135.

[50] Beowulf, p. 97.

God for sending "some warrior for help against such attacks."[51] Hygelac, Beowulf's lord and kinsmen, offered his gratitude to the Lord upon his thane's safe return from Denmark. Wiglaf, the heroic thane who helped Beowulf, chides the other men who fled from the battle and says that he did little in the battle itself, but that the Lord allowed Beowulf to avenge himself by slaying the dragon. Like Beowulf himself, each of these characters proved their belief in God by thanking Him for sending them help in their hour of need or fulfilling their dreams. There can be no question of the sincerity of these remarks even though they contain no deep theological meaning.

The poet himself uses Christianity several times to make moral comments about life in heroic societies. For example, the poet describes how some of the Danes turned to paganism in a desperate attempt to rid themselves of Grendel's attacks. He tells how those Danes that did so brooded on evil things and ignored the worship of God; all for naught since the attacks of Grendel continued unabated.[52] The poet then warns his audience against the dangers of making such a foolish mistake themselves:

> Woe to the man who,
> in his wickedness, commits his soul to the fire's embrace;
> he must expect neither comfort nor change.
> He will be damned for ever. Joy shall be his
> who, when he dies, may stand before the Lord,
> seek peace in the embrace of our Father.[53]

The audience would quickly understand that those who were foolish enough to revert to paganism would eternally damn themselves to the torments of hell, but those who were faithful would be welcomed into Heaven. Similarly, after

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[51] Ibid., p. 89.

[52] Parker, p. 161-3.

[53] Beowulf, p. 78.

Grendel had been slain by Beowulf, the poet states that the creature's reign of terror would have continued and

> he would have slain many another,
> had not foreseeing God and the warrior's courage
> together forestalled him. The Creator ruled over
> all humankind, even as He does today.
> Wherefore a wise man will value forethought
> and understanding. Whoever lives long
> on earth, endures the unrest of these times,
> will be involved in much good and much evil.[54]

The poet not only stated that Beowulf and God had worked together to kill Grendel, but the writer believed that since the Lord watches over all humans, it was wise to realize that we shall live through experiences both good and evil on our journey to the ultimate reward. Thus, in the case of the Danes a horrible experience had just ended, but an extended period of prosperity would hopefully follow on the heels of Grendel's death.

The monsters of *Beowulf* reflect another aspect of the Christian influence in the epic poem. The stories of the Christian saints often had the heroes facing devils or evil humans who tempted and tormented them to the point of death. But God's champions would never be affected and would remain faithful to their religion because they knew the Lord was with them at all times. It seems appropriate, therefore, that the foes of the greatest secular hero in Old English literature are far more dangerous than any mere humans. By facing and defeating monsters such as Grendel, Beowulf rises above the other heroes of Old English secular poetry whose foes were simply other men. The first two monsters that Beowulf is challenged by have direct connections to the Christian religion. Grendel and his mother are descended from the "seed of Cain," the first murderer who, as punishment, was sent by God "into exile, far

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[54] Ibid., p. 100.

from mankind" for all eternity.[55] The blood-line of Cain has spawned "monsters and elves and spiteful spirits of the dead" as well as "the giants who grappled with God."[56] The fact that they are monsters is enough to condemn Grendel and his mother, but this combined with the knowledge that they are descended from the first murderer who killed his own brother would instantly damn them in the eyes of all Anglo-Saxons.[57] Yet, another important aspect of this passage is that it shows that most of the evil creatures that haunted the edges of civilization have been give an origin connected to the stories in the Bible.

The hideousness of Grendel and his mother is also increased by the fact that they are aberrations of human beings, and exemplify all of the dark and evil emotions that lurk within mankind. They still retain some small shred of the human form of their ancestor. But the human traits that remain within them are those that are considered the worst and most reprehensible in both the Germanic heroic tradition and Christianity. This is clearly shown when Grendel attacks Heorot after he has suffered great pain from hearing "the din of merry-making."[58] It was particularly appropriate that the thing which has so enraged Grendel is the retelling of the Creation of the World by a singer in Heorot. The sounds of this song would have sparked the bitter memories that had been passed on to all of Cain's descendants of what God had unjustly done to them. Grendel was engulfed by a searing and bitter anger that he could never join in the joyous celebrations because the evil within him has

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[55] Ibid., p. 76.

[56] Ibid., pp. 76-7.

[57] Cherness, p. 139.

[58] Beowulf, p. 76.

dominated his life. He was infuriated by the fact that he could never participate in such happiness and had been cursed by God to forever lurk on the outskirts of civilization as an eternal exile for his ancestor's vile misdeed. Therefore, he avenges himself by attacking Heorot and terrorizing the Danes for the next twelve years. Yet, by doing so Grendel is only showing himself to be truly worthy of God's damnation for he is committing senseless murders of innocent men and women which were condemned both by Christianity and the Germanic heroic tradition.

Grendel and his mother are indeed good foes for Beowulf to face as they not only represent the worst aspects of those who violate the Germanic heroic tradition, but are the enemies of any Christian since they are descended from one of the worst sinners described in the Bible and have always been hostile to the Lord. However, the third monster that Beowulf faces is not connected to any of God's enemies. The dragon represents a force of nature, a most powerful and horrifying reflection of the hostile environment that surrounded the Anglo-Saxons. The dragon is a fiery lizard, a hideous creature of the night, far older than mankind, an ancient evil awakened by the greed of a thief who "seized some of the pagan treasures" and stole some "drinking vessels."[59] However, Beowulf is still able to overcome the greatest challenge of his life, even at the cost of his own, with the help of God. Thus all men could feel confident in attempting to face the hostile environment that surrounded them if they placed their faith in the Lord.

Beowulf is a poem about a secular, Germanic hero who believes in God and is fighting against the foes that threaten to destroy his world. He retains all the best qualities of the Germanic heroic tradition, but these have all

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[59] Ibid., p. 129.

been easily adapted by the poet for the use of Christianity as he often notes that God has helped the hero in his quest or having the characters thank Him for their triumphs.[60] The transition from the German hero figure to a Christian one has been smoothly made in this epic poem because there are no major differences between the two of them. The main reason for the easy merging of the two different patterns of heroic characterization in this epic lies in the fact that the Germanic heroic tradition and the Christian religion valued many of the same things in the secular world. This was shown in one of the most important passages in *Beowulf* in which the elderly king of the Danes gives advice to the young hero on how to be a good lord.

Hrothgar tells Beowulf that God "gives wisdom and land and high estate to people on earth" for "all things are in His power."[61] If He wishes the Lord can grant unlimited prosperity to a man--give him a plethora of treasures; followers who would never consider betraying him and would gladly lay down their lives in his service; a strong country to hold as his own for as long as that man lives. Such a man is perfectly happy and content until he begins to forget how he received such wealth and power. A good and wise king must remain ever humble before the eyes of the Lord and realize that all his glory and achievements flow from God. He must be wary of the growth of "the seed of arrogance," for once his growing pride begins to poison his mind a man no longer knows "how to resist the devil's insidious temptations."[62] Once a man submits to these temptations

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[60] Cherness, pp. 149-50.

[61] Beowulf, p. 117.

[62] Ibid.

> `What had long contented him now seems insufficient;
> he becomes embittered, begins to hoard
> his treasures, never parts with gold rings
> in ceremonial splendour; he soon forgets
> his destiny and disregards the honours
> given him of God, the Ruler of Glory.'[63]

Once this has happened it is only a matter of time before that man suffers a horrible and lonely death, bereft of all his friends and companions. Hrothgar urges Beowulf never to succumb to the arrows of pride and to remain humble for his life on this earth is very limited.

The importance of Hrothgar's sermon lies in the fact that it condemns behavior that is considered evil by both moral systems. Greed and pride both inevitably lead to disaster in the Germanic code and the Christian religion.[64] The king must not only remember that his support rests with his thanes and without their help he would easily fall, but also that his good fortune stems from God and without the Lord's assistance he will also be destined for a disastrous fate. Hrothgar's sermon is a guideline for how a good Anglo-Saxon kings should behave, but it is also serves as a useful guide to how all people in the secular world should act to avoid disaster. The speech also shows how the poets of Anglo-Saxon England were able to successfully merge the Christian religion with the Germanic heroic tradition in secular poetry. They did so by emphasizing the heroic traits and ideals which both value systems supported or condemned. This made it simplicity itself to present heroes who were not only great warriors and met all the obligations demanded of them by society, but were also good Christians who could serve as models for their audiences to

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[63] Ibid., pp. 117-8.

[64] Margaret E. Goldsmith, The Mode and Meaning of `Beowulf' (London, Great Britain: The Athlone Press, 1970), pp. 206-7.

imitate. This same kind of adaptation is present in the last extant poem to survive from the Old English period--the *Battle of Maldon.*

In the year 991 the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* describes how the Danish army, under the leadership of Olaf, arrived in Maldon to ravage the countryside. There "Ealdorman Brihtnoth came against him with his army and fought against him; and they killed the ealdorman there and had control of the field."[65] A heroic poem was written to immortalize the men who had lost their lives in the battle, and to serve as an example to others of how true heroes should act in a time where the king paid off the Vikings rather than face them in combat. Although an unknown number of lines have been lost at the beginning and end of the poem, what remains serves to reconfirm the fact that the Germanic heroic traditions remained strong in the secular world. Byrhtnoth acts as a good leader when he leads his troops into battle on foot rather than staying mounted upon his horse. He recognizes the honor that would be lost if he capitulated to the Vikings demands for tribute, and thus he states that they will be paid in blood rather than gold. Byrhtnoth proves himself to be a warrior cast in the mold of other great heroes of the Germanic past as he perishes in fierce combat against the Danes. The ultimate tribute to the fallen monarch is given by those of his thanes that stay behind and die in an attempt to avenge their leader's death. These men prove themselves worthy of the trust Byrhtnoth had placed in them when he presented them with gifts of wealth. Unfortunately, three of his thanes betrayed their former lord by fleeing the battle, with one of them, Godric, stealing his lord's horse. This had disastrous consequences as the rest of Byrhtnoth's foot soldiers thought that their lord was in flight so they also fled the combat, leaving the rest

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[65] ASC, p. 213.

of the slain ealdorman's thanes to fight a hopeless battle in which they would ultimately die. Godric and his brothers rightfully earned the curses of their fellow thanes, and would suffer the eternal condemnation of all other men.

The *Battle of Maldon*'s primary focus is upon the world of secular heroes. However, it, like *Beowulf,* shows how Christianity has merged with the Germanic tradition by presenting the heroes as believers in God, and stating that the Lord controls their fates.[66] For example, when Byrhtnoth allows the Vikings to cross the ford of the river so that they can face his whole army in battle, he tells them that "God alone can say who will control the field of battle."[67] Finally, Byrhtnoth shows himself to be a good Christian when, in his last moments of life, he looks up to the sky and states:

> 'O Guardian of the people, let me praise and thank you
> for all the joys I have known in this world.
> Now, gracious Lord, as never before,
> I need Your grace, that my soul may set out
> on its journey to You, O Prince of Angels,
> that my soul may depart into Your power in peace.
> I pray that the devils my never destroy it.'[68]

The hero of the *Battle of Maldon,* like Beowulf, does not forget to thank God for all that he has accomplished in his lifetime just before his death, but he goes beyond the Geatish hero's final pleas when he asks the Lord to protect his soul on its journey to Heaven from the attacks of devils. This one speech reveals that the form of adaptation used for the Germanic traditions in *Beowulf* by the Christian church was also present in the *Battle of Maldon.*

The process of adaptation of the Germanic heroic tradition by Christianity in Old English secular poetry did not cause any radical changes

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[66] Kennedy, p. 345.

[67] Maldon, p. 13.

[68] Ibid., pp. 15-6.

in the former by the new religion. The Christian church did not really need to change the tenets of the Germanic heroic tradition for so many of the things which it valued were also important to the Church. The concept of loyalty to a man's lord and kinsmen, which formed the foundation of Germanic heroic society, was simply taken one step higher to the acknowledgement that God was the highest authority. The major heroes of Old English poetry, such as Beowulf and Byrhtnoth, all acknowledge that the Lord controls their destiny and also remember to thank God for their good fortune in life. Similarly, those who have broken faith with the Lord, such as Grendel and his mother, suffer the worst kind of exile possible for any creature. For these poor souls can take no comfort from the knowledge that the Lord is with them as do the exiles in both the *Wanderer* and the *Seafarer*. Treasure continued to serve as the material symbol of loyalty that exists between men for Christianity did advocate generosity as one of its main principles. The Christian religion, like the Germanic heroic tradition, despised the hoarding of wealth for its own sake. Both also condemned excessive pride which could lead to disaster as Hrothgar warned in *Beowulf*. However, the Germanic heroes often boasted of the deeds that they had done in the past and what they would do to their foes in battle which might seem to many to be excessive pride, but Christianity accepted this by having the heroes show humility to the greatest Lord of them all. The concept of vengeance was also left unchanged in the secular world as was shown in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* where the writer claims that the murder of Edward was avenged by the Lord, although this retribution was non-violent but just as effective. Thus, in Old English secular poetry, the Germanic heroic tradition continued to be very strong throughout the Anglo-Saxon period. The process of adaptation was limited to largely making the heroes of

the epics Christian men, but leaving the basic concepts of the traditions of the past intact.

However, such was not the case in the poetry that was intended primarily for presentation to religious audiences in such places as the monasteries. It is in these poems that a much more radical change took place in the development and portrayal of hero figures. The earliest religious poems, such as *Genesis B* and *Exodus*, are marked by the presentation of the basic messages and stories of Christianity through the use of the language and concepts of the Germanic heroic tradition. In later poems, however, the hero becomes more and more Christianized, moving closer to the virtues which are commonly associated with the heroes of that religion. The concepts of the Germanic heroic tradition were either adapted and changed for the use of the Christian religion, or were entirely eliminated by the process of adaptation. This change was representative of the gradual evolution of a new set of heroic standards that would replace the old Germanic code in Old English religious poetry. Thus through the use of the program of adaptation set forth by the Church Fathers, the writers of Old English religious poetry could present thoroughly Christian heroes while still using the language of the old epic poems.

The Old English poem, *Genesis B*, contains one of the better meshings of the Germanic heroic tradition with the Christian religion. The poem itself is translated from another work in Old Saxon and was probably written sometime after the mid-ninth century. But it still provides a spectacular example of the effective merging of the Germanic and Christian worlds.[69] The story and the setting are in the Christian realm, but the guiding moral force that

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[69] Greenfield, pp. 150-1.

controls the actions of the character and the judgments the poet passes on them is the Germanic heroic tradition. One of the reasons for the effective merging of Christianity with the heroic tradition is the nature of the story itself. The main focus of the poem is on the Fall of the Angels, followed soon after by the successful temptation of Adam and Eve which causes their expulsion from Paradise. The central theme of both of these stories from the Bible was that man should be loyal to God, and that disloyalty would be severely punished.[70] Since loyalty was the most important aspect of the Germanic heroic tradition, it was not hard for the writer of this poem to easily recast the story of the Fall of Man by using the virtues that governed comitatus society. Therefore, the main theme of *Genesis B* is loyalty along with the other concepts (i.e. vengeance, treasure, and exile) that were inherently tied to it in Germanic society.

The poem's central theme of loyalty, as well as the effective unification of the Christian and Germanic values, can also be seen in the character of Satan. He is portrayed as God's most powerful retainer:

> He made one so strong, so mighty of mind;
> Gave him such power next unto God
> In the heavenly kingdom; shaped him so shining;
> So fair the form God fashioned for him;
> That his beauty was like to the blazing stars.[71]

Satan had received everything that anyone could possibly desire from God. He could have been God's most faithful and powerful retainer, much as Beowulf was to Hrothgar and Hygelac. He should have thanked God for all that he had been given and shown proper humility to his rightful Lord and Creator. But his overweening pride led him to revolt against the Lord. Satan came to believe

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[70] Cherness, pp. 150-1.

[71] Genesis B, in Kennedy, Early English Christian Poetry, p.51.

himself to be more powerful than God and to have a larger group of followers. Satan foolishly boasted to others of his plans:

> 'My hands have might
> To work many wonders. I have strength to rear
> A goodlier throne, a higher in heaven....
> I may be God
> as well as He. Brave comrades stand by me,
> Stout-hearted heroes unfailing in strife.
> These fighters fierce have made me their leader;
> With such may one plan and muster support.
> They are my loyal friends of faithful of heart;
> I may be their lord and rule this realm.'[72]

God is justifiably enraged at his retainer's excessive pride and disloyalty, and casts Satan and his followers out of Heaven. Satan's betrayal was seen as exceptionally abhorrent in both the Christian religion and in the light of the Germanic heroic tradition. In both the Christian and Germanic code of conduct the betrayal of one's overlord or friend was one of the worst crimes that one could commit, but it took on a much more important light when loyalty provided the basis for the stability of society. The actions and betrayals of such traitors as Satan could easily tear the foundations of society apart and reduce it to nothing but anarchy.

It is only just that Satan was exiled from Heaven, and the poet reminds his listeners that now "must he pay for that deed of pride" and tells them that this example should serve as a warning to "whoever wickedly wars against God."[73] Hell is described as being an exile's worst nightmare for it is blanketed in eternal darkness, and its inhabitants are constantly tormented by blazing heat or bone-chilling cold. Such was the fate of all traitors in the society of the Germanic heroes. Satan mourns his loss, but he does not blame

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[72] Ibid., p. 53.

[73] Ibid.

himself for being expelled from Heaven. Instead he places the blame on God and tells the devils that the Lord "has wrought us wrong."[74] Satan now reacts as any good Germanic warrior would upon feeling that he has been slighted and mistreated, he decides to seek vengeance against God.[75] Yet, this is not a just vengeance, for Satan has no one to blame but himself for being banished from Heaven. God has committed no crime by expelling the former retainer who had tried to rebel against Him. Therefore, Satan's claim of vengeance against God becomes nothing more than blatant moves of aggression on his part, since of the Germanic heroic tradition holds that acts of retribution must have some justification.

Satan can not seek vengeance personally, for he is chained in hell, but his followers are free to do his bidding. Therefore, he decides to corrupt God's new creations--Adam and Eve. If the corruption could be accomplished not only would God be dishonored by the betrayal of his new creation; the devils also hope to gain new servants for themselves in hell. Satan reminds his followers of the treasure that he had given to them in Heaven which he believes should still obligate them to serve him as the heroic tradition required.[76] Yet, it is nothing short of hypocritical in the light of Germanic tradition to expect the devils to serve a creature who has betrayed his own master. And those that did choose to serve Satan could only be untrustworthy followers at best, for they would feel no obligation to be loyal to a traitor. Finally, Satan appeals to his followers saying

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[74] Ibid., p. 55.

[75] Cherness, p. 161.

[76] Woolf, p. 9.

> `If one of you can win them in any way
> To forsake God's law, they will lose His love...
> More softly then
> Shall I lie in these chains if they lose the heavenly kingdom.
> Whoever shall bring that to pass shall have portion for ever
> In all we may win of advantage in these wide flames.'[77]

Like a good Germanic lord, Satan promised a reward to his followers for the success of their mission. Unfortunately, he is in no position to carry through on this promise, and probably never will since he has already broken the most important oath he ever made. Nevertheless, one of his servants accepts the task and departs for the Garden of Eden to tempt Adam and Eve.

The characters of Adam and Eve are also presented as Germanic retainers serving their lord faithfully in paradise. They have sworn an oath not to eat the fruit of the tree of death which would give them knowledge of good and evil, and would cause untold woe to descend upon them. The devil comes up from hell and disguises himself as one of God's emissaries (as a snake) in order to trick them into eating the fruit. He first attempts to trick Adam by complimenting him on how faithful he has been to the Lord, and that as a reward he shall be allowed to eat of the fruit. Adam shows how his deep loyalty to God's commands by refusing to eat the fruit because of

> `What our Saviour said when last I saw Him:
> To honour His word and keep it well,
> To fulfil His law. You are not like
> Any of his angels that I ever saw,
> Nor do I find in you any token of faith
> That God has sent me as a sign of His favour.'[78]

Unfortunately, the devil finds an easier target in Eve, whom he tells that Adam will be severely punished unless they eat the fruit. Eve's duty to her husband causes her to fall victim to the temptation and eat the apple. Eve

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[77] Genesis B, p. 57.

[78] Ibid., p. 61.

later gets Adam to eat the apple, and the illusion of its benefits that the devil had been maintaining is instantly dispelled.

Adam and Eve have both betrayed the trust the Lord placed in them, which is a great crime in the comitatus society. But they did not do so willfully like Satan. They were not to blame for their actions, since they were deceived by the servant of the devil. Adam and Eve shall suffer the consequences for betraying God, but in the light of the Germanic code they are still heroes for they were tricked into being disloyal. The greatest criminal by far is still Satan who deliberately betrayed the Lord out of his excessive pride.[79] Eve is not blamed for having been the first to eat of the apple since the main reason she did so was out of her loyalty to Adam, and her desire not to see him punished for disobeying what she thought were God's commands. Adam eats the apple because he has no reason to think that Eve is trying to betray him, and she is not for she was offering him the fruit in all sincerity. After they have both discovered the truth of what they have done, they also show their admirable qualities by being willing to repent their actions. The poet tells how

> They bowed them in prayer,
> Man and woman together, and called upon God
> Imploring their Lord, the Prince of heaven,
> To punish their sin, let them suffer their penance,
> Because they had broken the bidding of God.[80]

Both the fact that they repent their sins, and then ask for punishment set them apart from Satan who never regretted any of his actions and only sought vengeance for his punishment. They expect to be exiled for what they have

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[79] Cherniss, p. 167.

[80] Genesis B, p. 66.

done and this is expressed in heroic terms as Adam laments the extreme weather that they will have to face and the lack of a refuge into which to retreat.

Genesis B is a poem that has effectively united the Christian and Germanic worlds by taking a story from the former and placing it within the value system of the latter. The poet not only manages to do this without losing the basic meaning of the story, he even strengthens its message by presenting it in this fashion for his audience. For example, it would be easy for them to realize that Satan was by far the greatest sinner in the story for he had betrayed his Lord and Creator. The ease with which Christianity has been fused to the Germanic heroic world is once again due in large part to the nature of the story. Yet it is also very important to realize that this was the kind of story that would most appeal to a group of listeners who had been raised from the day of their birth in the value system of the Germanic heroic tradition. This would be especially true if the audience happened to be recent converts to the Christian religion. The story of the Fall of Man as it is presented in *Genesis B* is easily understandable and full of concepts with which they would have been familiar. Thus, such a story as this would prove much more effective at entertaining and teaching them than, for example, the story of the Crucifixion of Christ, since a Germanic audience might not understand why the son of God allowed himself to be tortured and humiliated.

Another Old English poem that a newly converted audience could easily understand is found in *Exodus*. In this poem, as with *Genesis B*, a story from the Bible (in this case the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt and the crossing of the Red Sea) has been taken and placed in the world of the Germanic hero.[81]

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[81] Edward B. Irving, Jr., ed., The Old English Exodus (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 29-30.

Moses is presented as a Germanic lord who is leading his band of warriors, the Hebrews, away from the pursuing armies of the Pharaoh. He is called

> the prince of the people, shrewd and wise guide of the host, bold leader, was loved by God....Great was the guerdon, and the gracious Lord gave him mighty weapons against the assault of foes; he overthrew in battle the power of many hostile kinsmen.[82]

He is often hailed as the "leader of the people" or the "prince" in the poem. Moses does indeed act as if he were leading an army of warriors. When Pharaoh's armies drew closer, Moses leapt atop the rock and "raised aloft his shield, bade the captains make quiet the army, whilst many harkened to the brave man's speech."[83] In his speech he bolsters his men's confidence by telling them to take heart for God will not abandon them and that He will protect them from the Egyptian armies.

The Hebrews and the Egyptians are both treated as Germanic armies that are armed to the teeth. The Egyptian army is constantly described in ringing martial langauge, as when the Hebrews first glimpse the onrushing horde and begin to lose hope when they see

> Pharaoh's host come sweeping on from the south, bearing their shields, the troops gleaming--spears were strong, battle drew nigh, shields shone, trumpets sang--banners reaching aloft, the host treading the road.[84]

Similarly, when the Egyptians are crossing the Red Sea and the waves come crashing down upon them, the imagery of this horrifying moment is depicted as if the waters were actually alive and slaughtering the Pharaoh's men. Not one of the Pharaoh's men survives "to proclaim through the cities to the wives of

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[82] Exodus, in Anglo-Saxon Poetry, trans. R. K. Gordon (New York, N.Y.: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1949), p. 123.

[83] Ibid., p. 128.

[84] Ibid., p. 126.

men the greatest of evil tidings, the fall of princes."[85] Similar language is used to describe the Hebrews. The Israelites are constantly called the "army" or the "host," and they often act as if they were part of a large army. Thus, when they are at the edge of the Red Sea awaiting the arrival of the Egyptians, the Hebrews separate their vast host into separate units, dividing the young and old, in preparation for battle to come. However, this emphasis on the prowess of the Hebrews in battle is not simply there for descriptive purposes, for several allusions in the poem look forward to the time where they will have to use their military ability to conquer their foes without God's direct intervention.[86]

The treatment of God in *Exodus* is similar to that of *Genesis B* in that the Lord is once again presented as a Germanic lord, and the usual secular obligations that bind a man to his lord have been once again carried over to the Creator.[87] Thus since the Hebrews have been faithful to him and have served him well, he protects them from the onrushing Egyptian horde by making an escape route through the Red Sea. The Egyptians had broken the promise which had been given to Joseph to allow the Hebrews to live in peace when they stole their treasure and made slaves of the tribes of Israel. Thus the drowning of the Egyptian army is an act of vengeance by God for having broken their promise and for having done such great harm to the children of Israel. The poet also describes how the Lord gave Moses His laws so that the people might obey and win entrance to Heaven. The poet states that Moses wrote down these laws in the Scriptures, and by studying them a man's soul will be

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[85] Ibid., p. 130.

[86] Irving, p. 30.

[87] Ibid.

granted many benefits. The poet then talks briefly of the coming of Judgement Day when God will punish those who have sinned and "He shall lead the souls of the righteous, the blessed spirits, to heaven, where are light and life, and also abundance of mercy."[88] In this work, like *Genesis B*, an effective merging has taken place between the Germanic and Christian worlds. *Exodus* succeeds admirably in presenting a Christian story and message within the framework of the Germanic heroic tradition.

However, although the vast majority of the tales of the Old Testament were easily unified with the traditions of the Germanic world, such was not the case with the stories of the New Testament. The tales of the Old Testament largely revolve around things which the Anglo-Saxons could easily understand--those which related the constant warfare between the Hebrews and other tribes that inhabited Israel; the stories of the numerous prophets and leaders that arose through God's will to lead His people to victory; and the tales of a just God who could be both kind and stern.[89] However, the majority of the tales in the New Testament are much more peaceful and relate the actions of men who resist attacks passively rather than strike back. The God of the New Testament is a more forgiving and kind Lord than the one of the Old Testament. Thus, the stories of Christ and his disciples could not be easily fit into the world of the Germanic hero. It was in the stories of St. Andrew, one of Christ's apostles, found in the *Andreas* and the stories of saints, such as St. Juliana and St. Guthlac, that the full development of the Christian hero would take place.

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[88] Exodus, p. 131.

[89] James H. Wilson, Christian Theology and Old English Poetry (The Hague, Netherlands: Mouton & Co., 1974), p. 44.

Andreas seems to mark a half-way point in the process of adaptation. The poem tells of a thoroughly Christian hero, but much of the language is still from the Germanic heroic tradition. However, the concepts of the heroic tradition, which had dominated both of the previously discussed poems, no longer play a controlling influence in this work. Rather they appear in isolated spots to emphasize an important point. The definition of heroism must be seen as in the process of transformation in this work. The emphasis was no longer be on such things as a hero's military prowess, their generosity to their thanes, or their quest to avenge the death of a fallen comrade. Rather it now focused on the Christian aspects of their character--their ability to resist the temptations of the devil; their patience in enduring innumerable tortures that often broke their bodies; and whether or not they could maintain steadfast faith in God in the face of all of these challenges. The Germanic heroic elements that are present in *Andreas* are usually there to better express concepts which an audience might have trouble comprehending, or to simply help the poet in the telling of the story.

The opening lines of the poem are a perfect example of the poet's use of the language of the heroic tradition to benefit the telling the story. The opening lines begin

> Lo! we have heard of twelve mighty heroes
> Honoured under heaven in days of old,
> Thanes of God. Their glory failed not
> In the clash of banners, the brunt of war,
> After they were scattered and spread abroad
> As their lots were cast by the Lord of heaven.
> Famous those heroes, foremost on earth,
> Brave-hearted leaders and bold in strife
> When hand and buckler defended the helm
> On the plain of war, on the field of fate.[90]

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[90] Andreas, p. 122.

This is a very unusual way to describe the twelve apostles of Christ, but it is most likely designed to reach out and grab the attention of the poet's listeners. However, if they thought what was to follow would be a great epic like *Beowulf,* full of mighty warriors and hideous monsters, they would be greatly surprised. The story concerns the trip of St. Andrew to rescue his brother and fellow apostle, St. Matthew, from the grips of the cannibalistic Mermedonians. St. Andrew hires a ship which is piloted by a sailor who is really Jesus Christ in disguise. During the voyage, Christ asks Andrew a number of questions in order to test his faith. After he has freed Matthew, Andrew himself is captured and subjected to four days of torture by the Mermedonians who serve the devil. After keeping his faith in the Lord during these trials, he is freed and granted miraculous powers. Andrew caused a flood to sweep down upon the Mermedonians, but when they repent their past sins the waters draw back and all the people are restored. The Mermedonians then became good Christians and were baptized by St. Andrew, who departed for his homeland after a short stay with the new converts.[91]

St. Andrew and his brother, St. Matthew, are treated as Christian heroes rather than great Germanic lord or warriors as one might expect from the first lines of the poem. They both endure horrible tortures at the hands of the Mermedonians that serve as a severe test of their faith in the Lord. Most Germanic warriors would not have the patience to endure these tortures without seeking vengeance for their loss of honor, and they would not be able to deal with the humiliation of letting others hurt and maim them.[92] These are two aspects that separate Andrew from the other heroes which have been examined in

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[91] Wrenn, pp.133-4.

[92] Greenfield, pp. 104-5.

this chapter. The patience and the ability to endure humiliation without feeling the need to strike back are Christian ideals. However, the main reason Andrew and Matthew are able to endure the long days of torture and humiliation is that they know the Lord will always be with them. This is clearly shown when God tells Andrew, as the saint is about to be captured by the Mermedonians, that he shall have to endure many tortures, but that the time has come to

> 'Harden your spirit, make steadfast your heart
> That men may perceive My strength in you.
> Nor can they, nor may they, against My will,
> Deep in sin, deal death to your body
> Although you endure the dreadful lash,
> Black deeds of wickedness. I shall be with you.'[93]

Andrew knows that God shall be with him through it all and although he might feel a great deal of pain, he shall not die unless the Lord should will it.

Andrew suffers through all the tortures for four days until, at long last, God frees him from his bonds and rewards him for his faith and loyalty by bestowing great powers upon him. At this point, if the poem were guided by the ethics of the Germanic heroic tradition, Andrew would have taken a bloody vengeance upon his captors that would have wiped them out of existence. Andrew does unleash upon the Mermedonians a huge flood as a punishment for having served the devil. A large number of youths are killed by the flood as it ravages Mermedonia, and the people gather together and ponder the dire straits in which they find themselves. One of the Mermedonians suggests that they should go to Andrew and "break his bonds...and beseech the saint for help and succour."[94] They then wisely proceed to go and beg Andrew for

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[93] Andreas, p. 153.

[94] Ibid., p. 163.

forgiveness, and the saint orders the flood waters to recede. The deluge sweeps into a huge chasm and takes with it the fourteen most evil men amongst the Mermedonians to endure the eternal torture of demons. The survivors realize their mistake and know that the true power lies with the Lord. Because of this Andrew

> sent his prayer before God's Son,
> Prayed that the Holy One grant His grace
> To all the youth who had lost their lives
> In the flowing waters, the grip of the flood.
> That their souls be not carried to the clutch of fiends,
> The anguish of torment, empty of good
> And deprived of glory. When the plea was spoken
> The prayer of the saint found favour with God,
> The Ruler of nations. Uninjured from earth
> He bade the youths rise whom the sea had slain.[95]

If Andrew had been a Germanic warrior in this situation, the youth that had died would never have been resurrected for all the members of the tribe would have been slain. Andrew has demonstrated another characteristic of most Christian heroes, not only by forgiving his foes once they have repented their sin and realized the error of their ways, but also by showing mercy to them by recalling the flood waters and praying that their dead be raised.

Andrew is much different from the heroes of the Germanic heroic tradition in that he battles his foes using non-violent methods. The disciple of Christ does not need to depend on physical prowess to prove himself to be a great hero. Andrew need only depend on his faith in God to bring him through his greatest challenges and to help him defeat his most malevolent foe--Satan. The devil himself comes up from the bowels of hell with six servants to further ridicule Andrew while he awaits the coming of the next day of torture. Satan begins by hurling insults at the saint saying that Christ had come down

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[95] Ibid., p. 164.

to earth to claim it as His own, but the King of Jews had been conquered and killed upon the cross. Satan then orders his fiends to attack the saint, but they are turned back when they see the symbol of the crucifix upon his brow. Satan is then reduced to simply insulting the saint, boasting that the Mermedonians shall destroy him, and that no one can save him. Andrew is not in the least disturbed by his insults. He only has to remind the Devil that God cast him out of Heaven, and that the woe he suffers in Hell would become worse and worse as time marches forward, to cause Satan to flee back to the pit. Andrew does not need to waste the effort it would take to battle the devil for his faith in God will always drive Satan back into the depths of the abyss. The Mermedonians and Satan can inflict as much pain as they wish upon Andrew's physical body, but they will never pose a direct threat to his soul so long as Andrew remains faithful to God.

The various aspects of the heroic tradition can be shown to have changed radically in the character of Andrew. The importance of the concept of loyalty is still stressed, but the way loyalty is shown has changed from the characters presented in the secular poems. Loyalty is shown to God by Andrew and Matthew by doing such things as maintaining their faith in the face of days of torture and by resisting the temptations and the insults of the devil.[96] God rewards Matthew for his faith and loyalty by freeing him from the grips of the Mermedonians. Similarly, the Lord removes the chains that bind Andrew and grants the saint the power to work miracles. The Christian hero no longer is bound to seek vengeance for any insults which are thrown against him for they are able to forgive their enemies. The concept of treasure has also changed in *Andreas*. It is not necessary for Andrew to give

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[96] Cherness, p. 181.

the sailor (Christ in disguise) monetary wealth to pay for their passage or to gain the man's friendship. Andrew is able to pay for his passage by teaching the man about the live of the Son of God and the lessons of the religion which He spawned (although it must be kept in mind that this is part of a test of Andrew's loyalty to his faith by Christ). Thus treasure usually refers to simply monetary wealth and no longer carries the symbolic meaning it did in the heroic tradition.

The heroes of *Andreas* were Christians and the ethical system upon which the poem is based was drawn from the precepts of the Church, but the Germanic heroic tradition was by no means dead in this work. The first eleven lines of the poem show that much of the language that was used in the epic poems is employed within *Andreas* as well. For example, Andrew and Matthew are constantly referred to as God's "thanes" or as His "warriors."[97] And it is also important to notice that many of the concepts of the heroic tradition are used by the poet to illustrate various points or to make a murky concept more understandable. Thus, the poet had Andrew's followers describe the vision of Heaven which they had seen in their dreams as if it were a Germanic comitatus:

> 'About the Noble One bands of angels,
> Thanes in thousands, encircled their Prince
> Praising in heaven with holy voices
> The Lord of lords....
> There was grace of glory
> Renown of warriors, noble demeanour,
> Nor was any sorrow there for any soul.'[98]

The portrayal of Heaven as an ideal Germanic comitatus is natural for this was probably the way in which most Anglo-Saxons viewed the afterlife. It would

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[97] Claes Schaar, Critical Studies of the Cynewulf Group (New York, N.Y.: Haskell House Publishers, Ltd., 1967), p. 312.

[98] Andreas, pp. 144-5.

naturally hold the most appeal to the members of secular society if Heaven were presented to them as a place of eternal feasting where they could always sit next to God in His great hall.

Another area in *Andreas* where heroic concepts are used is in the reply of Andrew's men to the sailor's offer to deposit them safely on land so that they could get out of the raging storm which surrounded the ship. They quickly reply that

> they would not agree
> That they should forsake at the vessel's stem
> Their beloved leader and choose the land:
> "If we desert you whither shall we wander
> Lordless and lonely, lacking all good?
> We shall be loathed in every land,
> Hated of all men where valiant heroes
> Sit in assembly holding debate
> Who best has bolstered his lord in battle
> When hand and buckler were bearing the brunt,
> Hacked with swords, on the field of fate."[99]

The poet is emphasizing the devotion of Andrew's men to their leader through the use of the heroic concepts of loyalty and the punishment which was brought by betrayal.[100] Yet this passage also reflects the complete acceptance of the importance of loyalty and devotion in the lives of Christian men as well.

However, the main concentration of heroic concepts within *Andreas* is in the descriptions of the Mermedonians. The race of cannibals is presented as a Germanic tribe of warriors. The poet describes how

> The host assembled; the heathen warriors
> Gathered in bands. Their battle-gear rang,
> Their war-spears rattled; their hearts were enraged
> Under their bucklers.[101]

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[99] Ibid., p. 132.

[100] Greenfield, p. 194.

[101] Andreas, p. 125.

The Mermedonians were brave warriors who could be good representatives of the Germanic heroic code except for the fact that they are under the influence of a very bad leader--Satan. The poet describes how they

> Recked not of right or the grace of God.
> Often they plunged to the pit of darkness
> Through the Devil's teaching when they put their trust
> In the power of fiends.[102]

However, the Mermedonians are not all bad. This is proven when they ask for forgiveness at the end of the poem and realize the error of their ways. The main problem with them is that they are under terrible leadership and are thus acting in a non-heroic fashion for which they are punished by the flood. Yet, once they have been baptized by Andrew they will make good and faithful Christians.

The conversion of the Mermedonians in *Andreas* shows that there is nothing wrong with following the precepts of the Germanic heroic tradition, but it can lead to disaster if the ruler should be corrupt or evil like Satan. The normal society of the Mermedonians has been disturbed by Satan. They could no longer partake of the hall-joys or experience the normal activities of heroic life until they shake off the leadership of Satan. Normalcy is restored once they become Christians. Thus it is best for the members of a Germanic tribe to convert in order to ensure lives of relative stability.[103]

Andreas is an example of a poem that is Christian, but uses the heroic concepts and language in a secondary role. The writer puts the language of epic poetry to extensive use in his work as well as using some of the concepts of heroic tradition to prove his point or present the basic messages of the

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Cherniss, pp. 184-5.

poem. The combination of the heroic and religious in *Andreas* is often rough and uneven. But the poet must be given credit for attempting such a merger in order to present the story of one of Christ's disciples through the use of heroic language. The writer may have been attempting to present a story about a hero whose qualities were very unlike those of the Germanic heroes of the past to a secular audience. In spite of the fact that it is not entirely successful, it is a notable step forward in the process of adaptation of the Germanic heroic tradition in Old English religious poetry.

The next development in this process can be seen in *Juliana*, one of the signed works of the Anglo-Saxon poet, Cynewulf. The plot revolves around the trials of the heroine, St. Juliana, a woman who is martyred during one of the waves of persecutions which took place in the reign of the Roman Emperors Diocletian and Maximian. The rich and powerful prefect of the city of Nicomedia, Eleusius, wished to marry Juliana, but she rebuffed him due to the fact that he was a pagan and she a Christian. However, she does say that if he converts to Christianity she will marry him. He is enraged at the thought that she could refuse him. He captures her and tries to get her to renounce her Christianity through the use of torture. While she is imprisoned in the dungeon, a devil comes up from hell to torment the heroine, but she captures him and makes him reveal how he seduces the minds on men. After she has completed her interrogation, Juliana lets the fiend go free only to have the ungrateful wretch return and try to convince Eleusius to slay her. She dismisses the fiend by simply staring at it, but Eleusius soon has her put to death after she has kept her faith in God through all the tortures that he has used to break her. But Juliana's death is soon followed by his own as Eleusius and his men are drowned in the middle of a raging storm at sea.

The heroine of the story is a devout Christian and shares many of the same heroic qualities of St. Andrew in *Andreas*. Juliana possesses incredible patience in dealing with her enemies, a strong faith in the Lord that can not be broken by the most devious tortures, and the ability to show mercy and lenience to one of the servants of Satan himself. Like St. Andrew she does not need to use physical force in her confrontation with the devil. All she needs to rely upon is her faith in the Lord and His help to keep the creature from the depths bound to her will. It is only natural, therefore, that the guiding ethical system of *Juliana* is that of the Christian religion. Cynewulf uses the language of epic poetry, for example, to call the victims of Maximian's persecution "the champions of God."[104] If he uses any of the concepts of the Germanic code in relation to Juliana, it is usually only for symbolic purposes. However, Cynewulf does put the concepts of the Germanic heroic tradition to use in describing the villains of the poem. He portrays Eleusius and his followers as being a Germanic war-lord and his band of thanes. By doing so he sharply criticizes many of the concepts within the heroic tradition.[105]

Cynewulf describes Eleusius as a man who would be very admirable in the light of the Germanic tradition:

> There was a rich man of noble lineage, a mighty prefect. And he did wield it over squadrons, and ever defended the land, and in the camp of Nicomedia held his treasure. Oft with zeal he prayed to heathen idols against the word of God. His name was called Eleusius, and he had mighty and illustrious dominion.[106]

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[104] Juliana, p. 129.

[105] Cherniss, p. 207.

[106] Juliana, p. 129.

Eleusius possesses all the qualities that compose a good Germanic hero, but his greatest flaw lies in the fact that he is a pagan. Cynewulf has thereby associated the best qualities of the Germanic heroic tradition with a heathen and this serves to discredit them from the very start of the poem. Eleusius is soon consumed by desire for Juliana, and believes that she will become his wife. After all, from his point of view he possesses all the qualities which any woman could ever desire in a man. He's the leader of a large group of retainers, he has achieved a great amount of glory and is descended from a noble family, and, most importantly, he owns a vast hoard of treasure. Juliana is not interested in his wealth for she "was greatly minded that she would preserve her purity unspotted of any sin for the love of Christ."[107] Thus she resists his advances "although he possessed treasure in the treasure-chest, vast wealth of jewels throughout the world."[108] Juliana's refusal to marry Eleusius just because he is wealthy is a clear criticism of the importance which Germanic heroic society placed upon wealth. Cynewulf is pointing out that all the wealth and material things of this world are unimportant to a Christian for they are temporary and do not reflect the true qualities of a person.

However, the main reason for Juliana's rejection of Eleusius is the fact that he is a pagan. She does not completely close the door on his proposal as she tells him:

> `For if thou dost love and believe in the true God and observe His worship, then dost thou understand the spirit of God, and quickly, yea without wavering, will I yield unto thy will. Likewise I say to thee that if thou dost put thy trust in any lesser God through idolatry, and dost promise heathen tribute, then mayest thou not have

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[107] Ibid., p. 130.

[108] Ibid.

> me, nor by compulsion take me to wife. Nor ever through harsh anger shalt thou prepare such mighty pain of cruel torture that thou mayest turn me from these words.'[109]

Eleusius could have easily become a Christian and seen that Juliana was simply telling him what he must do in order for her to accept his proposal. Instead he sees it as an insult to his honor, and is therefore bound by all that is right to take vengeance upon this woman. He angrily summons Juliana's father to him and righteously proclaims that his daughter "hath shown me dishonour for that she saith to me outright that of my love she recketh naught, or my affection."[110] Eleusius whines that he has suffered grievous harm from her insults for she has humiliated him in front of his people by asking him to worship some unknown God. The very concept of avenging one's honor is nothing more than sheer idiocy in this situation. The story of Juliana shows that this kind of obsession can lead to nothing but waste as a beautiful and kind woman is uselessly put to death because Eleusius feels that his honor had been impinged. Cynewulf is criticizing the whole concept of vengeance by pointing out that it will usually lead to such incredible tragedies as that of Juliana.

The father of Juliana, Africanus, sees that his lord has been mortally insulted by his daughter and so he swears

> 'by the true gods that as ever I shall find mercy at their hands or favour at thine, O Prince, in the joyous cities, that if these words be true, thou dearest of men, which thou sayest unto me, that in no wise will I be sparing unto her; but I will give her over to destruction, noble Prince, and into thy power.'[111]

The fundamental concept of loyalty to one's lord is here called into severe criticism. It has been shown that in the world of the Germanic hero, the

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[109] Ibid.

[110] Ibid., p. 131.

[111] Ibid., p. 131.

loyalty that bound a lord to his retainer was more important than the ties which united a family. Yet, the main examples of this conflict have been in life or death situations where the fate of hundreds of people depended on devotion to the lord rather than the family. This poem presents an example of the concept of loyalty being carried to ultimate extremes. It would be a very different story if Juliana actually posed a threat to Eleusius' life, and her father had no choice but to give her over to his lord in order to save his liege from death. Instead Juliana's father agrees to turn her over to a man who will certainly kill her on the basis of a simple insult. Cynewulf uses Africanus' decision as a warning that the bonds of loyalty must never lead a man to follow orders blindly with no thought as to the consequences. This is the basic problem that could arise out of the incredible importance placed upon loyalty in the Germanic tradition. As shown in *Juliana*, it was all too easy for men to fall under the sway of a bad leader, but not do anything about it since they are so used to obeying the orders of their lord without question if he has provided them with treasure.

Cynewulf takes another shot at the principle of vengeance when he has the devil which Juliana had so easily defeated return to encourage Eleusius to execute her. The devil laments that she forced him to become a traitor to Satan. He demands that vengeance be taken against her through the use of the sword. Yet, his desire for revenge is shown to be absurd in the light of his cowardice for it takes but one glance from Juliana to cause him to flee in panic back to the depths of hell.[112] It is also appropriate that Eleusius and his followers drown in a huge storm after having put Juliana to death. They

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[112] Daniel G. Calder, Cynewulf (Boston, Mass.: Wayne Publishers, Inc., 1981), pp. 97-8.

are quite justifiably sent to hell where they will suffer eternal exile with the devil. They had been deceived into believing that they could "look for their appointed treasure at the hands of their lord, so that they in the wine-hall, upon the beer-bench should receive rings and appled gold."[113] Only sinners and the servants of evil can truly suffer exile in the Christian world for God would never abandon those who were faithful unto Him.

Cynewulf's *Juliana* clearly shows that Christianity had come to dominate the Germanic heroic tradition in the later works of Old English religious poetry. The heroic concepts which had been so prevalent in *Genesis B* had been replaced by those of the Christian faith. They had been adapted to the point where poets such as Cynewulf could put them to use to criticize what they felt were the worst aspects of the Germanic tradition. Yet the poets could still use the Germanic heroic code to better illustrate difficult theological concepts. For example, when Juliana is questioning the captured devil, she asks him how he seduces the minds of humans to the forces of darkness. The fiend replies by describing how he assaults the walls which protect the minds of men with arrows of temptation that cause the man to betray God. However, the fiend sometimes encounters a champion of God whose soul is protected by strong walls that easily deflect his attacks. This is described in the martial imagery of epic poems, but it is only used figuratively and not intended the poet to be taken literally.

The writers of Old English poetry had at last reached the point where they could characterize a Christian hero while describing them in the language of the epics. They could use such concepts as the misery of an exile and the joy-filled life of feasting and companionship in a Germanic mead-hall as

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[113] Juliana, p. 150.

metaphors for the suffering of a Godless man and for what life was like in Heaven. The poems and prose of the *Life of St. Guthlac* provide a perfect illustration of all of the aspects of the transformation of the Germanic hero figure to the Christian in Old English religious poetry.

The story of St. Guthlac unfolds in two separate poems and a prose life written between 730 and 740 by an East-Anglian monk known as Felix. The early years of Guthlac's life are described by Felix who portrays him as a very mild and gentle youth until "a noble passion for power and greatness flamed up in his young heart."[114] Felix describes how "he called to mind the mighty deed of heroes of old and...gathered about his troops of followers, and took to a life of war."[115] Guthlac embarked upon a series of victorious campaigns that stretched over nine years in which he finally succeeded in driving his foes out of Mercia. This unnamed host of foes was so exhausted by the victories of Guthlac that they were forced to keep the peace. Guthlac was a man who had embarked on a career that would rank him among the greatest of the secular heroes. However, Felix relates that one night Guthlac was struck by a spiritual flame that burst into life within his heart. He "thought upon the miserable deaths that had concluded the shameful lives of ancient kings of his race in ages past, and...he considered the perishable wealth of the world and the pitiful glory of doomed life."[116] This leads him to abandon the ways of war and the quest for worldly glory in order to become a servant of Christ. The unknown poet who composed *Guthlac A* transformed this change of attitude

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[114] Felix, Life of St. Guthlac, in Anglo-Saxon Saint and Heroes, ed. Clinton ALbertson (Fordham, N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 1967), p. 176.

[115] Ibid.

[116] Ibid., p. 177.

into a philosophical debate between the angel and devil that served as the young man's guardian spirits. In both cases, Guthlac makes the choice that enables him to rise to a new level of heroism.

Guthlac A relates how the hero travels by himself to a lonely bog that is haunted by the devil's minions. The monsters which inhabit the swamp try to drive Guthlac off by threatening him with physical violence, showing him the corruption of young monks, and transporting him to the entrance of hell itself. Yet none of these are successful for God protects his servant so long as the saint maintains his faith in the lord. The devils are finally driven out of their former haunts without by the saint. This transforms Guthlac's home from a dangerous swamp, inaccessible to any human settlement, to a place that is safe for civilization.[117] After he has defeated the minions of hell, Guthlac falls ill and suffers for several days before ascending to Heaven which is the main subject of the second poem concerning the life of the saint.

Guthlac achieves far more glory as a servant of Christ than he ever could have hoped for in the secular world. The saint was able to live alone in a dank swamp which was isolated from almost all human civilization and inhabited by numerous devils and monsters. The hero who was guided by the Germanic code would have seen this kind of life as an example of the miserable existence of an exile. However, Guthlac's sojourn in the swamp was a voluntary action on his part and the saint had no fear of living alone. Guthlac knew that he would never be alone, for God would always be with him, even in the face of the monsters' greatest assaults. The Lord's presence made the horrible life that faced an exile bearable to any man who believed in Him. The willingness

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[117] Alvin A. Lee, The Guest-Hall of Eden: Four Essays on the Design of Old English Poetry (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1972), pp. 105-6.

of Guthlac to live alone in the middle of the swamp would also have served to increase his heroism in the eyes of most Anglo-Saxons who still considered the life of an exile as the most horrible fate that could befall any person.

The writers of both poems use the language of the epic to describe the saint. For example, the poet tells how "the warrior [Guthlac] abode blithe on the mount" after he had overcome the first temptation of the devils.[118] Heroic traditions are used exclusively as metaphors for spiritual concepts or to enhance the power of their poems. In *Guthlac A*, the poet uses martial imagery to describe Guthlac's arrival at the hill which would serve as his home within the swamp. The poet states that

> There the blissful champion,
> the bold in fight, was an example
> for many men in Britain, when he had
> mounted that hill and had prepared him zealously
> with spiritual weapons.[119]

The poet then goes on to describe how he raised a cross over the plain and tells how "the champion" overcame the challenges thrown against him by the devils. The writer states Guthlac was given victory by God as well as protection "when many foes came with their sudden darts to raise up strife."[120] The martial imagery of epic poetry is used in this passage to describe the conflict between Guthlac and the devils in physical terms, but it is clear that it refers to the spiritual battle between them.[121]

The writer of *Guthlac B* describes the feelings of Beccel, Guthlac's servant, as he relates the news of the latter's death to the saint's sister.

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[118] Guthlac A, p. 131.

[119] Ibid., p. 115.

[120] Ibid.

[121] Cherniss, pp. 230-1.

The speech is not only reminiscent of the lament of the last survivor in *Beowulf*, but it also calls to mind Beowulf's speech to Hrothgar in which he tells the Danish king that it is better to have courage in the face of death. Beccel states that

> 'Courage is best for him who must too oft
> experience sorrow at his master's bale, and deeply ponder o'er
> his grievous parting from his lord, when the season cometh,
> woven with fate's decrees; he knoweth it who must pine
> with sorrowing soul; he knoweth his generous dispenser
> to be hidden in the earth; bowed down, lamenting,
> he must depart from thence. He lacketh all joy,
> who suffereth oftentimes afflictions such as these
> in his sad soul.'[122]

The poet uses epic language to clearly illustrate to all his listeners the incredible grief which filled Beccel at the death of his lord. Beccel's speech calls to mind the lack of any sense of purpose which any thane would feel at the death of his lord. Beccel, who now has nowhere to go and no purpose in his life, will wander about as an exile for the rest of his days. This is what is revealed in the last words of Beccel's incomplete speech as he predicts that "sorrowing in soul, dejected, I must wander forth; my drooping spirit..."[123]

The poems and prose life that portray the hero St. Guthlac clearly show the development that had taken place in the world of Old English religious poetry. The saint had started his life as a secular hero who would have achieved glorious things and been an outstanding exemplar of the Germanic heroic tradition. But he instead chose to serve God and by doing so rises to a different and higher level of heroism. Guthlac had no need of physical weapons to defeat his opponents for he only had to depend on his faith in the

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[122] Guthlac B, in Gollancz, p. 187.

[123] Ibid., p. 189.

Lord to bring him victory. He had no desire for material wealth since the love of God was all the treasure that he ever needed to support him. The saint did not need to fear the terrors that often accompanied the life of an exile for God would always be with him and defend him against the monsters. Finally, Guthlac gained even more glory than he ever could have hoped to won as a secular hero by serving God for not only would his deeds be recalled in this world, but his achievements would also be forever remembered in Heaven by the angels of God.

At the end of *Guthlac A*, the poet, in a stirring passage, enumerates the qualities of the champions of God that enabled them to ascend to Heaven. The Christian heroes

> bear within their bosoms bright belief,
> holy hope, a cleanly heart;
> they worship the All-powerful; they have wise thought;
> hastening on their onward way unto their Fatherland,
> they cleanse their spirit's house, and with wisdom
> overcome the fiend, and restrain all sinful lusts
> within their hearts; brotherly love
> they foster eagerly, and to please God
> they mortify themselves, and adorn their souls
> with holy meditations; they execute on earth
> the heavenly King's behest; they love fasting;
> they secure themselves from wicked hate, and seek prayer;
> they toil 'gainst sin; they keep truth and justice.[124]

The ultimate reward for abiding by this ethical code is by far the greatest treasure which any man could ever hope to achieve in his lifetime:

> It shall not rue them, after their going hence,
> when they wend into the holy burgh,
> and straightway go unto Jerusalem,
> where joyfully they may for evermore
> freely behold the countenance of God,
> in peace, with their own sight; then truly it abideth,

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[124] Guthlac A, p. 153.

radiant and glorious unto all eternity,
in the joyous land of living men.[125]

The program for the adaptation of pagan literature and concepts set forth by the Church Fathers took very different paths in Old English secular and religious poetry. The background of the secular world was filled with wars between the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms and the violence of the two Danish invasions. This constant warfare and violence ensured the continuing strength of the Germanic heroic tradition in Old English secular poetry for the Anglo-Saxons would most admire someone who was a great warrior and leader. Thus, the process of adaptation and change in these poems was very small as Christianity simply accepted and adapted most of the precepts of the heroic tradition. The heroes of secular poems--Beowulf, Hrothgar, Byrhtnoth, Waldere--became warriors who were Christians and acknowledged that God was responsible for their great victories and good fortune. The great epics, such as *Beowulf,* were probably also used to educate their audiences on the most important points of Christian theology, as is shown by Hrothgar's warning to the Geatish hero to beware of arrogance, for he must remember that all good things came from the Lord.

The process of adaptation took an entirely different course in Old English religious poetry which was mainly intended for presentation within the monasteries of Anglo-Saxon England. The first poems, such as *Genesis B* and *Exodus,* were marked by the domination of the Germanic heroic tradition over the Christian religions. These are attributed to the time when the Christian religion was relatively new to Anglo-Saxon England and the traditions of the past still retained much of their strength even within the monasteries. Thus,

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[125] Ibid., pp. 153-4.

the poems took Christian stories mainly from the books of the Old Testament and told them in a Germanic framework. Therefore, Satan was treated as a disloyal retainer in *Genesis B* and both the Hebrews and the Egyptians are presented as tribes of Germanic warriors in *Exodus*. By doing this the poets were able to present Christian stories that glorified the power of God in a context all Anglo-Saxons could easily comprehend. The process of adaptation continued to develop, however, and the heroes of the poems soon became Christians that were still praised using the vocabulary of epic poetry.

The concepts of the Germanic heroic tradition were not as easy to deal with in some of the poems. For example, *Andreas* tells the story of the Christian hero, St. Andrew, but makes very extensive use of heroic language and concepts. This leads to the poem being very rough and uneven at times--such as the first eleven lines of *Andreas* that treat Christ's disciples as Germanic warriors. These lines make it sound as if the poem would tell of a great secular hero who would perform mighty feats of arms, but it is really about a Christian hero who never uses physical force against his foes. Yet, the writer of *Andreas* does successfully use the heroic concepts to describe the Mermedonians and show that people who followed the Germanic code were not eternally damned and could make good Christians. This marks the deliberate use of the Germanic heroic traditions as an integral part of the communication of the Christian message.

Cynewulf does this as well in *Juliana*, but he uses heroic concepts to criticize the worst aspects of the Germanic tradition. He also uses the heroic concepts as metaphors for theological concepts such as spiritual warfare which might have been incomprehensible to some listeners. This marked the final step in the adaptation of the Germanic heroic tradition as the

concepts and language of that code could be freely used to describe things metaphorically without the fear that their true meaning could be confused. Thus, the poems concerning St. Guthlac portray a new hero figure that could indeed be identified as Christian. It is also true that this new hero figure, thanks to the program of adaptation put forth by the Church Fathers, could still be described using qualities and language that were familiar to the Anglo-Saxons because their source was the Germanic heroic tradition.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Based on the evidence presented in this thesis, it appears that the literary program promulgated by the Early Church Fathers to guide the adaptation of pagan literature for use in setting forth the themes and values of the Christian faith did indeed have a significant effect on the literature of the Old English period. Further, it seems clear that the development of the hero figures portrayed in this literature was also shaped, at least in part, by this process of adaptation. Many early Christian writers and theologians were disturbed by the fact that pagan literature appealed to so many people. Some believed that these works should be destroyed and all church members should be barred from reading them. Others believed there were things of value to be found in this literature, realizing that many of these works could be adapted for the use and benefit of Christianity. What was needed were a set of principles to guide the process of adaptation. St. Augustine, in his book *De Doctrina Christiana,* sought to provide writers and theologians with guidelines that they could use to determine which pagan literature could properly be adapted for use in the Christian Church. He held that the best aspects of pagan literature were those could be used to promote the message of Christ. These should be preserved for use by the Church, and the rest were to be discarded and rejected.

Thus, when Christianity became the dominant religion of Anglo-Saxon England, the traditions of the past could still be maintained and preserved for future generations. This can be most clearly seen in the adaptation and transformation of Germanic heroic traditions and concepts in Old English literature. The main goal of the Germanic hero was the achievement of glory, not only by prowess in battle, but also by observing and fulfilling the maxims of the heroic tradition. If a hero remained steadfast in his loyalty to his liege and kinsmen, willingly shared the treasure that he won by his achievements, and sought vengeance for the death of a comrade or lord, then he would be truly worthy of admiration and men would remember him in poetry and song long after he had died.

However, the Christian hero was different in many ways from his Germanic counterpart. The ideal Christian champion did not seek worldly glory above all other things. Rather, it was more important that he achieve everlasting fame with the Lord God in Heaven. Nor did he thirst after material wealth. The rewards found in the afterlife were greater by far than mere earthly treasures. There was no need to seek vengeance for all mortals had to endure the trials and tribulations of this transitory existence. Thus a number of differences can be found between the Germanic and Christian hero figures found in Old English literature. Through the use of the program of adaptation set forth by the Early Church Fathers the best aspects of the Germanic heroic tradition were preserved for the use of Christianity.

The process of adaptation took two different paths in Old English literature. The Germanic heroic tradition would continue to be strongly portrayed in the characterizations of the hero figures in the secular poetry written in this period. Although the heroes of these poems are basically

representative of the Germanic tradition, they are also shown to possess a strong faith and to recognize that He is the real source of that which is good in their lives. And the Germanic and Christian hero figures shared a number of common values, enabling Anglo-Saxon writers to blend the two patterns of characterization in many of the secular poems written during the period. A more noticeable change occurs in the religious poems found in Old English literature. The early poems, such as *Exodus*, are distinguished by the retelling of a Christian story set in a world which is governed by the ethics of the Germanic heroic tradition. The poem describing the deeds of Sts. Andrew and Matthew, *Andreas*, marks a mid-point in the adaptation process as the heroes are fully Christian, but much of the language and many of the concepts used to characterize the hero of the poem find their origin in Germanic hero figures. Finally, the later religious poems of this period, such as *Juliana* and *Guthlac A*, portray heroes that are characterized using predominantly Christian values and concepts. The heroic language of the German tradition was still used to describe these heroes, but only when they could provide a strong Christian message to the listener, or to metaphorically illustrate a difficult concept of Christian theology.

The evolution of the hero figures found in Old English Poetry matches the guidelines set forth by the Early Church Fathers for the adaptation of pagan literature In the secular poetry of the period, many of the concepts of the Germanic heroic tradition have been retained, but the heros themselves have been Christianized and acknowledge the supremacy of God. The evidence presented in this thesis demonstrates that the hero figures in the religious poetry became were changed into figures that were clearly Christian in their nature, actions, and demeanor. The concepts of the Germanic tradition were

retained, but they were used only to make the message of the poem stronger or to help the audience better understand a point of Christian theology. It seems clear that then, based on an analysis of the research presented in this thesis, that the program of adaptation set forth by the Early Church Fathers did influence the development of Old English Literature and that an examination of the changes that occurred in the hero figures portrayed in this literature would lend support to that hypothesis.

Examined as a whole, the hero figures found in Old English literature express in many ways the changing nature of the world in which the Anglo-Saxon's lived. It was a time when the narrow vistas and limited perspectives of the pagan world were slowly being widened by the influence of Christian thought and doctrine. The values, folkways and traditions that had shaped the paths of life walked by their ancestors were slipping away. The influence of Christianity provided a life giving touch that reshaped and transformed the literature of the Anglo-Saxon people. The dark traditions celebrated in the oral poetry of the past gave way to a literature that told of the joys and wonders to be found in a new way of living, and hero figures such as Beowulf and St. Andrew who became shining symbols of what could be achieved by those who placed their faith in God. One of the great achievements of Old English Literature was the way in which it fused together the best of the Germanic and Christian traditions to provide hero figures that spoke to the needs of the Anglo-Saxon peoples and brought new hope to their hearts and lives.

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