

King Alfred the Great and the Moral Constitution of the English People

by

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this thesis is to analyze and investigate the literary revival and translation program that took place in the late ninth century under the directive of King Alfred the Great (849-899). This was a period of disruption and reorganization in English history due to Viking invasions. In response to these turbulent times, Alfred sponsored a program of literature translation of various historical, philosophical, and theological texts from Latin into English. He expressed his belief that the collapse of English prosperity was due to the failure of past generations to maintain the pursuit of wisdom. Thus, he believed that the continued survival of the English people rested on whether they would return to their former moral rectitude. This thesis will argue that Alfred's intention behind these translations was to create a moral constitution for his people that would redefine the behaviours and values that constructed the core of English identity. It will do this by examining the texts which Alfred translated himself: Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, Boethius' *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, and St. Augustine of Hippo's *Soliloquies*. These works taught such moral lessons as how to pursue wisdom, how to rule righteously, and the obligation to live respectively of eternal reward. Alfred offered such lessons to his people through these carefully selected texts and also through the accompanying prefaces and epilogues which he wrote specifically for each text. This investigation will involve both moral and political analysis which were both indivisible parts of medieval kingship. It was a king's duty not only to govern the people, but also to insure their spiritual and moral well being. The discussion of duty should not detract from the zeal with which Alfred undertook this program. He must have had a personal inclination toward academic study since he undertook these efforts so personally and extensively. With these understandings in mind it is comprehensible why Alfred would have thought it his duty to undertake this program. Therefore, this thesis will argue that it was Alfred's intention to fulfill his own duties as king by forming a constitution which would reflect the ideal English moral character for the emulation of his subjects.

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Introduction:

King Alfred the Great (849-899) ruled the kingdom of the West Saxons from his succession to his brother Aethelred in 871 until his death. Wessex had seen a period of substantial growth in the ninth century both under Alfred's grandfather, Ecgberht (r. 802-39), and his father, Aethelwulf (r. 839-58).¹ The first half of this century was defined by territorial expansion of the traditional West Saxon borders at the expense of the neighbouring kingdoms, especially Kent, which would retain its status as a separate kingdom, for a time, but under the authority of the West Saxon kings. The Kentish crown would subsequently be used as an appanage for secondary royal heirs. This would prove to be a source of frustration, particularly for Aethelwulf who faced the problem of civil war from his son Aethelbald who, according to Alfred's biographer Asser, conspired to seize his father's throne.² A brief period of conflict ended with the father confined to the eastern kingdom while Aethelbald maintained control over the West, the traditional base of West Saxon rule. These two kingdoms were combined under the solitary crown of Wessex at the ascension of Alfred's brother, King Aethelberht, in 860.³ Richard Abels argues that Aethelwulf had planned to follow the Carolingian succession model of parting two realms between his sons, and that it was only the threat of the Vikings, combined with a lack of heirs of suitable age, that forced his sons to consolidate the territory into one kingdom.⁴

¹ David Pratt, *The Political Thought of King Alfred the Great* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 17-18.

² Simon Keynes and Michael Lapidge, *Alfred the Great: Asser's Life of King Alfred and Other Contemporary Sources* (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 70.

³ Richard Abels, *Alfred the Great: War, Kingship and Culture in Anglo-Saxon England* (London: Longman, 1998), 30.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

Alfred's childhood was, in many ways, typical of a royal heir. He grew up in the royal court and was politically visible through his name which was affixed as a witness to royal charters.⁵ He also would have enjoyed typical noble activities such as hunting, which he considered a craft to be mastered. Hunting would be a favourite activity of the king throughout his life as a means of distraction from the duties of kingship. However, in many ways Alfred was distinct from his peers. Asser's *Vita* portrays Alfred as showing a great interest in literature and learning from an early age. Asser demonstrates this in narrative form with a story describing how Alfred's mother, Osburh, promised a beautifully decorated book as a reward to whichever child would learn it first.⁶ Doubtless, Asser provides this story as foreshadowing for Alfred's future interest in literature and his patronage of education.⁷ It is probably more symbolic than factual since it is very difficult to fit this story chronologically into Alfred's life, but nevertheless, it is indicative of Alfred's character.

Another rare event in Alfred's childhood was his pilgrimage to Rome. The historical record is quite unsettled about this event. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle places Alfred at the young age of four or five at the time of this journey, which seems exceptionally young.⁸ Furthermore, Asser records that his father, Aethelwulf, sent Alfred to Rome with a large company of nobles and while he was there Pope Leo IV crowned him as king.⁹ This is also historically problematic since at this time Alfred was still very young and had three older brothers still living.¹⁰ It seems that Asser may have repurposed the story of Alfred's childhood pilgrimage in order to explain his interest in church matters and also to assert his spiritual authority. While the details of this

⁵ Ibid, 53.

⁶ Keynes et al., 75.

⁷ Abels, 55.

⁸ Ibid, 60.

⁹ Keynes et al., 69.

¹⁰ Abels, 60.

trip are obscure, it nevertheless gives us a good understanding of the early influences on a young and impressionable mind. Alfred's experiences of the relative grandeur of Rome must have always remained impressed in his memory, even as he matured.

Even before the beginning of Alfred's reign Wessex was in turmoil. A great army of Vikings had arrived in 865, ravaging the Anglo-Saxon world.¹¹ Three out of the four English kingdoms were largely subdued by the Danes. First, under the banner of his brother, then after his accession to the throne, Alfred managed with great difficulty to push back the Danes and restore order to his kingdom. Alfred would have been remembered as a successful king just for his military campaigns alone, but the truly remarkable part of his reign is the depth to which he transformed the military, society, and culture of the West Saxons. Alfred's reforms are what make him a truly remarkable king and the sole English monarch to earn the title "The Great". Alfred's reforms began with the military, which desperately needed stabilization after the many years of defence against the Danes. He established a network of *burhs*, fortified towns, which could be used as the bases of military operations in both offensive and defensive wars.¹² He also organized the first standing army in English history. Alfred's *fyrð* helped insure that the West Saxons would be prepared to respond to any threat in a timely manner rather than having to rely on the retinues of the nobility which, according to the feudal obligations, were only at the king's disposal for a very limited period each year. He also earned the reputation as the father of the English navy.¹³ He constructed a fleet of his own of ships that were larger than the Danish ones and made from a unique design that did not follow the surrounding navies.

¹¹ Ibid, 113.

¹² Ibid, 194.

¹³ Ibid, 305.

Alfred was not content to settle for reforms to Wessex's military organization. He also produced a legal code which was a codification of the legislation of his forbearers, and especially the laws of the seventh century West Saxon king Ine, although there is some debate among scholars regarding the originality of Alfred's *domboc*.¹⁴ This thesis will examine Alfred's literary reforms and the educational program that he established. In the later years of his reign, Alfred invited many scholars from across Western Europe to come to his court including those from Wales, the birthplace of his famous biographer Asser, the old but much weakened Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia to the north of Wessex, as well as some from the Frankish kingdom on the continent.¹⁵ Alfred's educational reforms involved the sponsorship of the translation of various works into the vernacular. These included the *Dialogues* of Pope Gregory the Great, the *Histories* of Orosius, and *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by the Venerable Bede.¹⁶ Most historians believe that the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* was commissioned by Alfred as well, or that it should be, at the very least, associated with his reign. Lately, some scholars have considered the question of Alfredian sponsorship of the *Chronicle* more skeptically, but the majority still associate it with this series of educational and literary reforms. Other pieces of writing of historical significance produced in this period are Alfred's treaty with the Danish Earl Guthrum as well as Alfred's will.

The core texts of this literary production are *Pastoral Care* by Pope Gregory the Great, *On the Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, the *Soliloquies* of St. Augustine.¹⁷ These works attract the greatest attention from scholars because they make up a subset of the body of

¹⁴ Ibid, 34.

¹⁵ Ibid, 222.

¹⁶ Ronald Ganze, "The Individual in the Afterlife: Theological and Sociopolitical Concerns in King Alfred's Translation of Augustine's Soliloquies," *Studia Neophilologica* 83, no. 1 (2011): 21.

¹⁷ Ibid.

literature produced during Alfred's reign. Traditional historiography credits the authorship of these three texts, along with the first fifty Psalms, directly to Alfred, while the other works are the products of other translators. This stance on the authorship of these core texts goes all the way back to the ninth century, and the majority of scholars still hold it today.

Recently, there has been debate over the extent of Alfred's involvement in these translations, whether he undertook them independently or with heavy reliance on his scholarly court. Furthermore, a few scholars led by Malcolm Godden have begun to doubt whether Alfred was, in fact, directly involved in the actual translation of these texts. This debate will be addressed in more detail in the historiography chapter of this thesis. The question of authorship will probably never be fully settled, but it is my position that Alfred was highly involved in the work of translation. Ascribing these works to Alfred as translator certainly assumes him to be an exceptional individual and king, but the requirement of exceptional status is not sufficient to overturn the evidence of his authorship. These were some of the most influential works of literature in early medieval Europe and it is highly significant that Alfred was making them available in the vernacular in a time when literacy was nearly analogous to Latin education.

This thesis argues that Alfred undertook these educational reforms with the intent of constructing a moral constitution for the Anglo-Saxon people. In other words, he wanted to clearly define the character and behaviour of a true Englishman. It is impossible to read the works of this educational program without immediately recognizing the centrality of the theme of morality in them. I use morality in its broadest sense to refer to practical, political, social, and spiritual applications. The concept of a constitution is not frequently used in relation to early medieval kingdoms, but I believe it fits well in this context. It seems probable to me that Alfred intended to establish the basic principles and tenets of his kingdom through the use of these texts.

Certainly, this expression is not typical of its time, but Alfred's reforms merit special language due to the unprecedented scale of this work.

David Pratt has discussed Alfred's use of education in his book *The Political Thought of Alfred the Great*. He describes the actions of Alfred as using "learning as a tool of kingship."¹⁸ The concept of using education as a tool for political purposes provides a basis for my argument that the king's intention was to create a constitution for his kingdom, in this case a moral constitution. Pratt demonstrates the precedent for his methodology by looking at various twentieth-century scholars. He discusses the work of Michel Foucault and his idea that language is an expression of power which is able to "order and reinforce the organizing structures of social groups, through institutionalized thought."¹⁹ The importance of language and its use by political powers is a foundational element to my thesis. It is necessary to recognize that language, in this case in written form, has the power to create and establish political and social institutions. A constitution is itself expressed through language, and therefore, for it to have any efficacy, language must have the power to create and organize political and social structures. Pratt argues that Foucault's line of thought in this case is sound, although he believes that this methodology should not be applied incautiously throughout the middle ages.

Pratt also discusses Norbert Elias' line of reasoning that state building can occur "from above" through the means of cultivating certain behaviours.²⁰ Elias considered this to be most intensely true in the early modern age, and this means of state building only existed in seed form in the middle ages, but Pratt applies this interpretation much earlier, to the actions of King Alfred. Pratt provides a convincing argument that the methodologies invented by these

¹⁸ Pratt, 7.

¹⁹ Ibid, 9.

²⁰ Ibid, 10-11.

twentieth-century scholars can be applied to the reign of Alfred. This forms the basis of my argument that Alfred used language, in the form of translated written texts, as a political tool in order to construct a moral constitution for his kingdom and encourage certain behaviours from his people.

As previously mentioned, the literary and educational scheme that Alfred drew up involved a broad range of texts crossing multiple genres: history, philosophy, theology, and law. A survey of the whole body of literature produced in the ninth century would be far too great a project for this thesis. On the other hand, narrowly focusing on a single text would not provide the comparative perspective necessary to convincingly argue a broad scheme. Therefore, it is my intent to look at a limited, but still substantial set of texts by focusing my investigation on the more philosophical texts. Traditional historiography has credited Alfred as the direct translator of these works, and, therefore, they give us a more intimate view into the thoughts and beliefs of the king himself. The three works that I will examine in this thesis are Alfred's translations of Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care*, Boethius' *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, and St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*. This is arguably a substantial body of texts; as a result, this thesis will not be able to explore them in as much depth as they deserve. However, I believe that a broad comparative study of these works is a worthwhile trade-off for the depth that a more focused investigation would provide.

The line of thought that I am exploring through the investigation of these three works could be applied more broadly to the whole Alfredian corpus. Alfred Smyth has commented that the historical works of Alfred demonstrate a continuous narrative of the rise of Christianity.²¹ He

²¹ Alfred P. Smyth, *King Alfred the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 529.

believes that these works develop a central thought which culminates in the full Christianization of the English people. The first text is Orosius' *Historiarum Adversum Paganos Libri VII*, which shows the growth of Christianity and how it ultimately replaced classical paganism. Next, Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* shows how the Anglo-Saxons arrived on the island as pagans themselves, who ultimately converted to Christianity. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* follows a similar progression. These works provide a broad view of history which shows the growth and triumph of Christianity, and the latter two clearly define a place for the English in that story.

The implications of these works could certainly be considered in relation to Alfred's creation of a moral constitution. Without doubt, Alfred considered the extent of one's adherence to Christian standards to have real world effects as he demonstrates in his prose preface to *Pastoral Care*. Alfred believed that it was the abandonment of the spiritual duty of learning that brought the blight of the Vikings upon the English. The Vikings were a result of atrophied English learning, not the cause of it. Therefore, it is logical to think that Alfred would use his literary scheme to create a perception of the inevitable and continual growth of Christianity in order to elicit a return to the faith. Although thematic similarities may be drawn to the historical works, it would be far too ambitious to attempt such a feat for this thesis; therefore, this will be left for future research.

I intend to show, in each of the following chapters, the virtues that Alfred saw represented in each of these texts.²² While there are similarities, especially between *On the*

²² I am relying on various modern English translations for my analysis of these texts. This creates a limitation in my ability to discuss issues related to the interpretation of the original Anglo-Saxon texts. On occasions where I have discussed those issues, I am doing so under the guidance of other scholars whom I have cited. In cases where I weigh different interpretations, I do so based on the strength of the arguments of these scholars rather than on my own linguistic analysis.

Consolation of Philosophy and the *Soliloquies*, each text has unique contributions to the production of Alfred's moral constitution. Chapter Two will discuss Alfred's translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*, which in Old English has the title *Hierdeboc*, or Shepherd Book. This text outlines the duties of a shepherd, which is a favourite metaphor used to represent spiritual leaders as far back as the earliest Christian tradition. Therefore, this was most directly relevant to the clergy, but there is good reason to believe that Alfred intended the lay nobility to learn from its lessons as well. *Pastoral Care* discusses the legitimate use of authority and how that authority must be maintained for the betterment of society rather than for the fulfilment of personal ambition. This work is famous among scholars for its preface, which contains the clearest expression of Alfred's intent in his translations as well as the audience which he hoped to reach.

Chapter Three will discuss Alfred's translation of Boethius' *On the Consolation of Philosophy* and how Alfred took a work which does not display any definitively obvious Christian association and brought it into the realm of Christian thought. This book provided Alfred with a resource through which to discuss what was for him a paramount virtue, wisdom. Wisdom acts as a key anthropomorphized character in this work and demonstrates stability and closeness with God. Alfred draws a strong contrast between this character and the personified Fortune. She, in contrast to Wisdom, is fickle and arbitrary. She bestows her gifts and takes them away unexpectedly. Alfred, through this work, instructs his people to seek wisdom rather than trusting themselves to the unstable favour of fortune. Alfred also uses this book as an educational tool through which to explore the nature of the divine. Discussion of a divine perspective allows the reader to accept truths that seem contrary to perception. This work asserts that the good will receive rewards that cannot be taken away while the wicked trust in the winds of fate. Wisdom

argues that an eternal perspective also shows that true power rests in the hands of the righteous, and that, despite our limited perception, the evil have no power.

A third underappreciated work, which is the subject of Chapter Four, is the translation of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*. Similarities to *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, as well as its brevity, have often left this work understudied and underappreciated. However, the *Soliloquies* offers valuable insight into Alfred's intentions. Its preface provides a unique take on Alfred's own intentions for his translational program. In contrast to the preface in *Pastoral Care*, it is far more explicit in its description of a systematic program of translation and offers an alternate take on Alfred's purpose for this undertaking. This translation uses detailed references to Anglo-Saxon political and social structures which has the dual effect of making the arguments of this text more relatable to an Anglo-Saxon audience, as well as emphasizing the legitimacy of those institutions which it describes. Alfred also used this text as a stage from which to launch his own investigation into eschatological matters of the self. He asks the question, which Augustine declined to answer, whether human knowledge will persist into the afterlife, or whether it will be wiped clean. In the end, he concludes that it will not only continue into the afterlife, but it will grow in relation to the basis which one acquires in this life. This allows Alfred to emphasize the importance of seeking wisdom and virtue in this life as they have real and permanent consequences in the next.

Alfred uses these three works to establish a constitution for his people which he wants to have govern their moral behaviour. The implications cover moral behaviour on every level, from practical, social and political actions to spiritual contemplation and cultivation of one's own intellect. However, before these investigations can begin, we must look at the historiography that covers Alfred's literary reforms. In order to get a sense of Alfred's intent in this project, it is

necessary that we investigate the man himself and see what sort of individual he was. It makes little sense to form an argument around his political and moral purposes until we establish that Alfred was the sort of man who had the political creativity and ambition to use his royal power for the moral development of his people. For this reason, Chapter One will discuss the historiography concerning the character of Alfred and how we may understand this king who undertook such an ambitious project.

Chapter 1: Historiography

The historiography surrounding Alfred the Great has been nearly universally positive. Some kings are the centre of debates about whether to consider them good and effective kings or whether they deserve a negative reputation. This is not the case with Alfred. However, there have been several debates among historians about how to understand the nature of his translation program and educational reforms. One of the more recent debates, but foundational to all considerations of Alfredian literature reforms, is whether Alfred was truly involved in the translations or whether these texts have been misattributed to him. A second debate is on the question of when Alfred received his education. Asser's biography says that his education began at the age of thirty-nine. This has caused some difficulty for historians in understanding how he could have been capable of producing such a body of literature if his education came so late. A third debate is whether to consider Alfred successful in his efforts. This of course also involves trying to ascertain what Alfred's intentions were before any evaluation of his success can be made.

The final debate of this chapter, and perhaps one of the most long standing and significant, is whether to view Alfred as primarily a scholar who undertook this work to satisfy his own desire for education or a pragmatist who wanted to reform his kingdom. Some are content to see Alfred as intelligent, but at his core a pragmatist. The purpose behind his scheme of re-educating the kingdom was to restore its moral status and thereby both appease God, who had been punishing them with the scourge of the Vikings, and to establish order in his kingdom. However, there is another school of thought that presents Alfred as a true scholar and one of the most prolific minds of the ninth century. He undertook the re-education of his kingdom because of his own personal love of learning and his desire to share that love in the role of a true

philosopher-king. These debates have been staged throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and are essential to understanding the basis of Alfred's actions and intentions in his translation programs.

A discussion of the historiography of Alfred's educational reforms would be incomplete without addressing the question of the veracity of Alfredian authorship. Paul Szarmach has published an article in *A Companion to Boethius in the Middle Ages* which he titles, "Boethius's Influence in Anglo-Saxon England: The Vernacular and the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*". In it, he seeks to discover the presence of the vernacular translation in the years following Alfred's reign. Szarmach is unsure about the authorship of this translation. He discusses both sides of the debate, squaring up Ian Jack, Malcom Godden, and Michael Treschow on one side, which denies the authenticity of the texts' claim to Alfredian authorship.²³ Opposing these authors are Nicole Guenther Discenza, David Pratt, and Janet Bately, all of whom hold the traditional view and affirm Alfred as the translator.

Szarmach presents three primary theories surrounding the issue of authorship.²⁴ First is the traditional view that Alfred translated it himself, although even the most ardent of Alfredian supporters would not suggest that he did it without assistance. The second view suggests that some courtier or teacher served as a ghostwriter and used Alfred's name, either with his consent or by his command. These two theories are not mutually exclusive. If Alfred was the translator, it seems probable that he would have sought help from his cadre of highly trained scholars on how best to go about the project. It seems unlikely that he would have assembled such a group of

²³ Paul E. Szarmach, "Boethius's Influence in Anglo-Saxon England: The Vernacular and the *De Consolatione Philosophiae*," in *A Companion to the Boethius in the Middle Ages*, ed. Noel Harold Kaylor, Jr. and Phillip Edward Phillips (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 225.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 235.

scholars and not used them in this capacity. Certainly, no historian would suggest he did it alone. On the other hand, even if Alfred was not the primary translator, a work that bore his commission along with the authoritative stamp of his name must have had some level of review from the king, and therefore at least a minimal input. Therefore, these two theories of translation should not be considered mutually exclusive, but rather part of a spectrum. The question is not whether Alfred translated the *Consolatio*, but rather the extent to which he was involved.

The third theory is that the translation was completed by someone totally separate from Alfred's court, who merely forged Alfred's name as a means of legitimizing the work.²⁵ However, this theory is difficult to reconcile if Alfred's claim in his preface to *Pastoral Care* is correct, that he could not find one literate man in his kingdom. While this statement seems to be a hyperbole, it suggests that Latin literacy was so rare in the 9th century that it is difficult to imagine such a translation occurring without the knowledge of the king. If someone within Alfred's court had translated this work secretly, it is difficult to imagine how it could have been propagated publicly without coming to Alfred's attention. On the other hand, even if there were someone outside of Alfred's court but still near enough to him to see Alfred as a desirable pseudonym, it is still no less difficult to imagine that Alfred would be ignorant of his existence. Perhaps a potential forger could have belonged to a period after the death of Alfred, thus obviously escaping the king's notice. However, this too is problematic because the further we stray from the period of Alfred's reign the closer we come to Aethelweard and his chronicle compiled some time before his death (c. 988). It is difficult to imagine a secretive translation, bearing Alfred's forged name, appearing any time close to Aethelweard since such a work, not bearing royal commission, would require more time to reach a wide distribution since it would

²⁵ Ibid.

not have access to official means of distribution. This leads back to the translation of the *Consolatio* in Alfred's time and setting it up as a work of great cultural influence with, at a minimum, royal endorsement.

The debate about authorship is most palpable in a pair of articles written recently, one by Malcolm Godden, and the other, in reply, by Janet Batley. In the first, "Did King Alfred Write Anything?" Godden examines the question of authorship from two directions: the difficulties in accepting Alfredian authorship and the reasons for which to doubt the evidence that he did.²⁶ Godden demonstrates some rather legitimate reasons to doubt the external sources that discuss Alfred as a translator. The earliest source that exists which describes Alfred as a translator is Aelfric, writing a century later.²⁷ The only text he credits to Alfred is Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* which modern historical consensus does not attribute to Alfred. In the twelfth century, William of Malmesbury wrote a much more extensive list of Alfredian translations, but it still does not line up with the modern consensus, and he is quite late to be an authoritative source.

Godden has grounds for doubting the external evidence that presents Alfred as a translator. However, he goes further to argue that the internal evidence is also unreliable. The individual texts explicitly claim Alfred as their author, but this is not without historical precedent.²⁸ He references Charlemagne, primarily, who had many royal treatises written in his name, but no one seriously imagines him to be the author. He argues that these treatises represent a strong precedent of courtiers being allowed to speak in the voice of the king. I have no doubt in Godden's conclusion that Charlemagne did not literally write these texts and may not have even been involved in their creation. However, this does not provide a direct comparison to Alfred.

²⁶ Malcolm Godden, "Did King Alfred Write Anything?" *Medium Aevum* 76, no. 1 (2007).

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

The reason that historians deny these claims of Charlemagne's authorship is that the historical record claims that the king was illiterate. However, this is not the case with Alfred. Certainly, there is some vagueness surrounding the discussion of how and when Alfred learned to read, but the consensus remains that he was literate. So, while it was impossible for an illiterate Charlemagne to write his treatises, this does not cast significant doubt on Alfred's authorship.

Godden also raises several objections within the texts themselves. First, he argues that the differences between the texts suggest different authors.²⁹ He accepts that linguistic differences are inconclusive in determining authorship, since an author can change his style over time. However, he argues that the different approach to translation between these texts strongly suggests different authors. The fact that *Pastoral Care* was translated very literally in comparison to the *Consolation of Philosophy*, and the *Soliloquies* has a whole new added book is too great of a style difference to attribute to a single author. This seems like a weak argument because the differences in translation approach are easily accounted for by many possible solutions. Perhaps the translator matured and felt more secure in his ability and thus more confident in making significant alterations. Godden admits this as a possibility but dismisses it far too easily without much consideration. It is also possible that differences in approach demonstrate a different understanding of the authority of the texts. Batley argues in reference to this point that the difference simply suggests a different significance of each work in its historical context.³⁰

²⁹ Ibid, 13.

³⁰ Janet Batley, "Did King Alfred Actually Translate Anything? The Integrity of the Alfredian Canon Revisited," *Medium Aevum* 78, no. 2 (2009): 191.

Another problem that Godden sees in relation to these translations is the critique they offer of kingship, especially in the *Consolation of Philosophy*.³¹ He references a specific passage that satirizes kings rather scathingly, presenting them as oppressive, having exalted minds, and unable to abide even the slightest indignity. However, this criticism is not difficult to reconcile with the complex character of Alfred. Although he may have been king, he had reason to feel critical of the role. As a child, and the youngest of five, he probably never expected to become king and only accepted the crown reluctantly out of duty. Also, the political machinations of his brothers against their own father might have given Alfred a somewhat cynical perspective of the abuses of kingship. This might have led him to become more critical than those who were groomed their whole lives to be kings. Batley has also noticed this same issue with Godden's argument.³² She says that since Alfred would have spent so much of his life as a courter under his older brothers, he would have understood and sympathized with the vulnerabilities of those under the king.

Godden also argues that it is very difficult to believe that Alfred translated these texts because that would require exceptional circumstances considering the historical record. He discusses Alfred's late education; he did not receive a Latin education until the age of thirty-nine according to Asser.³³ Also since the *Life of King Alfred* makes no mention of Alfred translating anything, any translation program probably could not have begun until after 893, the year that Asser finished writing.³⁴ This means that all of Alfred's translation program must have been crammed into the final six years of his life, three of which were busied with war against the Danes. Admittedly, these are difficult issues to answer, but this is not an insurmountable

³¹ Godden, 13.

³² Batley, 191.

³³ Godden, 2.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 2-3.

obstacle. Batley argues in response, that the *Life* does not always present the most reliable information as it often appears more like a panegyric than unassailably factual history.³⁵

Batley may be correct to doubt Asser's assertion that Alfred did not learn Latin until late in life, but, on the other hand, this difficulty may be answered without resorting to doubting Asser. Certainly, the translation program as Godden describes it would require Alfred to have had an exceptional intellectual ability. However, this is not unreasonable to accept at face value; exceptional people do exist. A series of translations into vernacular in the ninth century is an exceptional event in its historical context, so why should we doubt the presence of people with high ability behind it? Godden certainly does present some significant points on which to question Alfredian authorship, but his arguments are far from conclusive. So, while the question of authorship cannot be fully settled, this thesis will continue on the premise that Alfred was the translator of these texts.

One of the major debates surrounding Alfred's life regards his education. Asser tells us that Alfred did not begin his education until his thirty-ninth year, which creates some problems in understanding how he could have produced this literature. This debate is important because much of the evaluation of Alfred's intent with this program rests in his own experience with education. The debate breaks down into two main camps. One camp takes Asser's word that Alfred was educated late, while the other doubts the accuracy or precision of the biographer's statement and presumes that Alfred must have had, at the very least, a basic education and literacy as a child. At the beginning of the twentieth century there were several historians who wrote biographies about King Alfred, and each portrayed him in a slightly different light. One

³⁵ Batley, 190.

such biographer was Alfred Bowker, who spent a year as mayor of Winchester from 1897-98, then in 1899 he compiled a series of essays about various aspects of the life of Alfred.

One of these chapters, authored by the bishop of Bristol, is titled *Alfred as a Religious Man and an Educationalist*. This essay highlights the early education of Alfred in the court of his father King Aethelwulf.³⁶ Despite the devotion of Aethelwulf to his children, and especially Alfred, the young boy did not receive an advanced education, especially since his mother was likely illiterate. It was not until Aethelwulf's second marriage to Judith, daughter of the Frankish King Charles the Bald that Alfred's education really began.³⁷ The bishop credits Judith with creating the spark of Alfred's lifelong interest in learning. As a Frankish princess, she would likely have had access to the famous illuminated manuscripts of the court of Charles the Bald, and by introducing these to Alfred she sparked in him an interest in searching out the learning in those books.

Despite an interest in learning as a child, Alfred did not receive a proper education until late in life. As a youth his education suffered as a result of the lack of available scholars to teach him.³⁸ As a young adult he was hampered by recurring bouts of an unknown disease compounded by the constant threat of attack by the Danes and the various duties of kingship. Because of these factors, Alfred did not have the opportunity to satisfy his desire for learning until very late in his life. Once Alfred made peace with the Danes, he turned his attention to establishing a proper system of education which targeted all the children of the nobility, and perhaps some of those outside of the nobility, who had the freedom to pursue it.³⁹ While the

³⁶ Alfred Bowker, *Alfred the Great* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1899), 77.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 80.

³⁸ *Ibid*.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 88.

bishop acknowledges Alfred's own curiosity with respect to learning, he presents Alfred as a man who never had the opportunity to pursue his desire because of the many demands of his position.

These perspectives are supported by another essay in Bowker's biography. In the chapter *Alfred as a Writer*, Rev. Professor Earle argues that Asser's biography of Alfred leaves two possible interpretations of Alfred's character.⁴⁰ This limitation stems from the fact that Asser says that Alfred did not receive any Latin education until late in life. Either Alfred was a prodigy who, despite a poor educational upbringing, was able to learn difficult subjects later in life, or he remained mostly illiterate with an unfulfilled desire for learning. Earle leans closer to the second alternative. With respect to the translation program, he argues that Alfred's goal was to produce a text that would be useful to his subjects, and so the works translated by his court should be viewed as practical guides rather than the philosophical contemplations of the original authors.⁴¹ One important thing to note in Alfred's translations is the rather loose manner in which he tended to produce the texts in English. He would frequently break from the original text to add his own thoughts and explanations.

The interpretation of these alterations is highly significant to understand Alfred's own mind. Earle largely discredits the originality of Alfred's notes. He presents the evidence of German scholarship on the text *On the Consolation of Philosophy* which has discovered various Latin iterations of Boethius' work that possess similar additions to Alfred's.⁴² Thus, Earle argues that Alfred's ingenuity in translation has been overstated, and that he may have been drawing on ideas that were already circulating. The understanding of Alfred as a relatively insignificant

⁴⁰ Ibid, 171.

⁴¹ Ibid, 181.

⁴² Ibid, 184.

voice with regards to his contribution to medieval scholarship stems from Earle's belief that Alfred did not receive a strong education until later in life. Without an early education, Alfred did not have the foundation that he needed to participate in elite scholarship.

One of the greatest barriers to viewing Alfred as a mature scholar is that he himself bemoaned his own illiteracy. Edward Conybeare tackles this issue saying that by claiming to be *illiteratus* Alfred was simply admitting that he did not possess the training to read in a proper scholarly manner.⁴³ According to this theory, Alfred was fully literate in English, and already possessed a passable literacy in Latin as well, at the time he began to invite scholars of high reputation to join his court. Thus, he was already familiar with the major works of literature and his mind was ripe for training in literary criticism. Therefore, he sought to educate himself by inviting Western Europe's leading scholars to his court. This interpretation does suffer from the contradiction to Asser's claim that Alfred did not learn to read until later in his life. However, if Conybeare is right about this interpretation of illiteracy, then perhaps that answers Asser's objection as well.

The medieval British historian Alfred Smyth advocates for a scholarly vision of King Alfred. According to Smyth, the understanding of Alfred's capacity as a scholar rests in the debate over the authenticity of authorship of Asser's *Life of King Alfred*.⁴⁴ If we accept Asser as the author of this work, then we must take him at his word as an eye-witness to Alfred's Latin illiteracy until the age of thirty-nine. If it is the case that Alfred did not learn to read Latin until later in life, then his translations are a first foray into a new and complex body of reading, and the alterations which he made are likely simplifications to aid his own understanding. However,

⁴³ Edward Conybeare, *Alfred in the Chronicles* (London: Elliot Stock, 1900), 48.

⁴⁴ Smyth, 568.

there is a group of scholars who believe that the *Life* has been misattributed to Asser and was not authored by anyone in Alfred's court, making many of the specific details suspect. Smyth is part of this camp of scholars, and, therefore, he dismisses Alfred's late literacy completely arguing that Alfred must have been well versed in Latin and familiar with the literature by the time he began translating. By doubting Asser's authorship of the king's biography, Smyth looks solely at Alfred's translations and concludes that the best portrait of him is as a mature and scholarly mind.

It is difficult to be conclusive on this issue of when Alfred received most of his academic training. The deciding factor rests mostly on whether we accept Asser's assertion that the king only began his education at age thirty-nine. Testing the veracity of the *Life of King Alfred* is not the purpose of this thesis, so I cannot take a firm stand on this issue. However, the balance of evidence does seem to lean more in the direction of a late education, especially since Alfred himself lamented the state of Latin education in his kingdom.

By the middle of the twentieth century, there was slightly less scholarship surrounding the life of Alfred, but still a significant contribution to the overall historiography. A third debate which arose at this time considered the success of Alfred's education program. The perspective provided by Eleanor Duckett in her biography is of an uneducated man who had a thirst for learning but was ultimately flawed as a scholar, more due to circumstances than his own capabilities. She posits that Alfred did have a genuine thirst for learning coupled with a desire to restore the atrophied scholarship of his kingdom.⁴⁵ However, she presents the damage to the collective education as irreparable, or at least beyond the reparation of a single generation. Even

⁴⁵ Eleanor Duckett, *Alfred the Great and His England* (London: Collins, 1957), 99-100.

the court of scholars that Alfred gathered was flawed. Duckett points specifically at Asser's *Life of King Alfred* and notes the poor Latin in its composition.

So, despite Alfred's best efforts and intentions, the scholarship simply did not exist to either suitably educate him or restore his kingdom to the previous golden century when Anglo-Saxon scholars were in high demand. Furthermore, Duckett doubts the effectiveness of Alfred's reforms for another reason. She argues that there would likely have been strong resistance to the new educational program.⁴⁶ The cries for the value and necessity of education would likely have fallen on deaf ears since old men do not like to be taken to school. So, the image of Alfred's reforms that Duckett presents is that of a man of genuine intentions who was ultimately frustrated in his attempts to restore the glory of the past.

P. J. Helm provides a radically different perspective from Duckett. He argues that Alfred had two goals in his academic revival.⁴⁷ First, he wanted to restore the morality of his kingdom, which would appease God and lift the Viking curse; in this he was not successful since the problems of Viking invaders and those already settled in the Daneland would persist beyond Alfred's reign. However, Alfred's second goal was to revive learning. Helm examines this program closely and finds that Alfred was quite successful in this restoration. He states that Alfred had three steps to his educational program. First, he wanted to restore a standard of education. Secondly, he wanted to learn Latin for himself. Finally, he wanted to translate the most important works into English so that he could spread knowledge most efficiently. Helm calls this scheme "a remarkable plan for a Saxon chieftain living on the fringe of civilization to envisage, and – what is even more remarkable – it was to a large extent realized."⁴⁸ Alfred drew

⁴⁶ Ibid, 110.

⁴⁷ P. J. Helm, *Alfred the Great* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1963), 126.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

heavily on the example of Charlemagne in his program to restore education. Like the Frankish king, he focused largely on cultivating the liberal arts. He also followed his strategy of seeking outside help. Although Charlemagne relied heavily on eighth-century Anglo-Saxon scholars such as Alcuin, it was now the Anglo-Saxons who would have to rely on outside scholars.

Helm refers to the work of seventeenth-century historian Sir John Spelman who wrote a biography of King Alfred. He quotes Spelman's view that Alfred, "in a short time brought it to pass that Learning and Civility, which formerly had been in Contempt, became the only Thing in request and generally desired of every Man."⁴⁹ Helm admits that Spelman's assertion was perhaps too optimistic, but agrees with him in principle that Alfred was successful in fostering the education of his kingdom. Overall, Helm's presentation of Alfred is of a man of high intelligence who enjoyed great success in all aspects of his reign. He took the poor circumstances in which he found himself and deftly maneuvered his way to success as a scholar. This portrait stands in stark contrast with Duckett's portrayal of a well-meaning but ultimately frustrated scholar.

Evaluating whether Alfred was successful in his efforts is probably the most subjective of these debates. Success or failure depends entirely on what we presume Alfred's intentions were and how we should rank the purposes he had for his work. If the purpose was to usher in a golden age of Latin literacy, then this period cannot be seen with any real success. Duckett is probably right that this effort did not bring much improvement to Latin education in the ninth century. However, Alfred's purpose was not to restore Latin, and he rather undermined this by translating into the vernacular. If we take it as his goal to produce a moral constitution for his

⁴⁹ Ibid, 132.

people, then we can fairly attribute success to Alfred. We know that his translations continued in use in the subsequent centuries and were used by Aelfric in his writing. We also know that the kingdom of England would grow out of the seedling nation that Alfred protected and maintained against the Danes. On the other hand, Alfred's hope that the education system that he began would continue to grow in size and scope does not seem to have had as much success. There does not seem to have been a continued effort to grow this body of literature beyond the life of Alfred. So, it is difficult to conclude that Alfred had a perfect success rate in his efforts, but, on the other hand, we should credit him with, at the very least, limited success.

The final debate of this chapter deals with the perception of Alfred himself. There has been disagreement with how historians should view his own personal motivations for the literary reforms which he undertook. Some see these efforts as stemming from pragmatism. Alfred saw the moral decline of his people and believed it was his duty as king to restore the former glory of the English people through educational reforms. Whether or not Alfred had any personal affinity for learning is a secondary point. Alfred was aiming for practical change and development in his kingdom. In debate with these scholars, some historians believe that Alfred's motivation for his program stemmed from his own affinity and attraction to intellectual disciplines such as philosophy and theology. This is a debate without clear sides since these ideas are not mutually exclusive. The disagreement comes out of trying to assess which motive was primary to Alfred and what the balance was between them. Some historians have favoured a more slanted vision of Alfred to one side or the other, while others have preferred a more measured and even perspective.

Dugald Macfadyen, a clergyman and author writing in 1901, viewed Alfred's literary work as primarily practical in nature. He argues that Alfred preferred practical thought to

abstract thought, especially in his translation of Boethius.⁵⁰ From his perspective, there is a stark contrast in Alfred's practicality from the original erudite and rhetorical style of Boethius. Macfadyen credits Alfred with "a genius for coming to the point," which seems to be as much a slight of Alfred's academic capabilities as it is a compliment. While he does not go so far as to deny Alfred's authorship of his various translations, he argues that the likeliest scenario is that Asser read the Latin texts to Alfred and proposed translations, which suggests that Alfred possessed only a functional literacy in Latin at any point in his life.⁵¹ He sums up his perspective of Alfred's reign quite succinctly, stating that he was a man of "Cautious and practical statesmanship."⁵²

The historian Beatrice Lees produced one of the most critical portrayals of Alfred's literary career. She argues that Alfred worked in two spheres.⁵³ On one hand, Alfred wanted to educate the clergy through whom he would disseminate wisdom to all of his subjects, and on the other, he wanted to produce a body of vernacular literature to teach free men of all ranks. She presents Alfred's work as a pragmatic action rather than stemming from a personal love of education and desire to share it.

It is Alfred's personal quest for learning about which she is most critical. Lees highlights Alfred's continuous dependence on his staff of scholars rather than on his own ability.⁵⁴ She doubts that Alfred displays any level of originality in his translations. In fact, she places him deep within the tradition of medieval scholars of his own day which she claims lacked any power

⁵⁰ Dugald Macfadyen, *Alfred the West Saxon, King of the English* (London: J. M. Dent & CO. 1901), 316.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 317.

⁵² *Ibid*, 292.

⁵³ Beatrice Adelaide Lees, *Alfred the Great: The Truth Teller, Maker of England, 848-899* (New York: The Knickerbocker Press, 1915), 323.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 345.

of critical faculty. According to Lees, the height of intellectual ability was in the collection and interpretation of ancient knowledge; this period produced precious little in terms of new thought.⁵⁵ In the translation of *Pastoral Care* she notes an inability to keep up with Gregory's metaphysics where Alfred defaults to more practical modes of thought.⁵⁶ Admittedly, Lees is certainly not the only historian who notices Alfred's trouble with metaphysics, but she is probably the most critical. Lees' discussion of Alfred's translation of the *Consolation of Philosophy* is even more critical where she accuses him of trite moralizing.⁵⁷ Lees is highly judgemental of not only Alfred's own thought, but of the medieval intellectual world in which he operates. She seems quite incapable of assessing Alfred's value as a scholar in his own school of thought because she cannot see the value of that school on any level.

Patrick Wormald, a highly regarded historian in Anglo-Saxon studies, sought to rein in the praise directed toward Alfred as the father of English prose. In a survey text about Anglo-Saxon history, he partly discredits the work of Alfred's team of scholars, showing it to be greatly inferior to that of Charlemagne's court.⁵⁸ As for Alfred's reputation for establishing the vernacular, he believes this to be an overstatement. Alfred's supposed scheme of universal education was abortive at best. However, Wormald seems to be setting up a strawman with this argument since few would claim that Alfred was trying to establish universal education. Certainly, Alfred considered the books that he translated to be, in his own words, "most necessary for all men to know," but he explicitly directs his educational reforms toward, "all the free-born young men now in England who have the means to apply themselves to it."⁵⁹ Judging

⁵⁵ Ibid, 347.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 348.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 366.

⁵⁸ J. Campbell (editor), *The Anglo-Saxons* (London: Penguin, 1991), 156.

⁵⁹ Keynes et al., 126.

by Alfred's words there never was a scheme of universal education such as Wormald states. He also makes the claim that Alfred was not a champion of the vernacular, but that English was a means to an end.⁶⁰ Since Latin literacy had declined so much in the early part of the ninth century, the English language was mostly an expedient to restore learning to the kingdom. Alfred still considered Latin essential for young children destined for the clergy.

Wormald also argues that Alfred's desire for learning was based more on his sense of duty as a king than a personal interest as a scholar.⁶¹ He points to the teaching in Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care* that it is the ruler's duty to educate his people. Alfred took this duty to heart and sought out scholars so that he could fulfill this duty. Alfred must have had some interest in learning, but it was less important to him than fulfilling his religious duty as a king. This is not to say that Alfred was not a thinker. Certainly, Alfred possessed powers of contemplation, but he preferred contemplation on matters of religion over philosophy. Wormald argues that by looking at Alfred's translation of the *Consolation* there appears a mind focused on Christian morality which is distinct from the Neo-Platonist and Stoic philosophies of the original Latin text. Therefore, he argues that Alfred was not terribly interested in philosophic contemplation but much more concerned with fulfilling his religious duty toward God and his subjects. This is the image that Wormald gives, a pious king who attempted educational reform, prone to religious contemplation rather than the philosophic.

In contrast to these historians, Edward Conybeare, who published a biography of King Alfred at the beginning of the twentieth century, paints a glowing picture of his reign and his intellectual prowess. He draws some rather exalted comparisons between Alfred and Julius

⁶⁰ Campbell, 156.

⁶¹ Ibid, 157.

Caesar, depicting both as master statesmen, great generals, engineers, law givers, and writers.⁶² As if a comparison to Caesar were not enough, he continues to compare him to the Hebrew King David as organizers of state, men who prepare the house of worship, and writers of Psalms. His retelling of the story of Alfred seeing the intellectual potential in a lowly swineherd, educating him for the ministry, and ultimately preferring him to the bishopric of Winchester displays a man who was able to recognize intelligence anywhere he saw it.⁶³ Conybeare admits that this anecdote is likely apocryphal, but maintains nonetheless that it accurately represents Alfred's character. Conybeare also makes the bold claim that Alfred could be considered the father of Cambridge University, drawing a tenuous line between Alfred's foundation of the college of priests at Ely to the modern university.⁶⁴ This is especially telling of his admiration for Alfred because Conybeare was tied to that very university.

According to Conybeare, Alfred quickly developed as a scholar, with the help of his court. Soon Alfred was able to stand on his own ability as a master of literature.⁶⁵ Alfred not only demonstrates his mastery through his translations and intermittent commentary on the great medieval works, but also as the original sponsor of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Conybeare presents the debate about whether Alfred truly was the originator of the chronicle, but sides firmly with Alfredian authorship. He also credits Alfred as being the first writer ever to include chapter headings and a table of contents in his work, such as is present in the translated version of *Pastoral Care*, and holds this as an example of his literary genius.⁶⁶ Conybeare's biography of Alfred provides a counter to such works as discussed above and shows a very different

⁶² Conybeare, 45.

⁶³ Ibid, 47.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 53-55.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 58.

perspective of Alfred's character, but it is limited in the way that it reads more as a panegyric rather than a critical historical account.

David Pratt does not accept Alfred's Smyth's assertion that the assessment of Alfred's scholarship rests on Asser's authorship of the *Life*. Pratt accepts Asser as the true author but still draws a picture of Alfred as a learned king.⁶⁷ In fact he praises him quite highly, saying that there were many examples of learned kingship in early medieval Europe, but Alfred is a cut above the rest because of his unique level of authorship. Other educated monarchs patronized and consumed works of literature, but Alfred is unique because he produced scholarship himself. Pratt's picture of Alfred is one of a man with an insatiable desire for wisdom, but also someone who desires to share that wisdom with others.⁶⁸ He promoted wisdom in the form of liberal arts and used the vernacular as a tool to disseminate that wisdom most efficiently. Alfred wanted to spread wisdom in a variety of forms; hence he used a variety of texts in his translation program.⁶⁹ It is important to note that, for Alfred, wisdom is always centred on God-consciousness. Any analysis of his scholarship must accept this fact in order to properly evaluate Alfred's intellectual ability and intentions. Readers who limit themselves to secular thinking and analysis will find it very difficult to accept Alfred as anything but a trite moralist. Historians such as Edward Conybeare and David Pratt present a picture of a highly developed scholar who undertook his efforts because of his love of education. Pratt's discussion is certainly the more balanced of the two since he undertakes to examine the political actions of Alfred as well as his work as an intellectual.

⁶⁷ Pratt, 115-117.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 119-123.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 127.

Richard Abels is a historian who specializes in Anglo-Saxon military and political institutions. However, he still has instructive observations about Alfred's literary career. Abels is one of the most neutral scholars on the question of Alfred's scholarship, providing a well-balanced perspective combining both the scholar and the pragmatist. He shows Alfred's educational reforms as a key part of the king's duty to maintain the welfare of his people while at the same time stemming equally from his own personal love of learning.⁷⁰ Education was not only a duty for which the king was answerable to God, but also a refuge from the toils and difficulties of life. Abels paints Alfred flatteringly in the form of a Platonian philosopher-king.⁷¹ He was a man who fulfilled his duty of sharing his wisdom with his subjects.

Abels also discusses the invitation of many of Western Europe's leading scholars to the royal court.⁷² This action demonstrates the high value that Alfred placed on learning since he was willing to pay well for good scholarship in the form of high episcopal offices and material wealth. His purpose in gathering an elite brain-trust was to have personal and spiritual companionship with men of high intellect. Their duties involved reading books to the king and discussing the meaning found within them.

Abels also examines the methodology of the translation process which was likely collegial.⁷³ One scholar would read a passage of a certain text and the whole group would discuss the meaning and possible translations, but the final authoritative voice belonged to Alfred. Most historians agree about the collegial approach to these translations, which allows for disagreement about the degree of Alfred's involvement. A wide base of learning is evident

⁷⁰ Abels, 221.

⁷¹ Ibid, 222.

⁷² Ibid, 223-225.

⁷³ Ibid, 223.

through these translations by the many references to the classics of Antiquity such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Virgil's *Aeneid*. Each text that Alfred chose for translation had a specific purpose. *Pastoral Care*, which is essentially a handbook on how priests ought to lead their congregations, appealed to Alfred for practical reasons.⁷⁴ One of Alfred's primary goals as king was to restore the spiritual health of his kingdom and to do to this, he needed to re-educate the clergy. However, Abels argues that this book also appealed to Alfred on a personal level. Alfred would have identified personally with Gregory. Both men were intellectuals who reluctantly accepted authority out of their sense of duty and struggled to maintain the joys of contemplation while fulfilling the obligations of their offices. Both men also struggled with chronic debilitating illness. Since Alfred's political thought saw no clear boundary between religious and secular rulership, he was able to read this handbook for clergy and easily apply it to himself.

According to Abels, Alfred chose to translate *On the Consolation of Philosophy* because the contemplation of suffering attracted his attention.⁷⁵ Boethius was a sixth-century Christian philosopher and politician. He was imprisoned and later executed on charges of conspiracy against King Theodoric the Great. While in prison he wrote his famous work, which discusses how contemplation provides refuge and comfort from life's changes of fortune. Since Alfred suffered many different challenges in his life, the subject of this book appealed greatly to him. While composing this work, Boethius relied heavily on Neo-Platonist philosophy rather than resorting to Christian theology. However, this philosophical base was foreign to Alfred, so he felt much more liberty to revise and insert his own ideas. As with Smyth, Abels recognizes Alfred's discomfort with abstract arguments, and his frequent revision of the original texts in

⁷⁴ Ibid, 236-37.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

order to present more concrete thought.⁷⁶ This strategy is especially true for his translation of Boethius' work, as well as Augustine's *Soliloquies*.

Alfred took a didactic approach in translating the Psalms and wanted to prepare a handbook for those who would not advance to Latin education.⁷⁷ Therefore, he not only translated the text but added commentary to help laymen understand the various levels of meaning. Alfred discussed the interpretation on three levels. First, there was the historical meaning of the Psalms which entailed what they would have meant to David and his people. He also presents a moral understanding to help his own subjects apply the text personally. Finally, the text provided an analogical meaning, teaching how the Psalms fit with the life of Christ. So, in his translation of the Psalms, Alfred wanted to create a useful textbook to help develop the spiritual devotion of his subjects. As with *Pastoral Care*, the Psalms had a personal attractiveness for Alfred. Just as he appreciated Gregory's writings because of a common ground with the author, Alfred also identified deeply with King David. The two kings shared the bonds of suffering and the joys of spiritual contemplation. Overall, Abels presents the image of a king who used education as a practical strategy to stabilize his kingdom but who also pursued learning for his own personal interest demonstrating a developed and scholarly mind.

Nicole Guenther Discenza is a professor of English specializing in medieval languages and literature. She has examined the works of Alfred in great detail and has written excellent articles examining the apparent contradictions that arise between the practice of the king and the teachings he wished to promote. She also has a fairly well balanced perspective on Alfred, although she leans slightly more toward a pragmatic approach. She often reads through the texts

⁷⁶ Ibid, 242.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 238.

that Alfred translates to find contradictions between the philosophical and theological wisdom that Alfred wanted to teach his subjects and the practical actions that Alfred did himself. So while he did have a love of wisdom and a desire to share it with any who would listen, he also had a pragmatic approach that sometimes practical concerns could outweigh ideology.

In “Wealth and Wisdom: Symbolic Capital and the Ruler in the Translational Program of Alfred the Great”, she studies Alfred’s perspective on wealth in relation to its handling in the works which he translated. She notes that in the preface to *Pastoral Care* Alfred claims that wisdom leads to wealth.⁷⁸ However, the works that Alfred translated tend to repudiate wealth; this is especially true of Boethius in his *Consolatio*.⁷⁹ So, it is important to ask how Alfred can believe that these texts will help to restore the Anglo-Saxons to their former wealth.

Discenza argues that there are two early Christian perspectives on wealth.⁸⁰ First, it is a worldly substance which a Christian must transcend on their journey to heaven, but which only provides a useful language to discuss spiritual reward. Secondly, wealth is a tool which a good Christian should use to better others and thereby benefit one’s own soul. It is in light of these two understandings of wealth that Alfred must be understood. As a pious Christian he would have agreed with these teachings. However, he could not have simply turned away from wealth if he wanted to properly govern his kingdom. Therefore, while Alfred understood the wisdom of the rejection of worldly goods and sought to promote that wisdom among his subjects, he also must have understood the absolute necessity of wealth. By discussing the necessity of wealth in the proem to a work which forms part of a corpus of literature that collectively denies the importance

⁷⁸ Nicole G. Discenza, “Wealth and Wisdom: Symbolic Capital and the Ruler in the Translational Program of Alfred the Great,” *Exemplaria* 13, no. 2 (2013): 434.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 438.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 442-43.

of wealth, Alfred was proving that he was at heart a pragmatist. This is not to paint Alfred as a hypocrite, but rather that he was willing to set aside his philosophic principles to fulfill his duty as king.

In this article, Discenza also presents a noteworthy discussion of the political factors of the educational program. Alfred's scheme created a unique relationship between the king and his subjects, especially the nobles. First, she argues, the benefits of education are not equally distributed; they favour the upper orders which would have had better access to education than those lower in society.⁸¹ Therefore, since education tends to elevate individuals socially, the upper nobility were likely the only people to benefit from the educational reforms. On the other hand, it is also possible to view this program as a means of controlling the nobility by monopolizing a desirable commodity. If education is necessary for social advancement, then it is in the king's best interest to control education through royal sponsorship. In addition to providing a means to control the nobility, education would also serve to unite and therefore stabilize the aristocracy in a very unstable time by giving them a shared set of ideals. In this light, the educational program sponsored by Alfred served the practical purpose of stabilizing the kingdom and consolidating his power over the nobility.

In "The Paradox of Humility in the Alfredian Translations", Discenza discusses another apparent contradiction between what Alfred said and what Alfred did. The works which Alfred translated praise the virtue of humility, yet she observes a lack of humility in the king's own actions.⁸² He was fond of affixing his name to translations, even those which he did not actually translate, to gain the credit and fame. He also promoted older Anglo-Saxon heroic literature

⁸¹ Ibid, 455-457.

⁸² Nicole G. Discenza, "The Paradox of Humility in the Alfredian Translations." *Studia Neophilologica* 75 (2003): 44.

which does not promote humility as a virtue. On the other hand, the texts of Alfred's educational curriculum strongly promulgated the virtue of humility. Some of the most striking examples come from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* in which there are multiple instances of kings bowing to the will of bishops.⁸³ However, these examples in Bede seem to be the exception rather than the rule. While virtue is a prominent feature in the Alfredian corpus, it is rarely associated with the person of the king.

Alfred encountered a great moral dilemma while reading *Pastoral Care*. Pope Gregory argues in this work that a ruler must not exalt himself above his subjects, yet he also must somehow maintain his authority over them.⁸⁴ Both Alfred and Gregory struggled with this challenge, although it seems to have bothered Alfred more given that, in his translation, he obscured this passage with some rather convoluted language. When Boethius wrote *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, he promoted the rejection of political office hand in hand with virtue, but this was farther than Alfred was willing to go. It seems that for Alfred, humility was an abstract virtue and should not in any way weaken the power of the king. Discenza concludes that Alfred believed that humility should exist in the mind of the ruler and in the behaviour of the subjects.⁸⁵ He agreed with Gregory that a ruler should consider himself to be the equal of his subjects, but he should not act as though he were. This is not a statement of tyranny, nor a quest of power for power's sake. Rather, Alfred believed that power was necessary to stave off evil and wrongdoers. While performing the royal duty of protecting the kingdom, the virtue of humility is not a luxury that a king can afford. Once again this leaves us with an impression of

⁸³ Ibid, 46.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 47

⁸⁵ Ibid, 48.

Alfred as a man who recognizes and promotes virtues but is willing to skirt them for pragmatic concerns.

It is important to recognize the value of balance on this debate. Alfred was not simply a scholar who isolated himself in a room with esoteric philosophical texts with no care for how those texts would relate to the outside world. Even the act of translation shows a practical side of Alfred. He wanted to use the vernacular as an expedient for transmitting the wisdom to the people so that they could apply it in their lives. Alfred himself presents his actions under a pragmatic light. He discusses the relationship between the wealth and prosperity of the people with their commitment to wisdom; one cannot exist without the other. However, we should not allow this pragmatism to detract from Alfred's academic bent. He displays, through the texts that he translated, a love for all disciplines related to what he called wisdom. Beatrice Lees goes too far in her assessment of Alfred by considering his literature nothing but trite moralizing. She fails to recognize the depth and complexity to this program which Alfred built for the benefit of his people.

As is the case in all eras, judging the hearts and minds of people is a difficult task. Discussing what people did is often sufficient to foster historiographical debate without introducing the question of why they did it. The issue of motivation creates a difficult, but profoundly interesting area of study. When it comes to judging the motivation for the ninth-century translation program and educational reforms, Alfred proves to be an elusive subject. Was he a man who used learning as a practical means to restore the morality and prosperity of his kingdom, or was he one of the great minds of his era, who happened to be thrust into the kingship by chance and fulfilled his own desire for learning by taking up the mantle of the philosopher-king, dutifully instructing his people? Of course, neither of these two sketches

represents the exclusive truth, but historians throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have continuously wrestled with finding the balance. Perhaps the difficulty of the question is itself a testament to the mind of a man who refuses to let us stop talking about him.

With this groundwork for Alfred's educational reforms, we can proceed with examining the individual works in greater depth and how each plays a part in establishing the core elements of the moral constitution which he wished to create for his kingdom. The first of these works will be his translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care*. This treatise holds unique importance in the translational program because of its singular preface, which explains Alfred's whole purpose for his work, and for its key thematic elements describing the nature of royal authority and creating an essential part of the moral constitution.

Chapter 2: *Pastoral Care*

Pope Gregory's *Pastoral Care* was likely the first work that Alfred translated. There are several reasons for this choice. First of all, a book written for the purpose of instructing the clergy was a necessity for Alfred's plan to restore his kingdom since the church lay at its moral heart. A well-educated clergy was required to restore the moral integrity of his people.⁸⁶ Furthermore, Alfred likely identified with Gregory on a personal level.⁸⁷ Both were quiet intellectual men who accepted the burden of office reluctantly and who probably would have preferred a peaceful life of contemplation.

Alfred's translation of Pope Gregory the Great's *Pastoral Care* features several framing pieces to the main body of the work. It opens with a prose preface which explains Alfred's intentions for translating this book. It continues with a second preface in verse which explains the history of the book and how it arrived in the hands of the bishops, after which follows a list of the sixty-five chapters in the form of a table of contents. Then, there is a third preface which is original to Gregory's text, after which follows the main text. The book closes with two epilogues. One was penned by Gregory in prose, but the other was written in verse by Alfred and explains the final instructions to his bishops on how they should handle the book. The structure of this chapter will follow this order, and along the way it will discuss several important themes of this work.

Most of the modern scholarship on *Pastoral Care* has covered the prose preface because of its historical significance as a description of Alfred's literary program and why he chose to undertake it. For this reason, the prose preface will feature heavily in this chapter. However, the

⁸⁶ Abels, 236.

⁸⁷ Ibid, 237.

themes established there will follow throughout the whole text of *Pastoral Care*. The primary theme of this work is the establishment of authority and hierarchy. We will see how Alfred used this text to assert his own authority as well as to teach his readers how to maintain their own position. Alfred did not support the arbitrary abuse of power, but he demanded righteous rule from those who were in positions of authority. Therefore, this work serves both as a standard of how leaders ought to act as well as an instruction manual on how they might fulfill that obligation. Alfred sought to convince his people of the benefit of upholding the political and ecclesiastical hierarchies so that they would be more willing to participate and act according to their position within it. He promised that submission to these socio-political structures would result in the restoration of the kingdom to its former wealth and glory. Wessex could only prosper if each level of society acted in conjunction with their social obligations. He also promised that any who read the book and apply its teaching would be spiritually refreshed. These are the main themes that we will examine in relation to this text.

There are two main levels at which Alfred uses this text to discuss authority. First, he uses it to lay the foundations of his legitimacy, and second, he describes the parameters of his responsibilities as the possessor of authority. Alfred pursues several strategies throughout the text to establish his authority. On one hand, he draws direct links between himself and Gregory as well as to the Carolingian literary revival. He claims the credit of the authorial voice in his translation. He also promises to restore the past prosperity of the kingdom. Finally, he claims the authoritative role of teacher over his bishops, which is also a fundamental part of the text because of his desire to turn them into authoritative figures under him through the wisdom found in this book. At the heart of *Pastoral Care* is a desire both to establish and define authority

which Alfred believed was a necessary first step to restore his kingdom and create its moral constitution.

Alfred introduced his translation of *Pastoral Care* using two prefaces. The first preface, in prose, explained the background reasons for his decision to translate such important works as well as his aspirations for what this work could accomplish. The verse preface, which comes after it, details the history of the book itself, first written by Pope Gregory and carried across the salt sea into Britain by Augustine, where it would eventually be translated by Alfred. The first preface has received the most attention from scholars because of its historical significance. Traditionally, historians have considered this preface to be a statement of intent regarding Alfred's planned educational program. Alfred reflects on the way in which learning and scholarship have atrophied since the days of his ancestors, first because of their own neglect and then compounded by the ravaging of the Vikings. For this reason, Alfred planned to restore the ancient ways of his ancestors by translating, "Certain books which are necessary for all men to know."⁸⁸

While the traditional interpretation of this statement has been as proof that *Pastoral Care* represents the beginning of a curriculum which Alfred sponsored to restore the intellectual integrity of his kingdom, Daniel Anlezark, Professor of Anglo-Saxon literature, has expressed doubts about this interpretation of Alfred's intent. He argues that this preface should not be read as an establishment of a specified canon of works that Alfred intended to translate.⁸⁹ He supports this by arguing that in Alfred's discussion about the history of translation, "the Law" to which Alfred refers is a euphemism for the Scriptures as a whole. This is a solid premise that Anlezark

⁸⁸ Keynes et al., 126.

⁸⁹ Daniel Anlezark, "Which Books are "Most Necessary" to know? The Old English Pastoral Care Preface and King Alfred's Educational Reform." *English Studies* 98, no. 8 (2017), 764.

offers because it aligns with traditional Christian expression. However, he continues by arguing that this shows that Alfred's consideration of the works "most necessary to know" refers to the Scriptures. A more nuanced reading of this account undermines this conclusion. As can be seen in the quotation below, Alfred merely discusses the translation of the Law as an example of the expediency of translation, not an exact precedent of what he is doing.

Then I recalled how the Law was first composed in the Hebrew language, and thereafter, when the Greeks learned it, they translated it all into their own language, and all other books as well. And so too the Romans, after they had mastered them, translated them all through learned interpreters into their own language. Similarly all the other Christian peoples turned some part of them into their own language. Therefore it seems better to me... that we too should turn into the language that we can all understand certain books which are the most necessary for all men to know.⁹⁰

While the translations to which Alfred speaks, in reference to the Greeks and Romans, likely are direct translations of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, and the Vulgate respectively, this clarity breaks down as he discusses the translations of the "other Christian peoples." In their notes on this passage, Keynes and Lapidge discuss several possibilities including several earlier ninth-century works, none of which are direct translations of the scriptures.⁹¹ With the exception of the translation of the fourth-century translation of The Bible into Goth, of which Alfred was probably unaware, there is no precedent of Biblical translations into Germanic tongues aside from various quotations in ecclesiastical literature. Because of this lack of proximate historical precedent, it seems unlikely that Alfred was initiating a program of Scriptural translation as

⁹⁰ Keynes et al., 125-126.

⁹¹ Ibid, 295-296.

Anlezark argues, and much more likely that this passage represents the beginning of a program of translation of medieval works into English, although it is not necessary that this represent an established canon at this early point in the program. *Pastoral Care* represents the beginning of such a program that would go on to include other works such as *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, Augustine's *Soliloquies*, as well as many other works. However, it is not necessary for this list to have been codified at such an early stage, although Alfred probably already had ideas about what sorts of works were most necessary.

Malcolm Godden has also examined the preface to this work in light of its historical context, and he concludes that the style of preface mirrors the styles of Carolingian texts, likely with the intent of mirroring the educational reforms of Charlemagne. There is very little precedent for these types of prologues and epilogues in Anglo-Saxon vernacular works.⁹² The closest example belongs to Waerferth's translation of Pope Gregory's *Dialogues*, and although this work was probably translated before *Pastoral Care*, it was probably completed under Alfred's commission, and its prologue may be a later addendum.⁹³ The translated version of Bede's *Ecclesiastical History* also possesses such framing pieces. The dating of the translated version is uncertain, but probably belongs in the Alfredian program some time after *Pastoral Care*. Godden highlights several clear precedents in Latin, although the standard practice was to include prose prefaces for poetic works and vice versa. Authors who wrote in this fashion spanned several centuries such as Gregory, Bede, Orosius, and Aldhelm. The use of a prose preface for a prose work, or poetry to introduce poetry was much rarer as was a combination of prose and poetical prefaces as seen in *Pastoral Care*.

⁹² Malcolm Godden, "Prologues and Epilogues in the Old English *Pastoral Care*, and Their Carolingian Models." *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 110, no. 4 (2011), 441.

⁹³ *Ibid*, 443.

Despite the general rarity of this style of introduction, Godden does find a close precedent in medieval scholarship in the court of Charlemagne. The best example he provides is in Alcuin's commentary on Ecclesiastes which features a long prose preface followed by a twelve line verse preface.⁹⁴ Not only is the arrangement the same, the length of each section also bears similarities. The fact that this style of literary formation is so rare in medieval Europe and yet follows so closely on the styles used in the eighth-century Frankish court probably indicates that Alfred was purposefully imitating this style of literature and therefore presenting his own text as the equivalent to those produced in the Carolingian period. This is Godden's conclusion. Close association with the Carolingian court suggests an appropriation of Frankish royal authority and power, and thus lends legitimacy and strength to Alfred's regime.

Godden also wrestles with the issue of Latin learning in the Alfredian Renaissance. This article focuses primarily on the debate over one line in the preface which discusses Alfred's linguistic desire for his kingdom.

And accomplish this... [the translation of books into English] so that all the free-born young men now in England who have the means to apply themselves to it, may be set to learning (as long as they are not useful for some other employment) until the time that they can read English writings properly. Thereafter one may instruct in Latin those whom one wishes to teach further and wishes to advance to holy orders.

The proper translation of this last phrase of this quotation has been the subject of some debate over the last 150 years of scholarship. Henry Sweet translated it as "to a higher rank", but many later translations preferred a less literal translation to refer to holy orders as do Keynes and

⁹⁴ Ibid, 444-445.

Lapidge in the above quotation. Godden suggests that this later translation supposes two basic facts about Alfred's intention for Latin learning.⁹⁵ First, Latin education was exclusively taught to those destined for ordination. Secondly, Latin was an essential requirement for them. These two premises create the traditional view that Alfred saw English as the language of the laity and Latin as the language of the clergy. However, the prestige of Latin had atrophied of late, and there were many among the clergy who would rely on rote memorization to recite services without having any understanding of the full meaning of the words. As Alfred himself suggests, there were also libraries of Latin books, vast by contemporary standards, but the clergy could not benefit from them since they had lost their proficiency in Latin.

Godden refutes the simplicity of this perspective. He shows through Asser's *Life of King Alfred* that the king founded a school where both English and Latin were taught which all of the free young men of the region could attend.⁹⁶ Even Alfred's son Aethelweard attended this school, and judging by the education of his father, he was probably not held back from learning Latin despite the fact that he was not bound for a career in the church. Furthermore, the preface shows that Alfred possessed a nostalgia for a time when Latin was commonly known among the people, and there is nothing in this passage to suggest it was exclusive to the clergy.

For these reasons it seems most likely that Alfred was concerned with making education available more broadly, especially if we take at face value his statement that it was for "all the free-born young men now in England who have the means to apply themselves to it." Godden's conclusion is that Latin education should be administered at the discretion of whoever had

⁹⁵ Malcolm Godden, "King Alfred's Preface and the Teaching of Latin in Anglo-Saxon England." *The English Historical Review* 117, no. 472 (2002), 596.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 598.

charge of the pupil whether he be bound for the secular clergy, regular clergy, or political life.⁹⁷ In any case, the vagueness with which Alfred discusses the condition of Latin literacy in his kingdom suggests that restoring that literacy was not his primary concern. It seems that he was more concerned with restoring the substance of the education rather than the means by which it was imparted. However, whether in Latin or in the vernacular, establishing his role as the educator of the people was both an important part of Alfred's duty to his subjects and also provided an example for his clergy to follow.

Patrick Wormald has recognized a similar theme, going so far as to argue that Alfred's own desire for learning was based in his sense of duty as a king.⁹⁸ He argues that an important part of *Pastoral Care* is the centrality of the king's role as educator. It was Alfred's profound belief in this fact that motivated him to pursue education for himself so that he could foster it in his kingdom. This was part of the fulfillment of his religious duty to God and to his people. Duty as a parallel element to authority is a repeated theme throughout *Pastoral Care*, and therefore, by fulfilling his duty toward the people, he is also legitimizing his authority and teaching his bishops to do the same.

Alfred worked to establish the fundamental nature of authority in order to address various concerns. First, there was a practical concern that stable authority was necessary for the continuation of the kingdom. If figures of authority were to fail, either through negligence or rebellion, then the prosperity of the kingdom would suffer. Alfred also uses this text to address the moral concern of Christian duty to participate in hierarchy. The proper maintenance and application of hierarchy is an important part of Christian doctrine, and both the ruler and the

⁹⁷ Ibid, 604.

⁹⁸ Campbell, 157.

ruled have an obligation within the structure. Those in positions of authority have the obligation to rule well, to not act like tyrants, and to avoid the abuse of their authority for personal gain. Those in subservient positions have the obligation to submit to that authority. Only when both sides participate well can the hierarchy operate efficiently and produce prosperity.

One of the most important roles for the king to play in the hierarchy is the maintenance of the prosperity of the people. If the prosperity of the kingdom fails, then the authority of the king will suffer. *Pastoral Care* is in part a plan to restore the prosperity of the kingdom. In the preface Alfred reflects on the former prosperity of his kingdom. Speaking theoretically, on behalf of the generation before him, he says:

Our ancestors, who formerly maintained these places, loved wisdom, and through it they obtained wealth and passed it on to us. Here one can still see their track, but we cannot follow it. Therefore we have now lost the wealth as well as the wisdom, because we did not wish to set our minds to the track.⁹⁹

The plan that Alfred offers to restore the prosperity of the kingdom is to restore the wisdom of their ancestors since wisdom is inexorably linked to wealth.¹⁰⁰ T. A. Shippey examines Alfred's definition of wisdom as it appears in this passage. He argues that book learning is only a part of the restoration of wisdom. There must be a moral quality to wisdom as well, and not simply an abstract concept of morality but a practical one where every member of the kingdom works to fulfill his role in the system. Not only do the words of the preface imply that this work will provide a means to restore the wealth of the kingdom, but Alfred sent a

⁹⁹ Keynes et al., 125.

¹⁰⁰ T. A. Shippey, "Wealth and Wisdom in King Alfred's Preface to the Old English Pastoral Care." *The English Historical Review* 94, no. 371 (1979), 353.

physical token to enforce the point. The preface mentions how each copy will be accompanied with an *aestel*, a book marker, which Alfred boasts at a value of 50 mancuses. The implication is clear. The contents of this book are valuable and will help to restore the kingdom to prosperity.

At first glance, the use of a work of Christian doctrine as a guarantee of restoration of wealth seems to be an odd tactic. Christian Scriptures frequently use wealth as a symbol of spiritual value. This is most evident in the Parables of Jesus such as the Story of the Talents, The Good Steward, and the Pearl of Great Price.¹⁰¹ *Pastoral Care* follows a similar trope using elaborate priestly robes as a symbol of virtue and gold as a symbol of good words.¹⁰² Despite the fact that Christian doctrine is typically indifferent toward the procurement of wealth, Alfred seems to have had a practical end in mind. Convincing the clergy and the nobility to forsake their pursuit of worldly goods would not be a successful platform, nor would it have led to the restoration of the kingdom. However, a promise of restoring wealth would be much more likely to attract those with the necessary power to submit to Alfred's reforms.

Nicole Guenther Discenza argues that Alfred clearly demonstrates his authority in the verse preface to *Pastoral Care* by drawing a direct link from Pope Gregory down to Alfred thus establishing his authority over church and lay people alike.¹⁰³

Augustine brought this work from the south over the salt sea to the island-dwellers, exactly as the Lord's champion, the pope of Rome had previously set it out. The wise Gregory was well versed in many doctrines through his mind's intelligence, his hoard of ingenuity. Accordingly, he won over most of mankind to the guardian of the

¹⁰¹ Matt. 25:14-30. Luke 12:42-43. Matt. 13:44-46.

¹⁰² Discenza, "Wealth and Wisdom," 440.

¹⁰³ Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Alfred's Verse Preface to the Pastoral Care and the Chain of Authority." *Neophilologus* 85, no. 4 (2001), 626.

heavens, this greatest of Romans, most gifted of men, most celebrated for his glorious deeds.

King Alfred subsequently translated every word of me into English and sent me south and north to his scribes; he commanded them to produce more such copies from the exemplar, so that he could send them to his bishops, because some of them who least knew Latin had need thereof.¹⁰⁴

Such is the verse preface of *Pastoral Care* which unfortunately has received far less scholarly attention than its prose counterpart. The primary purpose of this poem is to establish a chain of authority which extends from Gregory through Augustine to Alfred embodied by this book itself. The first line of this poem refers to this book as an *aerendgewrit* which Augustine carried across the sea. This word has proven a difficult challenge for translators.¹⁰⁵ Common usage creates the image of a letter of authority or some sort of missive directing the recipient to a certain task. They are usually associated with papal or apostolic authority. While it seems odd to call a book of sixty-five chapters a letter, this seems more in line with Alfred's understanding of its purpose of directing his clerics and nobles toward certain behaviours. What is even more informative is the way in which, as Discenza argues, Alfred links himself with both Gregory and Augustine.¹⁰⁶ Just as Pope Gregory produced the book, Alfred is distributing it to his scribes and ultimately to his bishops. Alfred and Augustine are linked as translators of the book. Augustine physically translates the book to the island, and Alfred linguistically translates it into the native tongue. While Discenza's interpretation of the link between Alfred and these men might be a

¹⁰⁴ Keynes et al., 126-127.

¹⁰⁵ Discenza, 626.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 627.

little over simplified, she is certainly right in recognizing a direct chain of authority on which Alfred draws heavily.

The verse preface features a unique blend of Latin and Anglo-Saxon poetic styles.¹⁰⁷ It features several names and terms as well as a subject of a more meditative style which all suits medieval Latin poetry well. It has similar structure as a traditional Anglo-Saxon riddle where the inanimate subject of the poem speaks directly to the audience. There are common literary structures visible in this poem. The salt sea over which Augustine carried the book is an example of both a compound construction and alliteration which were favourite devices of Anglo-Saxon poets. It also features heroic language in its description of Pope Gregory who bears multiple epithets in a short amount of lines and fulfills the role of *cempa*, champion, and possesses a hoard of learning. On the other hand, Latin names such as Augustinus and Gregorius and words like pope, bishop, and doctrine would certainly not be unfamiliar to Anglo-Saxon ears, but these Latin words would have stood out against a backdrop of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

This blending of Latin and English styles demonstrates a cultural translation of the text.¹⁰⁸ By translating it into English language, Alfred is removing it from its Roman context and placing it into an Anglo-Saxon context. This verse preface helps to ease the readers into this change. By blending Latin and English styles Alfred set out to prove that the two languages were not at odds, which would help him to fulfill two goals. First, he would prove that the Latin and English worlds were not mutually exclusive and could be brought together. Secondly, with this being the case, he could also assert his own authority over both languages. While the division of Latin and English might not divide neatly along the same line as church and laity, by mastering

¹⁰⁷ Ibid, 628.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, 629-630.

both languages, Alfred demonstrates his authority over both levels. By right of kingship he already possessed authority over the laity, but his mastery of Latin aided him in expressing his authority in church matters.¹⁰⁹ This is the fundamental purpose of the work as it instructs the bishops on how to perform their duties. By using this text to express his authority in church matters, Alfred is demonstrating his authority over the clergy. Alfred also demonstrated his power over the church in visibly manifest ways by seizure of land, so the reach of his authority could never be in doubt.

However, the most important inference from this preface is Alfred's connection with Pope Gregory as the author of this work, which indicates that the king has inherited a direct chain of authority. The allusion to Gregory was a wise choice. It demonstrates a practical use of nostalgia by reminding the audience of the pope who first brought Christianity to them.¹¹⁰ Gregory and Augustine were held in positions of high esteem by the Anglo-Saxons and any connection to them would be a high honour. Furthermore, an appeal to a dead pope offers a practical benefit because there is no risk of rebuttal that might accompany the disapproval of a living bishop.¹¹¹ Therefore, the verse preface, although woefully understudied, provides a significant demonstration of Alfred's secure place among the elites of spiritual authority in England.

The main text of *Pastoral Care* develops important themes of authority and righteous rule. With his authority firmly established in the prefaces, the translated portion of this work develops the idea of authority, how it ought to be used, and its purpose. The Anglo-Saxon scholars needed to conceive of a theory of translation to guide them on their process. They were

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, 630.

¹¹⁰ Smyth, 533.

¹¹¹ Discenza, 631.

one of the earliest Germanic peoples to be Christianized and, therefore, they were the first to begin translating ecclesiastical literature into their vernacular. To be more accurate, the Goths were earlier on both accounts, but the Gothic Biblical translations were probably unknown to Alfred and his court. For this reason, the Anglo-Saxons had to proceed without a near precedent on which to draw. The main issue that Alfred had in the ninth century is the same that faces every translator regardless of time or place: the tension between fidelity and free expression.¹¹²

Christine Thijs offers a brief overview of the evolution of translation practice from Classical Antiquity until the ninth century as a historical background to Alfred's literary program. Up until the early imperial period, the Romans learned their foundational literature, the most popular author being Homer, in its original Greek language, but as it grew in popularity much Greek literature was translated into Latin.¹¹³ However, since educated Romans were bilingual in Greek and Latin, they were capable of reading both the original and the translations. For this reason, a literal translation was considered unnecessary. Horace, for example, considered word for word translations to be artless and not worthy of a poet.¹¹⁴ The expected norm was to produce a new text worthy of reading for its own value.

In the Late Antique Christian world, the theory and, therefore, the practice of translation began to change. As Greek lost its prestige in the Western Empire there were increasingly fewer bilingual scholars. This shifted the priority of translation; where once it produced a new and reinterpreted work, now it became a function of necessity for the spread of literature. Christian doctrine of inspiration also influenced the theory of translation due to the need to preserve the integrity of God's words. Jerome's translation of the Scriptures into Latin is a prime example of

¹¹² Christine Thijs "Old English Translation: Practice before Theory?" *Neophilologus* 91, no. 1 (2007), 151.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

this shift in priorities by his close translation to the extent of preserving even the same word order as the original texts. This method of word for word translation became standard practice among medieval scholars as evidenced in England by Bede and by the Carolingian scholars.¹¹⁵ They demonstrated fidelity of translation when they quoted the church fathers as a display of respect toward their patristic authority.

Pope Gregory's method of translation differed from his contemporaries. In his *Dialogues* he claims to translate *sensum pro senso* and criticized overly literal translation for its failure to properly represent the meaning of the text.¹¹⁶ Alfred seems to have favoured a combination of these two styles judging by his claim in the prose preface where he claims to translate "sometimes word for word and sometimes sense for sense".¹¹⁷ A contrast between the translating styles of Wærferth, translator of Gregory's *Dialogues*, and of Alfred raises some interesting points about the different levels of authority that the king possessed. Based on what we are told by Asser, Wærferth translated the *Dialogues* before he came to Alfred's court, so this work probably demonstrates the earliest translation of a full work into English.¹¹⁸ Thijs theorizes that there must have been some sort of earlier translations of ecclesiastical literature dating to the time of Augustine, bishop of Canterbury, to aid in proselytization, which is a logical conclusion. However, Wærferth's translation of the *Dialogues* is the first surviving translation for which we have of a full text. His style follows a very literal method.¹¹⁹ The purpose of translation in the Anglo-Saxon context was to reproduce the works in the vernacular for the sake of accessibility.

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 155.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Keynes et al., 126.

¹¹⁸ Thijs, 152.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, 160.

Waerferth achieves this goal by closely replicating the work in English, and he makes no assumption of authority to alter the text.

In contrast to the translation of the *Dialogues*, Alfred aimed for a less literal style of translation.¹²⁰ All of Alfred's translations demonstrate varying degrees of alteration, and Thijs argues that these works are better viewed as transformations rather than translations. Alfred undertook a much freer approach in his translation of *On the Consolation of Philosophy* and St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*. In comparison with these works, *Pastoral Care* is much closer to its source material. However, it is considerably lower in fidelity when compared with Waerferth's work. This question of translation liberties will crop up again in the next two chapters while dealing with the more altered works. However, in reference to *Pastoral Care*, the main point is that, as king, Alfred needed to be wary of any visible shows of humility to avoid undermining his royal authority. The translation of *Pastoral Care* demonstrates Alfred's authority in two ways. First it associates him with Gregory by adopting his preferred method of translation, and secondly, it places him on an intellectual level with the pope by demonstrating the right to alter his words as he sees fit.

Nicole Discenza has also noticed a lack of humility from the king. In fact, there is an apparent contradiction in the way humility is portrayed as a virtue in Alfred's translations but not in his actions.¹²¹ This contradiction seems to stem from a paradox which Gregory describes in Chapter XVII. After arguing that a ruler ought to view his subjects as equals, he backtracks, knowing that it is necessary that a ruler not withhold punishment if he will maintain order.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 163.

¹²¹ Discenza. "The Paradox of Humility in the Alfredian Translations," 46.

And yet it is necessary that a man fear his lord, and a servant his master. Therefore, when the teachers understand that those who are subordinated to them fear God too little, then it is necessary that they act so that the subjects indeed have human fear of them so that they do not dare to sin although they do not fear divine judgment.¹²²

Discenza senses an awkward discomfort with this passage, both from Gregory and Alfred.¹²³ While neither man desired to promote himself above his subjects, both knew that they bore responsibility to maintain order as a part of their office, and thus humility must always remain an abstract virtue and could never diminish their power.

Returning to authority through translation style, Amy Faulkner enforces this point clearly through her discussion of Alfred's treatment of the quotations which Gregory used in his book. Gregory used many Biblical quotations throughout his work and Alfred handles these with the same free hand as he does Gregory's own words.¹²⁴ Faulkner argues that two sources of authority show through the text. First, there is Alfred's natural royal authority, but more importantly there is an authorial authority as the translator which he maximizes by altering the original text. One change that Alfred made that augments his own authorial authority is omitting Gregory's name from the third preface, which is original to Gregory's text.¹²⁵ This effectively removes Gregory's authorial voice and allows Alfred to appropriate the full authority of the writer. Another strategy to demonstrate his authority is repeated invocation of royal Biblical

¹²² Henry Sweet, *King Alfred's West Saxon Version of Gregory's Pastoral Care*, (London: Trubner & Co., 1871), 108-109.

¹²³ Discenza, 47.

¹²⁴ Amy Faulkner, "Royal Authority in the Biblical Quotations of the Old English *Pastoral Care*," *Neophilologus* 102, no. 1 (2018), 126.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 128.

characters such as David and Solomon.¹²⁶ In this way Alfred associates himself with these ancient Biblical kings and thus shares in their authority.

So much scholarly attention has been given to the first preface of *Pastoral Care* at the expense of the main body of the work; this is especially true of the epilogues. William Whobrey is one of the few scholars who has addressed this short, thirty-line poem. It imparts one final piece of advice to the reader. Its structure breaks down roughly into three parts.¹²⁷ The first part establishes the Scriptural foundation of the work as a whole (ll. 1-8). Then it discusses the role of the church in passing on doctrine (ll. 9-21). Finally, it extends an invitation to the reader to accept the revelation provided in the book (ll.22-30).

Present throughout the epilogue is the imagery of water, which is based around a partial quotation of Jesus, "He that believeth in me, as the scripture saith, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."¹²⁸ There are two implications of this epilogue. First, it presents *Pastoral Care* as a thirst-quenching river of living water to whoever will read it.¹²⁹ Second, it provides the bishops with the wisdom needed to spread that soul-refreshing water to the Christian congregation. This places the bishops in the role of a teacher, and as seen earlier with Alfred, the role of the teacher is attended with authority. The water in this metaphor represents knowledge and the Holy Spirit and the embodiment of Christian doctrine.¹³⁰ Alfred instructs the bishops to build a dam on the river so that they might store the water and ultimately release it carefully. Alfred closes by issuing a final warning that uncontrolled water can flood the land turning it into

¹²⁶ Ibid, 129.

¹²⁷ William T. Whobrey, "King Alfred's Metrical Epilogue to the "Pastoral Care," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 90, no. 2 (1991), 176.

¹²⁸ John 7:38 DRB

¹²⁹ Whobrey, 178.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 180.

marsh and so the bishops ought to be wary of presumption and to be wise in their distribution of knowledge to the people.

So much discussion of authority quickly begins to sound cynical. It has certainly not been my intent to portray Alfred as an authoritarian despot. In fact, he exudes the opposite impression. Reflection on the writings of Alfred suggest that he would personally have been happiest if he were left alone to study and contemplation. He did not pursue authority as a means of fulfilling his own desire for power but as a moral duty and a practical means of stabilizing his kingdom. He understood that a strong hand was needed to restore his kingdom, whether the atrophy be due to impious habits or many years of destructive warfare. It was this understanding that pushed Alfred to begin his translation work, and *Pastoral Care* was an excellent text with which to start and whatever it lacked he supplied in the prefaces and epilogue. Alfred's translation of *Pastoral Care* allowed him to emit an image of authority that could be clearly understood by his people as well as teach his subjects in high office to share in that authority.

This study of Alfred's translation of *Pastoral Care* gives historians an understanding of his purpose in beginning his translation programs as well as his understanding of the nature of authority, which is an essential element of this moral constitution. If those who held ruling offices, whether political or ecclesiastical, in the English kingdom were not careful to build the foundations of their authority on Christian principles, the voice of Alfred appears in this text to warn them of the impending consequences of their impiety and to guide them back to the straight and narrow way. While the content of *Pastoral Care* primarily deals with morality where the personal meets the political, and where self-improvement must be undertaken for the sake of one's public life, the subject of the next chapter is far more deeply internal. In the translation of

Boethius' *On the Consolation of Philosophy*, Alfred will present a much more personal and individualistic conception of morality.

Chapter 3: *On the Consolation of Philosophy*

Alfred the Great's translation of the sixth-century work, *On the Consolation of Philosophy* focuses on a particular sort of morality, that of personal development. The work itself was written by Boethius, a Roman politician and philosopher. At the time that he wrote this he had fallen out of favour with Theodoric, king over the remnants of the Roman Empire. Boethius was arrested on charges of treason, which resulted in his imprisonment and ultimate execution. It was during these latter days that he wrote the *Conslatio*.

The work itself features a long Socratic discourse between Boethius and the personified Lady Philosophy, who visits him while he is in prison lamenting his lot. The work borrows heavily on Greek philosophical tradition, both in its veneration of philosophy and reason as the chief good, as well as in its style of conversation between two personages in the Socratic style. In the first of the five books, Lady Philosophy consoles Boethius about his present misfortunes and through her discourse seeks to break his attachment to worldly goods and ambitions, encouraging him to find comfort in reason and philosophy. Once she has accomplished this, she reveals the fickle nature of Fortune, also personified as a woman, who bestows and removes her favour at her own whim. The important lesson is that the gifts that she gives never truly belong to the receiver, and equally important, that which truly belongs to the individual, Fortune can never take away.

In Book III, Philosophy teaches Boethius to distinguish between the true goods and the false goods. The true goods, of which the ultimate is happiness, are eternal and self sufficient and originate from God, while the false goods are temporal and mere shadows of the true goods. Philosophy also teaches Boethius how men foolishly pursue the true goods through the abuse of the false goods such as money, power, and fame. Books IV and V cover the problem of good and

evil. The central thesis is that good men have power and evil men have none. This proves to be one of the most difficult things for Boethius to grasp since his time in Roman public life, and especially his fall from grace, have left him with a bitter outlook on human politics and power. Lady Philosophy defends her point by teaching him about the limited perspective of man. From a divine perspective, which is not limited by time, this fact becomes evidently clear, that while God's providence does not interfere with human autonomy, it also has none of its authority diminished. This is because God is outside of time and can see that the good are ultimately free while the evil are enslaved by their own lusts. This section also discusses the ontological difference between good and evil, that while good exists substantially and absolutely, evil, by contrast, is nothing and does not exist ontologically except as the absence of good.

The style Boethius chose to adopt for his *Consolatio* is that of *prosimetrum*, which involves a mixture of prose and poetry. The main dialogue between Boethius and Philosophy uses prose. In breaks between these prose sections there are sections of poetry which are most often sung by Lady Philosophy in order to sum up and underscore the arguments she has made in the prose sections. The exception is the first poem in which Boethius sings in lamentation about his own personal trials.

The primary influence on the themes of *On the Consolation of Philosophy* seems to be Classical literature, which provides its contextual framework. There is no indication that Boethius intended this work to be a Christian text. It is evident from the context of the sixth century, and also from Boethius' other works, that Christianity was a great influence on his thought.¹³¹ While this it is still observable at some level, this work is not explicitly of a Christian

¹³¹ Nicole Guenther Discenza, "Alfred the Great's Boethius," *Literature Compass* 3, no. 4 (2006): 736.

nature. Perhaps the difficulties which he faced caused some level of coldness toward Christianity in his later life. Or perhaps there is some other explanation for why Boethius chose to resort to Classical philosophy for consolation rather than to religion. This question will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter.

King Alfred brought this text better into alignment with Christian doctrine in the ninth century when he translated the *Consolatio* into Old English under the title *Boethius*. In comparison to his translation of *Pastoral Care*, Alfred took a much freer approach to the *Boethius*. This probably suggests different levels of respect if not toward these two works then toward the authority of the two authors. Alfred left the words of Pope Gregory the Great as untouched as he felt that he could in a translation, which demonstrates his respect for Gregory's authoritative exposition on the proper function and attitude of the pastor. On the other hand, he chose to add or subtract from the *Consolatio* at his own discretion. This is not to say that Alfred considered it an inferior work given that it still belonged in the program of books "Which are necessary for all men to know." It is likely that Alfred greatly enjoyed the contemplative and eternal perspective that it offered. Alfred's affinity for this work is certainly understandable. Because of his young age and the fact that his four older brothers were more mature and ready for the throne, Alfred probably never expected to be seen as a legitimate candidate to the *witan*. Therefore, since he had very little expectation of inheriting the throne, he must have had greater freedom to explore more philosophical pursuits. As presented in the biography by Asser, Alfred's childhood love of literature and two trips to Rome would have excited a passion for the late Classical world. Of course, the historiographical debate will always cast doubt on the extent of Alfred's early education, but all that is necessary for this point is that Alfred gained a curiosity about philosophy at this time even if he lacked the tools to pursue fully until his later life. Also,

his bouts of frequent ill health and war with the Danes, often at great peril of the loss of his throne and his life, would have left him with a propensity toward an anticipation of a time with no suffering. The *Consolatio* offers this in the present through contemplation and also eternally through the long reaching arm of Providence.

The idea that Alfred chose to translate with a freer style in order to demonstrate his authority over the texts is discussed in the previous chapter. However, it is relevant to discuss this issue again with reference specifically to the *Boethius*. The fact that Alfred translated *sensum pro senso* suggests that he wanted to address certain minor disagreements that he had with the original text and also to translate it into a Christian framework. Perhaps the most obvious change is the renaming of the Lady Philosophy to a more Biblically acceptable conceptualization of Wisdom. There are few things valued as highly within the Christian tradition as wisdom. For example, “Get wisdom, because it is better than gold: and purchase prudence, for it is more precious than silver.”¹³² Furthermore, there is strong precedent of Wisdom being personified as a woman in the Bible, specifically in the book of Proverbs.¹³³

It is reasonable to think that Alfred was familiar with the book of Proverbs because of his high evaluation of wisdom, which is the main theme of the book. Furthermore, his translation of the first fifty Psalms demonstrates his familiarity with the wisdom literature of the Bible, of which the book of Proverbs also forms a part. Thus, the connection is evident between Boethius’ Lady Philosophy and Alfred’s Wisdom, but the latter lives more happily within a Christian framework. In fact, this freer style might betray a subtle preference for the *Consolatio* in relation to his other translations since the alterations demonstrate a deeper level of engagement and even

¹³² Prov. 16:16 DRB

¹³³ Prov. 1:20-21, 4:5-6, 9:1-2 DRB

debate with this text than with *Pastoral Care*. Perhaps Alfred allowed his mind to inhabit and explore the world that Boethius had created.

It also follows that Alfred would see the value in this work for his subjects, both to his own benefit and to theirs. Instilling the fleeting nature of fortune and worldly goods of power and money, Alfred could quell the restless ambitions of his nobility which would in turn secure his own position and calm any strife between them. It also encourages moral behaviour by assuring that the good have power while the wicked have none, thereby encouraging the people to pursue good and not to stoop to dubious tactics used by less scrupulous men to attain worldly goods. Furthermore, it is likely that Alfred sought to share the comfort that he had found with his nobility, who had suffered equally under the constant warfare and fear of destruction at the hands of the Vikings.

Two of the central points of this chapter are the Christianization of the work and the exploration into the nature of wisdom. Alfred acts as the translator of the text, not only in a linguistic sense, but also in that he brings it out of its original philosophical context into a more fully Christian framework. In this he had the help of his Carolingian predecessors who created a wealth of glosses containing Christian commentary on Boethius' writing. Translating the *Consolatio* into a Christian context had the dual purpose of making it accessible to an audience that would be more familiar with Christian thinking, as opposed to classical philosophy, as well as emphatically underscoring the essential role of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon society. The insertion of the character of Wisdom in the place of Philosophy is one such change, and probably the single most important. This change allowed Alfred to explore the nature of wisdom and teach this fundamental virtue to his people.

For Alfred, wisdom has both spiritual and practical consequences, and thus, it is central to his moral constitution. Alfred would have hoped that by translating this work he would convince his subjects of the necessity of wisdom so that they would search for it themselves. The character of Fortune stands in contrast to Wisdom exemplifying instability and transience rather than stability and permanence. A third point of this chapter will discuss the nature of the divine as presented in this work. All of these points serve as essential parts of Alfred's purpose to create a moral constitution for his people.

John Marenbon has written about the historical significance of Boethius in the Middle Ages. His primary influence was as a translator of earlier Classical thought, especially the works of Aristotle.¹³⁴ These translations later became the textbooks of the medieval university. The fact that Boethius worked primarily as a translator creates an interesting link between him and King Alfred. Both men strongly desired to translate, literally, in the sense of carrying over, the works of a previous age to make them accessible to their contemporary audience. While Boethius spent most of his academic career as a translator, the *Consolatio* was his most influential work, both immediately after his death and throughout the medieval period.¹³⁵ This work was rediscovered by scholars in the eighth century at Charlemagne's court, and although this period saw the enrichment of this text by many glosses, it was not until the late ninth century that commentaries begin appearing in support of this book. Therefore, the only collective academic thought to which Alfred would have had access would have been the glosses on which he must have relied heavily to make his translation.

¹³⁴ John Marenbon *Boethius*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 165.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 172-173.

One of the main problems of this work for the early medieval scholars was trying to reconcile this text, which delves so deeply into theological issues, with Christian thought.¹³⁶ This problem was deeply felt from the very beginning, immediately after the work's production. One common solution was to recharacterize Lady Philosophy as Wisdom. This solution was popular because of the common Christian association of Wisdom with Christ. Of course, this is one of the alterations that Alfred made in his translation of the text, but he was certainly not the first reader of the *Consolatio* to make this association. This association was made as early as the sixth-century scholar, Cassiodorus (c.485-c.585). He was a rough contemporary of Boethius, although he outlived him by about sixty years. He wrote an enhanced edition of the *Consolatio* which included Greek glosses, in addition to the text. Alcuin also makes the same identification of Philosophy with Wisdom drawing on Cassiodorus and Augustine for support. Alfred's decision to translate the text so freely might have been his solution to this common problem.

Antonio Donato has also written about this problem of reconciling the *Consolatio* and its dearth of Christian elements with Christian doctrine, although he examines the problem within the mind of Boethius himself. He recognizes it as a logical problem that Boethius as a Christian would have turned to Classical philosophy for comfort while facing his execution rather than turning to Christianity.¹³⁷ Some commonly proposed solutions to this problem include misauthorship, syncretism, or a disenchantment with his former religion.

Donato proposes a different answer to this problem.¹³⁸ He argues that Christianity and paganism had a symbiotic relationship for Boethius. He did not view the two as distinct from

¹³⁶ Ibid, 173-174.

¹³⁷ Antonio Donato, *Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as a Product of Late Antiquity*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 164.

¹³⁸ Ibid, 165-166.

each other. Even in late Antiquity, education was still based on a small number of Latin authors which formed the essential *paideia* of both Christian and pagans alike. Therefore, the language of education was the same for all scholars regardless of belief. As a result, Greek philosophy, and all its attendant themes, became the vehicle by which Christians developed and transmitted their doctrine. Therefore, for Boethius, his decision to express himself in a style imitating Classical Greek philosophy would not have seemed antithetical to his Christian beliefs. He would not have thought of this work as adopting a non-Christian style. Rather, this would have been his natural means of expression that was the result of his common Classical education. Even if Donato's explanation proves that this work contained no contradiction in the mind of Boethius, this does not alleviate the very real contradiction as perceived by his contemporaries and intellectual successors. Donato's explanation might explain how Boethius felt about his own writing style, but, even so it did not settle the issue for those who received his text. They were much disturbed by the lack of Christian elements in the text and had to stretch their imaginations to read a Christian understanding into the text.

Helen Barrett has also tackled this quandary of the lack of Christian elements in the *Consolatio*. Her solution to this problem is that, while he would have identified as a Christian in faith, Boethius' greatest passion was for pre-Christian philosophy.¹³⁹ She notes that his translations of the early philosophers use language that demonstrate a deep allure and personal preference for these early thinkers. He shows a lot of intellectual interaction with them that show a mental dialogue. On the other hand, his theological writings are much more coldly logical and do not express the same depth as the thoughts of the heart; they were much less a labour of love. She proposes that he may have undertaken the project of his theological texts at the request of

¹³⁹ Helen M. Barrett, *Boethius: Some Aspects of His Times and Work*, (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965), 160.

Symmachus and John the Deacon, who targeted him because he was a well known and respected scholar. So, Boethius may have turned to philosophy in his final days because, even though he was a Christian, the ancient writings of the philosophers always found a favoured place in his heart. Barratt's solution to this quandary is more convincing than Donato's because she supports her argument through careful examination of Boethius' own writings while Donato draws on broader cultural trends to make his point.

Nicole Guenther Discenza offers some basic analysis of the purpose and the audience of this book. She says that Alfred intended it as a sort of handbook, or an entry level reader into the world of Classical Antiquity for his subjects.¹⁴⁰ Alfred's translation adds several explanations to things that Boethius would not have needed to explain to his audience, which suggests that Alfred wrote for an audience much less familiar with the world of the Roman past. He also adds in other Christian narratives such as the tower of Babel to bring the book into the context which would be more familiar to the audience. Alfred also adds a more Christian character, as evidenced by certain explanations that the Roman gods are not true gods. However, even Alfred's Christianized version kept much of its original flavour. Discenza also argues that Alfred intended the *Boethius* to be a manual to lead the reader through multiple levels of discourse.¹⁴¹ It not only guides the reader in their first step to seek transcendent truth through deep philosophical contemplation, but it also serves as a rough and ready guide to the practical expectations and responsibilities of life. Thus, Alfred provided the *Boethius* as a handbook for teaching his readers wisdom springing from Biblical literature as well as whatever he felt he could redeem from lessons of Roman history and mythology.

¹⁴⁰ Discenza, *Alfred the Great's Boethius*, 740.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 742.

Paul Szarmach observes that, while there were many reasons for the changes that Alfred made, one probable reason is to make the work more relatable to an English audience. Book I, Meter VI of the *Consolatio* contains a nature poem with references to Phoebus, Ceres, and Bacchus. Not only does Alfred abbreviate the passage by removing them from the text, but he also removes references to Classical heroes like Agamemnon, Ulysses, and Hercules. This is probably because he considered these to be of dubious moral standing.¹⁴² In Book II, Meter II he does not eliminate Classical imagery to the same extent, but he does change the claim that “Copia” distributes wealth and instead credits this to God.¹⁴³

When examining the various changes which Alfred made to the text it is important to recognize the inspiration of those changes. It is also important to recognize the historical scholarly context in which Alfred translated this work. In the medieval scholarly milieu, books were passed from person to person, and monastery to monastery, each scholar adding his own glosses either in the margins or interlineally. In the case of the *Consolatio*, these glossed manuscripts probably came from the Carolingian court brought over by Alcuin in the previous century.¹⁴⁴ Hobson has analyzed these glossed texts and argues that they found their way into Alfred’s library and he used these glosses as inspiration for his own translation. However, rather than keeping these glosses as marginalia, he incorporated them directly into the text. Thus, the changes which Alfred introduced into his *Boethius* would have been in large part inspired by the scholarly work done at the Carolingian court putting it into a larger Christian context. In some cases, Alfred did not incorporate certain glosses into his work, which may indicate a disagreement. In those cases, he may have drawn on other sources for interpretation or added his

¹⁴² Szarmach, 228.

¹⁴³ Ibid, 230.

¹⁴⁴ Jacob Hobson, “Translation as Gloss in the Old English Boethius,” *Medium Aevum* 82 no. 2 (2017): 211.

own. For example, in Chapter XXXIX, there are relatively few glosses in the source material, but this did not stop Alfred from making alterations.¹⁴⁵

One particular passage proved troublesome for many medieval scholars, as evidenced by the glosses. Boethius speaks as though God dispenses fate through the stars.

He then effects fate either through the good angels or through men's souls or through the lives of other creatures or through heaven's stars or through the various wiles of the devils, sometimes through one of those things, sometimes through all of them.¹⁴⁶

Most glosses admonish him for this heretical notion, but Alfred's text noticeably does not join in these admonitions.¹⁴⁷ There are two possible reasons for this. First, he may not have had access to the texts that contained these specific glosses. However, another possibility is that he had no theological problem with the idea of the stars dispensing fate, at least as a metaphor.

There is good reason to believe that Alfred liked the metaphor of the stars and their relation to the human souls. Karmen Lenz argues that Alfred borrows this common Classical trope, using stars as representations of human souls, drawing this metaphor out to create a picture of Christian conversion.¹⁴⁸ In the fifth poetic section, Lady Philosophy uses the star as a metaphor to represent the soul's capability to receive and understand knowledge.¹⁴⁹ Just as stars can be obscured by clouds, so can human souls be obscured by despair. In Meter X, the soul

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 214.

¹⁴⁶ Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 349.

¹⁴⁷ Hobson, 216.

¹⁴⁸ Karmen Lenz, "The Star-like Soul in the Metra of the Old English Boethius," *Anglo-Saxon England* 39 (2010): 142.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid, 144.

fulfills its heavenly purpose by participation in divine law. In Meter XX, Philosophy demonstrates the fallibility of the human soul in contrast to the blessed one. This is illustrated by the rotation of the stars. Just as one star may at one point occupy a high place in the sky, then descend to a much lower place, then ascend to its former position, the human soul is naturally weak and fallible, but can transcend itself through divine grace and access greater heights. In this way, Alfred uses the image of the immortal, star-like soul to remind his readers of the moral implications of their actions, and that one will rise and fall by his integrity.

Erica Weaver's article, "Hybrid Forms: translating Boethius in Anglo-Saxon England", discusses the historical genre particularly popular in early medieval England known as the twinned works. Twinned works include two versions of a text, one in prose, the other in poetry. The style originated in Classical literature when an author would produce a work in poetry and include a prose summary, or vice versa.¹⁵⁰ Caelius Sedulius, an early fifth-century author, was the first to publish his works in dual form with full poetry and prose. Some of the most popular works in this style include Sedulius' *Carmen Paschale*, Aldhelm's *De Virginitate*, and the Venerable Bede's *Vita Sancti Cuthberti*.¹⁵¹ This genre would become most popular in Anglo-Saxon England; it was adopted as the favoured style for publication of hagiography, so much so that when Alcuin went to Charlemagne's court he taught it to his students there.

Weaver argues that the existence of both a prose version and a *prosimetrum* version of the *Boethius* does not show two separate translation efforts, but rather one single translation in this twinned work genre. She supports her argument that the *Boethius* was translated as a twinned work by showing that the prose version remained in use after Alfred's time. She shows

¹⁵⁰ Erica Weaver, "Hybrid Forms: Translating Boethius in Anglo-Saxon England, *Anglo-Saxon England* 45 (2016): 214.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 215.

that Aelfric consulted the prose version in the late tenth century which proves that it was still in use a century after it was translated.¹⁵² The proem of the *Boethius* says that Alfred first translated the work into prose and then into poetry, but the fact that the prose version was still in use demonstrates that it was not intended simply as a rough draft, but a finished work.

There is a significant reason why an author might wish to publish the same text in both prose and poetry. She draws on Aethelweard's analysis of the genre when he says that it allows the work to be useful both to experts and also to popular audiences since it increases the way in which the text may be used, whether in direct personal study or in public reading.¹⁵³ This genre allows an author to target a wider audience by adopting both a high and low level of writing. It benefits from having to sacrifice neither beauty nor clarity, art nor paedagogy, but rather separating them into two. Alcuin believed that prose was superior for reading aloud to audiences because of its increased clarity while verse was best for personal contemplation by the more advanced reader.¹⁵⁴ However, there was no consensus in medieval England on exactly which style was superior for each type of transmission. The author of the preface to the *prosimetrical* version of the *Boethius* invites the audience to "Hliste se þe wille".¹⁵⁵ He invites them to come listen in the fashion that a *scop*, a traditional Anglo-Saxon poet, would have drawn in audiences for his recitations of heroic verse.¹⁵⁶ Weaver argues that this indicates that the translator of the *prosimetrum* intended this version for public performance.

If Alfred did translate this work with the intention of imitating the style of twinned works, which was usually reserved for hagiography, it raises some interesting conclusions about

¹⁵² Ibid, 221.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 229.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 230.

¹⁵⁵ Irvine et al., 4.

¹⁵⁶ Weaver, 231.

how he viewed this the *Consolatio*. Weaver argues that the biography of Boethius at the beginning of the text imitates hagiography in order to present Boethius as a saint.¹⁵⁷ Significantly, in his Latin *Consolatio*, Boethius presents himself as an innocent sufferer of false political allegations, but Alfred changes the narrative so that, even though Boethius is guilty of the crime, he had the justifiable and righteous motive of trying to liberate the Roman state from the Germanic kings that had come to rule it.¹⁵⁸ Thus, he portrayed Boethius as a martyr killed by the heretical Arian king Theodoric.¹⁵⁹ Alfred also added an aside about the holy martyrs and depicts Boethius as a repentant sinner making amends. Thus, Alfred changed the tenor of this work by changing its primarily philosophical focus and emphasizing it as a work about morality. He accomplished this both by presenting this work in a genre that would remind the audiences of the hagiographic texts that they would know well and by presenting Boethius as a saint whose example was worthy of imitation. In this way we can see Alfred intended to use this work as inspiration for the restoration of Christian morality in his kingdom.

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of the most immediately obvious changes that Alfred made in translation was recasting of Lady Philosophy as Wisdom. Sean Pollack examines the personified characters of Wisdom and Fortune in Alfred's *Boethius* from a gendered perspective. He examines two conceptions of the pagan origin of the goddess Fate. One conception, dating back to Jakob Grimm, the most popular among early twentieth-century philologists and scholars of Anglo-Saxon literature, identified the Anglo-Saxon concept of *wyrd* with the Germanic goddess of fate.¹⁶⁰ However, an increasing consciousness of the Christian

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 234.

¹⁵⁸ Anne F. Payne, *King Alfred & Boethius: An Analysis of the Old English Version of the Consolation of Philosophy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1968): 12.

¹⁵⁹ Weaver, 234-35.

¹⁶⁰ Sean Pollack, "Engendering Wyrd: Notional Gender Encoded in the Old English Poetic and Philosophical Vocabulary," *Neophilologus* 90, no. 4, (2006): 645.

context of Anglo-Saxon writings in the middle of the twentieth century led many scholars to reject the notion of *wyrd* as a personified deity relegating her to a more abstract concept. Of course, poetry frequently represents such concepts as deities, but these scholars believed that poetry represented a pre-Christian folk consciousness which had escaped Christian thinking. However, Pollack argues that both of these perspectives are too polarized, and a more moderate perspective of syncretism applies more accurately to the Anglo-Saxon, and indeed Alfred's, concept of fate.

Anne Payne discusses why Boethius would have chosen philosophy to be the allegorical subject of one of his main characters. She defines philosophy according to Boethius' perspective as the love and pursuit of wisdom and also in some way the friendship with it.¹⁶¹ The distinction she makes between the two is that wisdom is eternal and an aspect of the divine, while philosophy, as the pursuit of wisdom, is a human activity and therefore is as temporal as mankind. According to Payne, wisdom would not have been suitable as a proper mentor for Boethius because he would have associated it too closely with the divine. Boethius chose his mentor very carefully. If a character with divine associations had appeared in Boethius' cell, this character would have been too distant and aloof to act as a proper mentor. A figure with ultimate authority does not provide suitable freedom to question and would have evoked a more submissive response rather than encouraging the dialectic that Boethius wanted. On the other hand, a human mentor would lack the intellectual authority that Boethius needed to establish the truth of his thoughts. So, Boethius could not have analogized one of his own teachers into the role.

¹⁶¹ Payne, 110-112.

Considering the fact that neither a human nor divine mentor provided the right mix of attributes for Boethius, Payne argues that his best solution was to present the personage of Lady Philosophy.¹⁶² She would be both identifiable due to her limits of temporality and, as the ideal and perfect spirit to which all humans attempt to attain through contemplation, she would act as a suitable authority on which to base his arguments. Another advantage of staging this character as Lady Philosophy was that it brought association with the areas of study most familiar and cherished to Boethius thus allowing him to explore his familiar mental pathways of his prior education

When Alfred undertook to translate this text, he ran into the very practical problem; Old English did not possess a direct equivalent for the Latin *philosophia*, so he would have to seek an alternative mentor. The option of replacing Lady Philosophy with a human figure was not practical as an option for Alfred because Boethius had set the drama of his *Consolatio* in such a way that a human would not fit.¹⁶³ One possible alternative would be to recast the role of Philosophy by placing Jesus in the lead role. In fact, there was even a precedent for this recasting found in the commentaries on the Latin *Consolatio*, but as Payne argues, Jesus, as the divine son of God, drew too much awe for both Alfred and his Mod.¹⁶⁴ (Alfred names this character after *mod*, the Old-English word for mind; Alfred uses Mod as a replacement for the character of Boethius in his translation.) The very pious Alfred may have felt that he was overstepping his authority by putting words in Jesus' mouth. This solution also suffers from the same problem that Boethius faced, namely that a divine interlocutor does not inspire conversation or interrogation, but rather subservience.

¹⁶² Ibid, 112.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 113.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 113-114.

A key omission in Alfred's *Boethius* is the passage that contains the description of Lady Philosophy's appearance. Payne argues that this approach strips away many of the tangible elements of the character, making her more malleable for Alfred to craft to his purpose.¹⁶⁵ For example, the lack of a description of the scepter, the symbol of authority, in the Old English text demonstrates that Wisdom does not possess universal authority. Rather, she only possesses authority over those who chose to submit themselves to her. Alfred's Wisdom is not a god, despite the fact that he does call him "divine Wisdom". This description is not with a sense of the possession of full godhood. Unlike Philosophy, Wisdom does not represent the ages of teaching or the knowledge accumulated in books.¹⁶⁶ Instead she is more primordial and fundamental. She is the "right will and intelligence" that existed before the books.

The relationship between Lady Philosophy and Boethius is noticeably different from that of Wisdom and Mod, according to Payne. The *Consolatio* portrays Philosophy as a goddess who exists on a separate plane impervious to assaults.¹⁶⁷ She towers over Boethius in assertion of her authority and power. Wisdom, by contrast, stands on the same plan as Mod. He is not impervious to the difficulties of this world. The haggardly aspect of Philosophy's appearance reaches only as deeply as her clothing, but it is Wisdom himself who appears worn and burdened by the cares of the world. For this reason, Wisdom can draw nearer in commiseration with Mod. The *Consolatio* presents the relationship between its two main characters as that of a teacher and student.¹⁶⁸ The Old English text presents their relationship more in the cast of parent-child. Lady Philosophy

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 115.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 117.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

appears to Boethius, not because she has a desire to soothe all suffering, but because she values him because he is an advanced student in her arts.

Pollack argues that the *Boethius* portrays Fate as feminine and therefore unstable, fickle, arbitrary, hostile to the good, and consistent only in her inconsistency.¹⁶⁹ She is not intelligible to men; even God is not willing or perhaps unable to control her. Paul Szarmach disagrees with the idea that the concept of fate, as Alfred presents it in the *Boethius*, is beyond the control of God. He seems to understand a more providential view of fate from this work. He borrows from Anne Payne to create the imagery of *wyrd* as a great wheel with God at the axle with all of fate spinning around him.¹⁷⁰ Those who are closest to God have a more stable position closer to the centre of the wheel. By contrast, the worst of men are far from God and lie on the extremities of the wheel where they are likely to fall off.

Pollack's vision of *wyrd* as an unruly woman that even God is unable to control contrasts starkly with Szarmach's vision of a God-centred and predictable pattern of a wheel. This is likely due to the fact that most of Pollack's analysis focuses on Book II where Boethius, still in the early stages of Lady Philosophy's lessons, wrestles with the seeming unfairness of this life. Szarmach focuses more on the spiritually mature Boethius of Book V who has been elevated by Philosophy to a higher level of thinking. He no longer perceives himself as a victim of Fortune, or subject to her, since he no longer values her gifts the same as he once did. Therefore, the contrast between these two perspectives on Fate's character does not represent a contradiction, but rather it demonstrates the growth and development of the protagonist's perspectives from the beginning of the book to the end. This development of the true nature of fate would likely have

¹⁶⁹ Pollack, 650.

¹⁷⁰ Szarmach, 247.

been a comfort to Alfred who suffered more than his share of changes of fortune and must have wrestled with many of the same questions as the Boethius of Book II. The end of the *Consolatio* would have reassured the king in his belief in the ultimate control of God over fate. This growth from fear of the whims of Fortune to the assurance of the power of God must have been a key reason for his desire to share this book with his people.

In contrast to Fortune, Wisdom is personified as masculine, according to Pollack, and represents the virtue of stability. The re-christening of Lady Philosophy of the *Consolatio* to the grammatically male Wisdom contrasts with the grammatically feminine *wyrd* to enforce the masculinity of this entity.¹⁷¹ Pollack acknowledges that while Wisdom seems to slip in between masculine and feminine at different points in the *Boethius*, he argues that Alfred portrays the concept as primarily masculine. While Wisdom does reprise the feminine role of nurturer from the *Consolatio*, this is the sum total of his feminine aspect. Alfred attempts to purge any notion of femininity from Wisdom by removing Boethius' description of Lady Philosophy, replacing her with the abstract, non-corporeal, though still gendered, Wisdom. While I admit the complexity of assessing the gender of Wisdom in this work, I disagree that Alfred considered Wisdom to be primarily masculine because in Christian literature Wisdom is almost exclusively personified as feminine, especially in the book of Proverbs. Wisdom also appears as a woman in Alfred's translation of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*, where he analogizes the search to know wisdom as a man's sexual intimacy with a woman.¹⁷² The confusion arises because the Anglo-Saxon word for wisdom is grammatically masculine, but this alone is not enough to overturn the cultural and literary context in which Alfred translated this work.

¹⁷¹ Pollack, 649.

¹⁷² Henry Lee Hargrove, *King Alfred's Old English Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies Turned into Modern English*, (1904), 24.

One clear literary device that Boethius used in constructing his text was to place Fortune up against Lady Philosophy as a foil. The two figures stand in obvious contrast to each other in their defining characteristics. When Alfred translated the *Consolatio*, he kept this juxtaposition of characters, not that this major feature could easily be left out. Anne Payne also discusses the relationship between Boethius' concepts of *fortuna* and *fatum* and Alfred's concept of *wyrd*. In Book II, Prose II of the *Consolatio*, Boethius portrays the personified goddess Fortuna as fickle and capricious, delighting in raising men to the top of her wheel, but taking equal delight in debasing them to the bottom of it.¹⁷³ The remaining prose sections of Book II show Fortune to be a universal force that manipulates human life. Lady Philosophy also describes the sphere of Fortune's power by defining the limits of her influence.¹⁷⁴ She cannot take away the memory of past achievements. She has no power over relationships which are based on love and friendship. From Proses III and IV, we see that she cannot touch the inner being of man whether he is still living, or especially after his death. In Proses V to VII, Lady Philosophy teaches that the absolute values that comprise a man's excellence are also beyond her ability to control. This basic character sketch forms the basis for Boethius' portrayal of Fortune in the Latin *Consolatio*.

The fundamental being and character of Fortune is one of the many things that Alfred reorients in his translation. Part of the reason for this orientation is practical from a linguistic standing since there is no single Old English word that could represent the full meaning of *fortuna* in Latin.¹⁷⁵ For this reason Alfred roughly splits the concept of fortune into two. He uses *wyrd* to represent fortune as a force within nature that has the power to act and influence the lives of men. To represent the other aspect of fortune, its attendant gifts, Alfred uses the term

¹⁷³ Payne, 79.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, 80.

woruldsælða.¹⁷⁶ For example, the *woruldsælða* give a speech in which they ask why Mod would be angry with them since he sought them; they did not seek him, and they only behaved according to their nature. They accuse him as being guiltier than them because he used them to fulfill his own greed. Alfred stages this speech as the actual gifts of fortune speaking rather than Fortune speaking as in the Latin text, or Wyrð as the force of fortune.

Payne also argues that the connotations of *fortuna* and *wyrð* are different.¹⁷⁷ The former, she argues, is fickle and frivolous. Her antics, even at their worst, come across as a painful joke, but there is certainly no malicious intent in her. Payne describes the Latin connotation of *fortuna* as the “familiar uncertainty. By contrast, *wyrð* connotes the “unfamiliar uncertainty”, and though it is no more sinister than *fortuna*, yet it is much more mysterious and unknown. Another difference is that the Latin *Fortuna* was associated much more closely with earthly goods and the characteristic of mutability.¹⁷⁸

Payne discusses the metaphor that Boethius draws of Fortune and the role she plays in nature.¹⁷⁹ In Book I, Meter II and Prose IV, he argues that the study of the natural world shows that disorder and disturbance are an integral part of the laws of nature. She is not solely a force of wanton destruction, but rather her presence allows the world to break down and reform. Thus, she is integral to the constant need for growth and change. In Book II, Meter I, Boethius compares her to the irregular tides of Euripus which flow much more powerfully than anywhere else in the Mediterranean. Her presence does not threaten the balance of nature; it sustains it. Alfred omits this passage about the tides of Euripus. The changes that Alfred makes to the

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 81.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 83.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, 84.

passages concerning fortune break down the metaphor of fortune being an integral part of the balance of nature.¹⁸⁰ The only part of the analogy that Alfred keeps is in Prose VIII which argues that *fortuna/wyrd* is profitable to man even when it appears bad by human perspective.

It seems natural that Alfred would want to keep this message in his text because he reforms *wyrd* as a function of God's work.¹⁸¹ God enacts his will through *wyrd*, and thus all things whether they appear to the benefit or the detriment of the individual are according to the plan of God. For this reason, Alfred would want to teach his subjects to accept their circumstances as the actions of God who will work out the best result through these actions.

Murray Markland discusses one of the key themes of the *Boethius* in his article, "Boethius, Alfred, and Deor".¹⁸² He addresses a thematic connection between this work and *The Lament of Deor*, a poem that is found in a tenth-century collection, the *Exeter Book*. Although we do not know the precise date of authorship for this poem, it must obviously predate the collection book, so it may date roughly around the same time or even before Alfred's translation program. The poem offers a series of people, both mythic and historical, who rose to great heights only to fall into various misfortunes. After each account the poet recites his refrain, "That passed over, this may also."¹⁸³ The poet, who identifies himself as Deor, offers this line of comfort to himself as in the final stanza he recounts his own fall from grace. He was once a king's bard, but he lost his privileged position of patronage to another bard.

Markland cites a parallel passage from the *Boethius* following a very similar line of thought which says,

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 85.

¹⁸¹ Ibid, 90.

¹⁸² Murray F. Markland, "Boethius Alfred, and Deor," *Modern Philology* 66, no. 1 (1968).

¹⁸³ S. A. J. Bradley, *Anglo-Saxon Poetry*, (London: Dent, 1982), 364.

If you now say that you do not have felicity because you do not have the passing honors and the joys that you had before, then you are not without felicity, however, because the sorrows that you are now in will pass just as you say that the joys did before.¹⁸⁴

The idea of the impermanence of present sorrows and that they are as fleeting as the pleasures of the past is clearly present in both works. Markland also raises a second parallel between these two works. The Latin *Consolatio* draws the image of Jupiter's two barrels, one for well and one for woe. Analogously, in *Deor*, the poet states that the Lord gives some men good fortune and bad to others.¹⁸⁵ The point of both of these works is to offer to the sufferer comfort in the knowledge that the current misfortunes will pass.¹⁸⁶ Neither looks for comfort in the restoration of the past; both have their sights firmly planted on the future. For Boethius the comfort comes in the form of looking forward to a future of eternal goods which will be unsullied by the failures of those who do not know how to seek them properly. Alfred takes comfort in a similar look past this life to spiritual salvation. By contrast, Markland argues that *Deor* looks to the return of temporal good fortune.

W. F. Bolton wrote an article disagreeing with Markland. While Bolton agrees that these two poems are thematically and perhaps historically linked, he thinks that Markland has missed the depth of the parallels. Markland argues that each of the stanzas of *Deor* reinforces the same theme, the passing of misfortune, and links it to the *Boethius*. However, Bolton argues that each of the first five stanzas corresponds to one of the five gifts of Fortune that Lady Philosophy

¹⁸⁴ Susan Irvine and Malcolm R. Godden, *The Old English Boethius*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 47. Prose 5.15

¹⁸⁵ Bradley, 365. Ll. 30-34.

¹⁸⁶ Markland, 3.

lists: wealth, honour, passion, power, fame.¹⁸⁷ Each of the stories which Deor recounts corresponds to one of these five gifts. Weland, the smith, lost his wealth. Beadohild lost her honour in her pregnancy. Meethild and Geat demonstrate the fact that passion provides little satisfaction whether it is fulfilled or unfulfilled. The Ostrogothic people learned what it was like to live under an oppressive power. Stanza five demonstrates the transience of fame and that even the well known will pass away. Thus, Deor is using the same technique of illustration that Boethius used so frequently, but instead he draws examples from Germanic mythology and history rather than Roman.

According to Bolton, the purpose of both these works is to push the readers to abandon their search for these five worldly pursuits and to seek instead a more perfect and moral path. He argues that the name Deor might also express a parallel between the two works. The name has certain base and animalistic connotations, and Alfred uses the word *deor* to refer to animals.¹⁸⁸ Essentially, Bolton's argument is that these two works share the common theme that those who pursue these five false goods are submitting to a sub-human path. In Book V of the *Consolatio*, Boethius argues that intelligence is a uniquely human trait, and that while animals possess the capacity for thought, it exists only to fulfill their own appetites. Animal thought extends only so far in that they have will or volition. Human intelligence is unique because it empowers people to act above their base animalistic desires. Therefore, the theme of both of these works is to rise above these five false goods in pursuit of a higher good.

Bolton's argument is intriguing. It is indeed exciting to imagine a world in which scholars and poets are interacting with each other through their various arts and discussing such

¹⁸⁷ W. F. Bolton, "Boethius, Alfred, and "Deor" Again." *Modern Philology* 69, no. 3 (1972): 224.

¹⁸⁸ Bolton, 277.

deep philosophical issues. Certainly, the thematic similarities between the *Lament of Deor* and the *Consolatio* are impossible to deny, but it is also not necessary that these similarities are the result of a common discussion. The idea that present sorrow will pass is fairly fundamental to the common theme of hope, so it is not difficult to imagine that these texts could have arisen separately from one another. If Bolton is correct that each stanza of the poem allegorizes one of the five gifts of Fortune, then that would be a nearly undeniable level of correlation. However, his associations of each stanza with an individual gift is not wholly convincing. The five sufferers do not seem to line up so clearly with the five gifts as Bolton believes. So, while it is an attractive and not an unreasonable idea that these texts are historically linked by a cultural dialogue, Markland offers the safer and probably more reliable mode of thought.

This discussions of Wisdom and Fortune demonstrate some lessons of morality that Alfred was attempting to communicate through the *Consolatio*. First, the value of wisdom is paramount. The pursuit of wisdom, which is a major theme across all of the Alfredian texts, promises rewards that will lend to the improvement in this life and will continue into the next. Since Alfred believed it was past generations who allowed the decline of the English people by forsaking the pursuit of wisdom, it follows that he would write extensively about how to restore that pursuit. Secondly, this text teaches the reader to hold the gifts of Fortune loosely, and to not measure the success in one's life through temporary and fleeting conveniences. This strikes a difficult balance with Alfred's promise that commitment to wisdom would result in the return of wealth, but perhaps this can be reconciled by understanding that he was presenting one idea on a national level and a totally different expectation of behaviour for individuals.

Toward the end of the *Consolatio*, Boethius begins delving deeper into more esoteric questions of philosophy and theology. Much of this discussion centers around the concepts of

divine nature and eternity. Alfred also entered into these discussions but made some alterations to Boethius' questions as suited his purpose. Anne Payne's book describes the changes that Alfred made to the *Consolatio* and how those reflect the philosophical and theological distinctions between Boethius and Alfred. Book V received the heaviest alteration of the entire work. In the Latin version of this book, the primary theme is solving the apparent contradiction of God's foresight and human freedom.¹⁸⁹ Boethius answers this quandary by explaining God's eternal nature. From a human perspective, man's choices result in tomorrow's consequences. But unlike man, God is eternal and therefore the consequences of man's choices are a part of an infinite present. Since God is not limited by a perspective of separate past, present, and future, all events are eternally present to him. Therefore, his foreknowledge does not restrict man because it is not truly foreknowledge at all, but rather present knowledge. Thus, God's knowledge of man's future does not limit man's freedom any more than one man viewing the actions of another man in the present can limit the latter's freedom. Viewing in the present does not limit another's freedom, and for God all things are infinitely present.

Alfred omits this discussion of the problem of freedom and foreknowledge which has led many scholars to believe that he was incapable of processing arguments on this elevated plane. However, Payne argues that this is an inadequate explanation for why Alfred chose to make such alterations. She contends that Alfred declined to translate Boethius' themes in Book V because he did not agree with his dualistic interpretation of eternity, that there is one time dimension for man and another for God.¹⁹⁰ She argues that the various philosophical changes that Alfred makes throughout his translation demonstrate his ability to think and understand on an equal plane with

¹⁸⁹ Payne, 17.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 21.

Boethius, and since Alfred makes many other erudite changes to the text, we should not assume he omitted this discussion because he was not intellectually capable of comprehending it.

One of the major theological changes which Alfred made to the *Consolatio* deals with the theme of divine order. Boethius' conception of divine order is primarily Platonic.¹⁹¹ Order is the ultimate cosmic reality of the universe which exists in the past, present, and future to the perspective of man. In this view, God is the ultimate manifestation of order. He exists within the world as a symbol of the absolute order. Since he exists within the world, he exists within time, but unlike men, he experiences all time simultaneously. Alfred cannot square this understanding of divine order with his Christian theology since he approaches the world from a creationist standpoint. He sees God as the creator and ruler of the world rather than as the ultimate expression of the cosmos. For Alfred, God exists outside of the world and therefore outside of time itself.

As already mentioned, there is evidence that scholars were aware of this work all the way through the twelfth century. However, the question still remains how influential it was through the years following Alfred. Szarmach discusses two texts by Aelfric that show the influence of the *Boethius* in the tenth century. Both of these texts come from his *Life of Saints*. The first text, *The Nativity of Christ*, borrows from the *Boethius* a sort of trinitarian view point to support his argument of the divinity of Christ.¹⁹² The borrowed passage discusses the nature of eternity with reference to "three things" or three fundamental modes of existence.¹⁹³ One is transitory, with beginning and end. Two are eternal, either with beginning and no end or with no beginning and no end. Aelfric uses this argument to support Christ's claim to divinity because it provides him a

¹⁹¹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁹² Szarmach, 239.

¹⁹³ Irvine et al, 397. Prose 33.2.

place in the godhead which is trinitarian, just as the fundamental nature of reality is trinitarian. Furthermore, it demonstrates how that Christ who was born could still be eternal which is a necessary aspect of the Christian concept of divinity. Aelfric also addresses an aspect of the eternal nature of divinity with relation to the concept of memory by directly adopting the line “He never remembers anything because he never forgets anything.”¹⁹⁴ By this he discusses how the human conception of memory is flawed when considering the mind of God because memory is the recollection of past events, however, to God, who is eternal and therefore exists in all moments at once, there is no clear distinction of past and present. Therefore, God cannot truly remember anything because to him all things are present and never past.

In his *De Auguriis*, Aelfric also refers to the *Boethius* which discusses God’s command “To forsake evil and do good” and for support calls in “that saying that he spoke: the more one labours, the greater the reward one receives.”¹⁹⁵ Aelfric interprets these as Biblical references: “Decline from evil and do good, and dwell forever and ever,”¹⁹⁶ and, “Now he that planteth, and he that watereth, are one. And every man shall receive his own reward, according to his own labour.”¹⁹⁷ The similarities between these two Biblical passages and the *Boethius* demonstrate a couple of points. First is Szarmach’s point that the translation which Alfred produced in the ninth century was still in use and a matter of intellectual discussion in the tenth century as evidenced by Aelfric’s interpretation of the text. Second, it also demonstrates Alfred’s desire to educate his readers on moral behaviour. This passage introduces the idea of moral labour, which involves both the avoidance of evil and striving for good. The author also suggests a reward which grows in relation to the effort by which one attains to these goals. This encourages spiritual growth at

¹⁹⁴ Irvine et al, 399. Prose 33.3.

¹⁹⁵ Szarmach, 242. Irvine et al, 385. Prose 32.

¹⁹⁶ Ps. 36:27 DRB

¹⁹⁷ I Cor. 3:8 DRB

every level of a Christian's maturity by promising an ever increasing reward for greater attainment. Since Alfred wanted to encourage the growth of Christian morals in his kingdom it is no wonder that he would do it by teaching this idea of ever-increasing moral labour with the promise of proportionately increasing reward.

Another philosophical difference between Alfred and Boethius is on the nature of freedom. Boethius is primarily concerned with freedom of the mind.¹⁹⁸ In Book V, Prose II, lines 2-5 he asks whether fate "Constrain[s] the motion of human minds." Lady Philosophy answers that all minds are indeed free, but those who regard divine things are freer than those who focus on the body and the things of this earth. She teaches that men's minds are proportionately free based on their reliance or distance from material things. Those that are easily tempted by the material become enslaved by the whims and hazards of fate, while those who reject earthly things enjoy a far more stable and happier existence.

In contrast to Boethius' fascination with the freedom of the mind, Alfred is much more concerned with man's freedom of action. In his translation, Mod inquires of Wisdom "Whether we have any freedom or any power as to what we do or not do, or whether divine providence or fate compels us to what they want."¹⁹⁹ Payne discusses Alfred's understanding of the nature of freedom through the explanation that Wisdom gives, that there are two kinds of freedom. First, Wisdom presents natural freedom, which is the fundamental right and ability to choose one's own actions.²⁰⁰ God has granted this freedom to all men and thereby all men have the capacity to choose their own actions. However, beyond this there is moral freedom, which only those who dedicate themselves to the study of wisdom can possess. Thus, some men will use their natural

¹⁹⁸ Payne, 40-41.

¹⁹⁹ Irvine et al, 379. Prose 31.3.

²⁰⁰ Payne, 42.

freedom to choose a path which will lead them into bondage while others will instead elect to follow the path of wisdom, which leads to ultimate freedom. Alfred discusses angels as the ultimate example of freedom since, like men, they possess natural freedom, but in contradistinction, they also possess perfect wisdom and therefore are free from the toils of this world.²⁰¹

Alfred, through the personage of Wisdom, underlies the importance of wisdom by discussing how only the wise can obtain power.²⁰² Man's natural freedom allows any to strive for power, and some may perhaps even temporarily attain their desires. However, any attainment of power through worldly means will ultimately prove to be a farce. Only those who dedicate themselves to wisdom can truly hold power as a natural part of their life. Therefore, freedom is intrinsically linked to what is morally right through the pursuit of wisdom. While this ideal form of moral freedom through ultimate wisdom is an unattainable standard, God will reward the individual in proportion to what effort they strive toward the ideal.

Payne summarizes three quick foundational points of Alfred's understanding of freedom that clarify the above discussion.²⁰³ The first point explains why God chooses to grant natural freedom to men and angels, the only two beings which possess this freedom. The answer is that they have natural freedom because a king must have free subjects to serve him or else he will be robbed of his basic right to honour. If all of the king's subjects are slaves, then he receives no honour from their service, but the choice of free men to serve provides the king with great honour. The second fundamental point of freedom is that while men are free to choose not to serve God, they will suffer punishment for this choice. This may seem to undercut man's

²⁰¹ Irvine et al, 379. Prose 31.4

²⁰² Payne, 43.

²⁰³ Ibid, 44.

freedom to choose their own path, but in fact it does not because a man will only take this path by his own choice, and he cannot escape the consequences of his refusal to accept the honour of their responsibility. The final point deals with the inevitable failure of man to meet these standards based on unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances. The expectation of the attainment of the ideal creates an impossible situation for finite man who cannot always deliver perfect results, even through maximum effort, due to the challenges of life. However, this passage teaches that if a man wills to act well and according to wisdom, but is hindered by outside forces, he will then be awarded according to his efforts. This is still quite esoteric discussion, but slightly more accessible and practical for Alfred's readers. Furthermore, it is an essential component of his moral constitution. If people have no freedom to choose their own actions, then they cannot improve themselves morally but only have the illusion of self-improvement. For individual choices and actions to merit reward it is necessary that they be undertaken by free choice.

De Consolatione Philosophiae was a valuable resource to Alfred as it allowed him to explore various themes that were central to the moral constitution he wished to create for his people. First, Alfred wished to demonstrate the essential nature of Christianity in his kingdom. In some sense, the *Consolatio* was a flawed text in accomplishing this purpose because of its lack of Christian elements. On the other hand, Alfred turned this to his advantage because he firmly demonstrated his Christian beliefs by changing the text to come into better alignment with Christian theology. The translation of pagan to Christian demonstrates Alfred's authority over the text as well as symbolizing the history of the Anglo-Saxon people which turned from their pagan beliefs toward the light of Christianity.

One of the most immediately evident changes that Alfred made was changing the character Lady Philosophy into Wisdom. This alteration should be understood in connection with Alfred's Christianization of the text. This updated characterization was a common interpretation among post-Boethian, Christian commentators, and the concept of wisdom fits more easily, not only into the Anglo-Saxon language, but also into the Christian context that Alfred was emphasizing. For Alfred, wisdom was one of the most essential virtues because it governs the actions of people in every sphere: social, spiritual, political, etc. Fortune also plays an important role in this work by providing an antithesis to Wisdom. She encourages the reader to consider the value of stability that Wisdom brings rather than relying on the changing and unreliable gifts of chance.

Alfred also uses this work to discuss the fundamental nature of the divine and eternity. This focus on the divine teaches the audience the importance of looking beyond the perspective that time allows. Much of the contemplative wisdom that the *Consolatio* offers seems to be contradicted by reality. However, reflection from the perspective of an eternal being allows one to realize that there is no reward for evil actions, and that the actions of the morally righteous are the only thing that will receive true rewards. By opening the divine perspective, Alfred hopes to show the order and stability that exists in this world even though human perspective only perceives disorder. The discussion of divine providence encourages the reader in the assurance of divine control and benevolence. On the other hand, Alfred is careful not to go so far as to deny human free will, which would undermine his purpose. Free will is essential to Alfred's moral constitution because without it, people have no freedom to choose whether to act morally or immorally. Alfred wants them to act morally, and therefore, he must allow for freedom in order for individual choice to be a reality.

Just as in *Pastoral Care*, Alfred uses the *Consolatio* to show that the moral constitution of the English people must have a Christian foundation. He supports this assertion through his discussion of wisdom and divine nature. Thematically, the *Consolatio* lines up very closely with much of the core of Augustine's *Soliloquies*. At a first glance, these two works are similar, although the latter is much shorter. Despite the many parallels, the *Soliloquies* allows us to explore other themes regarding Alfred's moral constitution such as the socio-political nature of the self, theological foundations for Anglo-Saxon society and politics, and a deep eschatological investigation into the nature of the self and the afterlife.

Chapter 4: *Soliloquies*

Another, lesser-known text which stands in the Alfredian corpus is his translation of Augustine's *Soliloquies*. Unfortunately, little scholarly work has been done on this text. There are several possible reasons that explain this scholarly neglect. Ronald Ganze posits that it has been passed over because it is the translation of an obscure and early Augustinian text.²⁰⁴ Since the original Latin text lacked the same celebrity in the medieval period, and indeed in the modern era, this work has garnered much less interest. Also, some thematic similarities have led the *Soliloquies* to be seen as a companion piece to Alfred's *Boethius*.²⁰⁵

Both Henry Lee Hargrove and Thomas A. Carnicelli reflect in the titles of their publications of this text that King Alfred's work on this text is best considered to be a version of the text rather than simply a translation. Alfred makes many alterations and additions to Augustine's text. The original Latin text, as Alfred states in the preface, was divided into two books, but the Anglo-Saxon text contains, not surprisingly, an added preface and quite peculiarly, an added third book. Ganze notes and commends Hargrove's model of the Anglo-Saxon *Soliloquies* in which he defines a different role for Alfred in each book.²⁰⁶ In Book I, Alfred acts as a translator since there are relatively few changes or fissions to the original text. In Book II, he acts as an adaptor of the text, since, although it still mostly follows the same thematic flow, the proportion of fissions greatly increases in relation to the proportion of faithful translation. In Book III, Hargrove presents Alfred as the author, since the Latin text ends in Book II with questions raised but left unanswered. Alfred took the opportunity to present his own answers to Augustine's questions, although his answers seem to rely heavily on later Augustinian

²⁰⁴ Ganze, 22.

²⁰⁵ Ibid, 21.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 26.

thought. Hargrave's model provides a useful way of understanding how Alfred interacted with each part of the text.

The text follows a similar structure to the *Consolation of Philosophy* in that it presents a dialogue between the author and an interlocutor, but in this text, Boethius and Wisdom have been exchanged for Augustine and Reason. While Wisdom is not the primary teacher in this work, she is constantly discussed as a character and as a virtue throughout the *Soliloquies*. Many of the characteristics of wisdom are shared points of discussion between these two works. Because the topic of wisdom, as it relates to morality, was discussed more extensively in the previous chapter, it will not be a major point of discussion here in order to avoid redundancy.

This chapter will discuss various themes within Alfred's version of the *Soliloquies*. First, it will cover Alfred's preface to the text, which revisits his intentions behind his literary program and what spiritual benefits he hoped it would provide. Alfred uses this preface to explain the value that he sees in these texts, which he collected for the purpose of inspiring his people toward a quest for wisdom. Alfred also discussed various socio-political institutions of the Anglo-Saxon people and used them as analogies to explain spiritual matters. This has the effect of confirming the legitimacy of those institutions, and, thus, it invites the readers to seek their place within that society. Finally, this work contains a fascinating discussion of Alfred's eschatological beliefs, which seem to have some points of disagreement with Christian orthodoxy. Alfred uses these discussions to demonstrate the significance of one's moral actions in this life by demonstrating their eternal significance.

Augustine wrote the *Soliloquies* in 386 while on retreat at Cassiciacum shortly after his conversion to Christianity and before his baptism.²⁰⁷ The translated text opens with a preface in which Alfred sketches out an elaborate construction metaphor in which he describes himself gathering materials which he will use to build a home where pilgrims may rest. The metaphor beautifully describes how he has gathered important texts from which to construct a body of knowledge for his people to use. After this metaphor, the preface closes with the factual information of Augustinian authorship and the basic format of the text. Book I opens by presenting the major questions of the text: what is the nature of the soul, and what is the nature of God, and how can one know good and evil. Then Reason arrives to answer his questions, but before they can begin their discussion, Reason instructs Augustine to pray, which he does. Then begins a long and elaborate prayer in which Augustine asks for illumination. The rest of the book covers Reason's answers to Augustine's questions.

Book II again begins with a prayer for understanding, and the main concern in this book is whether the soul is immortal. At the end of the book, Augustine asks whether one's current knowledge will persist into eternity, or whether it will wax or wane in the next life. However, Reason declines to answer and simply refers him to another book, *De Videndo Deo*. In Alfred's own Book III, he presents Augustine pressing Reason on the same question, which Reason again declines to answer, so Augustine engages in a monologue presenting his own systematic answer to the question by the end of which he concludes that knowledge does persist into the afterlife. This book is the most eschatologically focused of the whole text. The book ends abruptly with an incomplete sentence which asserts Alfred's authorship. Moral reasoning is ubiquitous in this text. It presents answers to questions about God and the soul, and about good and evil. It discusses the

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 23.

search for wisdom and shows how difficult and rare it is to attain true wisdom. It also discusses the afterlife as well as the rewards that will be for those who are righteous and the punishment of damnation for the wicked.

The preface to Alfred's version of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies* is a fascinating piece of literature and holds an important place in the study of the Alfredian corpus. It opens with the image of Alfred gathering materials for his construction. "I then gathered for myself staves, and stud-shafts, and cross-beams, and helves for each of the tools that I could work with."²⁰⁸ This theme of gathering represents Alfred's program of gathering the works of the church fathers, whom he lists in shorthand as St. Augustine, St. Gregory, and St. Jerome. He admits that he has been very selective in gathering his materials, and that there is much more that should be brought for this construction, so he invites anyone who is able to continue his work which he believes is unfinished. The purpose of all this gathering is to build, "Many a neat wall, and erect many a rare house, and build a fair enclosure, and therein dwell in joy and comfort both in winter and summer."²⁰⁹ So, it is Alfred's hope, by what he builds, to create a home where a soul may rest in comfort regardless of the season. Significantly, Alfred admits that he has not come to this rest himself, but still has hope for the future since he not only sees temporary cottages in this transitory world, but also the eternal home which has been prepared in the next life.

This preface shows similar purposefulness in his actions as the preface to *Pastoral Care*, in which he explains how he is translating, "Certain books which are the most necessary for all men to know."²¹⁰ His desire to provide the necessary materials to support the education of his people is evident from both of these prefaces. However, the extended metaphor of gathering and

²⁰⁸ Hargrove, 2.

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 2.

²¹⁰ Keynes et al., 126.

construction stands out for its elaborate nature. Scholars have wondered where the inspiration for this metaphor originated. Prodosh Bhattacharya has noted an analogue between this preface and a passage from his translation of Pope Gregory's *Cura Pastoralis*.²¹¹

So those who have done no good are first to be cast down by reproof from the hardness of their wickedness, so that they may after a time be raised, and stand [firm] with righteous works; for we cut down tall trees in the wood to erect them afterwards in the edifice where we intend to build, although we cannot use them for the work too soon, because of their greenness, before they are dry. But the drier they are while on the ground, the more confidently may they be erected.²¹²

Bhattacharya notes that in this passage, Alfred focuses as closely on the process of gathering the materials as on the actual construction, which is similar to how he presents the metaphor in the *Soliloquies*. This use of cutting down trees for construction is quite distinct because, as he notes, the standard medieval metaphor for gathering relates to flowers.²¹³ This concept does appear in the *Soliloquies* in the statements, as Bhattacharya translates, “Here end the blossoms of the first book,” and, “Here begins the gathering of the blossoms of the second book.” The word which Bhattacharya translates as blossoms appears as “anthology” in Hargrove’s translation.²¹⁴ So it seems that Alfred is fully aware of the metaphor of gathering flowers, but he instead chose a much more distinctive metaphor for his preface. This may be because it allows him to thematically tie the gathering process with the construction of a home. This allows Alfred to demonstrate how he has not simply collected texts arbitrarily; it

²¹¹ Prodosh Bhattacharya, “An Analogue and Probable Source for a Metaphor in Alfred’s Preface to the Old English Translation of Augustine’s *Soliloquies*,” *Notes and Queries* 45, no. 2 (1998): 162.

²¹² Sweet, 442-444.

²¹³ Bhattacharya, 162.

²¹⁴ Hargrove, 30, 37.

emphasizes the intentionality and purpose with which he constructs his literary corpus.

Bhattacharya notes that the writings which Alfred gathers provide havens of rest to guide and encourage his readers along their journey into the next life.²¹⁵ This relates to their purpose as a moral constitution because in order to instill right behaviour, Alfred must also provide the necessary spiritual care and encouragement in order to impart the motivation to change.

Valerie Heuchan disagrees with Bhattacharya's proposed source of inspiration for this metaphor, since the two passages are very different thematically, even though the expression may appear similar.²¹⁶ In the preface to the *Soliloquies*, the trees are valuable materials which must be collected; they represent the wisdom of the church fathers preserved in their writings. On the other hand, in this passage of *Pastoral Care*, the materials represent sinners who have morally failed and must be cut down and go through the redeeming process of drying to be of any use. Since Alfred would not likely be inclined to consider sinners and the church fathers in similar lights, the one passage likely is not the inspiration of the other. Heuchan acknowledges the similarities between the two passages, but she argues that the similarity more likely demonstrates a common tendency of Alfred to use practical imagery.²¹⁷ So the two may certainly be considered analogues, but neither seems to be the source of the other.

There is some merit to Bhattacharya's argument that the similarities in wording between this preface and the passage from *Pastoral Care* demonstrate some level of analogous thinking. The imagery of gathering materials for the purpose of constructing a house is strikingly similar, and not easily dismissed. There are certainly significant thematic differences in what the building

²¹⁵ Bhattacharya, 162.

²¹⁶ Valerie Heuchan, "God's Co-Workers and Powerful Tools: A Study of the Sources of Alfred's Building Metaphor in His Old English Translation of Augustine's Soliloquies." *Notes and Queries* 54, no. 1 (2017): 4.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*

materials represent, so it is unlikely that this passage from *Pastoral Care* is a source of inspiration for this metaphor, but it does expand our understanding of Alfred's intentionality behind his collection of educational texts, that, in the act of gathering, materials are carefully chosen, and are not haphazard.

As an alternative, Heuchan argues that the source of inspiration for this metaphor is the Apostle Paul,

For we are God's coadjutors: you are God's husbandry; you are God's building. According to the grace of God that is given to me, as a wise architect, I have laid the foundation; and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation no man can lay, but that which is laid; which is Christ Jesus. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble: Every man's work shall be manifest; for the day of the Lord shall declare it, because it shall be revealed in fire; and the fire shall try every man's work, of what sort it is. If any man's work abide, which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work burn, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.²¹⁸

There are several key thematic links between this Biblical passage and the preface to *Soliloquies*. First, Paul calls himself a master builder, which is similar to how Alfred describes himself.²¹⁹ Paul also warns others to take care how they build on his foundation which clearly shows that he expects others to continue the work, even if they must do so with caution. Alfred also invites those who are capable to continue collecting resources for construction. Both men

²¹⁸ I Cor. 3:9-15. DRB

²¹⁹ Heuchan, 5-6.

exhort their successors to take care to select the right quality of materials. Where Paul rates various qualities of material, from gold to stubble, Alfred emphasizes the finest wood for construction. Both authors present an eternal perspective in light of the construction projects. Paul says that only the materials of the highest quality will survive the fires of judgement day. Alfred says that these buildings will illuminate the eyes to light the way toward the eternal home.

This passage from I Corinthians is a probable source for Alfred's metaphor because it is quite clear that he was aware of the book.²²⁰ At one point in the *Soliloquies* he quotes the above Pauline passage saying, "Just as it is written that God is a fellow worker with each well-working person."²²¹ Also the metaphor that Alfred draws of the ship with three anchors which are faith, hope, and charity seems directly related to the passage of the transcendence of charity in I Corinthians 13. Alfred may have been inspired to draw this metaphor out of I Corinthians after reading Aldhelm's *De Virginitate* where he has occasion to use the same metaphor.²²² So Alfred's preface predominantly features this metaphor, which may well have been drawn directly from the Biblical passage. This serves as a reminder that the basis for Alfred's program of moral education is fundamentally Christian. Alfred draws these ideas out of the Scriptures and incorporates them into his translations of these texts. This demonstrates his methodology of using Scripture as a means of developing his thoughts about these texts and also for framing his own action in translating them.

In translating the *Soliloquies* into English, Alfred did more than simply present the text into another language. More accurately, he translated the text into a whole new cultural context. He used this translation to comment on Anglo-Saxon society through various allusions. These

²²⁰ Ibid, 5-8.

²²¹ Carnichelli, 68.15-69.2.

²²² Heuchan, 9.

allusions have the effect of supporting and legitimizing the underlying structures of English society. One of the important themes that permeates Augustine's *Soliloquies* is the idea of self and the discovery of one's own nature. Ganze investigates how Alfred altered Augustine's conception of the self from a purely phenomenological being by adding a more socio-political dimension to the self. He argues that not only does Alfred weigh in on Augustine's considerations about the self, free will, and the immortality of the soul, but he also used the text as a means to discuss his social and political concerns as a monarch thus adding a socially constructed view of self to the picture.²²³

From the outset, Ganze notes four goals that Augustine has in his writing. First, he would know God.²²⁴ Second, he wants to know the soul. He also wants to know the self, and finally he wants to prove the immortality of the soul. The first two goals are stated explicitly and fulfilled in Book I. The knowledge of the self and one's own soul is the subject of Book II, and Augustine abandons his fourth goal to be fulfilled in a later work. While the *Soliloquies* represent early Augustinian thinking, this work is still consistent with the rest of his corpus in that it presents the human soul as corrupt and in need of God to make the first move before one may turn to him.²²⁵ This is borne out in the opening prayer where he appeals to God as a physician who heals the soul. However, Augustine faced a problem in the exploration of self, which is that a first-person perspective is insufficient for such an investigation.²²⁶ This is why Augustine constructs the text as a classical dialogue between himself and Reason as a third person perspective.

²²³ Ganze, 22.

²²⁴ Ibid, 23.

²²⁵ Ibid, 24.

²²⁶ Ibid, 25.

When Alfred translated this work to English, he placed a stronger emphasis on the social nature of the self's identity. Ganze argues that, because he was a king, Alfred had to live in a state of greater awareness of his own social and political landscape that Augustine did.²²⁷ This different role in society forced Alfred to accept a view of the world that worldly things are necessary goods. It was necessary for him to accept the necessity of material wealth in order to maintain and protect his kingdom. He could not afford to accept an Augustinian level of transcendentalism. Because of this he makes necessary alterations to the text to support a more practical purpose. This shows that Alfred was highly concerned with bringing esoteric spiritual concerns into step with practical life.

One example that Ganze raises is in the passage where Augustine says that he wishes to know Alypius' soul. Ganze argues that the fact that Augustine desires to know Alypius' soul highlights how one self is alien to all others.²²⁸ However, despite the fact that alienness is a common theme of Anglo-Saxon literature, Alfred changes the emphasis by having Augustine say that he merely wishes to know Alypius' thoughts. This removes the Augustinian proposition of alienation and epistemic asymmetry. Ganze argues that while Augustine desires to remove the barrier between two souls to create bond of intimate knowledge, Alfred shows a much more practical concern of wishing simply to know another man's thoughts, most specifically to know whether another man is loyal to him.²²⁹ This slight change in wording shows a vastly different concern between the two authors. Alfred shows the political concern of wishing to ascertain the loyalty of his ruling subjects. He removes the discussion from a phenomenological consideration to a perspective which considers the maintenance of social hierarchy and one's identity in it.

²²⁷ Ibid, 25-27.

²²⁸ Ibid, 29.

²²⁹ Ibid.

Ganze mentions that, at one point in the original text, Augustine says that there are multiple paths to God.²³⁰ This concept is quite antithetical to Christian orthodoxy and Augustine himself later shows some discomfort with this statement in his *Retractiones*. However, Alfred not only seems comfortable with this expression, but he also develops it further by drawing imagery from his own socio-political culture. Alfred adds a social dimension to Augustine's concept of multiple paths by drawing a metaphor of the king's court.²³¹ He likens the political lord with the heavenly lord. He says that men who have more honour will have an easier path to access the king. Alfred uses Anglo-Saxon social structure to relate cosmic order. He discusses how some people dwell in the halls, cottages and prisons, which signifies how different people live in varying proximities to God. Here, Ganze argues, Alfred is not only making a theological point, but is also demonstrating the divine correctness of Anglo-Saxon social structure.²³²

In this passage, Alfred makes a moral point by highlighting the importance of honour, *ar*.²³³ The extent of a man's *ar* has the practical effect, in Anglo-Saxon society, of facilitating one's access to the king. *Ar* is gained by doing honourable deeds, and therefore these good works help to gain the individual access to the king, which in the metaphor helps in bringing salvation. Arguing for the salvific effects of individual works conflicts with Augustine's theology of grace, so it is to some extent strange that Alfred would insert the idea here. However, this is a political expedient for Alfred who needs his men to act honourably in the face of Viking aggression. The argument that Ganze constructs sounds rather cynical, but he defends himself by arguing that Alfred is not manipulating religion to benefit himself.²³⁴ He draws on Alfred's conviction that it

²³⁰ Ganze, 30.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 31.

²³² *Ibid*.

²³³ *Ibid*.

²³⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

was his spiritual duty to support his kingdom's spiritual health. Therefore, Alfred elevates the virtue of honour to salvific proportions as a means to forge the greatest possible earthy kingdom.

Valerie Heuchan also notes a similar phenomenon where Alfred draws on his own socio-political landscape to create a metaphor for divine order. In the preface to the text, Alfred draws a contrast between *laenland* and *bocland*.²³⁵ The former, loaned land, is traditionally used to describe a royal fisc which might be granted to nobles. It was not permanent, but the nobles hoped to receive a charter which would change the holding into a permanent possession. Once the king granted this charter, the legal status of the holding changed to *bocland*, or book land, to denote permanent, hereditary property.²³⁶ The permanence of this type of landholding made it enormously desirable to the nobility. Alfred uses this social mechanism to represent the movement of the individual from the transitory world to the eternal state. The life one lives in a short term on Earth would change to an interminable life in Heaven. This again has the benefit of making a theological argument more tangible for Alfred's readers as well as underscoring the compatibility of Anglo-Saxon culture with divine order. This is an approach that Alfred frequently undertook in his translations but especially in this text.

One topic that has garnered much attention in the *Soliloquies* is the discussion of eschatology. Alfred authored this third book himself in order to explore Augustine's and his own questions about the afterlife. The fact that Alfred undertook the effort of authoring this demonstrates the importance of these considerations to Anglo-Saxon society. This was a time of turmoil and uncertainty; the West Saxons had witnessed the collapse of the other English kingdoms and only narrowly escaped the same fate. Furthermore, the tenuous peace with the

²³⁵ Heuchan, 4.

²³⁶ Pratt, 20.

Danes could not have offered them much comfort for their own future. The hope of an afterlife rises to the forefront of the minds of people who endure such continuous difficulties. Alfred's focus on eschatology demonstrates the mindset of the ninth century Anglo-Saxons. Alfred lent comfort to his people by reminding them that, despite the turbulence of current circumstances, there was a better life awaiting those who lived righteously.

Malcom R. Godden has called the *Soliloquies*, "The most ambitious writing Alfred undertook."²³⁷ This is partially due to his wholesale construction of a third book which follows a line of thought which Augustine himself had abandoned. Godden also makes this statement because of Alfred's pursuit of eschatological ideas far beyond the well-trodden path of Christian Orthodoxy. As previously mentioned, the content of Book III is primarily concerned with discovering the extent to which human knowledge will persist into the afterlife, and whether it will continue to grow. Because Alfred operated in a Christian context, one of the most important facets of knowledge was the understanding of God. As such, much of the scholarly attention on this book has focused on Alfred's statement that the good will not be the only ones to see God after their death, but the wicked will also see him.²³⁸ Alfred explains that for the righteous, the vision of God will be a blessing a reward, but for the wicked the vision of God will further add to their torment.

D. P. Wallace was one of the first scholars to recognize how bold of a statement this was for Alfred to make that both the good and evil will see God in the same way.²³⁹ He notes that the king contradicts Augustine on this point, for in *De Videndo Dei* Augustine asserts that the vision

²³⁷ Malcolm Godden, "Text and Eschatology in Book III of the Old English Soliloquies," *Anglia – Zeitschrift Für Englische Philologie* 121, no. 2 (2003): 205.

²³⁸ Hargrove, 38.

²³⁹ Wallace, D. P. "King Alfred's Version of St. Augustine's Soliloquies, III, 23-26, The Vision of the Damned," *Notes and Queries* 37, no. 2 (1990): 141.

of God will be the exclusive experience of the pure in heart. The expression of “the pure in heart” ties directly to the Sermon on the Mount, specifically to Matthew 5:8. Wallace discusses an apparent contradiction in Biblical eschatology between this verse and other passages which suggest that both the damned and blessed will see God.²⁴⁰ Specifically, he draws on two Biblical passages for this point: “Behold, he cometh with the clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also that pierced him. And all the tribes of the earth shall bewail themselves because of him,”²⁴¹ and also the Old Testament passage which it quotes, “And they shall look upon me, whom they have pierced: and they shall mourn for him as one mourneth for an only son, and they shall grieve over him, as the manner is to grieve for the death of the firstborn.”²⁴²

Wallace argues that this difficulty is solved through the medieval topos that both the damned and blessed will see God on Judgement Day, but that they will see him in the physical form of Christ rather than the full deity of God which will be seen only by the righteous. In this way he reconciles this difficulty by arguing that, in Alfred’s eyes, though both parties will see God, “The wicked, because of their sins, are denied knowledge of God the Divine, wisdom that Alfred seems to value most highly.”²⁴³ Therefore, according to Wallace, Alfred’s assertion that the wicked will see God does not represent a venture into heresy, and the difficulty can be resolved through understanding that the wicked and righteous see God in different forms.

Wallace’s argument allows for some interesting discussion of what Alfred was trying to communicate through his discussion of eschatology. If Alfred had these texts in mind while he wrote this chapter, then it is probable that he was making a call to repent from immoral

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 142.

²⁴¹ Rev. 1:7. DRB.

²⁴² Zech. 12:10. DRB.

²⁴³ Wallace, 143.

behaviour while time still remained. In the prophet Zechariah's assertion that the people will look at the one they have pierced, he predicts a reaction of mourning and repentance. However, when the apostle John quotes Zechariah, he emphasizes the people who do not repent, especially at the eschaton. When the people see Christ at the end of time, they will no longer have the opportunity to repent from their sins. If Alfred had these passages in mind, he may have been pleading with the reader to repent and turn to righteous ways before the chance to repent was gone. This is an interesting line of thought, but it is speculation since we cannot be sure that Alfred had this idea in mind when he considered his views on eschatology.

Both Wallace and Albert Cook see a possible link between this portion of the *Soliloquies* and another Anglo-Saxon poem *Christ III*, which appears in the *Exeter Book*.²⁴⁴ The thematic link between the two works is that both the good and wicked can see each other. When the wicked see the good it will increase their torment as they witness the glorification of the good. On the other hand, the glorification of the righteous is perfected as they see the torment of the wicked. Cook argues that Alfred might have borrowed this concept from *Christ III*.²⁴⁵ He admits that one problem with drawing up these two passages as analogues is that this idea goes back much further. For example, Pope Gregory the Great developed this theme out of the story of Lazarus and Dives. However, despite the fact that this idea is not especially unique, these two passages share fairly specific vocabulary referring to the *wuldor*, glory, of the righteous, and *wite*, torment of the wicked.²⁴⁶ Therefore, the idea that the good and evil remain continually aware of one another's state is not unique to Alfred. Rather, it seems that he drew on wider Christian doctrine and especially from Anglo-Saxon poetry in *Christ III*.

²⁴⁴ Albert Cook, "Alfred's Soliloquies and Cynewulf's Christ," *Modern Language Notes* 17, no. 4 (1902): 219.

²⁴⁵ Cook, 219.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 219.

Michael Treschow disagrees with Wallace's conclusion about the nature of the wicked's vision of God being tied only to the physical form of Christ on judgement day. Instead, he asserts that Alfred was stating that the wicked will see God perpetually after death.²⁴⁷ This idea presents Alfred as progressing even further into heterodoxy than Wallace allows. This raises the obvious problem that orthodoxy would have had with this assertion, that the wicked cannot see God because they are unworthy of such blessing. As previously mentioned, Wallace argues that this level of comprehension of the divine is a level of blessed wisdom that should in no way belong to the wicked. However, to counter this point Treschow argues that Alfred had influence from the work of John Scottus Eriugena, especially the *Periphyseon*. In this work Eriugena asserts that all will behold the glory of God's light; it will appear to both the righteous and unrighteous. Eriugena was an Irishman who lived in the ninth century and was most active just before Alfred's social reforms. He was the successor of Alcuin as the head of the Carolingian Palace School. The historian William of Malmesbury says that he later went to Alfred's court, but this does not likely establish a link between the two authors since most modern scholars do not consider Malmesbury reliable on this point. However, Treschow argues that there is a clear link between the two since two of Alfred's scholars, Grimbald and John the Old Saxon, came from the continent and very probably brought Eriugenian ideas or even texts to Alfred's court. This idea is reinforced by the Carolingian influence through marginalia that is evident in other texts, especially the *Consolatio*.

With this link established between Eriugena and Alfred, Treschow argues that the king took inspiration from the scholar to write Book III of his version of the *Soliloquies*. He argues

²⁴⁷ Michael Treschow. "Echoes of the Periphyseon in the Third Book of Alfred's Soliloquies," *Notes and Queries* 40, no. 3 (1993).

that this is where Alfred draws the idea of both the righteous and the wicked seeing God perpetually. One difference between the two authors is the subject of the vision. While Eriugena asserts the indirect theophany of the True Light, Alfred describes the direct person of God. However, while the subject might be different, the effect is the same because the sight of God will be a terrible and perpetual reminder to the wicked of the evidence of their own spiritual shortcoming. Thus, while the righteous will eternally enjoy the presence of God, the wicked will forever loathe it.

According to Treschow, the previously discussed metaphor of the afterlife as a king's court further emphasizes this interpretation of Alfred's eschatology.²⁴⁸ Here, the court is divided into the favoured and the unfavoured, but there is no discernable difference in location. Rather, they are all part of the same community. Both Alfred and Eriugena reach to the same Biblical narrative for support. This is the story of Lazarus and Dives, which was a favourite text for medieval theologians when discussing the afterlife, but Treschow argues that the parallel use of this story demonstrates that Alfred took inspiration from Eriugena. The Irish Neoplatonist argued that the chasm that separated Dives from Abraham in the story is a spiritual divide emphasizing their difference in position and favour before God; it is not a physical difference that locates them in two different places.²⁴⁹ To borrow Alfredian language, the wicked are like prisoners who are aware of the situations around them, but have no influence on the king.

Wallace and Treschow raise two distinct views of Alfredian eschatology. Wallace argues that Alfred believed that the condemned would only see God in the person of Jesus Christ. He draws on common medieval orthodoxy to support his point. His argument does raise some

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid

interesting discussion of the repentance which Alfred must have wished to inspire among the people. However, despite this, Michael Treschow's view of Alfred's opinion of the vision of the damned is probably the more accurate perspective since he draws directly on Alfred's own discussion for evidence and proves a precedent for the idea. This does raise the issue that Alfred might have been heterodoxical on this question, but that is not beyond reasonable possibility. If Treschow is right that Alfred held a view that both the blessed and the damned continue to live in the presence of God, perhaps this could lead to some conclusions of a syncretic holdover from a Germanic past. It is possible that Alfred received a tradition of an afterlife which combined Christian aspects of Heaven and Hell with Germanic conceptions of a Great Hall where all people go and continue in service to their lord. It is impossible to know whether this was Alfred's view, or if he simply used this description of the afterlife as a creative means of expressing the gravity of one's decisions in this life. In either case, Alfred was clearly aiming his discussion at encouraging moral behaviour among his subjects through reminding them of the reward that could be theirs but also of the punishment that they risked.

That Alfred establishes moral teaching for his subjects is abundantly clear in his version of St. Augustine's *Soliloquies*. In his unique preface to the work he demonstrates the value of the early patristic teachings and encourages his readers to explore the depths of that wisdom for themselves. He also generates a discussion about the self and one's own place within the socio-political environment. This discussion has the effect of encouraging better moral performance and establishing the authority of Anglo-Saxon order by drawing it up as analogous to divine order. Finally, Alfred writes adventurously about eschatology and the continuation of life after death. He clearly defines the rewards for those who act righteously in this life as well as the judgements and terrors that await those who act wickedly. It is very important for Alfred to

establish that the rewards of one's life will not only be felt in this present life, but also in the continuation of life after death, which greatly raises the stakes of one's own actions.

Conclusion:

One factor which highlights the distinctiveness of Alfred's reign is the volume of vernacular literature which was produced in a short amount of time. This was an educational program unlike any other in that it sought to make education more accessible by using the vernacular as a tool. This was not done as a rejection of Latin, but nevertheless, it does affirm Alfred's belief in the capacity of the English language to express the lessons which he believed to be of utmost importance. Alfred's court was not unique in its pursuit and production of knowledge. There were other places in Europe where scholars placed a similarly high value on learning, for example, in Ireland and across the English Channel in Frankia.

It is also probable that Alfred's court might not have been the leading edge of scholarship within its own time despite all its impressive efforts. There was little new literature produced through his efforts. Most of his work focused on translation of much older texts which were already in wide circulation through Europe. Even though these translations sometimes contain extensive alterations that Alfred made to these works, a large portion of these changes were based on comments that spread to England from the continent. Even what does appear to have been original thought from Alfred would have been limited in the audience which it could reach. Since these works were produced in English, they would not have been easily accessible to other scholars across Europe. Alfred essentially made a closed communication circuit which allowed information to flow in from the rest of Europe but was practically closed in the other direction. The fact that Alfred chose not to produce literature in the *lingua franca* of his time meant that his scholarly production would have been of virtually no importance on a pan-European level. Therefore, Alfred's labour does not represent an advance of European scholarship to new

heights. Any advancement that it did make were limited to a small section of the island of Britain.

Furthermore, Alfred had to draw on these other places in order to build the group of scholars that he needed. This thesis has already demonstrated the extent to which Alfred had to lean on the scholarship from the Carolingian Palace School in order to make progress in his plans. Alfred himself seems to have understood that he was not creating an education program *par excellence* for exportation across Europe. He seems to have acknowledged that he was trying to make up the lost ground which previous generations of English had given up. He was not pushing education into new and unexplored territory. Rather he envisioned a restoration of the past.

However, one way in which Alfred surpassed the scholarship anywhere else in Europe was in how he made it much more readily available to a broader audience. The tool which he used to promulgate his reforms was the vernacular language. This vehicle likely allowed him to reach many more people than it would have if he had attempted to restore Latin education, as Charlemagne had done. However, we need to be cautious about viewing Alfred as the father of English writing. The English language already had a long and fascinating history prior to and apart from Alfred's reforms. *Beowulf* stands even to this day as the most popular and widely read piece of Anglo-Saxon literature. Other famous poetry such as *Caedmon's Hymn*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Wanderer*, *Seafarer*, not to mention some of the works discussed in this thesis such as *Deor*, and *Christ III*, found in the Exeter book. All of these works are difficult to date but seem to belong to a period roughly contemporaneous to Alfred at the latest, if not earlier. Even if Alfred had never chosen to pen a single word, the English language would have already possessed great treasure trove of vernacular literature.

So, if Alfred did not create the leading school of his time, and he was not the first person to see the English language for its value as a medium of literature, there seems little that makes his efforts remarkable until we consider how he brought vernacular writing into unprecedented areas. Alfred gave to the English language a unique prestige by taking what were considered to be some of the foundational texts of medieval education and translating them into the vernacular. This had the effect of elevating the prestige of the English language, perhaps not quite to an equal level to Latin since Alfred did see value in Latin education for a more advanced level. However, nowhere else in Europe was the vernacular used as a vehicle of scholarly discourse, especially not in writing. This was Alfred's great contribution to the system of education.

Another consideration that often attends discussion of Alfred is whether it is reasonable to place the origins of the kingdom of England in this period. Should historians give Alfred the credit for laying the foundations of the nation? Once again, I believe that this might be stretching the facts farther than they will reach. The fact that Wessex became the sole surviving English kingdom is arguably more of a historical accident than an inevitable occurrence. The elimination of the other Anglo-Saxon kingdoms results more from the action of the Vikings than the intention of the West Saxon kings. Therefore, the Vikings are at least equally responsible for England's birth as Alfred could be. There is a lack of evidence to prove that Alfred intended to create a new kingdom for all English people. The marriage of his daughter Aethelflaed to Aethelred, a leading noble of Mercia and his later campaigns into the Danelaw might suggest a desire to expand his borders, but these facts alone are insufficient to prove intent on what would eventually come to be. However, I believe that his work in vernacular literature could be viewed as creating the institutions necessary for future national development. This does not demonstrate

an intentionality toward the creation of a new state, but the eventual rise of England is largely founded on the political contributions of Alfred, namely his moral constitution.

Such a radical change was not without an equally momentous purpose. Alfred saw what he believed to be the moral decline of his people. He believed that the tribulations that the English had suffered at the hand of the Vikings were the result of their moral decline. Alfred himself had endured these sufferings, only narrowly escaping, so he deeply felt the gravity of the situation. He also believed as king it was his duty to ensure that the English morality would be renewed. For this reason, he undertook his project to re-educate his people in the teachings that had been handed down by the Christian fathers. For Alfred, the moral and the political were indivisibly linked. Moral destitution resulted in political decline. Thus, the solution was moral renewal which would lead to the political growth and renewal of the English people. With this intrinsic link between morality and politics established, we can begin to see an over-arching purpose to Alfred's actions. These translations were not randomly chosen, disparate texts, but rather the individual components which, when taken together, form what appears as a moral constitution which gives clear directives on what manners of behaviours should be expected for those who wish to consider themselves English.

Each text that Alfred added to his corpus adds new dimensions to this constitution. Likely the first text that he translated, *Pastoral Care*, instructs clerics on how they, as shepherds, ought to lead the Christian flock. In its ninth-century iteration, this text represented more than a handbook for priests. Alfred expanded the scope of the book to include political leaders: the king and his nobles. It establishes the bases and purposes of authority under a Christian system. Christian leaders should not abuse their authority through tyranny. They should remember that in their office they are to serve the people to the best of their ability. Leaders also must be careful

not to compromise their authority. It is their duty to ensure the moral health of the people. Therefore, any degradation in the authority of the leader will cripple his capacity to complete this commission. *Pastoral Care* is the most overtly political of these three works since it establishes the roles and responsibilities of every level of the hierarchical system of Anglo-Saxon government.

The other two texts that this thesis examines are less directly political, although they certainly have political elements and ramifications. *On the Consolation of Philosophy* discusses the virtue of wisdom and the benefits that it can grant to those who pursue it. It will provide comfort and stability to those in difficulty as well as intellectual stimulation to those who are curious about the world and its inner workings. It teaches contentment with one's own lot in life rather than constant anxiety over what the future holds. This text mostly accomplishes this through the portrayal of Wisdom as a character in the texts. She not only displays these benefits through the force of her character, but also explains them step by step to her student. This text also demonstrates these virtues through the character of Fortune who acts as a foil to Wisdom. Fortune can only grant temporary goods such as power and prosperity; she is fickle and unstable. Those who seek her blessings may find themselves in good standing at one time, but they will quickly fall out of Fortune's favour, not because they displease her, but because she is arbitrary and capricious.

Wisdom, on the other hand, allows men to have the perspective that it is the righteous who have all power, while the unrighteous are weak and can only float along wherever the wind may blow. She gives this perspective by explaining the eternal nature of the divine which gives new understanding of the world that is not limited by the temporal eyes of mankind. The discussion of the transient and eternal nature of the divine encourages the reader to hold the gifts of Fortune

loosely and to seek after the eternal blessings that accompany those who submit to it. In his translation of the text, Alfred makes a cogent point about the ground on which his moral constitution stands. While Boethius' Latin version demonstrates the much stronger influence of his immersion in classical literature, showing very little, if any, influence from Christianity, Alfred makes various changes to the text in order to bring it into a more Christian orbit. The point this makes is that one should not only regard one's own behaviour with respect to careful contemplation, but also that Christian morality must be at the centre of it. Thus, Alfred uses his translation of this text to teach his readers that Christianity is the foundation on which this moral constitution stands, and the pervasive theme of the text reminds the reader that wisdom and personal contemplation are defining features of a morally upright person.

If *Pastoral Care* demonstrates an Alfred who was in the early stages of producing his educational program with all the hope and vigour of its expectations, the *Soliloquies* gives a slightly different view. In the prefaces to both works, Alfred gives a glimpse into his purposes for his translations. However, in the former, he discusses how he wishes to translate certain works which are "Most necessary for all men to know." By the time he writes the latter, he shows signs of realization that this project is beyond his own ability to complete. So, he invites those who have the skill to continue on his work of gathering those texts which will best instruct his people in the ways of Christian virtue.

In addition to underscoring certain thematic elements of the *Consolatio*, especially the blessings of wisdom, The *Soliloquies* allowed Alfred to raise other important issues of relevance to the moral behaviour of his people. This work describes a vivid eschatology in which the good are rewarded eternally for their actions while the evil are eternally punished. Alfred goes beyond the safe boundaries of orthodoxy to describe an afterlife where both the good and evil are

perpetually aware of one another and their circumstances are magnified, to their benefit or detriment, by constantly being in one another's presence. In this way, Alfred emphasizes that the moral actions of the individual not only have consequences in this life but also eternally.

The *Soliloquies* also contains many allusions to Anglo-Saxon sociopolitical structures. These allusions have two effects. First, they express theological and eschatological ideas in a form that could be understood by a layman. This was important to Alfred because he wanted these texts to be useful for more than the intellectual study of the academic elites. His main purpose was the moral improvement of his people. For this reason, he expressed his thoughts in ways that they could relate. Secondly, the allusion to Anglo-Saxon institutions underscores their divine precedent and approval. For example, describing God's kingdom in the terms of a royal court, as Alfred does, has the effect of legitimizing the authority of the king who, on a human level, stands in the position of God. These institutions have not been invented by mankind, and therefore are not subject to change at man's behest.

In this way, Alfred provided the means through which his subjects might learn how they ought to behave as English people. To express it succinctly, he provided them with a moral constitution that governed all aspects of their life, publicly and privately. He taught them lessons on how they should perform in their offices, whether ecclesiastical or political. He exhorted them to strive after wisdom and to leave the whims of fortune to lesser men. He taught them about the nature of God, and how a divine perspective would give them greater peace and understanding through difficult times. These texts also gave instruction on the afterlife, reminding the people to regard their behaviour in relation to the rewards that they might gain or lose through their actions in this life. Alfred wanted all of these lessons to govern the moral behaviour of his people, and so

he compiled these various works together and gave them to his people in their own language as their very own moral constitution.

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