

## CHAPTER SEVEN

## Apocalypse, Eschatology and the Interim in England and Byzantium in the Tenth and Eleventh Centuries

Helen Foxhall Forbes, Durham University

Even if it were a thousand years until that day, it would not be long, because whatsoever ends, that will be short and quick, and will be just as if it had never been, when it will be ended. But even if it were a long time to that day – although it is not – nevertheless our time will not be long, and at our ending it will be judged to us, whether we shall await the general judgement in rest or in punishment.<sup>1</sup>

In a homily for the second Sunday in Advent, written probably in the early 990s, Abbot Ælfric admonished his congregation in south-western England to be prepared for the imminent end of time.<sup>2</sup> And, just in case the end turned out to be less imminent than he currently thought, he also instructed his listeners that they should be prepared for their own deaths. One way or another, he warned, we don't have long left in this world. The liturgical season of Advent, a period of preparation for the commemoration of Christ's Incarnation, was an appropriate time to think also of Christ's Second Coming, the *Parousia*: the Gospel

---

<sup>1</sup> CH I. 40, ed. Peter Clemoes, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: the First Series*, Early English Text Society, Supplementary Series 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1997): "ðeah ðe gyt wære oþer þusend geara to þam dæge nære hit langsum; for þan swa hwæt swa geendað. □ bið sceort 7 hræd. 7 bið swilce hit næfre ne gewurde. Ponne hit geendod bið; Hwæt þeah hit langsum wære to þan dæge swa hit nis þeah ne bið ure time langsum. 7 on ure geendunge us bið gedemed hwæþer we on reste oððe on wite þone gemenelican dóm andbidian sceolon."

<sup>2</sup> For dates see Peter Clemoes, "The chronology of Ælfric's works," in *The Anglo-Saxons: Studies in Some Aspects of their History and Culture Presented to Bruce Dickins*, ed. Peter Clemoes (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1959), 213-47 at 244.

passage set for the day around which Ælfric constructed his homily is drawn from the Olivet Discourse (or ‘Little Apocalypse’) in Luke’s Gospel (21), in which Christ warns of the signs which will appear as the end of time approaches. Much of Ælfric’s homily is based on an Advent homily by Gregory the Great which expounds the Gospel passage, and in which Gregory urges his congregation – nearly four hundred years before Ælfric was writing – that they were living in the last days and should expect the end imminently.<sup>3</sup> Ælfric’s warning that ‘our’ death may be imminent, even if the end of the world is not, brings the homily to a close, but it does not appear to be based on an earlier source, and is most likely his own thought on the matter. Here he touches on an important aspect of Christian eschatology, the significance not only of the general judgement of all souls at the end of time, but also the judgement of each individual soul immediately after death. In early medieval discussions of these topics the relative importance of the two judgements, particular and immediate or general and ultimate, varied substantially according to context. Ælfric’s apocalyptic focus in his homily, for example, is not out of place given the liturgical context in which it was intended to be preached. Elsewhere, however, he reveals a sophisticated and developed understanding of an interim state of purgation for souls immediately after death which is related to, but not constrained by, his anticipation of the imminent end. Most importantly, however, Ælfric’s closing statement about the imminence of death and the world alludes to a fundamental issue in apocalypticism, that is, the problem of what happens when the anticipated and supposedly imminent end continues not to come.

At the other end of Europe, and probably somewhat earlier in the tenth century, a rather different sort of text touched on the same issues. Visions of the judgement of the

---

<sup>3</sup> Malcolm Godden, “The Sources of Ælfric’s Catholic Homilies, I.40,” *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/August 2017>. Gregory, *Homiliae in Evangelia*, 1, ed. Raymond Étaix, CCSL 141 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 5-11; see also James Palmer, this volume.

individual soul after death, and of the Last Judgement at which all souls are examined, were recorded in detail in the *Life of S. Basil the Younger*.<sup>4</sup> This work seems to have been written in Constantinople, perhaps around the middle of the tenth century and possibly for lay patrons connected with the imperial administration.<sup>5</sup> It is narrated by one of the saint's disciples named Gregory who, unusually for a hagiographer, is the recipient of these visions of the afterlife and describes them at great length in the text. Gregory first experienced a vision of Theodora, a slave woman who had died and who recounted to him the trials which she faced immediately after death as well as showing him her current dwelling-place in the afterlife.<sup>6</sup> Gregory later entertained the heretical thought that perhaps the Jews would be ultimately be saved and, with Basil's help, was granted a vision of the future fate of the Jews at the Last Judgement.<sup>7</sup> Whether Basil or indeed Gregory were 'real' individuals is unclear; the *Life* is unconventional in a great many respects and its eschatological messages seem to have been more important to the author than encouraging devotion to Basil's cult.<sup>8</sup> The text is especially significant as one of only a few developed discussions of Middle Byzantine eschatology: it provides the most detailed surviving tenth-century Byzantine account of the

---

<sup>4</sup> Denis Sullivan, Alice-Mary Maffry Talbot, and Stamatina Fatalas-Papadopoulos McGrath, *The Life of Saint Basil the Younger* (Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Vasileios Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife in Byzantium: The Fate of the Soul in Theology, Liturgy, and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 34-5.

<sup>6</sup> *Life of Basil*, II. 1-54, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 190-273.

<sup>7</sup> *Life of Basil*, IV. 7-V. 144, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 364-699.

<sup>8</sup> Paul Magdalino, "'What We Heard in the Lives of the Saints We have Seen with our Own Eyes': The Holy Man as Literary Text in Tenth-Century Constantinople," in *The Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. James Howard-Johnston & Paul Antony Hayward (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 83-112 at 87-91.

post-mortem fates of souls immediately after death, and a lengthy account of the Last Judgement.<sup>9</sup>

The *Life*, and the works of Ælfric, thus offer windows into eschatological thought-worlds, allowing glimpses of the world to come through the eyes of two tenth-century individuals who experienced the first millennium drawing to a close in quite different contexts, at opposite ends of Europe. Both writers operated in a climate of heightened apocalypticism, which was felt across Europe in the latter part of the tenth century and into the eleventh, and which shows its presence in the sources in a variety of ways. This concern is now generally thought to have been partly a result of millennarian speculation combined with contemporary events that appeared to coincide with Gospel predictions of the last days, but also simply one of a number of moments of heightened sensitivity within a broader Christian culture of apocalypticism and anticipation of the end which waxed and waned at various moments across the early Middle Ages.<sup>10</sup> Canonical responses to the apparently swiftly approaching Second Coming (and subsequent Last Judgement) seem to have varied in the details, but the imminence (or at least possible imminence) of the end-times does not seem to have been seriously questioned by those learned in Christian theology, even if there were always some in early medieval societies who remained unconvinced.<sup>11</sup>

At precisely the same time as this heightened apocalypticism, however, there was also increasing concern for the immediate fate of the soul in the afterlife, in the period between the death of the individual and the general judgement. This is most obvious in western

---

<sup>9</sup> Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 29.

<sup>10</sup> See James T. Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> For discussion of medieval scepticism Susan Reynolds, "Social Mentalities and the Case of Medieval scepticism," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th ser. 1 (1991): 21-41; John Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London: Hodder Arnold, 2005).

Christendom where there is substantial evidence in the tenth and eleventh centuries for the idea of purgatory, in which souls could be purged of guilt from small (especially unconfessed) sins, and aided in their atonement by the offerings of the living.<sup>12</sup> In eastern Christendom, where purgatory was never formally accepted, there was in this period a considerable variety of opinions on the interim fate of the soul after death and before judgement, but it is evident – particularly from apocryphal and apocalyptic texts – that there was some significant concern over the immediate fate of the soul after death and, according to some writers, that the offerings of the living were believed to be beneficial to the souls of the dead (even if the ‘how’ or ‘why’ of this was not immediately explicable).<sup>13</sup> Both Ælfric and the author of the *Life of Basil* show concern for and interest in the immediate fate of the soul after death, and yet at the same time express apocalyptic anticipation of the imminence of the Second Coming and Last Judgement. At first sight, these two trends do not sit easily alongside each other.<sup>14</sup> After all, if the *Parousia* is expected imminently, and will be shortly

---

<sup>12</sup> See Helen Foxhall Forbes, “‘Diuiduntur in quattuor’: The Interim and Judgement in Anglo-Saxon England,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 61. 2 (2010): 659-84; Helen Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth in Anglo-Saxon England: Theology and Society in an Age of Faith* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), 201-64.

<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Dagron, “La perception d’une différence: les débuts de la querelle du Purgatoire,” in *Actes du XVe Congrès International d’Études Byzantines, Athènes, Septembre 1976, IV: Histoire, Communications* (Athens: Association internationale des études byzantines, 1976), 84-92; Robert Ombres, “Latins and Greeks in Debate over Purgatory, 1230-1439,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 35:1 (1984): 1-14; Jane Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium: Celestial Journey and Local Community in the Medieval Greek Apocrypha* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 300-12; Andrew Louth, “Eastern Orthodox Eschatology,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*, ed. Jerry L. Walls (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 233-47 at 242-3; Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 28-48.

<sup>14</sup> For discussion of a different aspect of the tension over purgatory in the context of the Last Judgement see A. Bratu, “Fin des temps et temps du purgatoire dans quelques jugements derniers de la fin du Moyen Age,” in *Fin des temps et temps de la fin dans l’univers médiéval*

followed by the Last Judgement, many souls might never experience the post-mortem interim which precedes the Last Judgement. Moreover, whether the warning was about the imminence of the Last Judgement or a need to focus on the individual soul, the fundamental message in either case was essentially the same: people had to be prepared to be held to account before God for everything they had done in life, and they had to be ready *now* because whether death or the *Parousia* came first, both were unpredictable and could occur at any time. In theory, either theme might allow an author to communicate the necessity of living a good Christian life, while both together might seem to send mixed messages. Although these texts from England and Byzantium witness to different traditions about the afterlife, the theology which they reveal in relation to the Last Judgement is substantially similar, while the theology of the interim is quite different. This means that reading them against each other is particularly instructive, because their differences and commonalities suggest that the interest in the immediate fate of souls in the context of apocalypticism is neither simply a product of the western concept of purgatory, nor is it a result of the less clearly articulated eastern alternatives, but something deeper-rooted.

Before examining the works of the two authors in detail, it is useful to consider briefly the eschatological traditions on which they drew and in which they participated. The separation of eschatology, the study of the Last Things, into individual and apocalyptic strands is to some extent an issue of modern scholarship rather than medieval thought. Christian eschatology encompasses apocalypse and apocalyptic expectation of the world's end alongside the death of the individual and the afterlife, both temporary and eternal (that is,

---

(*Sénéfiance* 33), ed. A. Bratu (Aix-en-Provence: Centre Universitaire d'Etudes et de Recherches Médiévales d'Aix, 1993), 67-92.

before and after the Last Judgement).<sup>15</sup> Apocalyptic texts and apocalypticism need to be understood in the light of eschatology and eschatological texts more broadly, since they form only one part of a series of issues which are intimately connected. This is clear, for example, in connection with the concept of judgement, which was the main issue for the soul after death, whether at the Last Judgement at the end of time, or in the individual judgement of souls immediately after death. The Last Judgement which will follow the Second Coming will be a grand and dramatic occasion at which all the souls who have ever lived will be called together to account for their deeds in life, before being assigned to places of rest or punishment for eternity. This judgement is described in some detail in Scripture and, in the early Church, was predominant in discussions of post-mortem retribution, reward and redemption.<sup>16</sup> However, even in these early centuries of the Church there is evidence for belief in the idea of a judgement for individual souls after death, which would determine how (or where) the soul would await the end of time and the final, general judgement.<sup>17</sup> This too finds support in the Gospels, for example in the story of the ‘Good Thief’ (who was told by Jesus that he would immediately reach paradise) or the story of Lazarus and the rich man (where the rich man is punished after death, while Lazarus is kept safe from torment in the

---

<sup>15</sup> Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul H. Freedman, “Introduction,” in *Last Things: Death and the Apocalypse in the Middle Ages*, ed. Caroline Walker Bynum and Paul H. Freedman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 1-20 at 1, 5-6.

<sup>16</sup> Mt 25; Mk 13; Lk 21; for an introduction see discussion in Brian Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: a Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 33-43.

<sup>17</sup> Daley, *Hope of the Early Church*, 220; Josephine Laffin, “What Happened to the Last Judgement in the Early Church?,” in *The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul*, ed. Peter D. Clarke and Tony Claydon (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer for the Ecclesiastical History Society, 2009), 20-30.

bosom of Abraham), but was outlined much less clearly.<sup>18</sup> The idea of individual judgement and its implications were articulated more gradually over several centuries of Christian writing: the question of whether souls simply ‘slept’ after death and before the general resurrection at the Last Judgement, or whether they had an active existence in the afterlife, was the subject of some debate well into the early Middle Ages, especially in eastern Christendom.<sup>19</sup>

By the tenth century, however, there seems for the most part to have been consensus among writers in both eastern and western Christendom that souls leaving their bodies would experience something immediately after death which related to the way they had lived their lives, and which might offer a foretaste of what they could expect after the Last Judgement when their fate would be sealed for eternity.<sup>20</sup> How exactly this worked appears quite differently across different texts: sometimes the focus is entirely on the individual judgement, which could involve a trial, or a series of searching questions, or was played out dramatically via angels and demons which each sought to claim the soul as rightfully theirs; sometimes there are explicit statements about the places or states in which different kinds of souls would

---

<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, both of these are found in Luke’s Gospel, the Good Thief at 23:32-43, the rich man and Lazarus at 16:19-31.

<sup>19</sup> Nicholas Constanas, “‘To Sleep, Perchance to Dream’: The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 91-124; Matthew Dal Santo, “Philosophy, Hagiology and the Early Byzantine Origins of Purgatory,” in *The Church, the Afterlife, and the Fate of the Soul*, 41-51; Matthew Dal Santo, *Debating the Saints’ Cult in the Age of Gregory the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 21-37 and passim; Nicholas Constanas, “An Apology for the Cult of Saints in Late Antiquity: Eustratius Presbyter of Constantinople, *On the State of Souls After Death* (CPG 7522),” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10. 2 (2002): 267-85.

<sup>20</sup> Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 306-7; Jane Baun, “Last Things,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity*, 3, eds. Thomas F. X. Noble & Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 606-624, 798.



await the final judgement, and the torments or pleasures which they could expect while they waited.<sup>21</sup> Texts which recount visionary experiences (like the *Life of S. Basil*) offer a significant contrast to those which present more abstract theological discussion, though the boundaries between the two genres are not absolute: theological discussion can appear in or alongside vision narratives and anecdotal accounts of visions can be used as evidence in the context of theological discussion (as they are in Ælfric's homilies).<sup>22</sup> The key issue here is that drawing out detailed theological information from graphic visionary narratives is often more complex than reading statements in more muted theological discussions which may be clearer or more systematic, and sometimes more coherent. While Ælfric explains reasonably straightforwardly what he believes happens after death, and how different parts of the afterlife or different groups of souls relate to each other or to theological notions, the theology lying behind the *Life of Basil* must be inferred from the author's descriptions of places or souls, or the comments he gives to angels, demons, saints, or even Christ himself.

### Apocalypse and Reform

Ælfric and the author of the *Life of Basil* both clearly had didactic purposes, and at various points tie their calls for the reform of life to a high Christian standard to apocalyptic

---

<sup>21</sup> Claude Carozzi, *Eschatologie et au-delà: recherches sur l'Apocalypse de Paul* (Aix-en-Provence: Université de Provence, Service des publications, 1994), 145-7; Claude Carozzi, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà, d'après la littérature latine: Ve-XIIIe siècle* (Rome: École française de Rome, 1994); Baun, "Last things; Foxhall Forbes, "Diuiduntur in quattuor," 682-4; Helen Foxhall Forbes, "The Theology of the Afterlife in the Early Middle Ages," in *Cambridge Companion to Visions and the Afterlife in the Middle Ages*, ed. Richard Pollard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming)..

<sup>22</sup> The most famous work bringing the two types together is the *Dialogues* of Gregory the Great (d.604), which was widely used in both Latin and Greek traditions and which provided a significant body of evidence for the fate of souls after death.

warnings. As James Palmer has recently argued, the apocalypticism inherent in the Christian message was harnessed at various points across the early Middle Ages, and especially was ‘used as an important cultural resource for changing the world’.<sup>23</sup> The experience of the world that needed to be changed was, however, rather different for the two authors considered here. Ælfric trained as a monk at the episcopal monastery of the Old Minster in Winchester before being sent to the monastery of Cerne Abbas (Dorset) in about 987; he subsequently moved to Eynsham as abbot in c.1005, and probably died around 1009/1010.<sup>24</sup> His surviving written corpus (which includes both Latin and Old English works) is substantial, and he is most famous for his composition of a large number of homilies in which he attempted to set down canonical and orthodox teaching for audiences which seemingly included laity as well as monks and/or secular clergy.<sup>25</sup> He was a stickler for correct teaching and extremely concerned with the possibility of (deliberate or accidental) errors leading people astray. Ælfric composed two series of twenty homilies each (known now as the first and second series of *Catholic Homilies*) probably in or just before the early 990s, which seem to have been circulated by the southern English Church as a quasi-official body of material; he wrote a number of homilies after this which were not included in these collections but which sometimes were copied into manuscripts with them, and in addition he produced vernacular versions of saints’ lives (before c. 998) for his lay patrons at Cerne.<sup>26</sup> He seems to have intended these works to be of benefit to lay congregations and to religious communities, and especially to secular clergy, in a fairly wide range of circumstances: Jonathan Wilcox

<sup>23</sup> Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 3-4, 227-35.

<sup>24</sup> Joyce Hill, “Ælfric: His Life And Works,” in *A Companion to Ælfric*, ed. Hugh Magennis and Mary Swan (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 35-66 at 35-7.

<sup>25</sup> Jonathan Wilcox, “Ælfric in Dorset and the landscape of pastoral care,” in *Pastoral Care in Late Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Francesca Tinti (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2005), 52-62 at 53-6.

<sup>26</sup> Clemoes, “Chronology,” 243-5; Hill, “Ælfric: His Life And Works,” 51-60.

suggests that some of the preaching situations which Ælfric envisaged were those in which small groups of priests living in common in religious foundations might minister to a range of rural (and often predominantly lay) communities.<sup>27</sup> Some of these priests might have been rather less than well trained, and perhaps would have found the Christian education offered by Ælfric useful for improving their own learning as well as for offering to their congregations.<sup>28</sup>

The late tenth- and early eleventh-century world in which Ælfric lived, and which he sought to change, was one which included rural communities where priests and learning might be sparsely scattered, but also large monasteries with extensive resources for preaching, teaching and learning. Ælfric's monastic life was not detached from politics or the secular world, either: his move to Eynsham in c.1005 seems to have been connected with the fortunes of his patron, Æthelmær, while his time at Winchester coincided with a monastic reform which was given significant royal support and which was led partly by Æthelwold, Bishop of Winchester and one of Ælfric's teachers.<sup>29</sup> In addition, viking raids across southern England towards the end of the tenth century and into the early eleventh seem to have been felt intensely across a wide range of levels of society, with monastic and other clergy being no exception.<sup>30</sup> Ælfric's world was ultimately one of small communities, sometimes focused

---

<sup>27</sup> Wilcox, "Ælfric in Dorset," 57-61.

<sup>28</sup> Wilcox, "Ælfric in Dorset," 60.

<sup>29</sup> Julia Barrow, "The Chronology of the Benedictine "Reform"," in *Edgar, King of the English, 959-975: New Interpretations*, ed. Donald George Scragg (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2008), 211-23; Hill, "Ælfric: His Life And Works," 60-1; Catherine Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, 165-92 at 168, 175-6; Christopher A. Jones, "Ælfric And The Limits Of Benedictine Reform," in *A Companion to Ælfric*, 67-108.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Godden, *Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, the Second Series Text*, vol. 5, EETS ss (Oxford: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1979), xci-xciii; Simon

inward towards monastic life, sometimes outward and pastorally towards laity and clergy outside the monastery, and sometimes upward towards high political and ecclesiastical matters. He was not isolated from events of national importance, even if he was not at their centre.

The world described in the *Life of St Basil the Younger* seems in many ways to be dramatically different from Ælfric's, though there are similarities too. Although the authorship of the *Life* is unknown, the text offers some clues which allow reasonably close dating and which provide hints about the possible patronage and provenance of the author. The text shares a significant number of parallels with the *Life of St Andrew the Fool*, a work which purports to describe a sixth-century saint but which can probably be dated to c.950 x 959, and it has been argued that the two texts share an author or that the authorship of the two *Lives* was 'co-ordinated' in some way.<sup>31</sup> The presence of references to known historical figures also seems to place the *Life of Basil* roughly in this same period. There is strong criticism of the patriarch Theophylact, which has been taken to suggest that it was composed after his death in 956, while a meeting between Basil and the empress Helena would have had to have taken place (or have been imagined to have taken place) before her death in 961, though perhaps a report of such a meeting might not have been circulated publically while she was still alive.<sup>32</sup> Denis F. Sullivan, Alice-Mary Talbot and Stamatina McGrath, the recent

---

Keynes, "An Abbot, an Archbishop and the Viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12," *Anglo-Saxon England* 36 (2007): 151-220.

<sup>31</sup> Lennart Rydén, "The Life of St. Basil the Younger and the date of the Life of St. Andreas Salos," in *Okeanos: Essays Presented to Ihor Ševčenko on his Sixtieth Birthday by his Colleagues and Students* ed. Cyril Mango, Omeljan Pritsak, and Uliana M. Pasiecznyk (Cambridge, MA: Ukrainian Research Institute, Harvard University, 1984), 568-586 at 581-6; Magdalino, "'What we heard'," 87.

<sup>32</sup> Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, *Life of S. Basil*, 8.

editors of the Moscow manuscript of the *Life*, argue that the bulk of the text in this version probably dates to the 950s or 960s, though with occasional additions and changes which may represent later interference.<sup>33</sup> They also propose that the patrons of the work may have been the brothers Anastasios and Constantine Gongylios, eunuchs and *praipositi* at the imperial court who feature positively and prominently in the *Life*, while Paul Magdalino suggests another eunuch, Basil Lekapenos the Nothos, the illegitimate son of Romanos I, who founded a monastery dedicated to St Basil.<sup>34</sup> Even if the patrons cannot be identified conclusively, the social world and encounters presented in the text makes it likely that laity associated with the imperial court were the sponsors and intended audience.<sup>35</sup> Despite the references to known historical individuals in the text, it is not at all clear whether Basil himself or Gregory his hagiographer were real or fictional characters, though there are scraps of evidence which make it just possible that there was indeed a ‘real’ Basil the Younger.<sup>36</sup> It is probably impossible to be certain, though for the present purposes this is not entirely important: the visions which are of interest here are clearly didactic and may have been intended to be read allegorically as well as (or instead of) literally; in addition the relation of Basil himself to the visions is mostly tangential.<sup>37</sup> The *Life* in general has a strong focus on devotion to the saints (in general, as well as to Basil in particular), on charity, and on good living and repentance.

Whether Basil and Gregory are real or fictional, the text is firmly set in tenth-century Constantinople. Basil is brought to the city by imperial officials who captured him when they found him wandering the mountains in Asia Minor, fearing that he was a spy. After being imprisoned, tortured and then thrown into the sea, Basil is rescued by two dolphins who

---

<sup>33</sup> Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, *Life of S. Basil*, 10-11.

<sup>34</sup> Magdalino, “‘What we Heard’,” 108-11; Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, *Life of S. Basil*, 11.

<sup>35</sup> Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 34-5.

<sup>36</sup> Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, *Life of S. Basil*, 12-15.

<sup>37</sup> On the issue of allegory see Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 136-77.

deposit him in a suburb of Constantinople, at which point the rest of the *Life* (apart from the visions) takes place in various settings within the city.<sup>38</sup> For the most part, Basil's deeds take place in private houses where he was hosted by a series of different people, and he does not appear to attend the liturgy in local churches, though early on he is said to have visited a monastery.<sup>39</sup> Gregory reports that Basil's miracles were so extraordinary that all the inhabitants of Constantinople knew of him and that many distinguished and powerful people invited him to stay with them: this is not an uncommon claim in a saint's *Life* but, importantly, the social world of the *Life* is closely connected with politics and high-ranking individuals in a number of ways.<sup>40</sup> Basil is said to have performed miracles, especially of healing, which benefitted people from a range of social contexts, but the individuals who feature most prominently in the *Life* are well-connected and wealthy. Although Basil initially stays in the house of a humble couple, he eventually moves to the house of Constantine Barbaros, a wealthy man of significant social status, where he is given a part of the house and assigned a slave woman.<sup>41</sup> He meets high-ranking men and women who are connected to the imperial court and who live in the areas immediately around the Great Palace, and encounters their slaves and servants.<sup>42</sup> He is also said to have spent time with marginalized groups, and to have shared his provisions and hospitality with people from the other end of the social scale, such as the poor and slaves.<sup>43</sup> Priests, monks and nuns, too, feature in the *Life*, though they are sometimes presented rather ambiguously.<sup>44</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> *Life of Basil*, I.4-9, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 70-83.

<sup>39</sup> *Life of Basil*, I.11, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 84-7.

<sup>40</sup> *Life of Basil*, I.13, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 88-91; see also the editors' discussion of the social milieu at 31-9.

<sup>41</sup> *Life of Basil*, I. 10-11, 25-6, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 82-7, 112-19.

<sup>42</sup> *Life of Basil*, I. 27-32, II. 11-19, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 120-35, 292-305.

<sup>43</sup> E.g. *Life of Basil*, III. 1-10, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 278-93.

At times Gregory contextualises Basil's deeds within contemporary political events, particularly as they relate to Basil's ability to prophesy the outcome or his attempts to persuade certain individuals of appropriate responses. The extent to which any of this relates precisely to historical reality is difficult to determine, but it does give some impression of the intended audience and the social context in which the *Life* should be understood to have been read. Like Ælfric, the author of the *Life of Basil* lived in a world of small communities, though in the more urban setting of Constantinople some individuals from different social contexts were perhaps more likely to encounter one another than in parts of rural Wessex. The impression given of Basil is that he is an outsider, even though he is at times accepted into the social circles of the powerful. The author of the *Life of Basil* seems to have wanted to change a world in which he saw oppression, injustice and sinful living sitting side-by-side with virtuous deeds and charitable giving; where the rich and poor, and lay and religious, existed in close quarters and could equally be righteous or wicked; and where considerable numbers of people seem to have been marginalized and invisible.

Apocalyptic sentiment was used by both Ælfric and the author of the *Life of Basil* as one means of encouraging reform, but a broader culture of apocalypticism seems also to have provided the backdrop in which each author wrote. The debate over the 'Terrors of the Year 1000' has gone back and forth numerous times, though eastern Christendom has not been brought fully into it until fairly recently.<sup>45</sup> Paul Magdalino's examination of a range of

---

<sup>44</sup> E.g. a fornicating nun: *Life of Basil*, I. 36-8, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 140-9.

<sup>45</sup> A vast amount has been written on this. For useful summaries see: R. Landes, "The Fear of an Apocalyptic Year 1000: Augustinian Historiography, Medieval and Modern," *Speculum* 75. 1 (2000): 97-145; E. Peters, "Mutations, Adjustments, Terrors, Historians, and the Year 1000," in *The Year 1000: Religious and Social Responses to the Turning of the First Millennium*, ed. Michael Frassetto (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 9-28; Simon MacLean, "Apocalypse and Revolution: Europe around the Year 1000," *Early Medieval*

Byzantine sources shows that there was a mood of apocalyptic expectation in the Byzantine Empire in the tenth century and into the early eleventh, including predictions of the end of the world.<sup>46</sup> He also stresses the significance of the survival of a significant number of texts containing visions of heaven and hell – of which the *Life of S. Basil the Younger* is one – from precisely this period.<sup>47</sup> As in the West, attempts in the East to predict the date of the end were condemned on the grounds that Christ had stated explicitly in the Gospels that the moment of the end was unpredictable. But, as also in the West, these condemnations were not entirely effective and speculation is found in many different contexts. A number of Ælfric's works include apocalyptic pronouncements and, since he was writing around the turn of the first millennium, scholars have attempted to discern whether his apocalypticism was connected to millennial speculation.<sup>48</sup> In the Old English preface to his first series of Catholic Homilies (though not, interestingly, in the Latin preface), Ælfric stresses the

---

*Europe* 15. 1 (2007): 86-106; Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 4-9, 189-94; see also Wolfram Brandes, "Liudprand von Cremona (*Legatio* Cap. 39-40) und eine bisher unbeachtete West-Östliche Korrespondenz über die bedeutung des Jahres 1000 A.D.," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 93 (2000): 435-63.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Magdalino, "The Year 1000 in Byzantium," in *Byzantium in the Year 1000*, ed. Paul Magdalino (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 233-270; Paul Magdalino, "The end of time in Byzantium," in *Endzeiten: Eschatologie in den monotheistischen Weltreligionen*, ed. Wolfram Brandes & Felicitas Schmieder (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 119-133.

<sup>47</sup> Magdalino, "The Year 1000 in Byzantium," 244-5; see also Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 110-29; Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 4, 28-48.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Malcolm Godden, "Apocalypse and invasion in late Anglo-Saxon England," in *From Anglo-Saxon to Early Middle English: Studies Presented to E.G. Stanley*, ed. Malcolm Godden, Douglas Gray & T. F. Hoad (1994), 130-62; Malcolm Godden, "The Millennium, Time, and History for the Anglo-Saxons," in *The Apocalyptic Year 1000: Religious Expectation and Social Change, 950-1050*, ed. R. Landes, A. Gow & D. C. Van Meter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 155-80; Keynes, "An Abbot, an Archbishop and the Viking raids of 1006-7 and 1009-12."



importance of correct teaching at this time ‘which is the ending of the world’.<sup>49</sup> Other works in the two series of Catholic Homilies, such as those for the first and second Sundays in Advent, or the sermon for the dedication of a church, also warn of the terrible judgement to come and mention to the Gospel warnings of the imminent end.<sup>50</sup> Ælfric lived through a period of intense viking raids in England and his sense of living in the last days has been connected with these attacks, which may have also seemed to fulfill some of the biblical prophecies about the Second Coming.

The case for intensity of apocalypticism in England towards the end of the first millennium has recently been made again by Katy Cubitt, who highlights Ælfric as one of a number of authors in the years around AD 1000 displaying significant anxiety over the approaching end-times, while James Palmer suggests that the apocalyptic and penitential focus employed in the works of writers at this time reflects a mood which began much earlier, around the middle of the tenth century.<sup>51</sup> Ælfric’s apocalypticism has been seen as fading during the course of his career by Malcolm Godden, who argues that Ælfric’s later works show less concern over the imminence of the end than do the First Series homilies written in the early 990s, and that some of the revisions that Ælfric made to his own works may reflect his changing thoughts on the matter.<sup>52</sup> It is true that a sense of the end-times features prominently in some of Ælfric’s writings, and even in those works which are not about the Last Judgement he sometimes warns that all Christians should be prepared for the

---

<sup>49</sup> *Preface*, ll. 58-9, ed. Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: first series*, 174: ‘... on þisum timan þe is geendung þyssere worulde’.

<sup>50</sup> I. 39, 40, ed. Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: first series*, 520-3, 524-30; II. 39, 40, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 327-34, 335-45.

<sup>51</sup> Palmer, *The Apocalypse in the Early Middle Ages*, 189-226; Catherine Cubitt, “Apocalyptic and Eschatological Thought in England Around the Year 1000,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6<sup>th</sup> ser. 25 (2015): 27-52.

<sup>52</sup> Godden, “Millennium,” 158-67, 175-7.

imminence of the last day, but it is worth noting too how many of Ælfric's preaching texts are about other topics, are pastorally-focused, and are concerned with good Christian living more broadly. His repetition of Gregory the Great's warning that the end of the world was imminent sounds urgent, but it is difficult to know how Ælfric himself made sense of the fact that Gregory's expectation of the imminent end four hundred years ago had still not been fulfilled. In the same way, it is difficult to determine the extent to which the insistence on the imminence of the end was a real driver for the message of the *Life of Basil*. For much of the *Life* there is no obvious warning that the *Parousia* is fast approaching, though occasionally phrases like 'in these last days' are used to describe the text's present.<sup>53</sup> Warnings about the approaching end are only really found towards the close of the text, at the final moment of Gregory's vision of the Last Judgement. These admonitions have great authority since they are given by Christ himself, and they are directed primarily at the clergy and at monastic superiors, who are responsible for ensuring the salvation of those in their care, though the laity too are encouraged to be attentive in church and to look to their own salvation.<sup>54</sup> Apocalypticism as it is used here is clearly bound up with personal and individual reform.

The greater stress in the *Life of Basil*, however, seems to fall on the terrible nature of the Last Day and the Last Judgement – whether it comes soon or not so soon – rather than on the end-times which precede the Second Coming. A massive proportion of the *Life* is devoted to Gregory's vision of the Last Judgement, and the account is elaborate and detailed.<sup>55</sup> As with many visionary accounts, the internal and external logic is sometimes difficult to follow and there are confusing moments, though this may be partly the result of a writer struggling

---

<sup>53</sup> E.g. *Life of Basil*, I. 38, I. 46, III. 4, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 146-9, 162-3, 282-5; e.g. 'ἐν ταῖς ἐσκάταις ταύταις ἡμέραις'.

<sup>54</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 139-43, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 688-97.

<sup>55</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, IV. 7-V.144, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 364-699.

to represent the visual in a written medium.<sup>56</sup> The sequence of events is presented as happening ‘now’ before Gregory’s eyes, but Christ explains at the end of the vision that Gregory has seen something that will happen rather than something that has actually taken place; Gregory recalls at the end of his account that it seemed as if he had observed the end of the world in a waking vision, rather than an apparition of what will come in the future.<sup>57</sup> The vision was ostensibly experienced by Gregory as a result of his desire to observe the fate of the Jews at the Last Judgement, and their condemnation to hell is described in some detail here, along with a careful distinction between the ‘Hebrews’ who came before Christ and so could not know him, such as Moses, and the ‘Jews’ who came after Christ and refused to acknowledge the truth of his teachings.<sup>58</sup> Along with the condemnation and punishment of the Jews, the lengthy elaborations of the fates and tortures of different kinds of sinners, schismatics and heretics were presumably intended to warn readers away from these kinds of sins, which would condemn the soul to hell without hope of reprieve.<sup>59</sup> The different companies of the saved too are described at some length, and include saints, martyrs and virgins alongside various groups named by Christ in the Beatitudes (such as the pure in heart, the merciful and the meek), as well as those who were notable for certain kinds of good deeds or virtues, such as being faithful in marriage, charitable, or pious church-attenders, and a large number of repentant sinners.<sup>60</sup>

What is particularly striking in Gregory’s vision of the Last Judgement is that various saved and condemned souls receive different eternal rewards and punishments according to

---

<sup>56</sup> See Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 133-64.

<sup>57</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 135, 144, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 680-3, 696-9.

<sup>58</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 30, 32, 98-108, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 482-5, 486-7, 602-33.

<sup>59</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 50-94, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 514-97.

<sup>60</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 17-49, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 464-514.

how they behaved in life; Gregory even notes that it is by God's justice that the different groups of sinners receive different degrees of punishments.<sup>61</sup> Differentiation in the treatment of souls in the afterlife is a standard feature of textual 'Tours of Hell', like the influential *Vision of S. Paul*, but there are two especially significant aspects of this in Gregory's vision.<sup>62</sup> The first is that this differentiation in treatment occurs after the Last Judgement, in eternity, in contrast to the intermediate rewards or punishments which are often seen in other texts. The second is that the souls are treated differently not only in terms of varying types of punishments particularly appropriate to individual sins or sinners, but also in terms of the quality of the blessedness or condemnation that the souls receive: some sinners receive a greater degree of punishment than others, and likewise some of the saved souls experience greater bliss or exist in dwelling-places which bring them closer to God. Towards the end of the vision, Gregory's angelic guide explains to him that the souls of the martyrs and ascetics ascended to heaven with the Lord, those who lived in a holy and devout way but did not strive for perfection will dwell in the heavenly city of the new Sion, while those married laity who were chaste, charitable and prayerful occupied the new earth.<sup>63</sup> Although the text emphasises the joy and blessedness of all the abodes of the saved, presumably as an encouragement to aim for heaven, it nonetheless sends a stark message that salvation is not as simple as being either wicked or righteous. As on earth, souls are not all equal in heaven and hell, and doing the minimum is not necessarily enough. This serves to reinforce the importance of repeated good works and pious living, as well as confession and repentance, along with particular ways of life which will lead to inclusion in the heavenly city. It is

---

<sup>61</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 75-8, 125-33, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 556-65, 659-79.

<sup>62</sup> Theodore Silverstein, *Visio sancti Pauli: The History of the Apocalypse in Latin, Together with Nine Texts* (London: Christophers, 1935), 12-13; Carozzi, *Eschatologie*, 42, 58-65.

<sup>63</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 133, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 674-9.

perhaps worth noting here too that throughout the text Basil encourages Gregory to become a monk, and that monks (or good monks, at least) are one of the groups who enter the heavenly city among the blessed.<sup>64</sup> If the text was intended for wealthy lay patrons, this is a significant point: how would those individuals fare when brought before the Judge, and where would be their eternal resting-place?

In contrast, Ælfric's descriptions of the Last Judgement and the end-times are less elaborate, closer to the Gospels and more canonical – perhaps unsurprisingly, given his tendency to follow well-known authorities and to stick closely to his sources – though they are still dramatic and intended to prompt the audience to repentance and pious living. The Second Coming is the main focus of two of his homilies, while the Last Judgement is the focus of one and features prominently towards the end of another which also touches on the interim.<sup>65</sup> In addition to these, in a homily for the Sunday after Pentecost which is his most extended eschatological discussion, Ælfric touches on a whole range of topics from original sin to the fate of the soul in the interim to the Last Judgement, bringing all these together in a more-or-less systematic way.<sup>66</sup> In the homilies about the Second Coming, Ælfric stresses the suddenness and unpredictability of the time of the end as well as the terrible nature of the events which will accompany Christ's return as a prompt for urging his audience to righteousness of life. The *First Series* homily for the Second Sunday in Advent (part of which was quoted at the beginning of this essay) discusses 'the signs [which] there will be in those times', expounding an apocalyptic passage about the Second Coming from Luke's Gospel

<sup>64</sup> E.g. *Life of S. Basil*, VI. 7, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 712-17.

<sup>65</sup> I. 40, ed. Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: first series*, 524-30; II.39, 40, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 327-34, 335-45; XVIII, ed. John Collins Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric: a Supplementary Collection*, 2 vols., Early English Text Society. Original Series 259-60 (London: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1967-8), vol. 2, 590-609.

<sup>66</sup> XI, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, vol. 1, 415-47.

following Gregory the Great.<sup>67</sup> In the *Second Series*, written slightly later in the 990s, his homily for the nativity of holy virgins expounds the parable of the wise and foolish virgins following the interpretations of Gregory and Augustine, and the delaying and then sudden arrival of the bridegroom in the parable is highlighted as parallel to the sudden Advent of the Lord whose time cannot be predicted.<sup>68</sup> His major message in both homilies is one of repentance and attentiveness to God's commandments but, as Godden notes, it is only really in the Advent homily that Ælfric gives the impression that he believes that Christ's return may be imminent, and even then there is some ambiguity.<sup>69</sup>

The liturgical context for the *First Series* homily is absolutely crucial here since Advent is a penitential season of expectation and anticipation, and the commemoration of Christ's Incarnation requires the same kind of preparation as does the *Parousia*, a parallel noted by Ælfric in his homily for the First Sunday in Advent: in this context the spiralling cycle of time is collapsed together so that Christ's Incarnation and *Parousia* are both imminent, even though one is in fact in the past and the other in the future.<sup>70</sup> The homilies which are not fixed seasonally in the liturgy use apocalyptic eschatology to encourage reform in a rather different way but are for the most part closely connected with the explication of Scriptural passages appropriate for their context of preaching, as in the case of the homily for the nativity of holy virgins. The generic usefulness of eschatology is visible too though in one of Ælfric's sermons which seems to have been intended for preaching 'quando uolueris', that is, whenever seemed appropriate. This is entitled *De die iudicii*, probably written

<sup>67</sup> Lk 21:25-33; I. 40, l. 6, ed. Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: first series*, 524: 'be þam tacnum þe ær þyssere worulde geendunge gelimpað'; Gregory, *Homilia in Evangelium* 1, ed. Étaix, 5-11.

<sup>68</sup> II.39, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 327-34; Clemoes, "Chronology," 244; Godden, "Millennium," 162.

<sup>69</sup> Godden, "Millennium," 162-7.

<sup>70</sup> I. 39, ll. 19-25, ed. Clemoes, *Catholic Homilies: First Series*, 520-1.

c.1002x1005, where he examines the events leading up to the Last Judgement and the reign of Antichrist, along with a detailed consideration of who can be saved.<sup>71</sup> In this sermon Ælfric, like the author of the *Life of S. Basil*, emphasises the terrible fates of sinners, and the intense joy and blessedness of the righteous, exhorting his audience to ensure that they find themselves with the just and not with the wicked.

A dramatic approach was not the only way of conveying a message of reform and repentance though, and a rather more complex and nuanced version appears in the final part of Ælfric's homily for the dedication of a church, which closes the *Second Series*.<sup>72</sup> After considering the physical building of the church and the Church as spiritual bride of Christ, Ælfric turns to examine the Church as the body of the faithful.<sup>73</sup> In this context he expounds a passage from I Corinthians which identifies Christ as the foundation of the Church, and he encourages Christians to build on that foundation, warning that the building-work of each Christian will be tried by fire.<sup>74</sup> Ælfric's exposition of the text is based on the exegesis of two earlier works, a commentary on the Pauline epistles by Haimo of Auxerre, a ninth-century Carolingian writer, and on a sermon by Caesarius, bishop of Arles in the first part of the sixth century.<sup>75</sup> Drawing on both of these sources together, Ælfric stresses that the fire which will

---

<sup>71</sup> XVIII, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, vol. 2, 590-609 and see discussion at 585-6; Clemoes, "Chronology," 244.

<sup>72</sup> II. 40, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 335-45.

<sup>73</sup> II. 40, ll. 1-223, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 335-42.

<sup>74</sup> I Cor. 3:10-15; II.40, ll. 223-61, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 342-3.

<sup>75</sup> Malcolm Godden, "The Sources of Ælfric's Catholic Homilies, II.40," *Fontes Anglo-Saxonici: World Wide Web Register*, <http://fontes.english.ox.ac.uk/August 2017>; Haymo, *In divi Pauli epistolas expositio, In epistolam I ad Corinthios*, III, PL 117.525B-527A; Caesarius, *Sermo 179*, ed. Germanus Morin, *Caesarius Arelatensis. Sermones*, CCSL 104 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1953), 684-7. For discussion of the authors and their works see Sumi Shimahara, *Haymon d'Auxerre, exégète carolingien* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2013); Johannes Heil, "Haimo's Commentary on Paul. Sources, Methods and Theology," in *Études d'exégèse*

consume the earth on the day of judgement will not hurt the good but will torment the unrighteous: those who performed good works will not suffer but will go to Christ ‘as if they travelled on sunbeams’.<sup>76</sup> Ælfric explains that there are two different kinds of sins – light sins and capital sins – and stresses that sinners will experience this fire differently according to their deeds; he also outlines examples of both the light and the capital sins, warning that capital sins will condemn the soul to eternal fire. In contrast, for those with only light sins there is a measure of hope: although the expiation of light sins can (and should) be done in this life, any remaining light sins will be consumed by the fire at judgement and the soul will be purged of them, even if the purging fire will be unimaginably painful.<sup>77</sup>

In the course of this discussion Ælfric adds the information, not found in his sources, that ‘There are also many punishing places in which the souls of men suffer for their negligence according to the measure of their guilt before the general judgement, so that some will be completely cleansed and will not need to suffer at all in the aforementioned fire’.<sup>78</sup>

---

*carolingienne: autour d’Haymon d’Auxerre: Atelier de recherches, Centre d’études médiévales d’Auxerre, 25-26 avril 2005*, ed. Sumi Shimahara (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 103-21; and Pierre Jay, “Le purgatoire dans la prédication de saint Césaire d’Arles,” *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 24 (1957): 5-14; William E. Klingshirn, *Caesarius of Arles: The Making of a Christian Community in Late Antique Gaul* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 16-32; Isabel Moreira, *Heaven’s Purge: Purgatory in Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 82-5; on the treatment of the passage from Corinthians see also Artur Landgraf, “1 Cor. 3, 10-17 bei den lateinischen Vätern und in der Frühscholastik,” *Biblica* 5 (1924): 140-72.

<sup>76</sup> II. 40, ll. 246-50, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 343: ‘swilce hí on sunnan leoman faron’.

<sup>77</sup> II. 40, ll. 261-93, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 343-4.

<sup>78</sup> II. 40, ll. 275-9, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 343-4: ‘Fela sind eac wítniendlice stowa. þe manna sawla for heora gymeleaste on ðrowiað. be heora gylta mæðe ær ðam gemænelicum dome. swa þæt hí sume beoð fullice geclænsode. and ne þurfon naht ðrowian on ðam foresædan fyre’.



Ælfric makes no further comment on these souls in the interim, though it is clear that soteriologically their purging immediately after death is carefully linked to their ultimate fate at the Last Judgement which is the main focus of his discussion in this sermon. This is particularly striking since his source-texts both relate the passage from I Corinthians to the fire of the Last Judgement, and not to the interim. When Ælfric draws this section on the Church as the body of the faithful to a close, he urges his audience to come to true repentance and to expiate both light and capital sins so that they will avoid both burning and eternal damnation, and instead be counted among the righteous.<sup>79</sup> It is interesting that this discussion comes in a homily for a church dedication, an occasion which may have been particularly important in the local communities (primarily rural, but also what counted for urban in tenth-century England) of Ælfric's immediate world, and one on which a significant number of people might have been expected to attend church.<sup>80</sup> The lay communities of Ælfric's world increasingly had churches of various kinds in their midst as nobility in this period often founded churches on their own estates.<sup>81</sup> These could be small churches, like the single-cell building at Raunds Furnells (Northants), or larger affairs, for example the (re)foundations of Cerne and Eynsham by Æthelmær.<sup>82</sup> Importantly, church dedications were performed by

---

<sup>79</sup> II. 40, ll. 288-93, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 344.

<sup>80</sup> John Blair, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 496.

<sup>81</sup> Blair, *The Church*, 368-425; Richard K. Morris, "Local Churches in the Anglo-Saxon Countryside," in *The Oxford Handbook of Anglo-Saxon Archaeology*, ed. Helena Hamerow, David Alban Hinton & Sally Crawford (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 172-197; for discussion of the phenomenon in its broader European context see Susan Wood, *The Proprietary Church in the Medieval West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>82</sup> Barbara Yorke, "Æthelmær, the Foundation of the Abbey of Cerne and the Politics of the Tenth Century," in *The Cerne Abbas Millennium Lectures*, ed. Katherine Barker (Cerne Abbas: Cerne Abbas Millennium Committee, 1988), 15-25; A. Boddington, Graham Cadman & John Evans, *Raunds Furnells: The Anglo-Saxon Church and Churchyard* (London:

bishops and the sermon therefore seems to presuppose a fairly important and inclusive occasion in a small community, though it may also have been intended to be preached on the anniversary of the dedication by way of commemoration.<sup>83</sup> The closing passages of the sermon also indicate that the imagined context may be the lay establishment of local churches, since Ælfric includes a series of injunctions against laity directing or holding authority over ordained ministers, and stating that laity who build churches should hand their control and appointment of personnel over to God's servants.<sup>84</sup> His aim seems to have been to take the opportunity of reaching a wide range of different people in order to convey a fundamental soteriological message, and his inclusion of a passing mention of the interim indicates the importance of this to his eschatological vision, which is developed further elsewhere.

### Eschatology and the Interim

Ælfric's most extended discussion of the afterlife occurs in a sermon probably written c.1002 x 1005 for the Octave of Pentecost.<sup>85</sup> He uses the opportunity to summarise the life of Christ through a recapitulation of the liturgical year, beginning with Christmas and moving through to Pentecost, followed by a discussion of the Trinity; he then turns to the topic of sin and

---

English Heritage, 1996); Alan Hardy et al., *Ælfric's Abbey: Excavations at Eynsham Abbey, Oxfordshire, 1989-1992* (Oxford: Oxford Archaeological Unit, 2003); Blair, *The Church*, 388-92; Cubitt, "Ælfric's Lay Patrons," 168; Hill, "Ælfric: His Life And Works," 51-2.

<sup>83</sup> See for example the description of the dedication of a church in tenth-century Winchester in *Vita S. Dunstani*, 8.2-3, ed. and trans. Michael Winterbottom and Michael Lapidge, *The Early Lives of St Dunstan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012), 28-31.

<sup>84</sup> II. 40, ll. 298-311, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 344-5.

<sup>85</sup> XI, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, vol. 1, 415-47; Clemoes, "Chronology," 244; Milton McC Gatch, *Preaching and Theology in Anglo-Saxon England: Ælfric and Wulfstan* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 100-1.

redemption by explaining the coming of sin to God's creation, the deaths of body and soul, the soteriological relationship between God and humanity, and the life of the world to come – both immediately after death and at the end of time. This lengthy work is a catechetical masterpiece and was clearly popular since it is unusually well-represented in the surviving manuscripts.<sup>86</sup> The editor of this text, John Pope, notes that it covers 'subjects on which a lay congregation in particular might not be adequately informed' (though its length suggests that some members of congregations, lay or otherwise, might have had difficulty concentrating all the way through).<sup>87</sup> Ælfric's source for the major part of the sermon was the *Prognosticum futuri saeculi* of the late seventh-century Spanish theologian, Julian of Toledo.<sup>88</sup> Julian's treatise addresses a series of questions about the world to come, frequently by excerpting passages from the Fathers, especially Gregory the Great and Augustine of Hippo (d. 431). Towards the end of the sermon Ælfric examines the Second Coming and the Last Judgement and once again emphasises the sudden nature and unpredictability of the Last Day, before discussing the signs of the end and outlining the events of the Judgement.<sup>89</sup> He highlights the fearful nature of the Judgement and the stark division between the saved and the damned, as well as the great contrast in what they experience after Judgement. Once again his account is dramatic and is clearly designed to inspire fear as well as to encourage the congregation to desire the delights of heaven. Ælfric does not give the impression in this work that he believes the *Parousia* to be literally just around the corner, but he does note that the holy

---

<sup>86</sup> Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 410.

<sup>87</sup> Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 407.

<sup>88</sup> Julian, *Prognosticum*, ed. J. N. Hillgarth, CCSL 115 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1976); Enid M. Raynes, "MS. Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric," *Medium Ævum* 26 (1957): 65-73; Milton McC Gatch, "MS Boulogne-sur-Mer 63 and Ælfric's First Series of Catholic Homilies," *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 65:3 (1966): 482-90; Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 96-9.

<sup>89</sup> XI, ll. 274-571, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 429-47.

souls in the afterlife eagerly await the Last Judgement, because it is only at that point that their souls and bodies will be reunited and they will thus experience true heavenly bliss.<sup>90</sup> This link point which leads into the discussion of the universal and general judgement follows an extended discussion of the individual judgements of souls and their fates immediately after death in the interim.<sup>91</sup> Ælfric explains that at this point in time there are three types of souls, the very good who are led by angels to heaven, the very wicked who are led by devils to hell, and a third group, who experience punishments in the afterlife to purge them of the little sins that remain at the time that they died.<sup>92</sup> These souls are not necessarily destined to wait in punishments until the Last Judgement, however, since Ælfric explains that the offerings of the living – especially alms and masses – can be of valuable help in releasing these souls from punishments.<sup>93</sup> This is ultimately drawn from Julian's *Prognosticum* but, more specifically, it comes from the excerpts which Ælfric made from it at an early point in his career, in which he makes the relationship between the different groups of souls in the interim clearer than they had been in Julian's text, and thus reveals precisely how he understands the possible fates of souls immediately after death and how his understanding has developed from what he found in Julian's work.<sup>94</sup>

Ælfric's beliefs about immediate eschatology, the fate of the soul in the interim, are intimately bound up with his understanding of ultimate or apocalyptic eschatology, what happens at the end of time. His views on the subject, pieced together from a number of his works, show that he affirmed a nuanced and complex view of the afterlife in which the period

---

<sup>90</sup> XI, ll. 243-60, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 428-9.

<sup>91</sup> XI, ll. 181-271, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 424-9.

<sup>92</sup> XI, ll. 185-94, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 424-5.

<sup>93</sup> XI, ll. 205-15, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 425-6.

<sup>94</sup> Boulogne-sur-Mer, MS 63, ff. 2v-4, ed. Pope, *Homilies of Ælfric*, 425-6, see also discussion at 407-9; and Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 101.

immediately after death was significant (even if it did not change the soul's ultimate soteriological fate), and which fitted tightly into a clear eschatological framework. Ælfric is unusual among English writers of this period in having a body of material that allows for a detailed analysis of his views, but he was not alone in attributing a significant place to the immediate post-mortem fate of the soul.<sup>95</sup> Though some writers – notably his younger contemporary, Archbishop Wulfstan of York (d.1023) – mention little about the interim, a culture of prayer for the dead which was expected to influence the fates of souls immediately is prevalent in a wide range of contemporary sources, as I have shown elsewhere.<sup>96</sup> Much of the driving force for these developments seems to have come from monastic contexts, and the monastic culture of *memoria* which involved the recording of names of the living and the dead for liturgical remembrance in necrologies and *libri vitae* as well as the general commemoration of the dead seems to have led to the introduction in the 1030s of the feast of All Souls at Cluny, which then spread relatively quickly through western Christendom.<sup>97</sup> Throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries, very wealthy individuals sought to secure prayers and other liturgical offerings for their salvation by donating land and other wealth to churches; slightly lower down the social scale the formation of prayer guilds with common

---

<sup>95</sup> Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 84.

<sup>96</sup> Gatch, *Preaching and Theology*, 114-15; Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 201-64.

<sup>97</sup> Otto Gerhard Oexle, "Memoria und Memorialüberlieferung im früheren Mittelalter," *Frühmittelalterliche Studien* 10 (1976): 87-95; Joachim Wollasch, "Die mittelalterliche Lebensform der Verbrüderung," in *Memoria: der geschichtliche Zeugniswert des liturgischen Gedenkens im Mittelalter*, ed. Karl Schmid and Joachim Wollasch, Münstersche Mittelalter-Schriften 48 (Munich: Fink, 1984), 215-32; Megan McLaughlin, *Consorting with Saints: Prayer for the Dead in Early Medieval France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Dominique Iogna-Prat, "The Dead in the Celestial Bookkeeping of the Cluniac Monks Around the Year 1000," in *Debating the Middle Ages: Issues and Readings*, ed. Lester K. Little & Barbara H. Rosenwein (Malden, MA, & Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 340-62; Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 211-19.

interests in the care of the soul, along with casual mentions in homilies and other texts of the immediate effectiveness of prayers in relieving the pains of departed souls, attest to a widespread belief in purgatory and a concomitant perceived need to provide for suffering souls. Interest in the interim and provision for the fate of the soul in the interim, revealed in a wide range of different kinds of sources, thus visibly increased during the tenth century and into the eleventh.<sup>98</sup>

The purification of souls in purgatory during the interim between death and the general judgement was characteristic of Latin Christendom, while eastern Christendom remained much hazier on the details of the fates of souls in the interim and rejected the concept of purgatory when the idea was transmitted from west to east in the later Middle Ages (the importance of fire which by then was attached to the concept seems to have been one of the major stumbling blocks).<sup>99</sup> Christians in the East did offer prayers for the dead, believing (as they still do) that prayers for the dead were both licit and necessary.<sup>100</sup> What was different in the East, however, was that although the custom was established there was no systematic articulation of how or why those prayers were important. Where the formation of guilds in the east as in the west prompted prayers for living and dead members, or where alms were offered on behalf of the dead, it is usually not clear what exactly was believed to

---

<sup>98</sup> Foxhall Forbes, *Heaven and Earth*, 219-48.

<sup>99</sup> Ombres, "Latins and Greeks; James Jorgenson, "The Debate over the Patristic Texts on Purgatory at the Council of Ferrara-Florence, 1438," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 30:4 (1986): 309-334; Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 74-81.

<sup>100</sup> Elena Velkovska, "Funeral Rites according to the Byzantine Liturgical Sources," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 55 (2001): 21-51, at 39-45; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*; Margaret Elizabeth Kenna, "Rituals of Forgiveness and Structures of Remembrance: Memorial Services and Bone Depositories on the Island of Anafi, Greece," *History of Religions* 54 (2015): 225-59; Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 76-8.

be the relationship between the deeds of the living and the immediate fate of the dead.<sup>101</sup>

There were, however, various texts which attempted to address the uncertainty over what happened to souls in this period and which show that, as in the west, this was a topic of increasing concern in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Many of these refer implicitly or explicitly to the judgement of the soul after death and the subsequent allocation of each soul to an appropriate state or place in which to await the Last Judgement when all souls and bodies would be resurrected together. One of the earlier such discussions (probably dating to the late eighth or early ninth century) presents a dialogue between James the brother of Jesus and John the Theologian (i.e. John of Patmos, ‘the Divine’, who authored the New Testament *Apocalypse*): the text opens with James asking John about ‘the last days of men’ (περὶ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἡμερῶν τῶν ἀνθρώπων) and the fate of souls after death and before the Second Coming.<sup>102</sup> John relates what happens to sinful and righteous souls immediately after death, describing the punishments of the sinful and the blessedness of the righteous, as well as stressing that for all souls repentance for sins committed is essential before death: God will not listen to the unrepentant, says John, but through repentance all can be saved even though no soul is entirely without sin.<sup>103</sup> This text, which depends on John’s authority for its effectiveness, is an early witness to a move towards systematization of the interim which often appeared in visionary accounts and which continued to develop from the ninth century to the eleventh.<sup>104</sup> In this period a number of texts describe interim places (such as Paradise

---

<sup>101</sup> Rosemary Morris, *Monks and Laymen in Byzantium, 843-1118* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 126-30; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 311-12, 375-85.

<sup>102</sup> *The Third Apocalypse of John*, 1, ed. and trans. John M. Court, *The Book of Revelation and the Johannine Apocalyptic tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 108-9; see 107 for dating.

<sup>103</sup> *The Third Apocalypse of John*, 2-35, ed. and trans. Court, *The Book of Revelation and the Johannine Apocalyptic tradition*, 108-19.

<sup>104</sup> Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 28-9, 37-40.

and Hades) or states in some detail, sometimes with reference to prayers or offerings for the dead, though it is only later that there is a clear identification of in-between group of souls, referred to as οἱ μέσοι ('the in-betweeners'), whose fate in the interim is somewhere between heaven and hell.<sup>105</sup> This growing interest in the intermediate world to come which is visible in a range of texts in this period and which co-existed alongside the apocalypticism of the tenth and eleventh centuries is another context in which the *Life of S. Basil*, which offers the most detailed discussion of the individual judgement in this period, must be understood.

Gregory, the narrator of the *Life of S. Basil*, expresses interest in the immediate fate of one particular soul after death, that of Theodora, a slave woman who serves Basil. The vision is clearly didactic and the importance of repentance and especially confession is stressed throughout. In the narrative framework of the *Life*, however, Basil arranges for Gregory to experience a vision in order to allay his concerns about Theodora's spiritual fate, and specifically so that he knows whether her service to Basil benefits her in the next life.<sup>106</sup> While Gregory sleeps, he meets Theodora, who recounts everything that happened from the moment that her soul was preparing to leave the body.<sup>107</sup> The separation of body and soul is described as painful and difficult but the main drama in Theodora's account is the journey her soul makes through a series of tollhouses, each connected with different kinds of sins.<sup>108</sup> Theodora relates the terror of encountering the demons who manned each tollhouse and interrogated her about her sins: if she did not have enough good deeds to wipe them out, she would be dragged down to Hades. At some tollhouses, such as those of Pride, or of Avarice, the demons were unable to find any relevant sins, but at others the list of Theodora's sins

---

<sup>105</sup> Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 76-9.

<sup>106</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 2, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 190-3.

<sup>107</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 3-5, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 192-7.

<sup>108</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 6-41, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 198-251.



were numerous.<sup>109</sup> Her own good deeds were rapidly used up and her soul was only kept safe by the payment of spiritual gold which Basil had given her angelic guides in order to pay off the demons if the need arose.<sup>110</sup> In the narrative structure, these angels not only lead Theodora through the tollhouses, but also serve to explain what she sees and how the process of salvation works. They reveal that one of the main dangers for Theodora was that although she had abstained from sin and repented for a long time, this was not enough to wipe away her sin; she had died without confessing her sins and receiving forgiveness, and these sins were still held on her account. Confession of sins, explain the angels, wipes them off the record so that the demons cannot even find evidence of them to accuse the soul.<sup>111</sup> They also warn that those whose good deeds have been exhausted and who have no other spiritual resource can be (and often are) dragged down to Hades at the penultimate tollhouse (that of Fornication) or the last (Heartlessness and Cruelty), even if they have managed to make it through all the rest.<sup>112</sup>

As a motif, the tollhouses of the air has a long and complex literary history but the account in the *Life of S. Basil* is the most elaborate and developed version.<sup>113</sup> What is especially important in this account is that the particular judgement in the form of a careful balancing of sins against good deeds is presented as terrible and dramatic – a suitable

<sup>109</sup> E.g. *Life of S. Basil*, II. 10, 12-13, 16, 18, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 206-15.

<sup>110</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 17-22, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 214-221.

<sup>111</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 23, 25, 27-9, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 220-33.

<sup>112</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 36-8, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 240-5.

<sup>113</sup> George Every, "Toll Gates on the Airway," *Eastern Churches Review* 8 (1976): 139-51; J. Stevenson, "Ascent through the Heavens, from Egypt to Ireland," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies* 5 (1983): 21-35; Saskia Dirkse, "Telōneia: The Tollgates of the Air as an Egyptian Motif in Patristic Sources and Early Byzantine Hagiography," in *Medieval Greek Storytelling: Fictionality and Narrative in Byzantium*, ed. Panagiotis Roilos (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2014), 41-53; Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 33-5.

individual counterpart to the Last Judgement – and that the experience divides the souls so that they spend the period immediately after death and before the *Parousia* in Hades or Paradise, which are identified as temporary, lasting only until the universal judgement. After her own passage through the tollhouses, Theodora is given a brief tour of Hades, apparently at least partly so that she knows what she has escaped, before being brought into a place of rest set aside for Basil and his spiritual children.<sup>114</sup> This allows the angels to clarify the temporary nature of the experiences of the souls in Hades, though it is clear that they are not in the same kind of temporary situation as are the ‘in-between’ souls described by Ælfric. There is no possibility for souls to move from punishment to rest before the Second Coming, but there is also unclarity over the final destination of these souls, and whether they will necessarily be sent to eternal punishment at the Last Judgement, or whether after this gloomy intermediate existence some of these souls will attain salvation.<sup>115</sup>

It is also not clear how (or if) the actions of the living are understood to affect the fate of the dead. It is interesting to note here that Theodora’s statement that her soul journeyed for forty days coincides with the forty day services for the dead offered in the eastern Christian tradition (as opposed to thirty days in the western tradition), and that contemporary apocalyptic and eschatological texts occasionally make statements about suffering souls in the intermediate condition which relate to the value of prayers and offerings for the dead, and which suggest that an interim existence in Hades does not necessarily mean eternal condemnation at the Last Judgement.<sup>116</sup> In the *Apocalypse of Anastasia*, a (probably) tenth-century text which purports to record the visions of a sixth-century nun named Anastasia, there are two instances where souls being punished after death seek to convey messages to

---

<sup>114</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 45-53, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 258-71.

<sup>115</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, II. 38, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 244-5.

<sup>116</sup> Louth, “Eastern Orthodox Eschatology,” 239-41; Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, *Life of Basil*, 259, n.95..

the living with the aim of ensuring offerings on their behalf: priests complain that their wives have not offered alms for the salvation of their souls, and a *protospatharios* requests that his wife and children be instructed to offer alms on his behalf to ease his torment.<sup>117</sup> The text does not specify what exactly alms offered for these souls would achieve, or when, but the failure to offer alms is presented as an omission on the part of the living, and it is eagerly sought by the dead. It is worth noting too in this context the attention that Jane Baun draws to the possible differences signified by the terms Hades and Hell in apocalyptic and eschatological texts. Baun notes that there is flexibility in the choice of terminology, so that patristic and Byzantine authors do not clearly differentiate the eternal Hell (γέεννα) identified in the New Testament from the shadowy Old Testament underworld of *sheol*, translated as Hades (ᾍιδης) in Greek, but that Greek theology has always allowed the distinction between an eternal place of punishment for the damned and a temporary afterlife existence in the interim between death and the Last Judgement.<sup>118</sup> Gregory's vision of the Last Judgement likewise offers ambiguous terminology, since Hades is used to refer to the punishments of souls before the judgement, while the eternal punishments of Hell after judgement are described as the sea of fire, or the eternal fire, and also (for example) 'Tartaros of Hades' (τὸν Τάρταρον τοῦ ᾍιδου) and 'the Gehenna of eternal fire' (τὴν Γέενναν τοῦ πυρὸς τοῦ αἰωνίου).<sup>119</sup> It is possible, therefore, that the author of the *Life* believed that at least some souls who suffered in Hades before the Last Judgement could benefit from the prayers for the dead, and/or might ultimately come to Heaven rather than being condemned eternally to punishments.

---

<sup>117</sup> Apocalypse of Anastasia, 44-5, trans. Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 411 (Paris and Milan versions), 423 (Palermo version); for discussion see 311-12.

<sup>118</sup> Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 305-6.

<sup>119</sup> E.g. *Life of Basil V.* 9, ll. 43, 63, 67-8; V. 33, l. 9, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 448-9, 486-7.

Despite the completeness of the world to come offered by the account of the *Life of S. Basil*, Theodora's account of the afterlife is not necessarily consistently or coherently systematised, as Vassileos Marinis notes in his study of Byzantine ideas about the afterlife: it is instead a synthetic narrative based on many different kinds of traditions which circulated in the tenth century and were brought together by the *Life's* author.<sup>120</sup> The variety of the ideas about the interim in this period attests to a high level of interest in the immediate post-mortem fates of souls and, resulting from this, an attempt to supply information about the intermediate state in the absence of definitive statements either in the Bible or from the Fathers. The lack of coherent systematisation is evident too in the difficulty of relating Theodora's fate in the interim to a specific group identified at the Last Judgement. We are surely supposed to understand, based on her immediate enjoyment of the temporary paradise in the company of Basil, that she will ultimately be one of the saved, but it is not at all obvious which of the many groups of the saved might include her. It is also interesting that despite the clear emphasis in the *Life* on the importance of saintly 'friendship', so that the saints will plead for the individual with God at the Last Judgement, Gregory's vision of the Judgement never shows this in action – in stark contrast to other texts, both eastern and western, where the effect of saintly pleading is very clear (as discussed further below). Here it is worth noting Baun's suggestion that these kinds of visions were intended to be read primarily allegorically, rather than literally, so that the general didactic message was more important than the specific details about the afterlife.<sup>121</sup>

Although cast in the form of a saint's *Life*, the major didactic concern of Gregory's vision of Theodora appears to be to spur the audience to repentance and to confession, specifically to a single spiritual father. After Gregory discusses his vision of Theodora with

---

<sup>120</sup> Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 31-3.

<sup>121</sup> Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 136-77.

Basil, the saint predicts his death before Gregory, and the primarily didactic aim of the *Life* is overwhelmingly clear in Basil's statement that 'after my death you will record my worthless life in this city together with all your visions, and you will leave this account future generations for the benefit of many souls who may encounter it' (Μέλλεις γὰρ μετὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἀποβίωσιν τὸν ἐν τῇδε τῇ πόλει ἀχρεῖον βίον μου μετὰ τῶν ὀφθέντων σοι πάντων ἀναγράψασθαι καὶ ταῖς ἐλευσομέναις γενεαῖς καταλιπεῖν εἰς πολλῶν ψυχῶν τῶν ἐντυγχανόντων ὠφέλειαν).<sup>122</sup> In contrast to the eschatological scheme visible across Ælfric's writings, however, where the interim fates of souls relate clearly to the possible fates of souls at the Last Judgement, the eschatology espoused by the author of the *Life of S. Basil* is not entirely coherent in the relationship between individual and general judgements. This is partly because of the nature of the text, which presents didactic visionary accounts rather than a more systematised thematic discussion, and partly because ideas about the interim were much less clearly worked out in eastern Christendom.

The focus on confession and repentance may, however, relate to contemporary changes in penance in eastern Christendom in the ninth and tenth centuries, particularly in the emphasis on the place of private confession in the ritual rather than on the more demonstrative and public aspects of the rite of penance.<sup>123</sup> Changes which were in some

---

<sup>122</sup> *Life of Basil*, II. 58, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 276-7.

<sup>123</sup> John H. Erickson, "Penitential Discipline in the Orthodox Canonical Tradition," *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 21. 4 (1977): 191-206, at 198-201; Derek Krueger, *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 136; Marinis, *Death and the Afterlife*, 34; cf. Richard M. Price, "Informal Penance in Early Medieval Christendom," in *Retribution, Repentance and Reconciliation*, ed. Kate Cooper and Jeremy Gregory, *Studies in Church History* 40 (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), 29-38 at 34-8; see also E Herman, "Il più antico penitenziale greco," *Orientalia christiana periodica* 19 (1953): 71-127; Miguel Arranz, *I penitentiali bizantini: il Protokanonarion o Kanonarion Primitivo di*

respect similar were taking place in the west at around the same period and it is possible that these developments in both halves of Christendom were related to each other, and perhaps also to increasing interest in the interim.<sup>124</sup> But, I suggest, it is also at least as important that across Christendom the imminent end had been proclaimed for hundreds of years without ever having arrived. Both Ælfric and the author of the *Life of S. Basil* show apocalyptic sensibilities and proclaim the message of the imminent end, even if it is not always absolutely clear just how close they thought the end really was. But they also present the trials which will face unrepentant sinners instantly after death as a much more immediate danger, an urgent reality which will affect everyone and which might occur at any time. The major innovation of the *Life of S. Basil* in the way that souls after death are presented as struggling with the demons is in the spiritual wealth which Basil is able to offer to Theodora and which, by implication, other saints can offer for souls devoted to them.

Towards the end of the *Life*, Gregory tells the audience that it is important to acquire the friendship of several saints if possible, or at least one, who can offer spiritual help in the afterlife.<sup>125</sup> The importance of the aid of the saints after death is related here to the Last Judgement too, since Gregory also states that ‘whenever such a person passes on from this world, the saint receives him in the next world, and at the time of Judgment the saint presents

---

*Giovanni Monaco e Diacono e il Deuterokanonarion o “Secondo Kanonarion” di Basilio Monaco*, Kanonika 3 (Rome: Ed. Orientalia Christiana, 1993); Dirk Krausmüller, “‘Monks Who are Not Priests Do Not Have the Power to Bind and to Loose’: The Debate about Confession in eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantium,” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 109. 2 (2016): 739-68.

<sup>124</sup> See for example Mayke de Jong, “Transformations of Penance,” in *Rituals of Power: From Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages*, eds. Frans Theuws & Janet L. Nelson (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 185-224; Rob Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe, 600-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 101-89.

<sup>125</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, VI. 27, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 750-1.

him to the Lord, petitioning for him that such a person be bestowed upon him'.<sup>126</sup> As Peter Brown and others have noted, this relies on the idea of an approach of 'amnesty' at the final judgement which relies on pleading and pardons, a characteristic of the earthly Byzantine Empire which is reflected in Byzantine ideas of the afterlife.<sup>127</sup> This kind of approach can be seen in the *Life of S. Basil* when the personification of Mercy relieves some souls from eternal torment, while in the tenth-century version of the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos*, the Blessed Virgin Mary demands mercy and release for some of the souls which she sees suffering in the world to come.<sup>128</sup> Reflexes of this Marian tradition, connected also with other apocalyptic texts such as the *Visio S. Pauli* on which the *Apocalypse of the Theotokos* is based, are visible also in homiletic texts from tenth-century England, for example in a motif which relates that after the Last Judgement, SS Mary, Michael and Peter will plead for the damned, which will result in the release of some of these souls before the rest are taken down to hell.<sup>129</sup> Ælfric seems to have known of texts like these, since in his homily about the wise

---

<sup>126</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, VI. 27, ll. 13-15, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 750-1: "Καὶ ὅταν ὁ τοιοῦτος μετασταίῃ τῶν ᾧδε, δέχεται αὐτὸν ὁ ἅγιος ἐκέϊσε, καὶ ἐν τῷ κρίνεσθαι αὐτὸν παριστᾷ αὐτὸν τῷ Κυρίῳ, δεόμενος περὶ αὐτοῦ χαρισθῆναι αὐτῷ τὸν τοιοῦτον."

<sup>127</sup> Peter Brown, "Vers la naissance du purgatoire. Amnistie et pénitence dans le christianisme occidental de l'Antiquité tardive au Haut Moyen Age," *Annales Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 52:6 (1997): 1247-61; Peter Brown, "Gloriosus Obitus: The End of the Ancient Other World," in *The Limits of Ancient Christianity: Essays on Late Antique Thought and Culture in Honor of R. A. Markus*, eds. William E. Klingshirn and Mark Vessey (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 289-314; Peter Brown, "The Decline of the Empire of God: Amnesty, Penance and the Afterlife from Late Antiquity to the Middle Ages," in *Last Things*, 41-59; Baun, "Last Things," 617-22.

<sup>128</sup> *Life of S. Basil*, V. 75-77, ed. and trans. Sullivan, Talbot & McGrath, 556-63; Baun, *Tales from Another Byzantium*, 271-86; Baun, "Last Things," 620-1.

<sup>129</sup> Vercelli Homily XV, ll. 141-99, ed. D. G. Scragg, *The Vercelli Homilies and Related Texts*, Early English Text Society. Original Series 300 (London: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1992), 259-61. The motif is also found in an Easter Homily

and foolish virgins he complains about those who believe that Mary and other saints can help them even after the Last Judgement.<sup>130</sup> His concern is not the role of the saints after death *per se*, but the heterodox claim that souls who had already been judged as damned could nonetheless be saved by saintly intervention. Prayers found in tenth- and eleventh-century English books do include requests to the saints to help the supplicant at the day of Judgement but, in general, theological discussion of the Last Judgement in the west seems to have focused more on the reckoning of sins and the role of saintly intervention is less prominent.<sup>131</sup> In western and eastern Christendom alike, preachers were concerned to drive home the message that confession and repentance were absolutely essential before death for salvation and that if these were not undertaken before death then helping the soul afterwards – whether via saintly intervention or through purging pains in the afterlife – was extremely difficult. This implies that messages about the imminent Second Coming were not necessarily having the desired effect, and in this context the increasing concern with the interim begins to look

---

preserved in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 303, ed. William H. Hulme, “The Old English Gospel of Nicodemus,” *Modern Philology* 1. 4 (1904): 579-614, at 613. For a full discussion see Mary Clayton, “Delivering the damned: a motif in Old English homiletic prose,” *Medium Ævum* 55 (1986): 92-102.

<sup>130</sup> CH II. 39, ll. 184-95, ed. Godden, *Catholic Homilies: Second Series*, 333; Clayton, “Delivering the Damned”; Mary Clayton, *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 253-5.

<sup>131</sup> E.g. the prayer to St Peter in Cotton Galba A.xiv, ff. 37r-38r, ed. Bernard James Muir, “A Pre-Conquest English Prayer-book: (BL MSS Cotton Galba A.xiv and Nero A.ii (ff.3-13)),” (Woodbridge: Boydell for the Henry Bradshaw Society, 1988), 53, no. 21; or the prayers to St Andrew and to all the apostles in the eleventh-century book which belonged to Wulfstan, Bishop of Worcester (d. 1095), Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 391, p. 596, ed. Anselm Hughes, *The Portiforium of St Wulfstan: Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS. 391*, 2 vols. (Leighton Buzzard: Henry Bradshaw Society, 1958-60), II. 10. See also Palmer, this volume, for evidence of saints being invoked as intercessors in the West in Late Antiquity.



very much like another way of encouraging reform alongside apocalyptic rhetoric and promises which consistently remained unfulfilled.

## Conclusion

In their attempts to change the worlds in which they lived, Ælfric and the author of the *Life of Basil* drew on the rich resources of the traditions they inherited, synthesising, adapting and developing apocalyptic discourses as well as discussions of the interim which at times relied on rather hazier ideas that were often without clear scriptural precedent. In his role as pastor, Ælfric sought to encourage members of the various communities which existed within his world-view to turn to a righteous life and to look to the fates of their souls in the next world, though it is difficult to determine how much of this was connected with a genuine concern that the Second Coming was imminent and how much was connected rather with his responsibility to those souls (especially given the anticipated post-mortem fates of pastors who did not care for their congregations). In contrast, the author of the *Life of Basil* seems to have had a greater focus on the marginalized and invisible, and to have aimed his text at least partly at those who were wealthier and more powerful, perhaps in an attempt to reduce the oppression and injustice which he saw in tenth-century Constantinople. This is related closely to the author's focus on righteous Christian living, and the didactic purpose is clear from numerous statements stressing the potential usefulness of the *Life*, and the visions in particular, for encouraging reform. The text is a self-conscious attempt to prompt changes in behaviour, and was probably intended to be understood at least partly (if not entirely) allegorically.

Both Ælfric and the author of the *Life of S. Basil* display a mixture of occasional concern for the imminent end alongside pragmatic instructions which assume the continued existence of time and the world in the near future, and in which the salvation of the individual

is a matter of the utmost importance. The major divergence in the two authors' thought is in relation to the interim. Ælfric, particularly in his sermon for the Octave of Pentecost, has a clearly systematised idea of what happens in the interim, how and why souls are punished, how they can be released from punishments, and how different groups of souls relate both to each other and to the groups of the good and the wicked at the end of time. In contrast, the author of the *Life of Basil* really only presents the interim from the perspective of one soul, with the audience accompanying the soul of Theodora on her terrifying journey. The trial at the tollhouses is a form of individual judgement in which the soul is tested in the balance before being assigned a temporary fate, but the uncertain nature of the relationship between the various groups of souls in the interim and the companies of the blessed and the damned at the Last Judgement suggests that the extent of systematisation of beliefs here is limited. This stands in firm contrast to Ælfric, and is in keeping with the general divergence in western and eastern traditions in the way in which eschatological thinking evolved. Western authors who discuss the topic may present a fairly clear system in which souls can move between states in the interim between death and the Last Judgement, in response to the prayers and offerings of the living; in contrast, eastern authors, where they discuss the individual judgement at all, imply that this fixed the basic course of the soul's existence until the time of the Last Judgement. The custom of prayer for the dead was long established in the East as in the West, but in eastern thinking there was no clear articulation of how or why it worked. Where it was discussed, for the most part there seems to be a sense that prayers and offerings could be accumulated so that they could have an effect at the Last Judgement, though there are hints of the possibility of more immediate relief too. The existence of a temporary fate of the soul after death is clear in both parts of Christendom, however, and evidently became increasingly important throughout the tenth and eleventh centuries.

The perceived need to stress the imminence of the end might seem to suggest a widespread sense of ‘realism’ or ‘scepticism’ in the face of the ongoing failure of the apocalypse to materialise, but the situation seems in fact to be more complex than this. Clearly some people did believe that the end was imminent, even though there was a tension between the repeated warnings about the end and the repeated failure of the end to come. In connection with the use of apocalyptic discourse as a cultural resource for changing the world, some authors also drew on other kinds of traditions focusing on another aspect of the soul’s post-mortem fate, one which was just as unpredictable but more certainly immediate, since it related to human lifetimes rather than to God’s time. Although it might be questioned why the interim matters at all if the Last Judgement is imminent, the tension between discussions of immediate eschatology and apocalyptic discourse is, paradoxically, both real and unproblematic at the same time. In both contexts the essential didactic message is one of repentance, confession and righteous living; and in the sense that immediate and ultimate eschatology are closely connected their discussion in tandem is unproblematic, especially when some authors (like Ælfric) explain the close relationship between the two. Nonetheless, there is also a real tension when authors express their concerns that the end of the world is genuinely expected any day, and at the same time focus on how their audiences’ souls will fare immediately after death, assuming that this will happen before the *Parousia*. Some individuals may have felt that their own deaths were fast approaching, though in general audiences who found it difficult to accept the imminence of the end-times may have also found it difficult to accept that they might die suddenly and without warning. It seems likely though that the future occurrence of individual deaths was somewhat easier to accept on the basis of past experiences than the *Parousia*, which had been expected without fulfillment for hundreds of years.

The failure of the end-times to materialise certainly should not be seen as a simple cause for the increasing interest in the immediate post-mortem fate of the soul, since the development of ideas about the interim was a lengthy and complex process which spanned hundreds of years. Discussions of the interim in the context of apocalyptic discourse, however, especially when both were used together as a cultural resource for prompting change, seem likely to be at least partly related to the fact that Christians were still waiting for the *Parousia* many centuries after its imminence was first stressed. As far as possible, these discussions must always be understood in their own multiple contexts – whether the social worlds of rich and poor in millennarian-looking Constantinople, or the temporal and liturgical occasions for preaching in late tenth- and early eleventh-century south-western England, beset by viking attacks – in order to make full sense of what their authors were trying to do. The two authors considered here are probably not fully representative of their times and places, but the extensive nature of their comments on the afterlife allows for detailed comparison of their ideas. This in turn, shows how the increasing importance of the interim post-mortem fate of souls could be brought into dialogue with apocalyptic discourse, as another weapon in the armoury for bringing about Christian reform.