

Article

Bede on Jude

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Abstract

The Venerable Bede is known today as the first English historian. Yet he considered himself to be an exegete above all else, and was received as such in the medieval church. Among his various works of biblical interpretation is the first extant Latin commentary on the Catholic Epistles. Dating from the early stage of Bede's writing, the commentary is generally characterized as concerned with the plain or literal sense of the text. This article offers a reading of the final book of Bede's commentary, on the Epistle of Jude. Here we find evidence of Bede's learning and his interest in a range of canonical and doctrinal questions. Significantly, the article demonstrates that Bede also develops early and brief figural readings of the text, and thus disproves the contention that he is concerned only with its literal sense.

Keywords

Bede the Venerable, Jude, Epistle of, Catholic Epistles, figural exegesis, canon of Scripture, Christology

Introduction: A Northern English Scholar-Priest

This article offers a reading of the first extant Latin commentary on the whole letter of Jude, by the Venerable Bede. In this introduction I give a brief overview of Bede's life and career, and in the following section I offer an orientation to his work as exegete. I then turn to his exposition of Jude, exploring Bede's coverage of a range of canonical, doctrinal, and moral concerns. In contrast to the suggestion that Bede's interest in his *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles* is only with the 'plain sense' of Scripture, I aim to show that even in this brief, early commentary, we see him beginning to develop figural readings of the text.

Bede was canonised and made a doctor of the church in 1899 by Pope Leo XIII, the only

native of these isles to receive that recognition.¹ Yet he had been respected as a scholar from his own lifetime on down through the subsequent ages of the church. He was born

¹ For accounts of Bede's life and career see Benedicta Ward, *The Venerable Bede*, Outstanding Christian Thinkers (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1990); Sarah Foot, 'Church and Monastery in Bede's Northumbria', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 54–68; Michelle P. Brown, *Bede and the Theory of Everything* (London: Reaktion Books, 2023).

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in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Bernicia (the northern part of Northumbria) in c. AD 673 and entered the monastic life at the age of seven, being ordained deacon at 19 and priest at 30. He lived the whole of his life in the North East of England, residing at the twin monastic foundation of St Peter at Wearmouth and St Paul at Jarrow, travelling only as far as Lindisfarne and York. Thanks to the acumen of Benedict Biscop, the founder abbot, and his successor Ceolfrith, Wearmouth-Jarrow was equipped with an excellent library and a fine scriptorium responsible for producing the pandect (whole-Bible) Codex Amiatinus along with two sister codices, now lost.² The library and scriptorium were the late antique or early medieval equivalent of superfast fibre broadband, and meant that although Bede never travelled more than 100 miles from his place of birth, he was intimately acquainted not only with the Scriptures, but also with the Latin Fathers, the geography of the Holy Land, works of science and history, and more besides.³ As well as being the ‘father of English history’, he was a monk and churchman, a geographer, educator, poet, and biographer. He adopted, extended, and promoted the *anno Domini* dating system, and even developed an early referencing technique. He died in his early 60s in May of AD 735, and his remains were moved from Jarrow to the new cathedral

at Durham in the eleventh century; since the fourteenth century they have been interred in the cathedral’s Galilee Chapel, a couple of hundred yards from where I sit as I write this.

Bede as Exegete

While Bede is known today pre-eminently as an historian, he saw himself primarily as an exegete and teacher. He records this in an autobiographical note at the end of his *Ecclesiastical History*:

From the time I became a priest until the fifty-ninth year of my life, I have made it my business, for my own benefit and that of my brothers, to make brief extracts from the works of the venerable Fathers on Holy Scripture, or to add notes of my own to clarify their sense and interpretation. (Bede, *Eccl. Hist.* 5.24)

The note is followed by a list of his works, beginning with the many biblical commentaries which cover the major part of the Old and New Testaments. It is not only Bede who viewed his own work in these proportions; in the medieval church it is as scriptural commentator that Bede was primarily known and revered.⁴ It is ironic, then, that in the modern period Bede’s exegesis has largely been overlooked. In 1982 Roger Ray lamented, ‘In modern scholarship, [Bede’s biblical commentaries] have suffered remarkable, I would say regrettable, neglect.’⁵ And in 1990 Arthur Holder could observe, ‘The commentaries have often been dismissed as unoriginal and derivative, or simply ignored in favor of the historical works.’⁶ Happily, in

² On the library see M. L. W. Laistner, ‘The Library of the Venerable Bede’, in *Bede, His Life, Times, and Writings: Essays in Commemoration of the Twelfth Centenary of His Death*, ed. A. Hamilton Thompson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), 237–66; Rosalind Love, ‘The World of Latin Learning’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). On the production of the manuscripts see Celia Chazelle, *The Codex Amiatinus and Its ‘Sister’ Bibles: Scripture, Liturgy, and Art in the Milieu of the Venerable Bede*, Commentaria 10 (Leiden: Brill, 2019).

³ ‘It is important to stress how unique a situation it was, for an eighth-century monk in the far north of Britain to have at hand virtually all the resources of Christian tradition, in addition to the ability and leisure to avail himself of them.’ Scott DeGregorio, ‘Bede and the Old Testament’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 127–41 at 128.

⁴ Gerald Bonner, *Saint Bede in the Tradition of Western Apocalyptic Commentary*, Jarrow Lecture 9 (Newcastle: J. & P. Beals, 1966), 1.

⁵ Roger Ray, ‘What Do We Know about Bede’s Commentaries?’, *Recherches de théologie ancienne et médiévale* 49 (1982): 5–20 at 6.

⁶ Arthur G. Holder, ‘Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis’, *Anglican Theological Review* 72 (1990): 399–411; references are to the reprint: ‘Bede and the Tradition of Patristic Exegesis’, *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism* 214 (2021): 75–82 at 76.

the past few decades this situation has begun to change, with critical editions and English translations of most of Bede's exegetical work now available, and a growing number of studies.⁷ In her recent book *Bede and the Theory of Everything*, Michelle Brown comments that

⁷ For more general studies see: Sarah Foot, 'The Bark and the Text: Bede's Exegetical Method in His New Testament Commentaries', in *Early Christian Commentators of the New Testament: Essays on Their Aims, Methods and Strategies*, ed. Joseph Verheyden and Tobias Nicklas, *Biblical Tools and Studies* 42 (Leuven: Peeters, 2021), 243–70; Henry Wansbrough, *The Use and Abuse of the Bible: A Brief History of Biblical Interpretation* (London: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2010), 63–73; Ray, 'Bede's Commentaries'; Benedicta Ward, 'Bede, the Bible, and the North', in *What Is It That the Scripture Says? Essays in Biblical Interpretation, Translation, and Reception in Honour of Henry Wansbrough OSB*, ed. Philip McCosker, *Library of New Testament Studies* 316 (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 156–65; DeGregorio, 'Bede and the OT'; Arthur G. Holder, 'Bede and the New Testament', in *The Cambridge Companion to Bede*, ed. Scott DeGregorio, *Cambridge Companions to Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 142–55; 'Patristic Exegesis'. For studies of specific books, see: John J. Gallagher, 'Biblical-Textual Criticism in Bede's Commentary On Genesis', in *Bede the Scholar*, ed. Peter Darby and Máirín MacCarron (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), 198–222; George Hardin Brown, 'Le commentaire problématique de Bède sur le premier livre de Samuel', in *Bède le Vénérable: Entre tradition et postérité / The Venerable Bede: Tradition and Posterity*, ed. Stéphane Lebecq, Michel Perrin, and Olivier Szerwiniak (Lille: Institut de recherches historiques du Septentrion, 2005), 87–96; Paul M. Collins, 'The Expositio Apocalypseos of the Venerable Bede: An Example of Early Medieval Preoccupation with Construing Time and Its End', in *The Scriptures in the Book of Revelation and Apocalyptic Literature: Essays in Honour of Steve Moyise*, ed. Susan Docherty and Steve Smith, *Library of New Testament Studies* 634 (London: T&T Clark, 2023), 117–30. On Bede's sources and influences, see: Alan T. Thacker, 'Bede, Ceolfrith, and Cassiodorus: Biblical Scholarship at Wearmouth and Jarrow', in *Bede the Scholar*, ed. Peter Darby and Máirín MacCarron (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023), 141–74; Joseph F. Kelly, 'Bede and the Irish Exegetical Tradition on the Apocalypse', *Revue Bénédictine* 92 (1982): 393–406; Bonner, *Western Apocalyptic Commentary*. Note also the account of Bede's exegesis in relation to his history-writing in Timothy J. Furry, *Allegorizing History: The Venerable Bede, Figural Exegesis, and Historical Theory*, *Distinguished Dissertations in Christian Theology* 10 (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2013).

'[Bede's] works of biblical exegesis are among the most nuanced, multivalent early Christian commentaries, siting his own people in a perpetual biblical landscape'.⁸ While the appreciation of Bede's exegesis is gathering pace, there has not to my knowledge been a study of his *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles*. Such a study is a *desideratum*, and in this article I make a first foray by exploring its final book, the *Commentary on Jude*.

Before turning to the commentary itself, some brief remarks on Bede's exegetical approach are in order. In theoretical discussion, Bede espouses and elucidates the fourfold patristic approach to Scripture, distinguishing the historical or literal sense (the text's 'plain meaning'), its allegorical sense (referring to Christ), the tropological or moral sense (directing the ethical comportment of the church), and the anagogical sense (relating to heavenly and eschatological mysteries).⁹ In practice, however, and much like Origen before him, Bede mostly tends to operate with a twofold distinction between the literal and spiritual senses of Scripture.

Bede's approach is methodical, working through the text in order based on Jerome's arrangement of the Vulgate *per cola et commata*, divided into phrases for reading aloud.¹⁰ The Wearmouth-Jarrow monastery had received a copy of Cassiodorus's Old Latin Codex Grandior, and demonstrated the quality of its textual scholarship by producing corrected versions of the Latin Vulgate in the Codex Amiatinus. Bede also learnt Greek and put it to use later in his career when he commented on the Greek text of Acts.¹¹

⁸ Brown, *Bede and the Theory of Everything*, 11.

⁹ Bede, *The Art of Poetry; On Schemes and Tropes* (critical edition CCSL 123A, 1975).

¹⁰ Foot, 'The Bark and the Text', 264.

¹¹ This was in Bede's second commentary on Acts, the *Retractions*, written c. AD 725–731 and correcting some of his earlier interpretations in the first commentary written c. 709; Holder, 'Bede and the NT', 145.

Bede saw himself as a compiler and preserver of the exegetical traditions of the church. Where he has commentary before him, he is largely content to reproduce it, or to reorder it. Yet he is no mere copyist. For example, for the Pauline corpus he made excerpts from Eusebius's sixth-century thematic collection of Augustine's writings, but rearranged them in the order of Paul's letters, and thus produced a more useful and useable work of reference.¹² Where he finds nothing to go on in his patristic sources, Bede charts his own course.

Bede's attention to the Fathers is programmatic and pastoral, serving his overall aim of 'appropriating patristic exegesis to a Saxon church which needed to be drawn gently into the Christian mainstream'.¹³ Whether using patristic material or writing fresh commentary, Bede's exegesis is characterized by numerous scholars as practical, pastoral, and ethical, more than systematic or mystical.¹⁴ Particularly in his work on the Catholic Epistles and Revelation, he is taken to be more Antiochene than Alexandrian, more literal than figural in his exegesis.¹⁵ This is in part due to the influence of two seventh-century Irish commentaries which preceded him and to which he seems to have

had access, one from the south of Ireland and the other, attributed to 'Hilary', also likely composed in the British Isles.¹⁶ Robert McNally characterizes their exegesis as 'more often concerned with the literal than the spiritual sense. This follows from the fact that the Catholic Epistles are didactic rather [than] historical writing, not well suited therefore to spiritual and mystical interpretations.'¹⁷ In what follows, my contention is that Bede's *Commentary on Jude* does contain figural interpretations alongside a literal reading of the text, and that both together serve for him to adapt the message of Jude to his early medieval English context.

The *Commentary on Jude*

Arthur Holder's apt comment serves as a prompt for our close study of Bede on Jude: 'Better to read one of Bede's commentaries as a whole, so that we are able to follow the recurrent theological themes, than to examine piecemeal treatment of isolated verses.'¹⁸ To isolate the *Commentary on Jude* for study is in one sense artificial, given that Bede viewed the Catholic Epistles as a discrete canonical sub-collection and compiled a commentary on them as a whole. Yet at same time they are separable in principle and in fact. The *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles* contains 'seven books' as listed in Bede's record of his works at the end of the *Ecclesiastical History*, one on each letter. Moreover, Bede had previously sent his *Commentary on 1 John* as a separate work to Acca, bishop of Hexham, along with a short work on Acts, in an attempt to placate him in view of the deferral of the incomplete

¹² Foot, 'The Bark and the Text', 249. Bede develops his material 'by the structure he has given it. It has somehow become more coherent in his hands; the sum is greater than its parts.' Paul Meyvaert, 'Bede the Scholar', in *Famulus Christi: Essays in Commemoration of the Thirteenth Centenary of the Birth of the Venerable Bede*, ed. Gerald Bonner (London: SPCK, 1976), 40–69 at 62.

¹³ Ray, 'Bede's Commentaries', 12.

¹⁴ Holder describes Bede as 'more practical and ethical, less psychological and mystical' than Gregory the Great, more a practical than a systematic theologian, and as writing 'pastoral theology', Holder, 'Bede and the NT', 149; 'Patristic Exegesis', 77, 79. Ray states that 'Bede's method was not just allegorical and figural but mainly eclectic and pastoral', and describes him as offering 'pastoral synthesis, not original analysis; straightforward verse-by-verse commentaries, not complex discursive tractates', 'Bede's Commentaries', 9, 12.

¹⁵ Love, 'The World of Latin Learning', 41–42. Holder stresses the more literal approach in the commentaries on the Catholic Epistles and Revelation, 'Patristic Exegesis', 77.

¹⁶ This pseudo-Hilary is neither Hilary of Poitiers nor Hilary of Arles. See the Preface in Robert E. McNally, ed., *Scriptores hiberniae minores. Pars I. Commentarius in epistolas Catholicas Scotti anonymi; Tractatus Hilarii in septem epistolas canonicas*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 108B (Turnhout: Brepols, 1973), vii–xix. See also Kelly, 'Irish Exegetical Tradition'.

¹⁷ McNally, 'Preface', viii.

¹⁸ Holder, 'Patristic Exegesis', 78.

Commentary on Luke which Acca had commissioned.¹⁹ The *Commentary on 1 John* is largely based on Augustine's work on the same book, and thus would have been more easily prepared. For the other six Catholic Epistles, Bede had little to go on from the patristic writers available to him. The two Irish seventh-century commentaries, mentioned above, are both very terse and do not comment on every verse,²⁰ so it remains fair to say that Bede was charting new territory.²¹ The commentary was likely composed during the years AD 709–716,²² and thus sits among Bede's earlier written exegesis. The text is available in a Latin critical edition in the Corpus Christianorum Series Latina, and in English translation, both by David Hurst.²³ I explore the commentary under three headings: canonical, doctrinal, and moral.

Canonical Considerations

Bede is acutely aware of questions of canon. He identifies Jude as an apostle, 'whom Matthew and Mark in their Gospels call Thaddaeus' (cf. Matt 10.3//Mark 3.18). That is to say, he identifies him as one of the twelve disciples, reading 'Judas of James' (Ιούδας Ἰακώβου/*Iudam Iacobi*, Luke 6.16; Acts 1.13) as *brother* not

son of James, the same as Judas 'not Iscariot' of John 14.22. This is instead of Judas the Lord's brother (cf. Matt 13.53//Mark 6.3), as contemporary scholarship understands Jude 1 to claim (whether or not that claim is accepted). There may be influence from the earlier commentaries here: the anonymous Irish text takes 'brother of James' as a guarantee of authenticity though without specifying the author further, much like Jerome's *On Illustrious Men*, which Bede certainly knew, which also identifies him as 'brother of James' without adding further detail.²⁴ Pseudo-Hilary expands a little, noting that 'he distinguishes himself carefully and clearly from Judas Iscariot' (*diligenter et euidenter ab Iuda Scariot se separat*, my translation; cf. John 14.22). The canonical arrangement of the Catholic Epistles is accounted for as follows: 'Jude rightly has been placed last, because although this also was an important tribe, nevertheless he is of lesser importance than the aforesaid apostles [*praecedentibus apostolis minor est*; sc. James, Peter, John]' (Preface). The relation of Jude to the tribe of Judah is fleeting, unprepared, and not developed elsewhere, but it does at least indicate a concern to interpret biblical names within the frame of the canon. Bede immediately follows this with an alternative account of the ordering of the Catholic Epistles according to date of composition, allowing both to stand side by side, though he says nothing about the date of Jude.

Bede's treatment of non-canonical material is particularly interesting. Jude 9 recounts a tradition in which Michael and the devil dispute over Moses's body, which stems from the *Assumption of Moses*, a text known to some patristic writers and now available in

¹⁹ Foot, 'The Bark and the Text', 259–60.

²⁰ Each commentary on Jude takes up less than three pages in the McNally CCSL edition (see n.16; pp. 48–50 and 122–24, respectively), as against eight for Bede's: *Bedae Venerabilis opera. Pars II, Opera exegetica. 4, Expositio Actuum Apostolorum; Retractatio in Actus Apostolorum; Nomina regionum atque locorum de Actibus Apostolorum; In epistolas VII catholicas*, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 121 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1983), 335–42.

²¹ 'He broke new ground in writing a commentary on the seven Catholic Epistles', Foot, 'The Bark and the Text', 249.

²² Holder, 'Bede and the NT', 145.

²³ *Bedae Venerabilis opera II.4*; Bede the Venerable, *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, ed. and trans. David Hurst, Cistercian Studies 82 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1985); reprinted as *Commentary on the Seven Catholic Epistles*, Monastic Studies Series 30 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2010).

²⁴ *Vir. ill.* 4; cf. 2 where Jerome has identified James the Just as the Lord's cousin. Origen identifies Jude as the Lord's brother, *Comm. Matt.* 10.17; Tertullian sees him as an apostle, one of the twelve, *Cult. fem.* 1.3. On authorship see Jörg Frey, *The Letter of Jude and the Second Letter of Peter: A Theological Commentary*, trans. Kathleen Ess (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 21–31; Richard Bauckham, *Jude, 2 Peter*, Word Biblical Commentary 50 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 14–16, 21–23.

fragmentary form, but not known to Bede.²⁵ He is candid in admitting ‘It is not entirely obvious [*non facile patet*] from what scriptures Jude took this witness’, before citing ‘something like it’ (*similis his aliquid*) from Zech 3.1–2. He continues ‘we remain uncertain [*incertum habemus*] when Michael had a struggle with the devil over the body of Moses’, before tentatively suggesting that the body of Moses might stand for the people of God, a fleeting figural application which he does not insist on. Moving swiftly on, Bede returns to the main point of Jude’s example: ‘if Michael the archangel was unwilling to bring a charge of blasphemy against the devil [. . .], how much more ought all blasphemy be avoided by human beings’.

When he comes to the citation from 1 Enoch 1.9 in Jude 14–15, Bede first underlines the truth of the statement about impending judgment on the ungodly, without citing the Old Testament partial parallels (Deut 33.2; Dan 7.10) as he had done with the *Assumption of Moses* tradition. He then takes pains to clarify the status of the book:

But nevertheless we must know that the book of Enoch from which he took this is classed by the Church among the apocryphal scriptures [*inter apocryphas scripturas*], not because the sayings of so great a patriarch in any way can or ought to be thought worthy of rejection but because that book which is presented in his name appears not to have been really written by him but published by someone else under his name. For if it were really his, it would not be contrary to sound truth. But now because it contains many incredible things [*multa incredibilia*], such as the statement that the giants did not have human beings for fathers but angels, it is deservedly evident to the learned that writings tainted by a lie are not those of a truthful man. (on Jude 14–15)

²⁵ Bauckham argues that Jude refers to the lost ending of the *Testament of Moses*, which he sees as the precursor to an expanded *Assumption of Moses*, Jude, 2 Peter, 65–76; for an argument that it is the ascension not the burial of Moses’ body that is at stake, see Ryan E. Stokes, ‘Not over Moses’ Dead Body: Jude 9, 22–24 and the Assumption of Moses in Their Early Jewish Context’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 40 (2017): 192–213.

Strikingly, Bede has some sense of the contents of the Enochic Book of the Watchers (1 En 1–36). This is noteworthy both because he did not have access to the book itself (he derived his information from discussion in other sources), and because he inherits the non-canonical status of the book as a settled fact, which one might expect to foster disinterest in it. He follows this with a paraphrase of Jerome’s comment in *On Illustrious Men*, that because Jude cites an apocryphal book it ‘was rejected by a number of people from the earliest times. Nonetheless because of its authority and age and usefulness it has for long been counted among the holy scriptures’ (on Jude 14–15; cf. *Vir. ill.* 4).²⁶ He concludes by affirming that Jude took from an apocryphal book ‘a witness which was not apocryphal and doubtful but outstanding because of its true light and light-giving truth [*uera luce et lucida esset ueritate perspicuum*]’.

Bede takes time to address issues of authorship and canon, with erudition where he has knowledge and with candour where he lacks it. Alongside this he gives a succinct sense of the meaning or intention of the text.

Doctrinal Emphases

Bede is concerned with the rule of faith, taking a cue from Jude 3 to speak of ‘no other faith than that which was once handed down to you by the apostles’. This rule is robustly Trinitarian, as evidenced in his comments on the phrase ‘the only sovereign and our Lord Jesus Christ’ in Jude 4:

The only sovereign [*solus dominator*] is our Lord Jesus Christ together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, as the only sovereign is the Father together with the Son and the Holy Spirit, as also the only sovereign is the Holy Spirit

²⁶ Bede: *quia de apocrypho libro testimonium habet primis temporibus a plerisque reiciebatur, tamen auctoritate iam et uetustate et usu meruit ut inter sanctas scripturas computetur*. Jerome: *quia de libro Enoch, qui apocryphus est, adsumit testimonium, a plerisque reicitur. Tamen auctoritatem uetustate iam et usu meruit et inter sanctas scripturas computatur* (*De uiris illustribus*, ed. C. A. Bernoulli [Freiburg: J. C. B. Mohr, 1895]).

together with the Father and the Son, the only sovereign is the entire Trinity, Father and Son and Holy Spirit.

The 'coequal and coeternal' (*coaequalem et coaeternam*) nature of Father and Son is also, for Bede, affirmed by the closing doxology in Jude 25, despite the asymmetrical relationship between the two in his text ('to the only God [*soli Deo* . . .] through Jesus Christ [*per Iesum Christum*]').

Bede's reading is also strongly christological, aided by the reading 'Jesus' (*Iesus*) in Jude 5.²⁷ Bede clarifies that this denotes not Jesus (Joshua) son of Nun (*Naue*), but the Lord Jesus as the one who delivers the people from Egypt. This implies the pre-existence of the Son, and thus enables him to refute those who claim Jesus's beginning was at his birth from Mary. Bede also takes the reading 'Jesus' to identify him as the agent of the angels' punishment in the following verse, Jude 6; this serves as indication of his double generation and true divinity, which gives him the authority to judge the rebellious angels. He notes the fittingness of Jesus receiving his name from an angel, given that he with the Father willed the angels' creation and condemned those angels who sinned.

Throughout the commentary, the rule of faith is articulated in conversation with or, perhaps more accurately, in repudiation of heresy.²⁸ Those who deny the divine status of any one person of the Trinity thereby deny all three. If Jesus delivered the people from Egypt, he cannot have come into being at his birth from Mary 'as the heretics have wished [*ut heretici uoluit*']'. Thus, 'they are justifiably to be condemned who argue that Jesus Christ is not true God but was only a human being and the offspring from the two sexes'. At points heretics

are a generic, amorphous group, as when Jude likens them to Cain, Balaam, and Korah (on Jude 11), or identifies them as the 'stains' at the church's feasts (on v. 12) and the 'wandering stars' (on v. 13). From these verses it becomes clear that Bede identifies Jude's opponents or 'intruders' (v. 3) as heretics. The church's self-definition emerges in distinction from heresy, as when Bede extrapolates from the image of 'wild waves of the sea' to describe the church's peace as 'like the durability and strength of a breakwall [*obicum*]' (on v. 13).

Alongside the attack on adoptionism, noted above, Pelagianism is a particular target, as throughout the *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles*:²⁹

Blessed Jude, therefore, advises us so to build ourselves up on the foundation of our holy faith, [. . .] that we may never presume on our own strength but may hope in the help of divine protection, lest anyone, according to the teaching of Pelagius, declare that he can be saved on his own. (on Jude 20–21)

While it is not impossible that adoptionist or Pelagian ideas were an issue in the English church or for potential converts among the peoples of Britain, many of these concerns are likely to be simply the stock-in-trade of patristic writers, reproduced as a by-now conventional part of the church's teaching. In the case of Pelagius, Bede's emphatic rejection might also in part be due to a concern to distance himself and the English church from their earlier, heretical compatriot.

Moral and Figurial Readings

The Letter of Jude is concerned with the intrusion of a morally licentious group who are threatening the stability of the community to which it is written. It consists in large part of denunciation of these people as ungodly, using examples to indicate their certain condemnation

²⁷ On the textual issues here (many manuscripts read 'Lord'), see Philipp F. Bartholomä, 'Did Jesus Save the People out of Egypt? A Re-Examination of a Textual Problem in Jude 5', *Novum Testamentum* 50 (2008): 143–58.

²⁸ In the *Commentary on the Catholic Epistles* Holder identifies Bede's opposition to Manichaeans, Arians, chiliasts, and Pelagians, 'Bede and the NT', 146.

²⁹ So Foot, 'The Bark and the Text', 249.

by God. The examples apply to the opponents, and to the audience both as warnings about the intruders and by implication as negative exemplars not to be followed. There is also a brief section of positive injunctions to the audience at the letter's end. As an exhortatory and polemical text, it can fairly straightforwardly be applied by later readers to the church of their day. The moral reading of the text is therefore largely its literal or plain sense. Yet there are places in which Bede offers figural readings which might be classed as typological or tropological. Following Auerbach's definition, 'figural' here denotes a connection between two events or people in a mutually informing way, the first anticipating the second and the second fulfilling the first.³⁰

We look first at exegesis and application of the plain sense of the text. The pattern of salvation of the people from Egypt followed by later destruction of those who did not believe (Jude 5) opens up a space for Bede to affirm the opportunity that 'present evils' offer for repentance: 'Punishment, in truth, sets free from [paying the] penalty those alone whom it changes'. Defiling the flesh (v. 8) and blasphemy (v. 10) are to be avoided, and the triad of Cain, Balaam, and Korah warn against sins of envy, love of money, and pride ('yearning for an undeserved place of leadership'; on v. 11). The positive commands at the end of the letter are also straightforwardly applied to Bede's readers: they are to pray in the Holy Spirit by requesting help from on high; they build themselves up on the foundation of the holy faith when they join themselves as living stones to the church (cf. 1 Pet 2.5); they continue in the love of God when they rely on him; and they are to exercise mercy with care (on Jude 20–21 and 22–23).

We turn now to places where Bede develops a figural reading, even if only briefly. The deliverance of the people from Egypt prompts a reflection on other elements of the exodus not mentioned in Jude:

He stresses this [salvation] so much that we may remember [*ut . . . meminerimus*] even now that he so saves believers through the waters of baptism, which the Red Sea foreshadowed [*signabat*], that he demands a humble life of us even after baptism and one separated from the filth of vices, such as the hidden way of life of the desert [*heremi secreta conuersatio*] quite properly pointed to [*designabat*]. If anyone actually profanes this life either by departing from the faith or by acting evilly, being turned away in heart, as it were, to Egypt, he will deserve not to reach the promised fatherland of the kingdom but to perish among the ungodly. (on Jude 5)

The Red Sea–baptism typology is found in 1 Cor 10.2 (cf. 1 Pet 3.20–21 which connects baptism with the flood). Here we see Bede interpreting Scripture via Scripture, and readily moving from the text of Jude to the Old Testament exemplars it references – the exodus generation, their deliverance through the sea, their life in the desert, and the temptation to yearn for Egypt – before returning to his readers. The 'hidden way of life of the desert' might also evoke the desert fathers and mothers, though 'desert' (*heremus*) has not at this stage given rise to the coinage 'hermit' (*heremita*).

A further example of figural exegesis is found in Bede's treatment of the fallen angels. Jude 6 alludes to the myth of the Watcher angels who had intercourse with human women and taught illicit knowledge (cf. Gen 6.1–4; 1 En 1–36), although Jude's presentation of the story focuses on the angelic sin against cosmic order rather than anything more specific; it serves as one among several examples of God's judgment. The implication in Jude is that such judgment faces humans who sin as well; Bede follows this train of thought, but makes more expansive connections, which he signals with 'it is, then, to be inferred' (*deinde inferendum*) that:

[Jesus] does not spare proud human beings, but will condemn them also [. . .] when they have not maintained their place of leadership [*suum principatum non seruauerint*], namely, that by which they were made sons of God

³⁰ See Furry, *Allegorizing History*, 6–9.

[*filii Dei effecti sunt*] through the grace of adoption, but have abandoned their dwelling place [*dereliquerunt suum domicilium*], that is, the unity of the Church [*ecclesiae unitatem*] in which they were reborn to God, or at least their seats in the heavenly kingdom which they would have received if they kept their faith. (on Jude 6)

The phrases ‘maintaining their place of leadership’ and ‘abandoning their dwelling place’ are lifted verbatim from Jude 6 but here applied to the church as denoting not angelic status in heaven but instead the adopted status of the righteous and the unity of the church. As an aside, this provides further evidence that Bede knows the story of the Watchers, at least derivatively. This is clear in his comments on Jude 14–15, seen above, where he notes and dismisses the tradition that giants were born from angelic-human unions. It is also apparent here: in applying this verse about angels (*angelos*) to human members of the church, Bede describes the latter as ‘sons of God’ (*filii Dei*), the very term which occurs in the Vulgate of Gen 6.2 to denote the angels. His figural exegesis proceeds via knowledge of the background of Jude 6 and its connection with Genesis 6.

A comparable instance of Bede’s development of Jude’s relation of biblical figures to the ungodly is found with respect to Korah, whom Bede takes as a human example of precisely what he has earlier expounded from the example of the fallen angels. Those who rebel, like Korah ‘by their yearning for an undeserved place of leadership [*appetitu indebiti primatus sese*] cut themselves off from the unity of the holy Church [*ab unitate sanctae ecclesiae*]’ (on Jude 11).

One further example of figural reading is Bede’s reading of the phrase ‘wandering stars’ in Jude 13. Bede leads off with his knowledge of medieval cosmology, derived from the Greek Ptolemaic system: ‘The wandering stars, which are seven, never rise or set in the same place as they did the previous day but are seen now low on the horizon at the winter solstice, now high at the summer solstice, and now in an intermediate position at the two equinoxes.’ The light of

the celestial bodies is the teaching of heretics, whose promise of the light of truth is belied by their fickleness. He continues, ‘And indeed the best known of the planets, that is, the wandering stars [*planetas, id est errantia sidera*],³¹ are the sun, the moon, the morning and evening stars [i.e., Venus].’ There follows a disambiguation of the various figural applications of the heavenly lights, both positive (sun as Lord, moon as church, morning star as John the Baptist) and negative (the sun scorching the seed on rocky ground, a figure of persecution, Matt 13.5–6, 20–21; the fool like the moon, Sir 27.11; the devil’s fall from heaven like the morning star, Isa 14.12; the evening star as the antichrist, Job 38.32). Having clarified these figural applications, Bede then underscores and, in the case of the waves, extends the fittingness of the punishment in an application of the *lex talionis*: ‘those who bring the darkness [*tenebras*] of errors into the Church of God in the name of light will properly be sent into the eternal darkness [*tenebras*] of torments; those who disturb the peace of the faithful after the manner of storms [*tempestatum*] at sea will rightly be struck with a storm [*procella percellentur*] of tortures’ (on Jude 13, Hurst modified).

Conclusion

While Bede’s context was the early medieval society of Britain long after the fall of the Roman Empire, his connection with and place among patristic writers was secured by the continuity between his work and that of his predecessors in the Western church.³² Alcuin of York in the late eighth century went so far as to call him the

³¹ Bede’s knowledge of Greek improved through his career, but it is uncertain whether he had the Greek ἀστέρεις πλανῆται in mind here. The reference to the planets, even if not the etymology, is clear enough from the Latin *sidera errantia*.

³² ‘[I]n his monumental contribution to biblical scholarship, he seems much more distinctly like a bridge between the world of learning he encountered in the books at Wearmouth-Jarrow and the medieval world’, Love, ‘The World of Latin Learning’, 52.

fifth Latin Father, after Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great (*Epistola* 216).³³ This continuity is a phenomenon enabled by the textual world Bede inhabited, a world sustained by the material, physical reality of the political and religious situation in northern Britain and across Europe: the foundation and growth of his monastery as a centre of learning, and the means for Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith to travel to Rome and acquire a substantial library. Within this context, Bede the monk, the reader, pray-er, and teacher of Scripture, was able to flourish. In his *Commentary on Jude* we catch a glimpse of his learning, his position as an expositor of the rule of faith and defender of the canon of Scripture, and his acuity as an exegete of Scripture. In particular, I have shown

that this commentary cannot easily be classified as concerned only with the literal or historical sense. Rather, Bede expands and extends the Scriptural episodes he finds mentioned in Jude and interprets them not simply as negative examples but as figures of heretics and contemporary believers, using terminology of inference, signalling, and indicating (*inferendum, signare, designare*). That is to say, even in this short and early work we see Bede developing figural readings which serve his application of the text to the church of his day.

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I dedicate this article to friends and colleagues at Durham Cathedral.

³³ Foot, 'The Bark and the Text', 259.