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# Piety of the Germanic and Celtic Peoples Between their Christianization and the Era of Charlemagne as Seen from the Chronicles of Time

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# PIETY OF THE GERMANIC AND CELTIC PEOPLES BETWEEN THEIR CHRISTIANIZATION AND THE ERA OF CHARLEMAGNE AS SEEN FROM THE CHRONICLES OF THE TIME

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by

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

When the history of a people is studied it so often happens that in the whirl of great events the thoughts and actions of the "little people" are forgotten. This is true also in the study of theology. Here we are concerned with the great doctrines of the Christian Church, how they developed, and what they mean for us today. But in the discussion of this development, we too easily forget to characterize the influences that the beliefs of the non-theological classes had on theology, and also the effect of theology on these people. Somehow this is akin to reading the City of God by Saint Augustine, but forgetting to read his Confessions. The picture we would get of the man would not be a correct one. So it is in the history of theology.

We are interested here in piety or devoutness exhibited elsewhere than in theological works. That is to say, if the distinction is valid, we are concerned with religion rather than theology. There is a difference between the substance of Christianity as it finds expression in works like Saint Ambrose's Offices, and the substance of Christianity as it appears in The Ecclesiastical History of the Venerable Bede. The first is concern with stating a system, the second is concerned, and only secondarily, with showing how Christianity is effective in the lives of people. There is no creative activity going on in the second work, it merely records how Christian people are acting. This is what we are interested in probing. What were the basic beliefs and actions of the

Christianized person in the north among what are termed the "Germans" in the years 300-800.

The writer was led to an interest in this subject by three factors. The first was the reading of Oswald Spengler's Decline of the West. In this book the author points out that Christianity changes as it passes from culture to culture. The words remain the same, but they are filled with new meaning. Through an analysis of the piety of the Germanic peoples one could determine, at least to a degree, if they had the same fundamental concepts of Christianity as are found in the New Testament, or in Classical Christianity. The second factor was the reading of the first volume of Henry Taylor's The Medieval Mind. Here Mr. Taylor gives a brief account of some of the factors in Medieval piety. This survey led the writer to desire a fuller knowledge. The third factor in this interest is simply a rather general love for history as a whole. To probe beyond the political events into the minds of a people that lived centuries ago is simply a fascination with the author.

## CHAPTER II

### A DISCUSSION OF THE CHRONICLES

The contemporary Chronicles of the time 400-800 A.D. are the sources for this paper. We feel that here one may find the most accurate insights into the piety of the people of the era. There are a number of different types of literature that flourished during this period. There are the laws that each Germanic people developed, which, with a minute study of their development, might provide us with some knowledge of a trend toward a more Christian society. Another channel of study would be reflected in the hymns and prayers. Another source is the poetry of the time. Caedmon and Cynewulf in England as well as the poets of the court of Charlemagne would tell us much concerning the beliefs of the people. The most obvious sources of course are the theological works.

We have chosen the chronicles because their references to piety are the least studied in character. It seems that theology was highly stereotyped even at this time. Theological works would tend to reproduce this thought with little or no reference to the beliefs of the people.[1] The product of centuries of Christian thought would face us rather than the nascent beliefs of newly converted peoples. Poetry is a creative literary type and consequently not too reliable. Too, the poetry was

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[1] Note certain stereotyped sections in Gregory of Tours when he speaks on theology. See Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks, (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1927), V, 31 (43), V, 32 (44), II, 20 (29), and especially I, 47.

often written by theologians and monks on theological subjects.[2] It should be said here that any complete study of the piety of the Germanic peoples would have to include all these various writings.

In choosing the Chronicles as our sources we realize that this presents many problems in reliability. Like the poetry, the histories were usually written by monks. One type of history writing at this time, the lives of the saints, can hardly be distinguished from theology in many respects. Often they include long theological discussions. It has been noted by many scholars that there was a certain pattern that all the writers of saint's lives followed.[3] Furthermore they were written for theological purposes. Alfred writes just this in the preface to his Life of Saint Ninian. He claims as his theme, "He forsook all the earthly for the heavenly."[4] Gregory of Tours writes in his Life of St. Martin:

> Since we behold wonderous miracles issuing from the tombs of the Blessed ones, we are admonished to pay them all due reverence, from whom we cease not to ask the cure of our diseases; by their prayers we doubt not to win remission of our sins; and not only that, but salvation from the torments of Hell.[5]

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[2] Cf. Bede, The Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1951), IV, xxiv on Caedmon. Also Gregory of Tours, op. cit., V.

[3] James Westfall Thompson, A History of Historical Writing (New York: Macmillan Co., 1942), I, 153 f. See also Sir Samuel Dill, Roman Society in Gaul in the Merovingian Age (London: Macmillan and Co., 1926), pp. 26-7, 272-3.

[4] Alfred, Life of Saint Ninian, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), ii.

[5] Quoted from Dill, op. cit., p. 406.

Sir Samuel Dill writes that lives of saints:[6]

> . . . were generally written for religious comfort and edification, by men who, from training and habit of mind, knew and cared nothing for those canons of evidence which are necessary to secure severe historical accuracy. An organic life of a saint was often recast in later centuries with many additions and conventional details which recur with suspicious frequency. Old traditions were handled with a freedom which was justified to the redactor by a spiritual motive or effect. Traits and incidents are freely transferred from one life to another; and, more excusably, the narrative is coloured by reminiscences of Biblical story. Yet when criticism has passed its harshest judgement, to anyone eager for vivid facts of social life, hagiography has a strange fascination, and sometimes gives him just what he seeks.

The same author gives us the following insight into the pattern of these lives:[7]

> These lives in fact are invaluable to the student of secular society. For they offer glimpses, here and there, of the life of a class on quiet estates in Burgundy or Touraine or Aquitaine, which stand out in startling contrast with the greed and luxury, the audacious violence or cynical perfidy of kings and courtiers which shock us in the pages of Gregory. The saint and bishop are often sprung from old senatorial or well-to-do families, living in some rural estate whose vineyards and cornlands are cultivated by serfs or freedmen. The tone of the household is as a rule devoutly Christian with a tendency to ascetic quietism. There is an oratory or private chapel where the chatelaine will spend hours of devotion, often far into the night. Her son is carefully trained from infancy in the Scriptures and in habits of devotion. He is sent to the neighboring school, where he is imbued with the fast fading tradition of Gallo-Roman culture. His father or grandfather may have been count of the district, and have a courtiere for a time, and the family may have wished the boy to follow a similar career, for, in such circles, public ambition was not at all incompatible with deep spirituality. The boy would be commended by powerful patronage to the Palatine service at Metz or Soissons, and for a few years he would have a training in official and courtly acts. So Aridius, the famous saint and abbot of Limoges, the friend of Gregory and Fortunatus, had risen to high favour and influence at the court of Theudebert. When the young courtiere returned to his home, old family traditions would require that the hope of the house should marry and

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[6] Ibid., pp. 26-7.

[7] Ibid., pp. 272-3.

> prolong its dignity. But to the grief of many a pious mother in that age, the young man, in spite of courtly training and aristocratic associations, had often caught a mysterious passion for secluded sanctity which rejected with scorn the counsels of affectionate worldliness. And one day he would disappear to bury himself in some secret glade in the forest of the Jura or Le Perche. Sometimes, even after he had received Holy Orders, he might for a long time live on the parental estate, working his hands with the serfs, and training their children to read and sing the Psalms. In the end he might found a religious house, and some of his pupils would take monastic vows. And often his mother, who had lost husband and son, with perhaps as pure a devotion, in her old age, would carry on the management of the estate, and tend her olives and vines to provide a revenue for the new foundation of her son. It is this class, with the proud and wholesome tradition of Roman family life, now warmed and inspired by Christian ideals, who were the salt of Gallo-Roman society, and save it from ruin.

These forms that affect the nature of writing saint's lives also affect the writing of history. Probably the best example of this sort of thinking can be found in the Venerable Bede. In his Ecclesiastical History he writes:[8]

> For if history relates good things of good men, the attentive hearer is excited to imitate that which is good; or if it mentions evil things of wicked persons, nevertheless the religious and pious hearer or reader, shunning that which is hurtful and perverse, is the more earnestly excited to perform those things which he knows to be good, and worthy of God.

Bede often points out to his reader the observation that a king prospers because he is good in the eyes of the Lord and fails if he does evil. His reader is to find a lesson in this.[9] After relating one event he

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[8] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I.

[9] Ibid., II, v, ix; III, vii, xvii; IV, ii.

concludes:

> We have thought fit to insert this in our History, to admonish the reader of the works of our Lord, how terrible He is in his counsels on the sons of men, lest we should at some time or other indulge in the pleasures of the flesh, and dreading the judgment of God too little, fall under his sudden wrath, and either be severely afflicted with temporal losses or else being more severely tried, be snatched away to eternal perdition.[10]

These lengthy quotations have been inserted for two reasons: To give the reader some insight into the types of thinking that produced our sources, and also to pose the question of whether or not one can even claim that this is history. It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the question fully, but it should be noted in evaluating the material.

Since the canons of historical writing were not as stylized then as now, it was quite possible for the writer to insert whatever he thought edifying.[11] We have, therefore, confined ourselves to the histories that were written during the years 400-800 A.D. In this way the material, whether true of the historical characters or not, will at least tell us of the piety of the historian who is writing. No Greek or Roman historians were used in the paper, since they would be apt to insert Graeco-Roman ideas into the thinking of the German.[12]

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[10] Ibid., IV, xxv. Note also Paul the Deacon, History of the Langobards, (Philadelphia: University of Pa., 1907), III, xi.

[11] Dill, op. cit., p. 4.

[12] Such historians as Procopius, Eusebius, Ammianus Marcellinus, Socrates, and Rufinus.

Most of the Chronicles consulted[13] were quite careful to note exactly where they received their information. It has often been noted, and rightly so, that ancient and medieval historians were not as scrupulous in selecting their sources as modern historians since the advent of modern historiography. It will be noted in the following excerpts that the early medieval historian accepted many statements that would be held highly questionable today. On the other hand, these writers of the early middle ages were concerned to record the facts as accurately as they could.

Gregory of Tours followed the classical histories of Eusebius, Severus, St. Jerome, and Orosius down to the time of St. Martin of Tours. As most of his predecessors and contemporaries he traced the origin of his people back to the beginnings in creation. Bible stories are incorporated to show the generations from Adam. The Franks, as all German peoples, were supposedly descended in direct line from the Trojans.[14] These traditions were common and could have been received from any number of his contemporaries.

Paul the Deacon shows the same bent. Unlike Gregory of Tours, Paul was a learned man. Though he may lack at times the critical judgment that modern historiography requires,[15] he does receive most of his material from well known sources.[16] His Roman History is an expansion

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[13] A complete list of these will be found in the bibliography.

[14] Gregory of Tours, op. cit., I. See also Dill, op. cit., p. 5; Thompson, op. cit., p. 151.

[15] William Dudley Foulke, (Introduction to Paul the Deacon, History of the Langobards), p. iv.

[16] Ibid., p. xviii. Also Paul, op. cit., I, xv.

of Eutropius.[17] Paul was greatly respected by Charlemagne, as well as by the writers of the later middle ages.[18] In his History of the Lombards, which concerns us directly, there are a minimum of speeches and miracles.[19] One author has this to say concerning Paul:[20]

> But what he relates of miracles and wonderful things is due in part to the times, and in part to the traditions of his people which he tells with affection, without everywhere wishing to vouch for their accuracy, as he sometimes lets us perceive. His love of truth, the first quality of a writer of history, is unquestionable.

Like Gregory he traces the origins of his people back into the realms of myth. The many stories of the wanderings from Scandinavia present legends that are possibly part of the common history of the Germanic peoples as a whole.[21] Paul's treatment of it gives us one of the best insights into his method.

> Paul's narrative of the origin of the name of Langobards gives the best example of the manner in which he has treated the legends which have come down to him. The transposition of the direct speech into the indirect, the introduction of the phrase "to preserve their liberty by arms," and similar classical phrases, the new style and historical character given to the story, speak for themselves; but still the Langobards, in treating of the origin of the proud name could not disown his national character and even where "the ridiculous story told by the ancients" sets historical treatment at defiance, he still does not support it.[22]

While the History of the Goths of Jordanes, as the others, is filled with common traditions of the past, he too shows that he is

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[17] Ibid., p. xvii.

[18] Ibid., p. xix.

[19] Ibid., p. xxxix, xxxi. Note Paul, op. cit., II, viii where he relies on what was "related to me." But even here we trace a note of doubt in his words.

[20] Foulke, op. cit., p. xxxviii.

[21] Ibid., p. 30, note 2.

[22] Ibid., p. 17, note 1.

concerned about the sources that he is using. In one place he writes that he is quoting from the history of Symmachus.[23] His whole work is a condensation of Cassiodorus of which he writes:

> The words of Cassiodorus I recall not, but the sense and the deeds related I think I retain entire. To this I have added fitting matters from some Greek and Latin Histories.[24]

This same consciousness for sources shows itself also among the writers of the English Isles. Even in the lives of the saints, where one would least expect concern, the reader is explicitly assured that he is reading varifiable material. Adamnan writes at the beginning of his work:

> Let no one think of me as either stating what is not true regarding so great a man, or recording anything doubtful or uncertain. Let him know that I will tell with all candour, and without any ambiguity, what I have learned from the consistent narrative of my predecessors, trustworthy and discerning men, and that my narrative is founded either on written authorities anterior to my own times, or on what I have myself heard from some learned and faithful ancients, unhesitatingly attesting facts, the truth of which they had themselves diligently inquired into.[25]

Jonas and Jocelinus[26] are not as explicit about their sources. The latter does mention that there are no reports of miracles after the death of Saint Kentigern. He adds though that there must have been some performed because of the holy life that the saint led.[27]

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[23] Jordanes, Gothic History, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), LXXXVIII.

[24] Ibid., II, III.

[25] Adamnan, Life of Saint Columba, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), Second Preface.

[26] See Bibliography.

[27] Jocelinus, The Life of St. Kentigern, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), II.

The Venerable Bede in the preface to his Ecclesiastical History begins by stating, "My principle authorities and aids in this work are . . . ." He then records how the information originates in the Vatican archives and comes to him through the holy Abbot Albinus. He credits a certain Bishop Daniel of the West Saxons and Abbot Esius of the East Saxons. He further adds these telling remarks:

> Thus, from the beginning of this volume to the time when the English nation received the faith of Christ, we have collected the writings of our predecessors, and from them gathered matter for our history, but from that time to the present . . . has been conveyed to us by Nothelm through the industry of the . . . Abbot Albinus . . . . What I have written concerning our most holy father, Bishop Cuthbert . . . I partly took, and faithfully copied from what I have found written of him by the brethren of the Church of Lindisfarne . . . . And I humbly entreat the reader, that if he shall in this that we have written find anything not delivered according to the truth, he will not impute the same to me, who, as the rule of history requires, have labored sincerely to commit to writing such things as I could gather from common report, for the instruction of posterity.[28]

This same care is part of Nennius' writing. He used as his sources Saint Jerome, Isidore, parts of the Life of Saint Germanus, and parts of the annals of the Irish and Saxons.[29]

There is one difference in their writing from modern history that we of the twentieth century find it difficult to understand. In all the histories miracles are credited as fact along with many other supernatural events. This is seemingly part of the piety of the people. If the truth is spoken, it must be said that the only reason we cannot accept these paragraphs is not their lack of authority, but rather our

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[28] Ecclesiastical History, I, preface. See also Bede, The Life of Saint Cuthbert, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1951), Preface, VI.

[29] R. H. Hodgkin, A History of the Anglo-Saxons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 79.

predilection toward discounting all that is not reasonable in writing our history.

## CHAPTER III

## THE PIETY OF THE GERMANIC PEOPLES

### Part I: The Foundations

In discussing the piety of the Germanic people there is one factor that stands out above all others. This factor is the monastic atmosphere of the society. In the English Isles, especially among the Britons and the Irish, the monastery controlled the church organization. As one historian has put it, the Scottish church was "an aggregate of monasteries."[1] Each of these monateries depended on the mother house of Iona. This house was ruled by an abbot-priest to whom all owed implicit obedience. Even the bishops were subject to the abbot.[2] This control by the monateries was less in other geographical areas, but their influence was not.

It is easy to determine in the lives of the saints that these monks must have exerted a considerable influence just by their example. Their life was spent in setting an example of Christian "otherworldliness" to the people. This was their way of preaching; example rather than words. People saw Saint Cuthbert as a signal example "of how Christ could make a man count all things well lost for His sake."[3] Bishop Aidan, residing

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[1] R. H. Hodgkin, A History of the Anglo-Saxons (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 255.

[2] William Hunt, The English Church from its Foundation to the Norman Conquest, (London: MacMillian and Co., 1901), pp. 9-10.

[3] Ibid., p. 145.

in the monastery of Lindisfarne, would set out to preach and teach and heal in the surrounding districts and then return to the monastery.[4]

These monateries did not follow any one rule. Most of the monks were laymen and would attach themselves to some famous man of God. Some of these monks lived together, others preferred to be alone. Usually the leader set up some sort of rule which was often extremely ascetic. Saint Columba permitted his followers to eat together, but they were to dwell separately. Both women and children were accepted into his monastery.[5]

The Irish monastery was often synonymous with the clan. The abbot was the head, appointed by his predecessor. Each monk lived in his own hut and devoted himself to contemplation, prayer, writing, and labor. Some were recluses. Often some members of the clan lived outside the monastery, but a close relationship existed with those inside. Though the abbot was seldom a bishop, he often had bishops under him. Usually the abbot was also the king. All of the land was owned by the clan and parceled out to families. The monastery was obviously an intricate part of the society. This was also true of the preceding pagan society.[6]

Many of the monks, and especially the leaders, practiced extreme asceticism. It was told that Saint Illtud, the apostle to the Britons, had his monks yoke themselves instead of oxen to the plow in order to avoid idleness--"the mother of vices."[7] St. Etheldreda, the Abbess of

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[5]Adamnan, Life of St. Columba (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), III, xx.

[6]Henry Osborn Taylor, The Medieval Mind, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1951), p. 135, note 1.

[7]Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 247.

Ely, ate once a day and took only three baths a year.[8] St. Patrick wrote that his faith was so increased that he said "a hundred prayers in a day, and nearly as many at night."[9] Saint Columba would often recite the whole Psalter at night standing immersed in the sea.[10] The historian tells us that Saint Kentigern abstained from meat and wine, slept on a stone, and bathed in ice cold water. He dwelt in the desert throughout Lent, on Good Friday practiced the extremes of asceticism, slept all day Saturday, and rose to joy on Sunday.[11] The Venerable Bede wrote that Saint Cuthbert joyed in preaching to those who lived in places where no one else dared to go for fear of death.[12] An extreme sort of this asceticism is told (by Paul the Deacon) of Saint Hospitus after his followers left because of the invading Lombards:

> He showed himself to them the Lombards through the window of the tower. But when they, going around the tower, sought an entrance through which they could pass into him, and found none at all, two of them climbed up to the roof and uncovered it. And seeing him bound with chains and clad in goats skin, they said: "He is a malefactor and has committed murder, therefore he is held bound in these fetters." And when they had called an interpreter they inquired from him what evil deed he had committed that he was bound in such punishment, and he declared that he was a murderer and guilty of all crimes. Then one of

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[8] Hunt, op. cit., p. 185.

[9] Saint Patrick's Confession, vi. Found in the appendix of Daniel De Vinne, History of the Irish Primitive Church (New York: Francis Hart and Co., 1870).

[10] Adamnan, op. cit., III, xxiv. See also Jocelinus, Life of Saint Kentigern, (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), XXV.

[11] Ibid., XII, XIV, XVII.

[12] The Venerable Bede, Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1951), IV, xxvii.

> them drew his sword to cut off his head, but straightway his right hand stiffened while suspended in the act of striking, nor could he draw it back. So he let go of the sword and dropped it upon the ground. His companions seeing these things raised a cry to heaven entreating the saint that he would graciously make known what they should do. And he indeed, having made the sign of salvation, restored the withered arm to health. And the Langobard who had been healed was converted to the faith of Christ and was straightway made a priest and then a monk, and remained in that same place up to the end of his life in the service of the Lord. But when the blessed Hospitius has spoke the Word of God to the Langobards, two dukes who heard him reverently, returned safe and sound to their own country, but certain ones who had despised his words perished miserably in that same Provincia.[13]

Another passion, so to speak, of these monks was to travel about preaching the Gospel among the heathen. We recognize this in Saint Patrick, who after escaping from the Irish, traveled all through Europe learning, and then returned to preach to his ex-captors. Saint Columba traveled among the Picts and Saint Columban with Saint Gall preached throughout Gaul, Burgundy, and finally into Italy.

Gregory of Tours informs us of many incidents where not only monks but also women and fathers were drawn into this craving for asceticism. Besides the many that were either exiled into monasteries or placed there upon capture, there is recorded in the chronicles a growing tendency in this direction.[14] A certain nun came to the blessed Radegund and asked to live as a recluse.

> Which being granted, all the virgins assembled with much chanting, having their lamps lighted; thus was the maid escorted to her place, the blessed Radegund herself leading her by the hand. So, bidding all farewell, and kissing each in turn, she was

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[13] Paul the Deacon, History of the Langobards (Philadelphia: University of Pa., 1907), III, ii.

[14] Gregory of Tours, The History of the Franks (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1927), II, 19 (28).

> enclosed in her cell. The door by which she entered was filled in, and there she now devotes her days to holy reading and to prayer.[15]

Saint Aldhelm, Abbot of Malmesbury, had many women disciples. There were houses for women both in the English Isles and in Gaul. In the last book of his History of the Franks, Gregory recited in detail a scandal in the very famous house at Poitiers. It is difficult to determine the exact nature of the conflict because Gregory himself is rather prejudiced. But it is obvious that there were many men and women living in that place.

To determine the exact influence of the monastic life on the piety of these people is not possible. Most of the histories of this time were written by monks, which makes it very easy to overstate the case. If the Venerable Bede and Gregory of Tours are any indication of the influence, we can without doubt assign the monastery a central place in the piety of the Germans.

The second factor that we should consider in discussing the foundations of Germanic piety is the remaining fragments of the old religion in these newly converted people. In order to fully understand this influence it is well to review some of the stresses of the Germanic pre-Christian religions.

It is difficult to get an exact picture of most of these societies since almost all of the literature that we possess from the period has been "Christianized." Beowulf, for example, though originally a pagan poem, was later edited to give it the semblance at least of a Christian

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[15] Ibid., VI, 21 (29).

background. (The ethics even now can hardly be called Christian.) We dare not place too much trust in the histories of Tacitus or Caesar since they were Romans looking in from the outside. Tacitus especially saw only good in the idealized picture he had of the German. It has been pointed out for instance that while Tacitus speaks of a sort of primitive tribal democracy here, one can look all through the pages of the Venerable Bede or Beowulf and find no trace of this. They tell not of national assemblies but of kings and officials.[16] The writings of Tacitus about the Germans could well be compared to the idealized picture that James Fenimore Cooper painted of the American Indian.

In most ancient societies a close relationship existed between the kingship and the priesthood. There is an argument raging concerning the ethical nature of these pre-Christian religions. It is averred that they were merely ritualistic rather than ethical in nature. This assertion completely overlooks the close relationship between king and priest. The ethics of the religion were by the very nature of the society the civil laws. This is seen especially among the Druids.

> They joined to their supernatural lore innocent secular learning, skill in poetry, and knowledge of the laws and history of their country. They gave the kings advice and educated their children.[17]

The ethics of these peoples for the most part were governed by what is called today the lex talionis. Society not having the able system of police protection with which the twentieth century is endowed, the individual was forced to protect himself. The intricate nature of this

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[16] Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 202-9.

[17] J. B. Bury, The Life of Saint Patrick (London: Macmillan and Co., 1905), p. 76.

ethical system is beyond the scope of this paper. Suffice it to say that this same ethic of revenge maintained itself long after these people were Christianized.[18]

Seemingly there was a great conflict within the religion of these pagan peoples between what are termed the war gods and the fertility gods. From all that we can determine, it is possible that the war gods were from the far north originally, while the fertility gods moved in from Asia Minor. But this is merely an hypothesis. Possibly all societies require both to satisfy the religious needs of the people.[19] This conflict of deities was probably one of the factors that weakened the religious fabric of the society and thereby paved the way for Christianity. It is quite well substantiated that the pantheon of the Anglo-Saxons as they moved from the continent to the English Isles was entirely confused. The temple cult as described by Tacitus did not recur in England. Rather each king had his own temple. True, we do hear of a primus pontifigum in Northumbria, but judging by his actions he was not the head of an organized national cult.[20] Woden and Thunor, great gods on the continent, are hardly mentioned in England except as demigods connected with the employment of spells.[21]

Accompanying these great gods were all sorts of minor deities. These deities, like those of ancient Rome, were the personifications of

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[18] See Adamnan, op. cit., L, xvi.

[19] For this combination see Jordanes, Gothic History, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1915), XLI.

[20] R. H. Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 238.

[21] Ibid., p. 239.

the various elements in life.

> We see then that Woden and Thunor and the great gods . . . were less important than the lesser powers like Sceaf-Weland the Smith; and Wyrd, the irresistible Fate who ruled even the gods; and all the route of miscellaneous beings and spirits who accompanied the immigrants--elves of all kinds . . . giants, nightmares, dragons, sea-monsters . . . .[22]

These interesting forces of life could be controlled by the priesthood. Among the Irish these priests were called Druids. There is probably no other cast that fought so valiantly against the new Christian magic; for that is how they thought of it. Over and over again in the histories and lives of the saints we hear of great duels with the Druids. It was part of the ideal of the saint that he have more power than the Druid. Saint Patrick and Saint Columba had many a battle with these priests. As we shall see below, Christian and pagan alike believed in the power of this magic.

That many facets of these pagan rites maintained themselves is only natural. It cannot be doubted upon survey of the historical evidence. The Ecclesiastical History of the Venerable Bede gives example upon example of this! Saint Augustin of Canterbury was plagued with the problem. In his well-known letter to Pope Saint Gregory he asked him for guidance in dealing with these problems. Saint Gregory's answer is classic. He writes Saint Augustine that he should not disrupt any harmless heathen custom, but rather employ it in the favor of the new faith.[23] When Raedwald, king of the East Anglians, accepted Christianity, he

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[22] Ibid., p. 243.

[23] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xxx.

accepted it merely as an addition to the old faith.[24] Bede reports rather sympathetically that when Bishop Aidan came to England he was determined not to be as rough on the old beliefs as the Roman missionaries had been. If these paganisms occured under the Roman Augustine, they certainly must have flourished under Aidan.[25] Two hundred years later the problem still concerned the church. Pope Formosus sent a letter to England in 891 condemning them for not checking the heathen customs.[26] King Saint Edward the Confessor in his ecclesiastical laws determined that "all heathen practices, witchcrafts, and divinations were strictly forbidden."[27]

Professor Hodgkin comments on these pagan elements:

> Easter . . . retained some slight trace of pre-Christian origin in its name and its eggs. May Day continued to be celebrated with scarcely distinguished heathen rites. The "fetility" spirit was re-captured in each village with the ancient, primitive usage. As in pagan times, the country-folks covered themselves with spring's new greenery, they danced around the green tree, they processed with clamour round the fields--not indeed with the image of a god, but bearing a garland of flowers which could, by confusion with the new religion be called "Our Lady"; they stormed into the church-yard or the church with their pagan riot, and in the night as in the day there was a resurgence of the primitive instincts of man . . . . The Rogation-tide of the Church was still known as the "Gang-days"--the days in which the folk perambulated the bounds of their fields in order to call for a blessing upon the fruits of the earth. The Midsummer Fires, the Harvest Homes, and the mid-winter festivals might be rechristened, but their heathen traditions were again unmistakable.[28]

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[24] Ibid., II, xv.

[25] Ibid., III, iii; V, xix.

[26] W. Hunt, op. cit., p. 283.

[27] Ibid., p. 290.

[28] R. H. Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 464.

Sir Samuel Dill gives us the same picture on the continent.

> It is well known that the fiercest efforts of the Christian Empire long failed to abolish the performance of heathen rites in country places. They survived the Western Empire for generations, and popular devotion was only slowly weaned from the cult of the heathen gods and demons by the cult of the saints and martyrs. The councils of the sixth and seventh centuries are still compelled to launch their anathemas against the lingering reverence for stones and trees and fountains and the practice of the people going out from mass to offer meat to idols. The procession of Magna-Mater in her car, with music and dancing in the old fashion among the fields and vineyards of Autun in the fourth century was abolished by the zeal of Bishop Simplicius . . . . In the sixth century the worship of an old Celtic deity, identified in popular syncretism with Diana, still attracted crowds of devotees in the region of Troyes.[29]

We shall notice in detail as we survey the various elements of Christian piety how these pagan elements continued to maintain themselves.

Another foundation of early Christian piety that deserves special attention is its emphasis on the Old Testament. It is difficult to determine whether this emphasis determined the piety or whether the original pagan piety as it moved over into Christianity was naturally more congenial to the piety of the Old Testament. To discuss this emphasis in detail at this point would carry us through to the end of the paper. We shall only point out the main features here. The theme will reoccur throughout the paper.

As we worked through the sources we especially watched for references to the Scriptures. It was very interesting to note the meager number of times that the New Testament was quoted in relation to the numerous times that the Old Testament was used.[30] The Biblical book

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[29]S. Dill, op. cit., pp. 262-3.

[30]Note especially The Works of Gildas (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848). Also Jocelinus, op. cit., XXV. Also Asser, Annals of the Reign of Alfred the Great (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1848). See further Sidonius, Letters (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1915), CXXII.

referred to most was the Psalter, which was used regularly in worship and especially in the monasteries. It is only natural that it should become the inspiration for much piety. Sidonius writes the following concerning a noble friend of his:

> His is an indulgence which does not spoil, a punishment without brutality, a tempered severity, stern but never dreadful. With all this he is a regular reader of the Scriptures; even at meal times he enjoys this nutriment of the soul. He studies the Psalms, and yet more frequently chants them.[31]

Much of the thought of Gregory of Tours about the various Frankish kings was molded by the historical books of the Old Testament. Gregory is often at words to prove, as the Biblical writer, that God blesses the good and punishes the evil. He thinks of God as being with the kings of the Franks as He was with the kings of Israel because the kings of the Franks were still fighting the Lord's battle even though the names had been changed from Canaanite to pagan, from Baal Worshipers to Arians. He once summarizes a king's activity with:

> God daily subdued his enemies under his hand, and increased his dominion; since the king walked with an upright heart before Him, and did that which was pleasing in His eyes.[32]

These two influences, the one from the old Germanic religions, and the other from the Old Testament, rather than the New Testament, are determinative for the Christian piety of the early Middle Ages.

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[31] Ibid., IV, ix. See further R. H. Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 489. And W. Hunt, op. cit., p. 272 on the theme of Alfred's Laws. Note also The Life of Saint Cuthbert, Passim, (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1951), Also W. Hunt, op. cit., p. 108 on Wilfrith. Also Adamnan, op. cit., III, xxiv.

[32] Quoted in S. Dill, op. cit., p. 216. See also S. Dill, op. cit., p. 88.

## CHAPTER III

## THE PIETY OF THE GERMANIC PEOPLES

### Part II: Beliefs

The first aspect of Germanic piety that we shall survey is, what we might term, cosmology--for want of a better word. It goes without saying that the writers we consulted had no place reserved in their thinking for what is today called cosmology. What we mean here is their religious thinking concerning the powers and forces of nature and especially their thoughts concerning God and His relation to the powers of the universe.

If a god was to be worshipped among the pagans, it was necessary that there be some one in the group to whom the power of that god in some measure had been imparted. The pagan was not interested in a conceptual god. God had to act, and act in a way outside the "order of nature" so that there could be no mistaking that it was the god who was acting. When the early Christian missionaries approached these people, they had to show them that their God was a terribly powerful God. This became, at least according to the Chronicles, the basic approach of the early Christian teacher among these people. When God is spoken of in the Chronicles by any of the actors involved, He is seldom portrayed as a loving father, but rather as the ruler of the universe with power to attain His will among men. We note this in the preaching of Saint Patrick who warned that his God was the God who ruled the forces of nature, that his God dominated heaven and all that is above and below. "He inspires all, He

quickens all, He dominates all, He supports all."[33] It is only after saying this that he proceeds to speak of one who is co-eternal with the Father. Daniel, Bishop of Winchester, attempting to coach one of his students concerning methods of approaching the pagan, begins in the same manner. He uses what we recall from Aristotle as the cosmological argument for the existence of God. If this was not successful there was always another approach that was similar but more telling. The heathen were asked to show the missionary what happened before their pagan gods came into existence. A final blow was tendered with the assertion that "the Christians possess the fertile lands . . . and have left the heathen with their gods only the frozen lands."[34] This of course made the pagan appear ridiculous. Saint Alban, in the time of Diocletian, approached a pagan judge with the statement that he worshipped the creator of the world whereas this judge worshipped only devils who along with him would go to Hell on the final day.[35] The Venerable Bede records a letter that supposedly was written by Pope Boniface (625 A.D.) to King Edwin of Northumbria. In this letter the pope begins in the same manner. He speaks of the Christian God as the creator and ruler of the universe. The God "to whom also the heights of empire, and the powers of the world, are subject, because the bestowal of all kingdoms is granted by His disposition."[36]

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[33] Bury, op. cit., p. 139.

[34] Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 265. Also Bury, op. cit., p. 9.

[35] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, vii. Also Gregory of Tours, op. cit., 2.20 (29). This sounds stereotyped in the mouth of Clothilda, but it is still that thinking of Gregory.

[36] Ecclesiastical History, II, x'; III, xvii.

When Christ is spoken of, it is either in terms similar to the Nicene Creed, or, as the Father, in terms of creation or judgment.[37] His saving work on the cross is seldom mentioned. It is not implied here that the cross was not part of the preaching of this era, but merely that it seldom occurs in the Chronicles. In evaluating the piety, this would imply that Christ the redeemer was secondary to Christ the ruler of the universe.[38]

While this paper does not propose to deal with concepts that occur in the poetry of the era, we might note a few insights in the Saxon Hiliand and the Anglo-Saxon Caedmon. Both of these poems intend to paraphrase the Biblical stories. In doing this it is interesting to note how pagan ideas were superimposed upon the stories of our Lord's life. Caedmon's poems have God appear as the "chief of Thegns" in the Genesis account. Satan has his own "strong retainers," and he boasts that they will not fail him in any fight. The whole event of creation is pictured as a great warfare in which the whole creation is involved.[39]

In the Heliand the same martial and Teutonic spirit is obvious:

> Christ is the king, the disciples are His thanes whose duty is to stand by their Lord to the death; He rewards them with the promised riches of heaven, excelling the earthly goods bestowed by other kings. In the "betrayal" they close around their Lord saying: "Were it they will, mighty Lord of ours, that we should set upon them with a spear, gladly would we strike and die for our lord." Out broke the wrath of the "ready swordsman" Simon Peter; he could not speak for anguish to think that his lord should be bound. Angrily strode the bold knight before his lord, drew his weapon, the sword by his side, and smote the nearest foe with might of hands. Before his fury and the spurting blood the people fled fearing the sword's bite.[40]

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[38] Bury, op. cit., p. 139.

[39] Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 458.

[40] H. O. Taylor, The Medieval Mind, op. cit., p. 203.

This martial character does not occur as obviously in the Chronicles. At the same time it is evident that this sort of thinking is behind the actions of various kings. Both in the Venerable Bede and in Gregory of Tours we note many occurences where God or Christ are thought of as being either leaders in battle or at least giving victory. In many cases this dominated a man's conversion.. To be a Christian was not thought of as being a change of character, but rather as receiving some of that power of God which would give one victory over one's enemies. Over and over again we are told of a king who became a Christian because in this way he would attain victory. Often the king would promise merely to become a Christian if he was given victory. Clovis, according to Gregory of Tours, is supposed to have said the following:

> Jesus Christ, Thou that art . . . said to give aid to those in distress, to grant victory to those that hope in Thee, I entreat for a devout heart the glory of Thy succour. If Thou grant me victory over these enemies, and experience confirm that power which the people dedicated to Thy name claimeth to have proved, then will I also believe on Thee and be baptised in Thy name. I have called upon my own gods, but here is proof that they have withdrawn themselves from helping me; wherefore I believe that they have no power, since they come not to the succour of their servants.[41]

King Edwin supposedly made the same sort of deal with Bishop Paulinus.[42] Whether these kings actually said the words that are placed into their mouths by the historian is a difficult question. But we must recall that these historians themselves wrote during the period of time that we have under consideration, and therefore both writer and reader

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[41] Gregory, op. cit., 2:21 (30). Also 2:20 (29), 3:28.

[42] Ecclesiastical History, II, ix.

must have labored under this sort of thought. It is what we might call paganism dressed up in Christian clothes.[43]

The virgin Mary seemingly played a minor role in the thinking of these people. Though her name occurs at times, she does not seem to have been revered as a power in the celestial hierarchy until the time of Benedict Biscop (c700 A.D.). It is only then that we find her appealed to as the protector and prayed to as an intercessor.[44] She is held in high regard by Jocelinus. The mother of Saint Kentigern evidently admired the purity of the virgin and prayed to her; and the saint himself commended his disciples to her protection at his death.[45]

Angels are also a part of this celestial hierarchy in Germanic Christianity. They are thought of as intermediaries between God and man. Besides their occurence in visions, they appear most often as the beings who carry the body after death into heaven.[46] The angels were thought of as waiting in the air to receive the dying.[47] Often they could be seen.[48] The Archangel Michael appeared to Bishop Wilfrid and told him that he was to be granted longer life.[49] The child Cuthbert often conversed with angels

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[43] Dill, op. cit., p. 397.

[44] Ecclesiastical History, V, xix. See also Bede, Lives of the Abbots of Weremouth and Jarrow (New York and London: Everymans Library, 1951), passim.

[45] Jocelinus, op. cit., I, III, XLII.

[46] Alfred, Life of Saint Ninian (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1874), XI.

[47] Nennius, History of the Britons

[48] Adamnan, op. cit., III. Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., III, viii; IV, xxiii. Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., IV, XXXIV.

[49] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., V. xix. Gregory, op. cit., 6:21 (29). Paul the Deacon, op. cit., V, xli.

and his lame leg was cured by one.[50] Angels often came to him disguised as men to test his piety.[51] In time of war an angel appeared to Bishop Gall to tell him not to fear since he had yet seven years to live.[52]

Another power that influenced the lives of men was the stars. There is no doubt but that astrology was practiced by both Christian and pagan. Gregory of Tours and the Venerable Bede quote from "the signs in the heavens" again and again.[53] Whether or not these were conceived as living forces is not possible to determine from the Chronicles.

In the thinking of these people God had to act in such a way that the people could see His action without mistake. It was God who must give victory, for instance; if He did not there was always the possibility that the people would revert to their old gods.[54]

There are many ways that this power of God could be called upon. For the Christian at this time, as well as for the pagan, God made His power available through a number of avenues. There were always special people who had a certain hold on this power. At this time the most famous of these were the saints; men like Saints Columba, Columban, Patrick, and Martin of Tours. Whether these men were dead or alive did not make too much difference. If they were dead their graves contained this power. The means through which this power was channeled were

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[50] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., IV, xxvii-xxviii. The Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., II.

[51] Ibid., VII.

[52] Gregory, op. cit., 4:5.

[53] Ibid., 9:5; 6:34. Also Ecclesiastical History, I, xxxii.

[54] Note especially the first chapters of Bede's, Ecclesiastical History.

prophecy, magic, relics, and miracles. These areas of Germanic piety we would consider at this point.

It was the saint who was the ideal not only in ethics but also in power. Though they were not the only people to whom this spiritual power was given, they received a great share of it. In the eyes of the people they held power enough to do all sorts of miracles, to command kings, and teach with authority.

H. O. Taylor sees in this veneration of the saint a continuation of the tradition of the Sagas. He writes:

> There was no chasm between the pagan bards and the Christian clergy . . . . They also had their predecessors in the Druids, who had performed the functions of diviners, magicians, priests, and teachers, which were assumed by the clergy in the fifth and sixth centuries.[55]

There is something that is to this day fascinating about the lives of these saints. It is quite understandable why the people revered them, when we consider that their whole lives were a traditional manifestation of divine power. When we read about Saint Patrick and the vision which revealed to him that he was to return to the land of his captors, as we watch him in his magical bouts with the Druids among the Irish; we can understand to a degree the utter horror that must have overcome his old master when he saw Patrick coming to convert him. In sheer desperation he killed himself in order not to fall under the power of this saint.[56]

In Saint Columban also we note this power. Tradition had it that Columban's mother had seen the sun rise from her bosom when he was born.

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[55] Taylor, op. cit., p. 133.

[56] Bury, op. cit., pp. 86, 104-8.

Columban was instructed by a wise old man in his youth and was warned to stay away from the temptation of women. After spending time in the monastery at Banchor in Ireland he traveled to Gaul. While there he went to the court of King Sigibert in Austrasia where he spoke out against the rule of the flesh in that court. One can well imagine the effect of the presence of monks like this in the court of the kings. They owned nothing, all was held in common. They refused the basic comforts of life and preached against the rampant evils of the day. These monks "piously endeavored to propitiate Christ and to atone for their evil thoughts, through the mortification of the flesh."[57] Saint Columban is to have said that only the Creed remained of Christianity in Gaul. His miracles were remembered and recorded by the monk Jonas at Bobbio. A man of this type would naturally inspire an holy awe in the minds and hearts of people with whom he came into contact.

One could recite biography after biography of this sort. There were many of them written. This writing in itself is some indication that these men were highly revered as having a special power from God. Their lives were read to the monks years later while they ate their meals in the monasteries.[58]

Probably the most obvious indication of the reverence that was given to the saint was the esteem that was paid to their belongings either before or usually after their death. It is not certain when this whole reverence for such relics came into Western Civilization. It was already

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[57] Jonas, Life of Saint Columban (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1902), XIV; LIX.

[58] Jocelinus, op. cit., II.

a force by the time of Saint Ambrose, and part of the theology of Gregory the Great.[59]

Relics were usually sought for the power that they contained:

> To worship at spots hallowed by the apostolic memories, to adore relics of the martyrs, to receive the blessing from the pope in person, to spend the last days of life in Rome in penitence and good works, to die and be buried there, seemed to all men of that time to be an assurance of salvation.[60]

Relics were noted for their healing qualities. Dill writes:

> Neuralgia, gout, fever of many kinds, venal diseases and dysentry, apoplexy and paralysis, small pox, epilepsy, and sudden insanity--a ghastly company were there gathered to await the healing virtue of the saint's tomb.[61]

The graves of the saints were especially sought out. The saint's body was thought to be incorrupt.[62] Gregory of Tours notes very often the healing power and wonderful miracles of the tomb of Saint Martin of Tours. In fact it was the shrine of Gaul for many. Men and women came from as far as the English Isles to visit that place.[63] The tombs of Saint Patrick and Saint Oswald were also highly revered and the site of many miracles.[64] Because a certain queen built a church and dedicated it to Saint John the Baptist, the Lombards in that place could not be beaten in battle; the saint continually interceded for the inhabitants.[65]

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[59] Bury, op. cit., p. 151.

[60] Hunt, op. cit., p. 172. Also Gregory, op. cit., 8:2.

[61] Dill, op. cit., pp. 258, 322.

[62] Paul the Deacon, op. cit., V.

[63] Gregory, op. cit., 2:2 (3); 4:34 (49); 6:9; 9:6; 5:37; 3:28; 8:14; 8:15.

[64] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., III, ix-xiii. Bury, op. cit., p. 208.

[65] Paul the Deacon, op. cit., V.

Not only the graves but also the belongings of the saint were powerful. Asser tells us that before a battle certain soldiers swore an oath on the holy ring of Saint Alfred "which with the king were next in veneration after the Deity Himself."[66] The relics of Saint Ninian cured many illnesses after his death.[67]

People of this age traveled very far to procure these relics. As was said above many came from the English Isles to travel to Gual or Rome.[68] Saint Radegund sent to Constantinople for parts of the true cross.[69] Saint Ninian traveled about just visiting relics.[70]

This search for relics and the reverence for holy places gave rise to many pilgrimages. Many kings of the Anglo-Saxons forsook the throne to go to Rome.[71] Just as in Chaucer of a later generation, so here too a certain abuse of these holy endeavors took place. Saint Boniface warns the English bishops to keep their women at home because they become harlots in Rome.[72]

One of the most common occurances in the Chronicles is the miracles that these holy men performed. This was a common belief; a holy man did miracles. As we review these it may occur to the reader that this is difficult to explain. It cannot be doubted that the writers of these

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[66] Asser, op. cit., LVIII. Also Ecclesiastical History, I, xviii; IV, xxxii, V, xi.

[67] Alfred, op. cit., XII.

[68] Gregory, op. cit., 6:6; 10;1. Also Ecclesiastical History, III, xxv.

[69] Dill, op. cit., p. 322.

[70] Alfred, op. cit., II.

[71] Hunt, op. cit., p. 173.

[72] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., V, vii. See Hunt, op. cit., p. 172 for many references in Bede.

histories believed that miracles were possible, and occurred very often. It is not possible, unless one would tag them accomplished liars, to deny that many of these phenomena took place. True, the saint's life is a literary type and had to contain these miracles. We can assume further that the Chronicles were forced to compromise with this demand and include many miracles also, but this does not explain it altogether. Paul the Deacon admitted that he had omitted miracles not because they did not happen, but because he did not believe that they were necessary to support his case.[73] Since we do not believe it good historical judgment to assume that all these miracles did not happen simply because they could not happen, we have recorded all that the Chronicles and Lives tell us and permit the reader to draw his own conclusions. We can assume, not only from the culture of these people but also from other cultures, that order in nature as we know it was not part of their thinking. That there were certain physical laws that could not be broken was seemingly entirely foreign to their thinking.

The saint had the power to command nature at his will. Saint Ninian calmed the sea and raised the dead. When he was to judge who was the father of a certain child, he commanded the infant to speak; and the child spoke.[74] Saint Kentigern preached with reason and miracles already in his youth. He brought a pet bird back to life with prayer.[75] Columba healed the sick, commanded animals to do his will, drew water from a rock, drove off rain with prayer, healed a wound with spittle,

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[73]Foulke, Introduction to Paul the Deacon, op. cit., p. xxxi. Also Jocelinus, op. cit., II.

[74]Alfred, op. cit., V; VIII; XII.

[75]Jocelinus, op. cit., V.

multiplied water and food miraculously, broke the chains of a prisoner "like rotten wood," restored sight to a blind man, and many other such acts.[76] Women called on the name of Saint Columban for help. He could bring about the death of his enemies, and defeated a monster with the sign of the cross. He too healed the sick, raised a child from the dead, and changed water into wine. Other men used his name to change the direction of the wind.[77]

Saint Augustine in his letter to Pope Saint Gregory assumes that he has the power to perform miracles. Gregory believes him, but commands him to be humble about it.[78] At one time to prove his power to the Britons, Saint Augustine gave sight to a blind man.[79] Saint Martin of Tours and Saint Hilary of Poitiers raised people from the dead.[80] A certain Bishop Brice, in order to prove that he was not the father of a certain child, has the child tell the audience so.[81] A miracle by Saint Patrick provided hogs for starving men.[82] Saint Alban opened a path in the Thames as Moses opened the Red Sea.[83] Saint Aidan saved a city from fire through prayer.[84] The venerable Bede explained this power so:

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[76] Jonas, op. cit., passim.

[77] Adamnan, op. cit., I; II.

[78] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xxxi.

[79] Ibid., II, ii.

[80] Gregory, op. cit., 1:39.

[81] Ibid., 2:1. Also 2:2 (3); 2:27 (37); 4:32; 4:34 (49); 6:8; 6:9; 10:6.

[82] Confessions, op. cit., VIII.

[83] Gildas, op. cit., XI.

[84] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., III, xvi. Also of Bishop Milletus, Ibid., II, vii.

> Like the apostles, they had honour and authority through the good conscience, obedience to their doctrine through their sound learning, whilst the rewards of virtue attend their numberous merits.[85]

Adamnan too attempts an explanation:

> We must thus believe that our saint had the gift of miracles like the prophets Elias and Elissus, and like the apostles Peter, Paul and John, he had the honour bestowed on him of raising the dead to life, and now in heaven, placed amid the prophets and apostles, this prophetic and apostolic man enjoys a glorious and eternal throne in the heavenly fatherland with Christ, who reigns with the Father in the unity of the Holy Ghost for ever and ever.[86]

The saint had this power not only over nature but also over demons. It is difficult to determine just where this idea of the demon arose. Classical literature is filled with references to these creatures. Herodotus in his Histories tells us that the ancient Magi thought that all divine beings were demons.[87] In Egypt these creatures, according to the mythology of the cult of Osiris, haunted the soul as it made its way from the tomb to the underworld.[88] The demon also had his place in the higher philosophical thought of Socrates and Plato. These beings were often used in ancient thought to explain away the philosophical gap that existed between the infinite and the finite.

The demon entered into Christian thinking when thepagan gods were called demons by the Christians.[89] They could have followed the same

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[85] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., XX I, xvii. See also Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., XV.

[86] Adamnan, op. cit., II, xxxiii.

[87] Herodotus, Histories (New York and Cambridge: Loeb Classical Library, 1931), I, cxl; VII, cxiii-cxiv.

[88] Athenagoras, A Plea for the Christians (Grand Rapids: Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2, 1951), XXVI.

[89] Manucius Felix, Octavius (Grand Rapids: Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 4, 1951), XXVII.

tradition that the pagan Plutarch used when he explained away all the difficulties in pagan mythology by claiming that either these gods were actually demons, or that demons were actually responsible for some of the terrible actions that occured in that mythology. It is an interesting study to note the use that the early Christian fathers made of these beings in their controversies with the pagan.[90]

The demons were also a common idea in the thinking of the northern peoples. Though this name was obviously not applied, creatures with a similar nature appeared. Among the Anglo-Saxons they were called elves or dwarfs. These creatures were blamed for sickness or disease. Dwarfs were thought to be worm-like creatures that worked their way under a man's skin.[91] Jordanes blames the demons for begetting the hated race of the Huns.[92]

The Church demanded officially that her converts should abandon all heathen observances and cultic ideas. But these people were not required to give up their belief in these malevolent beings.[93] In fact they became a rather permanent part of the thinking of even the greatest teachers of the Church. The pagans were merely asked to add to their list of demons the names of the gods who they had before worshipped.[94]

Possession by a demon was as common seemingly as in the days of our Lord. On one occasion a youth possessed by a demon interruyted a mass in

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[90]Tatian, Address to the Greeks (Grand Rapids: Ante-Nicene Fathers, Vol. 2, 1951), VII.

[91]Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 466-7.

[92]Jordanes, op. cit., CXXI-CXXII.

[93]Bury, op. cit., p. 74.

[94]Nennius, op. cit., XXXI. Gregory, op. cit., 2:9 (10). Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, vii; II, x.

Gaul being celebrated by Bishop Nicetius to denounce the king as an adulterer. Saint Kentigern once commanded a wicked spirit to leave a crowd to which he was speaking, "whereupon, with exceeding speed, an immense multitude of phantoms, horrible in stature and appearance, coming out of the crowd, fled away in the sight of all."[95] One night when a certain bishop entered his church he found demons sitting in his throne in the guise of a woman.[96] According to the Venerable Bede the demons raised a storm to stop Saint Germanus from reaching the English Isles where he was to stamp out the Pelagian heresy.[97]

In all cases of contact with these demons the saint with the help of the true God could overcome. Saint Kentigern cast them out of people, Saint Germanus defeated them by stilling the sea, and many priests, through the rite of exorcism, expelled them.[98]

The most obvious cases in which these demons were dispelled were in the conflicts that the early Christian teachers had with the pagan priests, the Druids. Adamnan records with some satisfaction the conflicts that Saint Columba had with the Druids. At one instance the Druids were sure that the saint would die because he had drunk of water that had polluted others with disease. But they were confounded when the saint did not die, but rather that the demons left the pool forever.[99] In another case a

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[95] Jocelinus, op. cit., XXXII. Gregory, op. cit., 3:12; 4:36; 6:8; 8:33; 10:25.

[96] Ibid., 2:21.

[97] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xvii.

[98] Ibid., III, xi. Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., XV; XVII.

[99] Adamnan, op. cit., I, i, xxix; II, x.

young boy who had just become a Christian was taken ill and died. The Druids came and cursed the father because he had permitted the lad to become a Christian. Saint Columba came and raised the boy from the dead, thus proving that the Druids were powerless in the face of the power of the true God.[100] Saint Columba also contested with the Druids their power to control the winds. Here again the saint was more powerful.[101]

Saint Patrick had these same conflicts with the Druids. He asked God to throw a blaspheming priest to the ground and it was done. At another time when the Druids brought snow to the ground but could not remove it, Saint Patrick did so.[102]

It can be said that the Christians were just as superstitious as the pagans when it came to these demons. They also seemingly believed in the reality, in some manner, of the heathen gods; but that they were subject to the Christian God. Asser, for instance, claims that King Alfred was a descendant of Woden and Adam. Both are placed on the same level. Possibly he merely thought of Woden as an ancient human being, but this sort of thing occurs rather too often to be answered in that manner.[103]

The point of these miraculous acts was, of course, to convert the pagan. They proved that Christ was a stronger charm than any of the pagan

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[100] Ibid., II, xxxiii.

[101] Ibid., II, xxxiv, xxxv.

[102] Bury, op. cit., pp. 100, 104-6.

[103] Ibid., p. 75. Asser, op. cit., p. 44.

deities.[104] The sign of the cross was often used to conquer the demon.[105]

But the pagan charms remained. We hear again and again of provincial councils legislating against such customs as soothsaying, divinations, the eating of horseflesh, the slitting of horses' noses, and the docking of their tails.[106] The horse was regarded as sacred among the Anglo-Saxon.[107]

We also hear of numerous witches. When Saint Kentigern's mother was saved miraculously from a fall, she was called a witch.[108] When the son of King Chilperic died, it was rumored to the queen that he had been carried off by witchcraft.[109] They used such common articles as moles' teeth, bones of mice, and the claws and grease of bears.[110] These charms were the continual bane to the clergy. But it must be said that the clergy were just as eager to employ these methods as the witches. Possibly they were forced to do so to maintain their status among the people.

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[104] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xviii, xxv; IV, xiii. Gregory, op. cit., 9:6. Bury, op. cit., p. 77. Hodgkin, op. cit., pp. 256, 467. Hunt, op. cit., p. 13.

[105] Gregory, op. cit., 7:42.

[106] Hodgkin, op. cit., p. 465. Note Council of Clovesho in England 747, Hunt, op. cit., p. 230. Gregory assumes that the Huns have this magical power, Gregory, op. cit., 4:22 (29).

[107] Hunt, op. cit., p. 13.

[108] Jocelinus, op. cit., III.

[109] Gregory, op. cit., 6:25 (35).

[110] Ibid., 9:6.

Another of the great powers that the Church and her clergy maintained were the Sacraments. While one can hardly maintain that the Sacramental system, as we know it in the thirteenth century, was developed at this time, it can be said that there was a rather deep stress on the sacrament. As an illustration of this extensive use one need only note that the Eucharist was offered daily in the monasteries, and at least weekly in other places.[111] The Eucharist was usually received at death.[112] It was always spoken of in sacrificial, and at the same time sacramental terms. Adamnan calls it a "mystic sacrifice" and "holy sacrifice."[113] He speaks of "consecrating the Body of Christ."[114] Jocelinus tells us that at the death of Saint Kentigern, "He was anointed with the oil of remission, and purified with the sacrament of the life-giving Body and Blood of the Lord."[115] The same historian, attempting to point up the fact that the Eucharist was more highly revered in the saint's day than in his own, relates a story that is to have taken place during the life of Saint Kentigern.

> For while with his hands lifted in the form of a cross he said, "Sursum Corda," he lifted his own unto the Lord as he exhorted others; so from the golden censor of his most pure heart, filled with coals, burning with virtue, and kindled with delight in God, like the brightest and sweetest

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[111] Adamnan, op. cit., I, II. Gregory, op. cit., 5:8 (14). Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xxvii; V, x.

[112] Jonas, op. cit., XXIX. Jocelinus, op. cit., IX. Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., IV, ii, xxiv; V, xiv. Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., XXXIX. Bury, op. cit., p. 207.

[113] Adamnan, op. cit., II, i; III, xiii.

[114] Ibid., I, xxxv; III, xiii.

[115] Jocelinus, op. cit., IX.

> savoured incense, his prayer rising to the clouds, penetrating the heavens, and plunging into the light unto which no man can approach, was set forth in the presence of God; so that the Most High Himself vouchsafed by evident signs to manifest to the eyes of mortals that He had accepted it as an oblation, an odour of a sweet savour, well-pleasing to Himself; for very often, as he handled the Divine Sacraments, a snow-white dove, having as it were a golden beak, was seen to light upon his head, and with the transparent fluttering of his wings, like a ray of the sun, to overshadow him and what was laid upon the altar. Frequently also, when he stood sacrificing at holy altars, a luminous cloud overshadowed his head, and occasionally at the time when the Son was being immolated to the Father, he seemed not to stand there, but a fiery pillar by whose brightness the sight of the onlookers was blinded.[116]

Baptism was held in the same regard. Alfred tells us that Saint Ninian was baptized in his infancy.[117] Many were baptized in rivers.[118] It has often been stated in reference to this sacrament that whole tribes were baptized because the king commanded it. This does not seem to be true as far as the Chronicles are concerned. When a king was baptized it did not necessarily mean that his people would follow. In fact the kings were often hesitant because they were afraid that their people would object.[119] Usually the missionary went out among the people and baptized them individually.[120]

These rites were thought to have a terribly powerful influence on the people. This aspect is shown in the case of Clovis and Clotilda. When their first boy was born Clotilda had him baptized over the objection of the king. Later it died. Clovis blamed the rite of baptism for this,

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[116] Ibid., XVI.

[117] Alfred, op. cit., I.

[118] Hunt, op. cit., p. 62.

[119] Gregory, op. cit., 2:22 (31); 2:25 (34); 6:10 (17).

[120] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xx; II, xiv; IV, xiii.

thinking that it had a malevolent effect on the child. The second son, after it was baptized, also took sick. But through the prayers of the mother he survived. One wonders what might have happened to the Christian faith among the Franks if this child had died.[121] This example shows that the baptismal rite was conceived of as being very powerful. If the sacrament took place on the feast day of a saint, that saint would protect the person involved.[122] The Venerable Bede expressly placed the sacraments of the Church in juxtaposition to the rites of the heathen.[123] At another occasion he implied that it was the mystery of the sacraments that the pagan feared most.[124]

It would be interesting to speculate just how much these rites played in the minds of the people. Notably, all religions have such rites. This was the constant concern of the Church fathers when they replied to pagan slanders. Of the similarities that existed between the Christian and the pagan mystery religions, this one bothered the fathers most of all.[125] J. B. Bury has this to say about the people and the sacraments:

> It was, above all, these mysterious rites . . . without which the body and soul were condemned to everlasting torment, and the mystical ceremony which is known as the Eucharist, that stamped the religion as genuine in the eyes of the barbarians.[126]

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[121] Gregory, op. cit., 2:20 (29).

[122] Ibid., 2:14.

[123] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., IV, xxvii.

[124] Ibid., V, x.

[125] Cumont, The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism (Chicago: Open Court Publishing Co., 1911) pp. 67 f.

[126] Bury, op. cit., p. 75.

Another rather common occurence in the Chronicles is the power of prophecy. Paul the Deacon referred to this as "the spirit of prophecy" and a man possessing it as a "servant of God."[127] Saint Germanus could predict the time of another man's death.[128] This was very common.[129] King Guntram sought out a "woman of prophecy" to predict the fate of a battle.[130] The spirit of this type of action is summed up well by Paul the Deacon. It reminds one of ancient Isaiah.

> Hospitius, a man of God, who had been cloistered at Nicea, foresaw their invasion a long while before it happened, by revelation of the Holy Spirit, and predicted to the citizens of the city what calamities were impending . . . . This holy man then, predicted the coming of the Langobards into Gaul in this manner: "The Langobards," he says, "will come into Gaul and will lay waste seven cities because their wickedness has waxed great in the sight of the Lord, for all the people are addicted to perjuries, guilty of thefts, intent upon plunder, ready for murder; the fruit of justice is not in them, tithes are not given, the poor man is not fed, the naked is not clothed, the stranger is not received in hospitality.[131]

Along with prophecy, the people of this era also believed that visions were sent to men. Obviously there is a close relationship between visions and prophecy, since both were often concerned with seeing the future. A vision often revealed that some one had been selected by God for a specific task. This is seemingly the reason that Saint Cuthbert saw the soul of Saint Aidan being carried into heaven.[132] Saint Patrick saw how

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[127] Paul the Deacon, op. cit., V, vi.

[128] Nennius, op. cit., XXXIII.

[129] Gregory, op. cit., 2:4 (5). Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., III, xv. Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., XXVII-XXVIII.

[130] Gregory, op. cit., 5:8 (14); 6:8 (14); 7:44; 8:33.

[131] Paul the Deacon, op. cit., III, 1. Gregory, op. cit., 6:6.

[132] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., IV, xxvii-xxviii.

he was later to escape from his captors.[133] Paul the Deacon tells of a man in the midst of robbing a tomb who saw a vision of Saint John the Baptist. Knowing that his readers would doubt this he added, "I speak the truth in Christ; he who saw with his own eyes that very thing done related this to me."[134] King Oswald saw a vision of Saint Columban in the midst of battle who quoted the words of Jesus Ben Nun to him, "Be strong and of good courage; behold I shall be with thee."[135] Probably the most common vision was the type that recorded what the afterlife was to be like. When Saint Kentigern raised a man from the dead he reported:

> He asserted that he had been reft from things human with unspeakable pain, carried before the tribunal of the terrible judge, and that there he had seen very many on receiving their sentence plunged into hell, others destined to purgatorial places, some elevated to celestial joys above the heavens. And when, trembling, he was awaiting his own sentence, he heard that he was the man for whom Kentigern, beloved of the Lord, was praying . . . . He was sedulously warned by him who conducted him back to earth, that for the future he should lead a stricter life.[136]

From these visions we can not only determine what visions were like, but also what these people thought of the contents of the afterlife. When one reads the histories of either the Venerable Bede[137] or Gregory of Tours,[138] he notes that there were many such occurences recorded.

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[133] Confessions, op. cit., VI.

[134] Paul the Deacon, op. cit., IV, xlvii.

[135] Adamnan, op. cit., I, i.

[136] Jocelinus, op. cit., VII.

[137] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., II, xix; IV, iii, xxvii; V, xii-xiv.

[138] Gregory, op. cit., 7:1.

## CHAPTER III

## THE PIETY OF THE GERMANIC PEOPLES

### Part III: Ethics

It is always difficult to characterize a people by their ethics. If we were reading the theology of the time, we would find that these Christians had ethical ideals as high as any. We are concerned here not with this aspect, but rather with some of the prevailing characteristics of their ethics in action.

It is not altogether easy to determine the exact nature of this action because our sources do not give the same report. Bishop Sidonius in his Letters does not paint as terrible a picture as Gregory of Tours. While Sidonius does show at times that his age is not all it could be,[139] Gregory sees little besides cruelty, rapine, and war. It would be a study in itself to determine why Gregory has this rather morbid outlook, but here it should be kept in mind whenever he is quoted that his statements bear this imprint.[140] If one reads only Gregory this would surely look like a dark age, but when one reads Sidonius and the Lives it appears nowhere near as dim. At times even Gregory's bias shows through and we are able to determine that things are not as evil as he would have them.[141]

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[139] Sidonius, op. cit., VII, vi.

[140] Gregory, op. cit., 10:16 and passim.

[141] Dill, op. cit., pp. 21, 156.

How deeply Christianity affected the morals of the pagans can be seen to some extent. Some authors maintain that Christianity hardly changed the pagan morals of the Irish.[142] Just as we noted in the previous chapter that pagan ideas remained to become part of Christian thought, so in ethics many pagan patterns remained. The prevalence of "blood revenge" is probably the most obvious reminder of paganism.[143] It could be claimed that this remained because of the stress on the Old Testament, but it seems obvious that it is rather a remnant of paganism.

The highest ideals of paganism also influenced the new Christian ethic. It must be remembered of course that when this happened in men like Bishop Sidonius, we are dealing with a highly educated person. These indications cannot be taken as normal among the people. Sidonius, highly trained in classical philosophy, has ideas of virtue that can be compared to those of King Alfred, who received them from Boethius.[144] The humanistic spirit was much alive in these ideas.

The influence of the Old Testament on the ethics of the Germanic peoples is as obvious as its influence on their ideas. This is especially noticeable in the laws of the kings concerning the Sabbath. King Aethelwulf ordained that Sunday must be kept more strictly.[145] King Edward legislated a penalty for working on Sunday.[146] Bishop Sidonius

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[142] Taylor, op. cit., pp. 132, 193.

[143] Gregory, op. cit., 2:7 (8); 3:7; 6:10 (17); 6:29 (43); 8:5; 9:27. Sanctuary was provided as in the Old Testament, Ibid., 7:29; 9:3; 9:38.

[144] Sidonius, op. cit., VIII, xi, xiii.

[145] Hunt, op. cit., p. 322.

[146] Ibid., p. 290.

in Gaul is perturbed by the breaking of the Sabbouth and frivolity on that day.[147] In the letters of Pope Saint Gregory we note a very emphatic stress on the Old Testament purification laws.[148] The Laws of King Alfred include the Ten Commandments, the fifteenth chapter of Acts, and the Golden Rule.[149]

The preaching of the time was often geared to the idea of reward. In most of the speeches recorded by the Chronicles, there is little or no emphasis on the forgiveness that Christ offers, but rather on the reward of heaven,[150] the promise of victory in battle,[151] or the relief from sickness.[152] We note all through the Chronicles that the kings and queens were liberal in building churches. This was often done with the idea of such a reward, or for the protection of either the patron saint or of God Himself.[153] The emphasis is always on doing something, rather than, as we would say, "living in the forgiveness of sins."[154] When the Venerable Bede or one of the other writers preaches, the sermon is usually geared to the idea of doing something to get God on your side.[155] In the

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[147] Sidonius, op. cit., V, xiv.

[148] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xxvii.

[149] Hunt, op. cit., p. 272.

[150] Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., XVI.

[151] Gregory, op. cit., 2:2 (8).

[152] Ibid., 2:23; 3:16.

[153] Ibid., 3:5. Paul the Deacon, op. cit., V, vi; VI, xvii, lviii.

[154] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., III, xxvii.

[155] Ibid., III, v-xvii. Asser, op. cit., pp. 40, 49.

monasteries this idea of "working out your salvation in fear and trembling," was carried to the limit.[156]

There were emphases on the work of Christ and these dare not be overlooked. The Venerable Bede records the sermon of Saint Augustine to the pagan Saxons upon his arrival. Augustine preached "the merciful Savior had redeemed the world by His own agony and opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers."[157] Of Saint Aidan the Venerable Bede has this to say:

> He held, revered, and preached not otherwise than we do ourselves, the redemption of mankind by the passion, resurrection, and ascension into Heaven of Jesus Christ, the mediator between God and man.[158]

In ethics as in all of the piety of this time the ideal was the saint. The pages of Gregory and Bede are full of the lives of men whom succeeding generations were to emulate.[159] These saints set a high ideal by their chastity, humility, almsgiving, labor, etc.[160] Gregory of Tours tells of Saints Radegund, Vivianus, Remi, Genevieve, Severinus, and Hospicius, to name only a few.[161] Saintly kings like Ethelbert were also an example to their subjects.[162] Queens like Clothilda, saintly in their virtues, appear even in Gregory.

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[156] Supra: pp. 14-5.

[157] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xxv.

[158] Ibid., III, xvii.

[159] Supra: p. 16.

[160] Adamnan, op. cit., III. Hunt, op. cit., pp. 9-10.

[161] Gregory, op. cit., 3:7; 6:6. Dill, op. cit., pp. 63-9.

[162] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xxvii.

Probably the greatest manifestation of Christian virtue appears in the ethics of this period when we consider the work done by the saints and the royalty for the poor. It was the example of the great in this area that must have led many of the lower classes to the real meaning of Christianity.[163] King Segoert lost his life because some of his subjects "were disgusted with the king because he forgave his enemies and bore injustices patiently."[164] The people of the time saw in Saint Cuthbert "a signal example of how the love of Christ could make a man count all things well lost for His sake."[165]

There are many indications in the Chronicles of this work among the poor. Queen Clothilda helped all sorts of needy people and especially strangers. She knelt down to wash the feet of a supposed beggar.[166] King Oswald also loved the poor and the stranger.[167] Saint Columba's monks were known for their almsgiving.[168] King Alfred sent alms to the Christians of India.[169] In England the bishops and elders of each shire were in charge of the care of strangers and widows.[170] Ethelwolf directed

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[163]Note also the laws passed concerning slaves, Hunt, op. cit., pp. 59, 323. Also the sometimes enlightened attitude toward the Jew, Gregory, op. cit., 4:8 (13); 5:6; 5:6 (11); Sidonius, op. cit., VI, xi. For adverse comments on the attitude of this age toward the Jew see Dill, op. cit., p. 246.

[164]Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., III, xii.

[165]Ibid., IV, xxviii. Hunt, op. cit., p. 145.

[166]Gregory, op. cit., 2:19 (28).

[167]Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., III, vi. Also IV, xi. Life of Saint Cuthbert, op. cit., XXVI.

[168]Adamnan, op. cit., III, xxiv.

[169]Asser, op. cit., p. 85.

[170]Hunt, op. cit., p. 318.

that throughout his dominion one poor man in ten, either native or foreigner, should be supplied with meat, drink, and clothing.[171] Caesarius of Arles was especially devoted to the care of the sick, poor, and captives.[172] Bishop Sidonius had special sympathy for the unfortunate.[173] He often forgot to answer his letters, and this was really something considering his love for writing, because he was busy helping people out of difficulties.[174] King Theudebert "relieved the poor, and distributed many benefits on all hands with piety and friendliest good will."[175]

There remain two other areas of piety to be considered because their content is obvious in the Chronicles. First, we shall discuss the status of marriage in this society, and secondly, the ethics in war.

We note first of all that many of the rulers of the time had more than one wife. The Church seemingly saw nothing wrong here since nothing was said to counteract it. Even though this was especially common among the Franks, Gregory of Tours passes no judgment upon it at all.[176] The Venerable Bede sees nothing wrong with the fact that King Edwin has more wives.[177] Dill writes concerning this:

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[171] Asser, op. cit., p. 49.

[172] Dill, op. cit., p. 98.

[173] Sidonius, op. cit., IV, xi; V, iii, vi, ix, xii; VI, xii. See also Gregory, op. cit., 2:22.

[174] Ibid., IV, xxviii-iv; VI, ix.

[175] Gregory, op. cit., 3:25. Also 2:16 (24); 2:25 (34); 3:34; 4:24 (31); 5:13 (19); 5:26 (34); 6:8; 6:15 (23); 7:1.

[176] Ibid., 3:22 (23); 4:3; 4:19 (26); 4:21 (28); 5:8 (14); 10:8. Also Jonas, op. cit., XXXI.

[177] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., II, ix. One of Saint Dunstan's reforms was to forbid concubinage to the laity, Hunt, op. cit., pp. 359, 373.

> Nor does the Church, as a whole, seem to have exerted itself with much vigor or sternness to check this degradation of wedlock in high places. It is true that Saint Germanus excommunicated Charibert for his union with Marcovefa, but the sentence seems not to have been drawn forth by the king's promiscuous concubinage, but on canonical grounds, by the fact that the girl had already taken the veil and was the sister of one of Charibert's many wives. But Gregory, in speaking of the polygamous habits of Sigibert's brothers, seems to treat them as socially rather than morally degrading.[178]

Many of the priests and bishops were also married.[179] Bishop Sidonius as well as Bishop Urbicus was married when they took office.[180] Gregory has an interesting comment on this situation:

> At Clermont, Stremonius, bishop and preacher, was succeeded by Bishop Urbicus, a convert of senatorial family, who was married. According to the custom of the Church, his wife lived religiously apart, not cohabiting with the bishop, and both devoted themselves to prayer, charity, and good works.[181]

All through the Chronicles we find a seemingly steady advance toward the thinking that actually celibacy and virginity were better estates in the eyes of the Church than marriage. Many nobles during this era lived separate from their wives, or left them altogether.[182] There is a growing tendency to demand that bishops not be married.[183] Sidonius wrote a typical remark:

> It would of course have been greater glory to have abandoned the voluptuous life without taking to himself a wife; but few

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[178] Dill, op. cit., p. 287. Also pp. 257, 172.

[179] Hunt, op. cit., p. 327, 269.

[180] Sidonius, op. cit., IV, xxiv; VII, ix.

[181] Gregory, op. cit., 1:44; 4:4.

[182] Gregory, op. cit., 3:5.

[183] Ibid., 5:46; 8:19.

> of those who forsake error at the call of virtue can begin upon the highest level . . . .[184]

Bede implies as he writes his history that celibacy is a better estate than marriage.[185]

Women especially seemed to think more in terms of perpetual virginity. At this time there were many houses established for women.[186] Saint Ethelreda thought twice married remained a virgin.[187] Wilfrith lost favor with the king of Northumbria because his wife refused to submit to him on advice of the bishop.[188] Gregory joyfully reported whenever a wife refused to submit to her husband for religious reasons.[189] This was an example for all to follow if possible.

Since this was a warring society, an obivious emphasis in the histories is on the ethics of war. The times were those of change. With the breakup of the Pax Romana and the waves of barbarian invasions, society could not have maintained itself without adopting this mode of life. It is interesting to note what the Church did here.

War in this era was almost a sacramental endeavor.[190] Just as at ancient Troy the gods were thought of as being in the midst of battle fighting for one side or another. This is noticable especially in the

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[184] Sidonius, op. cit., IX, vi.

[185] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., I, xxvii; III, viii; IV, xix.

[186] Supra: p. 17.

[187] Hunt, op. cit., p. 186.

[188] Ibid., p. 145.

[189] Gregory, op. cit., 6:21 (29); Also 2:19 (28).

[190] Ibid., 2:21 (30).

pages of Gregory of Tours. The wars of Clovis were begun with prayer, and sacrament. Signs from heaven were awaited.[191] One feels as he reads that these are Crusade-like wars. Gregory added after a battle of Clovis:

> For daily the Lord laid his enemies low under his hand, and increased his kingdom, because he walked with Him with an upright heart, and did that which was pleasing in His sight.[192]

The blessed Saint Martin supposedly entered the lists. And Gregory is not slow to point out this as a reason for victory.[193] At times, hope was placed purely in God's judgment.[194] Evil deeds could easily be the cause of defeat.[195] Gregory writes as if the mighty arm of God rode with the horses of the Frankish kings. This is certainly a reflection of general thinking.

We note further the importance of vows in war. Many a king was converted on the basis of a vow he had made that if victory were his he would become a Christian. A most famous case is that of King Edwin who over a long span of years still feared to break that vow even though he realized that it might harm him politically.[196] King Oswy vowed that if he were victorious he would dedicate his daughter to the Lord.[197] The soldiers of King Oswald promised to be baptized if given the victory.[198] Probably the

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[191] Ibid., 2:21 (30).

[192] Ibid., 2:30 (41).

[193] Ibid., 2:28.

[194] Ibid., 6:22 (31).

[195] Ibid., 8:30.

[196] Ecclesiastical History, op. cit., II, ix.

[197] Ibid., III, xxiv.

[198] Adamnan, op. cit., I, 1.

most famous case is that of Clovis who vowed to become a Christian if given victory.[199] Paul the Deacon asserts that Narses actually gained his victories more through his prayers than by arms.[200]

It certainly was a warlike kingship that Gregory of Tours knew among the Franks. Clovis once remarked that if he and his soldiers had been present at the crucifixion it would have been avenged. "If I had been there with my Franks, I would have avenged His wrongs."[201] This was a cruel age. The later embellishments of chivalry were not to be seen.[202] Religious property was destroyed just as any other property. It is only Sir Samuel Dill, with all the force of his rhetoric, that can offer some understanding:

> Yet a great race which has done great things should not be finally judged by its behaviour in moments of delirious excitement of rapid conquest following years of hardship. It should be estimated rather by the social system which it strives to organize when the struggle is over, and when it has to address itself to the task of ordering a community on the lines of peace and justice.[203]

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[199] Gregory, op. cit., 2:22 (30).

[200] Paul the Deacon, op. cit., II, iii.

[201] Dill, op. cit., p. 90.

[202] Gregory, op. cit., 2:18 (27); 3:14.

[203] Dill, op. cit., p. 42.

## CHAPTER IV

## CONCLUSION

From this brief study we are able to determine that the piety of these Germanic people was not altogether the same as that of either Classical civilization or of the twentieth century. While exact comparisons can hardly be made, one factor is obvious. The piety of these people was not something imposed from without. It was not completely new with their conversion. Rather its seeds lay deep in the paganism from which they had been converted.

Were we finally to summarize the concepts of piety among these Germanic and Celtic people as it is seen in the Chronicles, it would be necessary continually to bear in mind that the historians do not give a complete picture. Gregory of Tours gives, on the whole, a rather negative account. Sidonius, on the other hand, presents another difficult problem for the historian in evaluating Germanic piety. To what degree was the fundamental source of his piety influenced by the classical ideal? To obtain a complete story, other sources would need to be consulted. This paper was primarily exploratory; to draw any extensive conclusions from this limited study would be hazardous indeed.

It is the judgment of this writer that we dare not be too critical of these early Christians. Their cruelty is obvious in the pages of either Gregory or Bede. One could hardly deny, on the basis of the Chronicles, that these early Christians were far removed from the elementary concepts of Christian love. It should be brought to mind that these people were newly converted, and were in a state of wandering. Furthermore,

before passing any critical judgment, we might recall that the last two world wars would hardly present our generation in a good light to future Christain historians, even though we have had the Gospel now for two thousand years.

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